



Newsletter

South West Retired Members Branch

No.39 September 2025

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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.

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

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

Andy Mathers retired recently from UWE Bristol where he was an active member of the UCU branch for many years.

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.

1. A branch meeting is planned for Tuesday 7th October 2025.

It is hoped that this will be a hybrid meeting at Exeter; 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 members are welcome to contact us anytime. [Tony Staunton](#) chair SWRMB

For more information please contact:

ucu.swest@gmail.com

or contact the officers below:

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and Mike Farmer
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3. May Day 2025. Our branch was represented at the Bristol event and here are some of the banners.



All gave permission to be used in this newsletter.



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4. Branch delegates needed.

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

Please get in touch if you could represent our branch at:

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/>

North Devon and Torridge TUC

[Facebook](#)

Mike Farmer SWRMB

5. USS Pensions update.

At our July 2025 branch meeting, Dooley Harte, UCU Pension Official with responsibility for the USS Pension Scheme provided us with an update on what work the UCU Superannuation Working Group (SWG) has been doing on behalf of scheme members with the USS Pension Scheme.

Dooley briefly introduced the work of the SWG as well as the structures UCU works within to represent all members in the USS Pension Scheme. He provided a brief history of the recent Restoration & Recovery agreements that seen a commitment of around £16bn transfer back to scheme members by restoring member benefits to their pre-2022 levels, paying members active during this period a one-off index-linked pension augmentation payment that would compensate members for their lost as well as agree lower pension contribution rates that would provide members greater take home pay while providing the same pension benefits going forward. You can further information on this at [UCU - USS benefits restored in full](#)

The Committee was then provided a brief Report of the ongoing work being taken forward by the SWG.

Stability Working Group – This work has two main strands.

i. Valuation Methodology - A priority for the SWG is getting changes to the

current scheme valuation methodology to move towards a Best Estimate assessment and away from the current Gilts-lead process. UCU considers Gilts as less stable and the current methodology has, in our opinion, driven a lot of the volatility seen by members over the last 10 years. UCU has submitted proposals to USS Trustee Board and is working with USS and UCEA to agree the methodology for the 2026 valuation.

ii. Conditional Indexation – SWG is currently working through a process to assess whether Conditional Indexation, a process where guaranteed inflationary increases paid to all scheme members, including pensioner members, are not guaranteed but conditional on the financial health of the scheme. In return for this transfer of risk, scheme members would be paid higher member benefits when scheme is in good health. This is a very complex proposal and an Interim Report has just been published on USS website - [Conditional Indexation interim report](#)

Other Issues the SWG are engaging on include –

-Re-Enrolment – we are engaged with branches to get those members who have opted out of USS to rejoin;

-Early Retirement Factors – We continue to assist UCU members who seek advice with early retirement

following changes to the factors in October 2024;

-Replacement Rules Group – We are engaged with USS to include the Deeds of Amendment and update the language of the USS Scheme Rules to make them more user friendly.

-Collaborative Review Forum – We have agreed to establish a forum with USS & UCEA that will look at minor rule changes and bring proposals to USS JNC for approval. We are currently looking at Co-Habitation rules, how Restoration & Recovery impacted on Ill-health retirement(IHR) and death in service as well as members who qualify for IHR but have less than 2 years' service.

-Revaluation – We are looking at Revaluation rules and seeking changes to current process to provide members with better outcomes.

-Investments – In line with union policy, we are engaged to provide more ethical; pensions and ensure USS investments take into consideration not only climate change but investments in Arms & Military complex.

Following the presentation members had an opportunity to engage in a Q&A session with a number of important matters raised including questions on RPI/CPIH rates, USS Investment strategy, Conditional Indexation and Scheme Governance.

Some questions were also raised on Techers Pension Scheme and Dooley agreed to respond after discussing with his pension colleagues Joyce & Emma-Jane who lead on TPS.

Everyone considered this a valuable session and agreed to seek updates from Pension Officials in the future.

Dooley Harte UCU
USS Pensions

6. 2025 Trades Councils Conference 24th and 25th May 2025, at Congress House, London.

The Conference was opened with an address by PAUL NOVAK (General Secretary, TUC) who stressed the importance of a vibrant Trades Council movement in supporting workers' rights and campaigns. He spoke about his recent visit to the Palestinian West Bank and of the appalling conditions, illegal Israeli Settlements, low pay and sexual harassment at work. He confirmed that the TUC is pushing for the full recognition of Palestine as a state.

He also spoke of the importance of the TUC ensuring that the Labour Party delivered on its promises; he said that we should expect more and expect better. He also spoke on the need to fully implement the Employment Rights Legislation and for it not to be watered down. Finally, he spoke on the importance that the Labour Movement was the

voice for the working class, and not Reform.

I was struck by the degree of unity amongst delegates. In all thirty motions were debated, and all were passed with little or no dissent. Topics included building the Trades Council Movement, opposing the Far Right (including our own motion “Countering the Rise of Reform UK: A Trade Union Response”), Employment and TU rights and the world of work, Public Services and the NHS and the Right to Protest.

Emergency Motions covered the Birmingham Bin Strikes, Post Office closures and opposing Disability Benefit Cuts. Given the strength of feeling on the subject, this year’s motion to the TUC is the one opposing cuts to Disability Benefits.

As well as PAUL NOVAK, we heard from a Unite Member and Birmingham Bin Striker (a bucket collection was held for strikers) and VICTORIA JONES (TUC Senior Policy Officer, Equalities, International, Strategic and Governance) who spoke on the work the TUC has been doing to tackle the far right, and specifically acknowledged the call in our motion for them to produce targeted briefings and material so that we might counter this threat.

Finally, on the Saturday evening there was a workshop and Q&A held with a young Trade Unionist from Derby TC who spoke about developing Social Media strategies and I was struck by the importance he put on Instagram and Tik Tok over Facebook and X.

Simon Smith
President, Cheltenham and Gloucester
Trades Union Council

7. Prison Education: Malcolm X centenary

Malcolm X's leadership reached far and wide and influenced countless individuals, communities, and global movements. We shine a light on the incredible work Black educators carry out across UCU to re-educate, rehabilitate and push for reform across prison education.

Ekau Agha, a prison educator and researcher at HMP Pentonville, [reflects on Malcolm X's connection with Yuri Kochiyama](#)

UCU campaigns team

8. A visit to the Melbourne Trades Hall, a building celebrating Australian workers organisation.



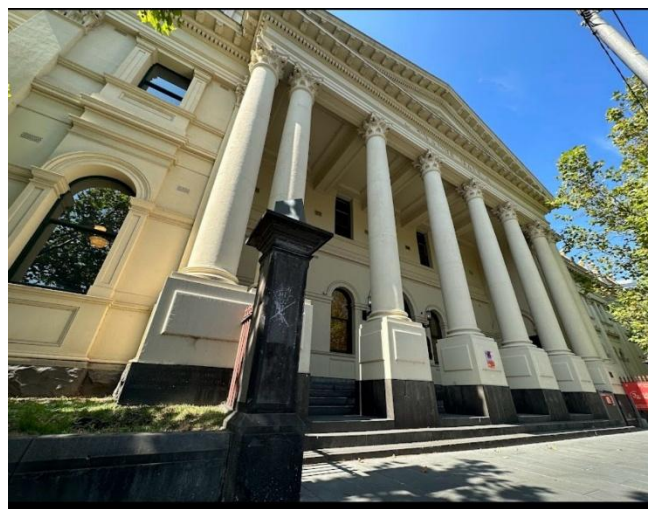
One of the first 8-hour days in the world achieved in 1856.



A celebration of the Eureka Rebellion of gold miners (their flag is still flown) and campaign headquarters of universal suffrage, the “no to conscription” campaign of WW1, equal pay for women and gay marriage equalisation campaigns.



Great 19th century building too, saved in the run up to the 1956 Olympics when loads of beautiful Melbourne buildings were demolished in the name of progress and modernisation.



Jackie Haskins
Bristol Unison RMB

9. Vampires strike back.

As a branch we receive regular emails from Tanbir Siddique, Secretary, Cheltenham and District Trades Union Council.

September 1st 2025 is the 161st day * of strike action by the Phlebotomists at Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

The demand is for their roles to be re-banded to band 3 and paid up to six years of back pay to correct **historic underpayment for the work they have done.** In early May, two of the members' band 4 managers have also joined UNISON and since been striking with them in solidarity to demand the re-banding. As a branch we receive regular emails from Tanbir Siddique, Cheltenham and District TUC.

At Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival this year several phlebotomists took centre stage to speak about the

dispute and hundreds of pounds was raised for the strike fund from donations by attendees.



Banner Theatre – Battle Lines. The inspirational phlebotomists appeared at this event.

September Picket Dates:

Wednesday 13th: Joint picket at Gloucester Royal Hospital from 07:30 to 12:00.

Thursday 14th: Joint picket at Cheltenham General Hospital from 07.30 to 12:00.

****AI Overview.** Gloucestershire NHS phlebotomists started their strike on Monday, March 17, 2025, with initial walkouts over three days. This industrial action escalated in subsequent weeks and months as the union continued to push for a formal review and re-grading of their roles, citing unfair pay for their skills and experience.*

Jo Corke SWRMB

10. Tolpuddle 2025

The festival was vibrant and friendly with people milling about, with a variety of stalls from the Trade

Unions, Morningstar & International Brigade and many more besides. Not to mention a rain forest worth of news, views and pamphlets.

Some of the marquees had speakers and music events, food and beverages, from across the globe, to suit all tastes.

The March Off, on the afternoon was an array of colourful Banners, Brass bands and a few celebrities, as always marching through the Tolpuddle village with the locals looking on in appreciation and wonder, (I don't know which) from their deck chairs with a glass of bubbly in their hand soaking up the spectacle.

Once we had recovered from the procession and holding a banner for an hour or so, we returned to the festival field to await Billy Bragg's brilliant performance.

On a final note, I must mention the festival organisers for their help and efficiency in not only their stewardship but the clean accessible facilities available. And of course, "Blair" our coach driver from Streets Coaches who safely guided our party to and from our destination in comfort and safety a big thank you.

Tolpuddle- Photos & Videos are available on North Devon & Torridge TUC – Facebook.

Also: <https://festivaltopia.com/how-20-small-towns-became-the-birthplaces-of-big-revolutions/>

Geoff Allen ND&T TUC

11. Ukraine



A 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.

12. Editor's Note.

It may be that you would like to contribute to this newsletter.

You might even want to try your hand at producing the next newsletter. You can use our current format, or another if you prefer. Distribution by email to our members can be delegated to the branch membership secretary, (that's me too). You can get in touch using this email ucu.swest@gmail.com Looking forward to hearing from you.

Jo Corke SW RMB
