



Newsletter

South West Retired Members Branch

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No.37 January 2025

Are you getting all the info?

If UCU HO has your email you should also receive regular updates on campaigns from UCU head office as well as occasional branch emails. If this is not the case let us know and we can check with the H.O on your behalf.

members are welcome to contact us anytime.

Tony Staunton chair SWRMB

2. Welcome to all members new to this branch since the previous newsletter.

New members are asked if they would like to introduce themselves.

Steve Heigham joins us from Weston College where he taught counselling on the BSc. He is interested in continuing his work on raising awareness around climate change and the effects on education and young people. He would welcome contact with other members who share this interest. Steve can be contacted at steve.heigham@gmail.com ...

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1. Branch meetings.

A branch meeting is planned for Tuesday 4th February 2025.

It is hoped that this will be a hybrid meeting at an **EXETER** venue; the zoom link and papers will be distributed to members in time for the meeting.

Branch members can contact officers and reps by the emails listed in this newsletter; the general branch email address is ucu.swest@gmail.com and

If you have any suggestions for the newsletter we are happy to hear from you.

Newsletters: these newsletters are sent to all branch members for whom we have email addresses.

Email addresses: UCU encourages us to use our home email when we retire.

For more information please contact:

ucu.swest@gmail.com
or contact the officers below:

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3. Beat The Scammers.

The last week of November was anti-scam week. On BBC Sounds there were 5 episodes –

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0025cr4>

All very interesting but the most alarming was about fraudsters who sell properties by assuming the names and details of rightful owners. The properties most at risk are mortgage free and often unoccupied. Listen at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0025cr4> .

The Land Registry offers a free alert service to let you know if searches are made against your properties. You can register easily at <https://propertyalert.landregistry.gov.uk/propertyalert/>

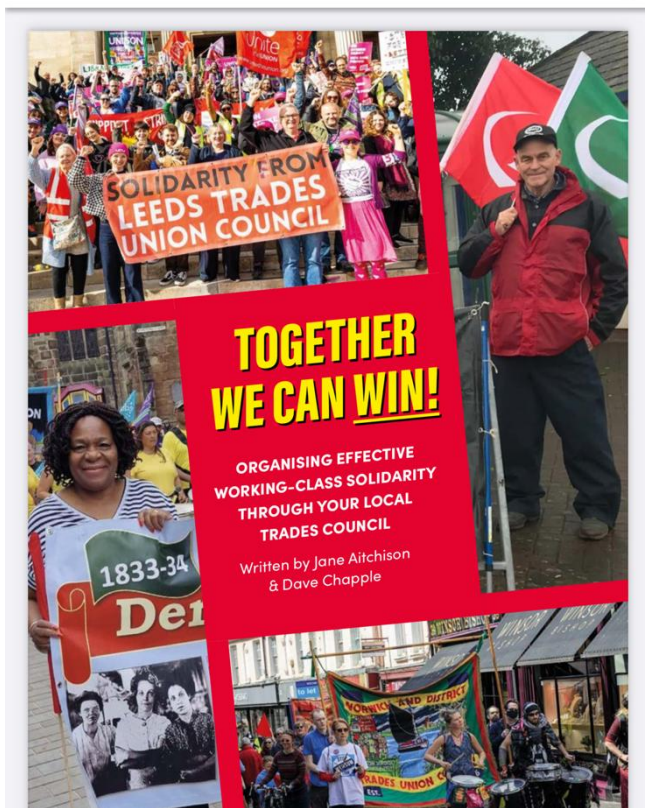
You do not have to own a property and you can register to track those owned by others.

Charles Henderson SWRMB

4. Together We Can Win.

Below is an extract from a new publication by Jane Aitchison & Dave Chapple. Local SW Trades Councils can get paper copies; it is available as a pdf – let me know if you would like me to email it to you.

Chapter one. A brief history.



From the dark days of trades unions' illegality in the early 1800's, trade unionists knew that, to make the trade union movement a permanent fixture, they had to build working class solidarity. They did that by creating Trades Councils to bring together all the trade unionists in a locality, beyond the borders of their own trade union, to fight for what they all needed.

The first UK trades council (or trades union council - these terms are interchangeable) was established in Liverpool in 1848. Others followed,

and, most important, the London Trades Council in 1860. By 1868, trades councils in the North of England had decided that a national organisation of the working-classes was needed, so they established the first Trades Union Congress (TUC) at the Mechanics Institute in Manchester in 1868. By 1871 unions were made legal and by 1875 so was their right to strike. Sticking together was working! Of course, these campaigns were political, but trades councils were involved in Politics with a capital 'P' from the start. As "New Unionism" swept through the trades' councils' movement in the 1880s, the realisation took hold that trade unionists needed an electoral political voice at local and parliamentary levels. Some trades council delegates stood for election as trades council candidates, others as Independent Labour candidates.

As local unions amalgamated, and eventually became national unions, with full-time general secretaries, the increasing socialist influence of Keir Hardie, and others within the TUC, panicked many national unions to take action against trades councils, in spite of the fact they had founded the TUC in the first place! In 1895 all trades councils were excluded from invitations to attend the Trades Union Congress, and we are still, 129 years later, suffering from that lack of representation. It doesn't stop us from organising and campaigning though!

Jo Corke SWRMB

5. Branch delegates needed.

Our branch has a number of vacancies following our AGM. We would welcome any volunteers to fill these roles.

In many ways, Trade councils are the trade union movement at the local level. Trades councils promote working-class solidarity, promote trade unionism as a powerful force for good, seek to influence the local political agenda, build stronger local communities and forge links with trade union branches. The labour movement desperately needs effective trade councils, and Trade, councils desperately need stronger relationships with unions and more activists.

<https://www.facebook.com/IlfracombeandDistrictTUC/>

We, North Devon & Torridge TUC, are the only functioning council in our area, fulfilling and promoting Trade unionism with stalls focused on recruitment or acting as a Hub for Trade Union members in the absence of a localised Branch.

We turn out in support of Workers in employment disputes and have a thriving Facebook platform (North Devon & Torridge TUC).

We are effective in localised campaigns such as the proposal to close the Ticket Office at Barnstaple Railway Station and currently campaigning with a petition to Devon County Council for a Bus route between South Molton & Great Torrington via Umberleigh Railway station collecting in two days 1000 signatures in support.

We need your continued contribution & support for our Facebook platform, <https://www.facebook.com/IlfracombeandDistrictTUC/>

street stalls, and campaigns but primarily a visible presence at our meetings.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and please look at our new pamphlet (*item 4 in this newsletter*) from South West TUC.

Geoff Allen,
North Devon & Torridge TUC

Other branch delegates are also needed:

Exeter Trades Council
https://www.facebook.com/ExeterTradesCouncil/?locale=en_GB

Bridgwater Trades Council
<http://www.bwdtuc.org.uk/node/1>

Torbay & S Devon Trades Council
<https://www.facebook.com/torbaytuc/>

National Pensioners' Convention (NPC) delegate(s) for Devon NPC <https://www.npcuk.org/regions>

Mike Farmer SWRMB

6. Yes we CAN! Support the climate and nature bill (CAN).

UCU Congress 2024 and the annual meeting of our climate and ecological emergency committee have called for our support to help the climate and nature bill.

Please write to your MP requesting that they [support the climate and nature bill \(CAN\) on 24 January](#). You can use [the 'Zero Hour' campaign online tool](#) here to contact your MP.

Head Office: Campaigns

7. Pensions & inflation.

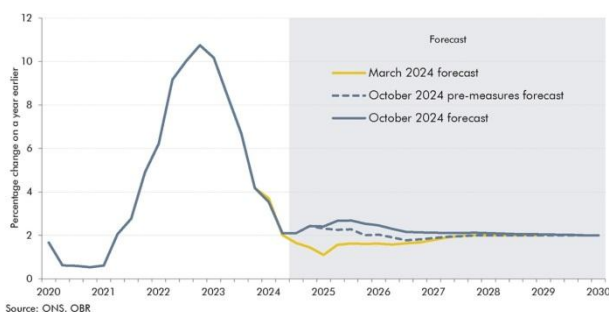
Philip Burgess produces regular comments on the ONS Monthly Inflation data. These go to the UCU Retired Members Standing Committee.

If you would like to get Philip's regular mailing, let us know and we'll arrange that for you. Below is an extract (dated 20.11.24) for our newsletter.

I noted in my Report to the AGM of the UCU Retired Members' Branches 2024, and elsewhere, that, in spite of its great value to us, the Triple lock has some notable peculiarities. One oddity is that the inflation criterion relies on just one month's figures; September. Now, I hinted at the time that the September CPI index of 1.7% was likely to be an anomalous blip. Such has proved to be the case. In August, the figure was 2.2% and in October it is 2.3%.

Now, I am not suggesting that the Government deliberately chose to make its Budget changes in October rather than September. However, it is my point that one month's figures are open to Governmental manipulation. It would be far better if a larger spread of data, closer to the implementation date for pensions were taken. Even better would be a rational and fair system for the determination of the level of State Pensions. We all know that they are far too low.

The OBR and ONS have produced data for their predictions of CPI inflation.



CPI inflation forecast

The graph shows how the budget measures will lead to increased inflation until about 2029. (I must confess that producing predictions about inflation, to two places of

decimals, covering a period in excess of five years, requires more Chutzpah than even I can muster. However, ours not to reason why!)

Our campaigns for the restoration of the Winter Fuel Allowance and for a better indexation system must continue. However, the real problem is the inadequate level of the State pension itself.

Philip Burgess
UCU RMSC

8. Artificial intelligence (AI) at work

University & College staff are currently working out how to use effectively & deal with misuse of AI. The TUC has provided advice and research on the current and potential impacts of AI on the workplace, and UCU's 'Future of Work in Post-16 Education' working group is currently considering AI in the context of our sectors. An example of AI is in item 10 of this newsletter.

However, this contribution is about an earlier problem for employers of graduates.

In a u3a group we read a book (Le diplôme) about faking a university certificate. It seems that it's quite a thriving business worldwide.

Here's one site I found. Note their final caveat.

Get Accredited Degree from Top University

Buydegreeonline.com is a UK's leading accredited degree provider that you can trust. Now, buying an original UK Degree doesn't require that you go through the old conventional method of learning. You don't have to attend classes, give those horrible tests, and write assignments or thesis. All you have to do is make payment for

your desired degree and an authentic UK degree will be sent to you.

Here at Buydegreeonline.com, we provide our students with accredited and authentic degrees that have the potential to significantly advance their careers. You do not need to be concerned about attending lectures on campus. Stay at home and purchase a degree online from the convenience of your own home. We have a variety of degrees available for you to choose from. We have a wide range of degrees available for you to choose from. When you're ready to purchase an online degree, you can look through the various options available on our platform.

It will be wise to select a degree based on your work experience and area of expertise so that you can function optimally once employed with the degree.

Actually I am glad I did the courses and I enjoyed my time in education, which may be why I became a teacher.

Jo Corke SWRMB

9. TUCSW Rep of the month, Martina Vrajitoru.



Workplaces with a union involved are much better for people. When I see what they can bargain for, what they've

accomplished at **Hinkley Point** - you simply can't have that without unions. Starting at Hinkley Point, she was frustrated by the lack of appropriate PPE for women. "The clothes were just men's clothes made smaller; nothing fit properly and I felt like a

penguin in the shoes. It was uncomfortable trying to work like that."

She raised these and other concerns straight with the site leadership with the backing of her union colleagues, and won a suite of tangible improvements - women's specific shoes, trousers, new material and more comfortable colours; not to mention new, cleaner toilet blocks and the provision of tampons. She also spearheaded Hinkley's Women in Construction group which oversaw the implementation of a new menopause at work policy.

Martina is seeking to set a benchmark for women in the entire construction industry, with the next step being a legal mandate for gender inclusive PPE. She is seeking testimony and videos from other workers who are required to wear unisex PPE; building up a repertoire and relevant case studies to make the case.

TUCSW

10. Book Corner.

Kingsolver is well-known as author of fiction, but her first book was the non-fiction *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike*. It is now (Oct 2024) published in the UK. This is an extract from an interview.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/oct/06/barbara-kingsolver-demon-copperhead-jd-vance-holding-the-line>

"I grew up in working-class, rural Kentucky, and in those days – hard to imagine now – almost no one was a registered Republican. Southern Appalachia was formed by the collision between labour and big capital. It wasn't mining country, but it was tobacco country, and everyone had a sense of "it's us or the big companies". Of course you don't think about these things when you're young; you just absorb your milieu. But as I got older, I always felt the story I wanted to hear was the workers' story. In a cafeteria, I want

to go into the kitchen, and talk to those people – and they're often the women." Her point is that she knew all about unions and how vital they can be long before she arrived in Clifton, Arizona, in her Nissan pickup with only a tape recorder and a few high-minded journalistic ideals for company."

As you may have noticed, ChatGPT, (a generative artificial intelligence chatbot) has been used in several recent editions of this newsletter. This is its *contribution* when asked for "under 250 words on "The Arizona Miners' Strike 1983"; graduate level text with Final Polish."

The 1983 Arizona Miners' Strike: A Turning Point in Labor History

The 1983 Arizona Miners' Strike stands as a pivotal chapter in U.S. labor history, underscoring the shifting dynamics of industrial power in the late 20th century. The conflict erupted when Phelps Dodge Corporation announced sweeping wage and benefit cuts, citing a global downturn in copper prices. Over 2,000 unionized miners, represented by organizations such as the United Steelworkers of America, initiated a strike on July 1, 1983, targeting operations in key Arizona mining towns like Morenci, Clifton, and Ajo.

Corporate Countermeasures and State Intervention. *Phelps Dodge countered the strike with aggressive measures, including hiring replacement workers and heavily fortifying work sites. Striking miners responded with organized protests and picket lines, but their efforts were met with escalating state intervention. Police and National Guard deployments led to violent clashes, laying bare the intense conflict between labor advocacy and corporate authority.*

The Decline of Organized Labor. *Central to the strike was the deployment of strikebreakers and the eventual decertification of unions, emblematic of the broader decline in organized labor's influence during the Reagan era. By 1984, the strike had concluded with most workers either replaced or compelled to return under significantly reduced terms.*

Legacy of the Strike. *The Arizona Miners' Strike of 1983 highlights the growing dominance of corporate interests and the mounting challenges faced by unions in a rapidly changing economic landscape. This event remains a poignant reminder of the vulnerabilities of organized labor amid the neoliberal transformations of the era.*

Contributions for this newsletter are encouraged; your own or an AI chatbot.

Jo Corke SWRMB

11. SW TUC Pensioners' Conference 2024.

Ines Lage the SW TUC Regional Secretary welcomed 40 delegates to the 2024 TUC SW Pensioners conference. After a gap of several years the Pensioners Annual Conference has been revived and a Pensioners Committee of 22 retired members elected.

The meeting heard an update on the pensions landscape from Jack Jones, the TUC Policy Officer on Pensions. The election of a Labour Government has meant more work for TUC Officers as there is now a closer link and more frequent contact and dialogue with Government departments. Jack told the meeting that a reversal of the cut in the winter fuel allowance is not 'up for discussion at a Treasury level'. The TUC is working with Ministers on measures to lessen the impact but progress is slow and any mitigation will not take effect this winter.

The Government is currently undergoing a pensions review to safeguard large pension funds from irresponsible behaviour in the financial sector. The TUC is pushing for an increase in employer contributions to

ensure a reasonable pension for all and lobbying for Government legislation to bring in a hybrid pension scheme part defined contribution and part final salary to provide a stable guaranteed income in retirement. There will be a statutory independent review next year of state pension age. The TUC is campaigning for the retirement age not to be raised to 68 as life expectancy is not continuing to increase and already many workers in manual and low pay sectors cannot work to the current pension age.

Glen Burrows described the work of the National Pensioners Convention highlighting the need for the Government to make the elimination of poverty its top priority. 2.1 million pensioners live in relative poverty and yet one of the first actions of the incoming Labour Government was to remove benefits from the most vulnerable in society. Glen pointed out that the state pension is not a benefit but part of a social contract between workers and the Government. The National Insurance fund is in excess every year but the money is not ring fenced and directed to social welfare. How many people can work for 35 qualifying years in a climate of austerity and zero hour contracts?

Nick Seymour a Principal Lawyer with Thompsons Solicitors described his work supporting TUC members affected by asbestos. In the period after World War 2 the danger and illnesses caused by asbestos were known but considered a price worth paying for its usefulness in the construction industry. Asbestos was not banned until 1999. Mesothelioma can take 15-50 years to develop and the current diagnosis of around three thousand cases a year is not declining

at the rate expected. Education staff working in CLASP schools (consortium local authority prefab buildings) have been badly affected and between 2011-2020 111 teachers died from mesothelioma. Talc is mined alongside asbestos and is another source of exposure to asbestos fibres. Unions have played an important role in protecting workers and companies should have an asbestos register so if exposed at work a record can be kept ensuring later claims are likely to be more successful.

There was a discussion on how to tackle the far right after a presentation from Riz Hussain, the TUC Race Relations Officer about how the far right organise and the normalisation of their ideas and messages. He described their modes of organising through political parties, street activities and online groups. The presence of these groups is increasingly online and decentralised relying on donations from followers. It is a meme culture aligning to the political moment and described as shape shifting and strategy shifting to exploit crisis to divide us.

The final speaker, Nikki Pound, TUC Women's officer discussed strategies to tackle the gender pensions gap. The gender pay gap has been around 13% for the last 20 years but the pensions gender gap has been 40% since 2015. The income of retired women is on average £7,000 lower than the income of retired men.

[Ruth Amias UCU SWRMB](#)

12. Winter Fuel Campaign.

On Friday, the 13th, of December in Bideford; the event was greeted positively, by passers-by at the

campaign street stall, with eager enthusiasm to sign the petition, and overall disgust (some unrepeatable) at the Labour government, withdrawing the allowance. The campaign will continue in the New Year at different locations in our region.



More photos at:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1mKIJb1Le1IRAmK4g6MPmEXLSAoTGNjd?usp=sharing>

Dave, & Andy travelled down from Bridgewater, joining Roz, Unite Community & Unite retired members.

Geoff Allan ND&T.TUC.

13. UCU Equality Groups Conference 29th November 2024

The 2024 UCU Equalities Conference took place over three days at the Birmingham University Conference Centre. Each of the UCU equality groups had their own conference starting with migrant members and disabled members on the first day. The next day a plenary session for all the equality groups was held followed by the women's members' annual conference. On the final day the black members' and LGBT+ members' conferences were held.

Plenary Session: Theme- fighting the rise of the far right in the context of there being a new Labour Government

Jo Grady, UCU General Secretary gave the opening address. She started by saying how proud she is of the equality work that UCU is doing. Given that the current Labour Government is not going to change Tory immigration policy or bailout FE and HE anytime soon the campaigning action of UCU members is vital. She warned that we are close to having Reform groups on campuses and co-operation is needed with the NUS and other Education Unions to fight back against the far right

A lot of racist rhetoric has become normalised. The Overton window has shifted. We need to consider the possibility of a far right Government in Britain in five years time driven by 14 years of austerity that has cemented social fragmentation into our society. Jo told the meeting that our UCU migrant members represent a powerful testimony of experience and achievement countering the narrative that immigrants are a drain on society. We must send a strong message that anti-immigrant rhetoric must not go unchallenged. There is not enough education about British colonialism past and present to develop public understanding of the roots of racism.



Jo Grady copyright: UCU

Jo argued that there is a social cohesion as well as economic argument for investing in education. As a result of UCU lobbying there is now

£300 million extra funding for the sectors but the £9000 pay gap between colleges and schools must be closed. UCU also continues to fight the increase in HE fees highlighting that it is a direct result of a failed marketisation model. On a more optimistic note Jo has found the new Labour Minister for prisons more positive about the need to finance and expand prison education. UCU membership in the Adult and Prison sector is now growing. UCU are committed to increase training of Union reps to recognise and counter racism and sexual harassment at work and there are plans to recruit a full time national legal caseworker to deal with cases of sexual harassment and violence.

Maxine Looby, UCU President told the meeting that her brief during office would be to listen, learn and collaborate to respond to member's challenges. We are stronger united, our voices louder when we amplify them together. Maxine's aim is that a commitment to intersectionality should not just appear on paper but operate in practice. UCU needs to take up more racism legal test cases as a health and safety issues. More steps need to be taken to promote proportionality in UCU as an organisation and there is a move to recruit more senior black staff and officers. Maxine reminded the meeting that UCU has a broad community of members and that retired members are ideally placed to play a leading role in the fight against the far right. Retired members leave large legacies to the Union and give generously to fighting funds.

Dr Leona Vaughn, Derby Fellow for slavery and unfree labour research described a direct route from Britain's

global footprint of colonialism, slavery and extraction of wealth to the hostile environment that sparked the summer riots in our cities. The language of racism is designed to divide and rule with its narrative of some lives are more valuable than others. If we do not know our history we are doomed to repeat it. We are not yet living in post-colonial times and the movement to decolonise the curriculum has run out of steam. Only ten universities have signed up for the slavery and universities project which aims re-write our history to promote reparative justice.

Ruth Amias UCU SWRMB

14. UCU: proud to celebrate Black History Month

The contributions Black people from the Caribbean and Africa have made to the United Kingdom are often ignored or erased. A month cannot do real justice in recognising the many contributions and sacrifices those brave and determined Black people who came before us made. As a union of educators we have a duty and responsibility to recognise, honour and salute those who dedicated their lives to fighting for racial equity and justice. From the Bristol Bus Boycott to the doctors and nurses who were architects of the NHS, for all those who served in the First and Second World Wars and, to those who heeded the call to come and build the country after the Second World War, we owe them a debt of gratitude. They fought for us all.

A few of these amazing people are listed below. I encourage you to take some time and read about their contributions and reflect upon the positive impact they made:

- **Amy Garvey:** co-chaired the first session of the Fifth Pan-African Congress (1945) in Manchester as one of only two women presenters
- **Claudia Jones:** Black nationalist, feminist and political activist and a founding member of the Notting Hill Carnival
- **Lady Kofoworola Ademola:** educator and advocate for women's education and social reform and first African woman to graduate from the University of Oxford
- **Paul Stephenson:** Civil rights campaigner, Bristol Bus Boycotts
- **Chris Braithwaite:** Trade union leader and founder of Colonial Seamen's Union
- **James Arthur Harley:** councillor and trade union activist
- **John Richard Archer:** former mayor of Battersea and first Black person to hold public office in London
- **Ottobah Cugoano:** author and anti-slavery campaigner

Let's work to acknowledge, empower, and embed their contributions in our teaching and learning, and our fight against racism.

For more information about Black History Month, please visit [UCU's dedicated webpage](#) as well as [BHM's official website](#).

Maxine Looby UCU President

designed to help you manage your pension more efficiently.

<https://www.teacherspensions.co.uk/members/faq/my-pension-online/my-pension-online.aspx>

16. Ukraine Independence Day 24th August.



“A referendum on the Act of Declaration of Independence was held in Ukraine on 1 December 1991. An overwhelming majority of 92.3% of voters approved the declaration of independence made by the Verkhovna Rada on 24 August 1991.”

Wikipedia.



Banksy Stamp; photo Copyright Jo Corke



Another Ukrainian stamp and a poster depicting the RTS Moskva. Source: Creator: Elena Perez-Alvaro; author's photograph. [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](#) Copyright: © Copyright by BACHLaw Foundation and the Authors.

17. Editor's Note.

Contributions to the newsletter are welcome.

Jo Corke SW RMB
