

1. Notice of branch AGM

This short newsletter is to give notice of the branch AGM.

The Annual General Meeting of the West Midlands Retired Members Branch of UCU will be held in the regional UCU offices at Alpha Tower in Birmingham, on 2nd March at Noon. Minutes of the AGM in 2014 will be distributed at the meeting. Last year our Chairman/Secretary made a report of the year's activities. It is reproduced below.

2. 2014 Chair's report

Just over a year has passed since our last AGM on March 20th 2013 and although there has been quite a lot of activity in the trade union field, there has not been the level that many expected given what was happening with falls in living standards from austerity policies.

Last year all of our activities were taking place against the backdrop of a weak economy teetering on the edge of a triple-dip recession. Due to a number of factors – mainly QE and Help to Buy - a recession was avoided. However, all the predictions from serious economists state that the recovery is partial, lop sided and unsustainable and that a new housing bubble is being prepared. This recovery is driven by consumers using up savings and borrowing.

The recent March 19th Osborne budget announced that public money would be spent bribing companies to invest – tax free investment levels up from £25k to £500k, richer pensioners could draw down cash sums (and then when the pot is empty go to the state for help) and richer savers could save up to £15k in ISAs when 8m households have no savings due to low wages that barely cover living costs.

Many are now borrowing to pay essential bills and the number using just the 400 plus food banks run by the Russell Trust alone has risen from 350k in all of 2012/13 to 614k in the first 9 months of 2013/14. Officially, 583k people are on zero hour contracts yet the Social Care Minister admits there are 370k in the care sector alone. Real wages have fallen by £1,600 since 2010, more working households are in poverty than non working ones, 80% of jobs created pay average wages that are less than a quarter of average earnings and 5 families have an income that is greater than the poorest 20% of the population.

The savage cuts to public services have reduced the budget deficit from £170bn to £105bn and the Coalition plans to have a surplus by 2018/19. That means even more savage attacks on working class people combined with a welfare cap. For every £1 saved in the deficit so far, 80p has been from cuts and 20p from tax rises. From now on 94p will be from cuts.

The economic crisis is driving the cuts agenda and the policy being followed is to cut the incomes of those at the bottom through wage cuts/freezes and cuts in public services, whilst bribing those at the top through income tax rate cuts from 50% to 45% or corporation tax cuts from 28% to 21%. For the rich you get incentives from a higher income, for the poor you are incentivised by income cuts. The cuts are therefore not ideological. They are driven by the need to save a capitalist system in crisis.

It is against this background that we have carried on our work over the past year. At the 2013 UCU Congress we had one delegate, one motion and one amendment. The amendment sought to include retired members in the category of the equality agenda alongside women, Black, LGBT and disability. The amendment was passed but no steps have been taken to include us. The motion was for UCU nationally to encourage debate at all levels of the union on the need for public ownership of banking and finance. It built on the policy motion from 2012 which we also moved and got passed. UCU nationally has done nothing to implement the 2013 motion.

So like last year we can report that we have flown the flag of UCU, of trade unionism and of the issues affecting retired members at all levels of the labour and trade union movement and beyond. Within UCU we have sent a delegate to the Regional Committee and the REC to raise our issues. We have supported action by our UCU members in FE and HE, especially during recent strike action by attending meetings and picket lines. In Coventry I have acted as coordinator/liaison between AE, FE and HE continually keeping UCU members informed of developments locally, regionally and nationally. We played a very important role in the dispute at Halesowen College last year and that was finally settled this year when the 4 sacked members received a cash settlement in a confidentiality agreement.

We have also been active in other arenas raising the banner of UCU, of education at all levels, and of the plight of retired members. Through our WMRMB branch I sit on the EC of and am a delegate to the Coventry TUC (CTUC). As a result of my work over past years I was elected as President of Coventry TUC at the March 2014 AGM. That gives UCU issues an even bigger platform and a voice at public meetings of the labour movement. I also regularly attend meetings of the British Pensioners Trade Union Action Association, a group that attracts retired trade unionists and retired political activists from the labour movement.

In short it has been a year of activity but at the beginning many of us had hoped that the official labour and trade union movement would have taken a more resolute stand against the austerity programme of the Coalition. That has not happened. In fact, despite our potential strength as a movement our leadership

has sought to make deals and compromises. What happened at Grangemouth was a gigantic step back for the working class – a 3-year pay freeze, a 3-year no strike agreement, an end to the final salary pension scheme and the banning of fulltime convenors from the site.

But we will recover. We have to as the coming year will see even greater strife as the cuts agenda really begins to bite. In many local councils the cuts so far have been around 40 to 50%. It will be increasingly difficult to fund even statutory services. And when the cuts programme is over and the budget is balanced, the Coalition has already stated that the level of provision will be at that of 1948. So all the gains our movement has made since WW2 will be eroded IF WE DO NOT FIGHT BACK.

So I attend meetings, speak at them, write articles and reports and discuss with many people in our movement – and in all cases of all the hats that I wear the first one is always UCU.

Darrall Cozens, Chair/Secretary, WMRMB of UCU.

3. Call for Motions

If any member wishes to put forward motions for the branch to consider, and if approved, forward to the UCU for Congress – then please bring them along to the AGM. The deadline for submitting motions is March 13th.

4. Report of Retired Members AGM

The inaugural meeting (following the addition of Rule 24.3 Passed at Congress in May 2014) took place on November 19th, 2014. It was Chaired by Tina Downes.

Twenty delegates attended (two from each RM Branch). There were 11 Motions for debate. There was a Presidential address from Liz Lawrence. Paul Cotteral, HO Official was in attendance. Each Branch made a brief report. There was also a report on the elections to groups and committees, i.e. NPC, TUC. Finally we held a one minute silence in remembrance of Andrew Price, a loyal NATFE/UCU colleague who died in September.

It was established that motions being carried by the meeting would be forwarded to the NEC (Rule 24.3). There were some informal mechanisms in place to track the outcomes of such forwarded motions. Obviously branches would still be able to submit motions to Congress directly in the usual way.

The WMRMB motion was the only one that did not follow this path. We decided to withdraw it, on the recommendation of the Chair, and set up a small sub committee (Kate, Paul Russell, John Williams) to write a rule change for Congress next year. The issues are around the term "qualifying employment" (Rule 3.1.1) and how this has been used to exclude retired members from the Equality Standing Committees. Currently we have not managed to write a new rule - suggestions please!

Through the discussion on the other motions, we recognised the need for a motion to Congress next year of the potential effects on the economy of the 'silver pound'. That changes to pensions

will have a direct impact on the economy, suggesting the Government are unprepared for the consequences. Also a motion possibly on the Social Care cap, which does not appear to account for the predicted care needs of older people. The nature of profit making care providers, training and the issue of safeguarding, could also be included.

Kate Clayton, Treasurer/Equalities Officer, WMRMB of UCU

5. Agenda

1. Apologies.
2. Minutes of AGM held on Wednesday, March 20th 2013.
3. Matters Arising.
4. Officers' Reports:
 - 4a. Chair/Acting Secretary.
 - 4b. Treasurer/Equalities Officer.
 - 4c. Newsletter/Communications Officer.
5. Elections.
 - 5a. Chair.
 - 5b. Secretary.
 - 5c. Treasurer.
 - 5d. Equalities Officer.
 - 5e. Newsletter/Communications Officer.
 - 5f. Delegate/s to UCU Regional Council and REC.
6. Affiliations.
 - 6a. NPC.
 - 6b. Women's Charter and other women's organisations.
 - 6c. Trade Union Councils.
7. 2014 UCU Congress Business.
 - 7a. Motions.
 - 7b. Delegates (2)
8. AOB.

6. WMRMB – Contacts

WMRMB Chair/Secretary: Darrall Cozens
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WMRMB - UCU also has a Facebook page:
<http://www.facebook.com/groups/156281354458418>

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WMRMB of UCU: 226 members – Jan 2015