University and College Union

Newsletter

East Midlands Retired Members Branch

No.26 December 2015

In this newsletter

The branch committee wishes all members seasons greetings and a prosperous new year

1. Branch meeting

Tuesday 24th February 2016

10.30 a.m. – 12.30 pm (Speaker at 11.30 pm)

Venue: Mechanics Institute

3 North Sherwood Street, Nottingham NG1 4EZ

Speaker: Alan Tuckman

'Anti-Trade Union Legislation'

Please note the earlier time. After the meeting join us for lunch for further discussion and socialising.

Alan is a UCU member and also coordinates the Nottingham Trade Union Forum. He is an Honorary Fellow, Centre for Industrial Relations, University of Keele and Visiting Fellow, Department of Business and Economics, University of Loughborough. He has written a pamphlet on and a guide to the TU Bill.

Please inform us of change of address or email

We encourage retired members to use their **home** email for when you give up your work email address. We send out a quarterly newsletter by email, but only an annual newsletter by post. Sending the newsletters by post is increasingly expensive and private to boot.

2016 Cromford Branch Meeting

Cromford: Tuesday 26th April. 11.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m.
Speaker: Chris Tansley from the Unison NEC who heads their social care charter campaign. Topic: Care Charter.

2. New website for our branch

One of our retired members who is expert in IT has set up the retired members branch website. Many thanks to Bob Haskins. The site is still being built so any helpful suggestions would be welcome to the committee. You can check on missed newsletters, dates and place of branch meetings, other branch activities etc, as well as useful links. Please add it to your bookmarks. We hope that you will find the website helpful.

The web address is: ucu-em-rmb.org.uk

3. Pension triple lock applied

Prices -0.1%, wages +2.9%, backstop +2.5%.
So the wages have it.
This is good news for 13 million state pensioners. The so-called 'triple lock' has produced a rise in their pensions of 2.9%. With inflation at minus 0.1% that is three clear percentage points ahead of the rise in prices. The basic pension will rise in April by £3.35 to £119.30 a week. It could never have been less than a £2.90 rise - that would have been achieved if the backstop 2.5% figure had been used. But the triple lock rule is that the pension goes up by the highest of those three figures. So in the 2016/17 round, wages win. That extra 45p a week to 13 million pensioners will cost the Chancellor around £300 million in 2016/17.

The 2.9% wages rise will also be instrumental in working out the level of the so-called flat rate new state pension which will be paid to new pensioners from 6 April 2016. In fact the new pension is not flat rate and for the first five years most new pensioners will get less than the standard amount. The Government says that standard amount will be 'at least' £151.25 a week. But it should be more. The Government has also said it will be more than the 'minimum guarantee' pension credit. Pension credit is a means-tested benefit that ensures no-one over state pension age has an income lower than the minimum guarantee. This year that is set at £151.20 a week. Hence the minimum for the new state pension of £151.25. But that is using the 2015/16 minimum guarantee. What will it be in 2016/17 when the new state pension begins? The law says that the minimum guarantee must rise with earnings (Social Security Admin. Act 1992). If the 2.9% figure is used the minimum guarantee will be £155.60 in 2016/17. And the new state pension should therefore be at least £155.65 a week.

Contrasts are already being drawn between the above inflation rise for pensioners and the zero rise in welfare benefits for everyone else. The Government had already decided that most benefits would be frozen at their current rates in 2016/17 (and for the next three years) as part of its austerity programme. Now that inflation in September is minus 0.1%, all the others will be frozen too, if the normal rules are followed, including those for disabled people, war veterans, widows, and carers. Even frozen benefits will seem generous to millions of working people who will see their income fall when tax credits are cut in April. The Treasury revealed this week that would save £4.23 billion in 2016/17. By contrast, a discussion paper from the Government Actuary, published by mistake on its website and quickly withdrawn, revealed that the triple lock had added £10 a week to the state pension at a cost of £6bn in 2015/16. So pensioners really are the winners from this week's round of figures. An announcement about the levels of the old and new state pension is expected in the Autumn Statement on 25 November.

from Money Box 16th October

4. The Triple Lock in Danger

The message that pensioners are too rich and too greedy is beginning to be heard. The triple lock on the State Pension guarantees that the state pension will rise with earnings or prices or 2.5% whichever is the highest. The present Government is committed to keeping it until the April 2020 rise. The habit of pensioners voting is well understood by our politicians and is likely to survive the present attempt to prune the electoral list by individual registration. This lock is being singled out for particular opprobrium, despite the state pension in the UK being one of the lowest in Western Europe.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) Director Paul Johnson has pointed out that median pensioner income is £398 a week, £14 a week more than the £384 median for working age people. Those figures take account of dependants and housing costs and are to a certain extent artificial. This change is partly due to the triple lock that has protected pensioners from the freezes and cuts in the state benefits paid to people under pension age. The older group is also far more likely to own their home than younger people and to benefit from work or private pensions.

The result is that a large proportion of those retiring now will be better off in retirement than they were during their working life. Thirty years ago pensioners were at least three times as likely to be poor as non-pensioners. Now they are less likely to be poor. IFS High levels of income for current retirees shouldn't blind us to future challenges.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) points out that the median income for retired households is now £1800 a year higher than it was in the economic downturn of 2007/08. But non-retired households were still £800 a year worse off than they were in 2007/08. The ONS also said that was due in part to the triple lock.

The Government Actuary's website is warning that the guaranteed rise in the state pension will cost £6bn this year and over time would become unaffordable. Obviously, wars in the Middle East and our nuclear deterrent (a hi-tech status symbol analogous to the Tudor cod-piece) are so essential that their costs must not be put under scrutiny. The website concluded that it may be useful to investigate different economic scenarios before committing to maintain the policy for longer. Pensioner poverty still exists and seeing its reduction as a cause for alarm is perverse. About as stupid as cutting real wages and expecting the economy to thrive on reduced demand.

Julian Atkinson

5. Further Threats to USS

Rising liabilities focus attention on whether Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) assumptions are 'unreasonably pessimistic'. The prospect of further cuts to the sector's largest pension scheme has been raised after its **deficit rose sharply** despite savings from the closure of final salary pensions.

The latest USS annual report and accounts say that removing the link to final salary and other changes being brought in next year will cut about £5.2 billion from the Universities Superannuation Scheme's deficit. However, those savings have been more than offset by adverse market conditions that have pushed up liabilities by a total of £10.7 billion since 2011. It means that the £2.9 billion deficit in 2011 almost doubled to £5.4 billion at the 2014 triennial valuation, despite assets increasing from £32.4 billion to £41.6 billion. The scheme, which has about 147,000 active members mainly at pre-92 universities, was 88 per cent funded in 2014 compared with 92 per cent funded in 2011. That fell to 86 per cent funded in 2015 as the deficit worsened to £8.3 billion as a result of difficult market conditions, the report adds.

Asked if further changes to USS may be required to address the growing shortfall, a spokeswoman said that its "trustee is alert to the continued challenging investment environment and anticipates that the deficit will continue to be volatile." It will "continue to monitor all aspects of scheme funding closely. Its liabilities have increased due to the historically low yields on government bonds and the continuation of a more pessimistic outlook for long-term growth".

However, the massively increased liabilities are likely to prompt further scrutiny from the sector about how they are calculated. Many economists and statisticians have claimed that unreasonably pessimistic assumptions have been used by the USS to "artificially create a high deficit" and justify next year's closure of the final salary scheme. Dennis Leech, emeritus professor of economics at the University of Warwick, believes that the way liabilities are calculated by the USS is "more or less arbitrary". "They are calculated by processes that are not rooted in reality, but based on fantastical theories about the economy," said Professor Leech. "The liabilities figure is going through the roof because it is computed using gilts, which are very low due to quantitative easing together with very unrealistic assumptions about the future the employers are insisting on imposing, such as unprecedented pay rises, unreasonably high mortality rates among members, high inflation rates, and – most shockingly – the assumption of a short employer covenant, treating old established universities in the same way as [businesses which may collapse]," he said.

"What is astonishing is that Universities UK (UUK) has apparently been prepared to go along with this reasoning applied to universities and not even post-92 institutions," he added. The UCU, which coordinated industrial action against pension changes last year, is holding a meeting with its branch pensions officers next month to start a campaign to persuade the employers to change the assumptions that underpin the liabilities calculation, Professor Leech said.

UCU is under the impression that UUK is becoming increasingly concerned about the USS trustee's approach to the valuation and de-risking of the pension scheme. UCU reports that UUK appears more receptive to exploring different approaches from USS's to valuation and de-risking than they have been in the past.

Part of the explanation is that employers had been under the impression that the major changes to pensions agreed a few months ago would probably get us through at least the next valuation, without the need for another round of cuts to pensions arising from the 2017 full valuation. But there now appears to be a decent chance that, under USS's current method of valuation and strategy of de-risking, there will be another large deficit in March 2017, which will force further cuts. This is because the rise in the Bank of England rate and the winding down of quantitative easing keep on failing to materialize, and hence bond yields aren't recovering as people expected. Moreover, stock markets have been worse than expected since the last round of cuts were agreed.

If there is another large deficit as of 31 March 2017, then, under the terms agreed in the consultation, the default is that employer 18% contributions on salaries above £55,000 will be diverted to a greater subsidy of Defined Benefit (DB) below £55,000. First, the 1% match of voluntary Defined Contribution (DC) contributions will be eliminated. And then the 12% of these 18% contributions that go into individual DC pots would be reduced. This would have an especially bad effect on those who have already been made significantly worse off by the closure of final salary and the introduction of a DC scheme that is inferior to DB below the threshold.

taken from an article by Professor Michael Otsuka, LSE
Russ Bowman

6. Getting victims to blame each other

There is little doubt that young people are having a difficult time. Student loans, jobs and housing have made life far harder than it was for us. Indeed, there exists the possibility that the upcoming generation might be poorer than ourselves. There has grown a divisive and false argument that in some way this is the fault of the "baby boomers" and that benefits should be taken from the old and given to the young along the lines of a zero sum game. This approach follows the well-worn path of divide and rule. Rather than facing up to the societal problems that cause inequality and poverty, there is an attempt to set native-born against immigrant, men against women, working poor against the unemployed and now young against old.

The TUC has produced a very useful pamphlet "Young against Old. What's really causing wealth inequality." The report was written for the TUC by Strategic Society Centre director James Lloyd drawing on analysis of the UK Wealth and Assets Survey by Andrea Finney and David Hayes at the University of Bristol Personal Finance Centre.

The latest attempt to divide ordinary people peddles the idea that pensioners are uniformly affluent and comprise the majority of the UK's wealthiest households, and that cutting benefits for pensioners would help the young. Pensioners are not uniformly affluent. There are still 1.7 million pensioners in poverty - as defined by claiming the guarantee rate of the means-tested benefit pension credit. Those aged 75 to 84 comprised 6% of the wealthiest decile, but also comprised 6% of the very poorest decile. The TUC said two-thirds (65%) of households in the wealthiest decile were aged between 45 and 65. This meant the large majority of the top 10% of wealthy households were not in fact pensioners. The largest component of pensioner wealth is caused by the price growth in the dysfunctional housing market. Those pensioners who own houses have had their "wealth" doubled due to house inflation during their pensioner lives. The liquidity of this "wealth" is somewhat limited. Of course, you could sell up, live in a tent in a field and happily count all your money as the rain patters on the canvass above you. (This is not a UCU recommendation!)

According to the DWP, expenditure on pensioners in the UK during 2012–13 was £109.9bn. Within pensioner expenditure, the State Pension costs £83bn, and means-tested Pension Credit cost £7.5bn. Winter Fuel Payments cost £2.16bn, free TV licences for over-75s cost £0.6bn and disability-related Attendance Allowance cost £5.48bn. Concessionary transport for pensioners is estimated to cost around £0.5bn per year. The new State Pension will supersede Pension Credit, so that will evanesce.

It is important to note that despite this, since the 2008 financial crisis, some aspects of public expenditure on older people have been cut. For example, analysis of the distributional impact of spending cuts in services set out in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review by household type estimated that single pensioners would experience an 11.1 per cent cut in spending. Cutting these benefits will not substantially help the young. Cutting the Winter Fuel payment is likely to increase the NHS bill and those affected do not only come from the poorest pensioners. (Lloyd J (2013) *Cold Enough: excess winter deaths, Winter Fuel Payments and the UK's problem with the cold*, Strategic Society Centre, London).

It is impossible to argue that the attacks on public sector pensions for both those paying in and the cut in indexation affecting existing pensioners have helped the young. In fact, these plus the increase in pension age have made their lives harder and more insecure.

And this brings us to consider the real problems of the young and who causes them. The spiraling cost of housing is a function of inadequate house building programs, particularly of social housing. Real wages of the young have fallen over the last 5 years by over 12.5% and casual work, zero hours contracts and part-time working have burgeoned. Student loans have burdened the young with debt. Pensioners can legitimately argue, "That was not our fault." The real culprits lie elsewhere.

7. The nasty view on pensioners

A modest proposal – revisited. The Taxpayers' Alliance (TPA) is urging the government to go further with its programme of cuts. TPA director Alex Wild has told a Conservative Party conference fringe event that ministers should waste no time in making unpopular cuts to pensioner benefits.

This might be a risky electoral strategy considering older people are more likely to vote than the young. But there are two factors that mitigate that risk. According to the TPA director, it's sensible to cut some pensioner benefits "as soon as possible" because by 2020 many of those hit by the cuts **will be dead**! "The first of which will sound a little bit morbid – some of the people… **won't be around to vote against you in the next election**", Wild told the conference fringe event.

The rise in numbers of those suffering dementia also provides opportunity for the Government. Wild after making his first point continued: "So that's just a practical point**, and the other point is they might have forgotten by then."** Unlike Dean Swift, Director Wild is not a satirist; just a nasty bastard.

Julian Atkinson

8. Care now at risk owing to £4bn underfunding

Government leaders and directors of adult social care have warned that the ability of Councils to provide dignified care for people in old age is at risk unless urgent steps are taken to plug the burgeoning gap in social care funding. The current combined pressures of insufficient funding, growing demand and extra costs mean that adult social care is facing a funding gap that is growing by at least £700 million a year, estimated to reach £2.9 billion by the end of the decade. The failure to properly fund services has already meant Councils have severely stripped back or axed services. It also means there is less money to properly recruit, train and keep the best staff and risks essential residential and home care providers going out of business if councils can't afford to pay the cost of the care being provided. Councils leaders claim they are then left facing impossible decisions about the types of care services they can afford to provide. The care regulator, the Care Quality Commission, could also be facing a 40% cut in funding; making the issue of standards and quality of care even more challenging.

NPC (National Pensioners Convention) November bulletin

9. TUC action in opposition to new Anti-Trade Union laws

In late October 2,500 trade unionists were at the lobby of parliament against the trade union bill. Even the police conceded that the TUC-organised event, with union members travelling from all over the UK to talk with their MPs in person, was the biggest lobby of MPs ever seen.

Despite this and strong opposition in the Commons, the amended Bill was given its Third Reading on 10 November, prior to scrutiny by the Lords and final enactment. Some of the concessionary amendments that were achieved are described as a "big climb down" by the TUC. Most importantly, the Government has now dropped its proposal to make unions publish a protest and picketing plan 14 days in advance. Also, it will not now go ahead with proposals to create new criminal offences around picketing. Crucially, the government has dropped its proposal for the picket organiser to have to carry a letter of authorisation with their name and address on, which would have to be shown to the police and any member of the public who asked to see it.

However this Bill, soon to become an Act, remains as a punitive further impediment on the rights of working people to defend themselves collectively. UK trade union laws are already some of the most restrictive in Europe and beyond, but this Bill intends to worsen the situation.

The ballot thresholds in themselves single out trade unions for different treatment to other elections. A 50% turnout for industrial action will be required, including action short of a strike such as working to contract. For "important public services", it must have the support of 40% of those entitled to vote. These measures effectively treat abstentions as active "no" votes. Keith Starmer QC states that the "International Labour Organisation (a special agency of the UN) has been critical of this on the very simple basis that it is undemocratic...and threatens the essence of collective action". The government is arguably in breach of ILO international standards in drawing in a wide range of public services such as education into the 40% restriction.

The government persists in ending "check-off" facilities (affecting 3.8m public sector workers), yet has refused to accede to online balloting. It is also insisting on an opt-in to union political funds and a cap on them that requires declaration of anything spent over £2000. Most commentators agree that this is designed to seriously hamper funding of the Labour Party, but will also affect all non-affiliated unions (such as UCU) who must have a political fund simply to campaign on a wide range of political matters (including future opposition to bills such as this!). Prof Keith Ewing has stated that these anti-democratic measures take us back to the situation in 1927, post General Strike. John Hendry QC argues that this is an attempt "to exclude trade unions from civil society". (*Protect the Right to Strike*, IER.) Additionally, a cap on time off for union representatives is envisaged, irrespective of negotiated agreements. Agency workers will now be allowed to be brought in to break strikes.

The extended powers of the Certification Officer are described as "extraordinary" by Ewing. They mean that that office can not only bring a complaint against a TU, but it then decides on its veracity and imposes a fine.

This Bill stands at odds with Cameron's stated intention of producing a "high wage economy". It will limit workers ability to fight on pay, have the effect of limiting the power of public sector unions to resist pay restrictions and campaign against cuts and it will gag the political voice of organised labour.

Angus McLardy

Useful background information:
http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/9/q/ucu_tubill_briefing_sep15.pdf

10. Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)

ACRONYMS OF THE MONTH ...

Firstly, the opposition is growing in the UK. At the end of October, Unite the Union seem to have achieved the almost impossible – bringing together most of the UK's main political parties. In an attempt to avoid TTIP becoming the vehicle which allows American business interests to take over the NHS, the union took the following statement to the UK's main political parties:

"TTIP must not restrict the scope for decisions by any level of government, public authority or NHS organisation relating to public healthcare [and] must not give US investors new rights that they could use to sue any level of government, public authority or NHS organisation because of policies relating to healthcare."

At the time of writing, Jeremy Corbyn (Labour), Nicola Sturgeon (Scotland's First Minister), Leanne Wood (Plaid Cymru), Natalie Bennett (Greens), Peter Robinson (Democratic Unionists), Martin McGuinness (Sinn Fein) and even Nigel Farage (UKIP) have all signed up. (The UCU RMB can't afford the prize money to run the 'Spot the Missing Names' Xmas quiz!).

Secondly, the opposition is growing in Europe. In Berlin, a quarter of a million people took to the streets against TTIP. Public opinion is on the move. The European Trade Union Confederation's 4-year Action Plan, recently adopted, opposes TTIP (as well as CETA – the similar deal with Canada). The Confederation also insists that all EU Trade Agreements must include enforceable labour protections.

Over three million European citizens have signed up to the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) to reject TTIP and CETA. When an ECI reaches one million supporters (across a number of EU states), the issue is supposed to be considered by the European Commission. So here comes the downside ... the Commission ignored the ECI and when challenged over this, the European Trade Commissioner, Cecilia Malmstroem, responded *" I do not take my mandate from the European people."*

But, thirdly, whilst not responding to the ECI there is movement from the European Commission. A lot of the opposition to TTIP has centred on the Inter State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) : the corporations' rights to sue referred to in the Unite statement. So Commissioner Malmstroem proposes to replace the ISDS with an Investment Court System (ICS). This new proposal would be based around:

- Qualified judges, not corporate lawyers, hearing cases,
- Judges hearing cases being barred from acting as lawyers in other ICS cases, and
- The establishment of a judicial appeal system.

So, progress ... but you've guessed it ... here come the downsides!

- The proposal will only apply to TTIP: CETA will still have the ISDS system and some 80% of US corporations have subsidiaries in Canada where they could generate claims against European governments using the ISDS procedure.
- Even under the proposal to amend the TTIP, corporations will gain rights not granted to countries or citizens.
- And what could be the final blow to the limited progress proposed is that the Investment Court System has been rejected by American businesses. The American Chamber of Commerce 'cannot in any way endorse ICS ... the proposal is deeply flawed.'

So, pressure is building. To an extent it is bringing about (small, but significant) changes. Keep on educating, campaigning ... but if you've managed to work your way through this, pour yourself a large glass of wine and award yourself a good, long sit down first!

Mike Shuker

11. Some Thoughts on the UCU Retired Members Branches AGM 2015

The second annual meeting took place on 5th November at UCU HQ in London. This small article is intended as a collection of my observations and thoughts, rather than a formal report. The overriding impressions from the day are, firstly, that we are making significant progress in integrating Retired Members and our branches into the union; but, secondly, we still need further work to define what we are really for. My personal opinion is that we must all remember that we are the Retired Members of a ***Trades Union*** and that we should focus on the issues that are implied by that role, rather than trying to be all things to all people by duplicating activity that is already appropriately taking place elsewhere. Julian adds a caveat that a union should also safeguard the future of employed members on such issues as pensions, care, NHS etc.

A common theme to many of the discussions and the motions was the need that we all have to refute the media-fuelled view that pensioners are removing income, jobs and houses from young people. Time and again, colleagues cited examples of this divide and rule thinking. Another major concern for the whole Trades Union movement is that the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) is experiencing significant financial difficulties. All the motions debated were passed, bar one proposing UCU affiliation to the Labour Party.

Work is continuing to take place on developing the structures that will give us a formal voice within the union, as of right, with defined communication routes from our AGM. I hope that this will end up with the right to automatically send motions directly to Congress from our AGM. We are not there yet, but, hopefully, we will be in a year or two. When we get to this point, all being well, we can expect many more motions that require specific action. During the meeting, we elected Ken Childerhouse of our South-Eastern Branch as our Chair for 2015-2016, and Norman Jemison of our Northern Branch as our Vice-Chair for the same period.

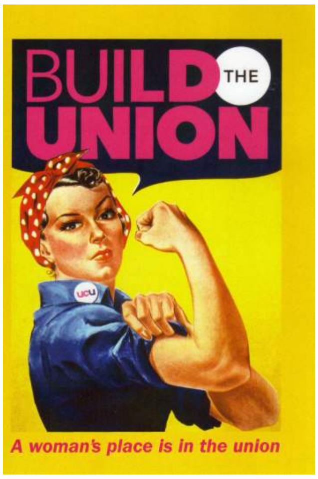
Rob Kirkwood

12. UCU Equality Annual Conference

12 – 14th November 2015, Eastbourne

What can I say? So many extremely knowledgeable, passionate people in one place! All eager to share their experiences and to build on them through well-managed, interactive workshops. It had been my intention to make copious notes in order to report back; however, I became so involved with the speaker's content and workshops that my note pages are almost empty! People like Elizabeth Lawrence, Quinn Roache, Alaa Elaydi and Wilf Sullivan, to name a few, gave us much food for thought and Sian James MP ensured that dinner went down very well!! Thank you to all the speakers and to those who worked in the back-ground to make the conference so enjoyable. I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to attend.

Barbara Smith



Important issues were raised throughout the conference such as:

- While wishing to warmly welcome refugees, concern was expressed for migrants, asylum seekers and others whose access to education is being eroded by current policies, especially access to ESOL courses. There are also more restrictions on foreign students, who, while paying much higher fees for their courses, are also only allowed short-term visas and may have to go home and re-apply if wanting to study at higher levels such as for PhDs. This is likely to reduce the valuable contributions such students make to research and practice while gaining further experience working here.
- Problems for women lecturers discussed, included maternity rights and pay and discriminatory practices such as "casualised" (zero hours) contracts giving women teachers and lecturers a "double whammy " of problems just when they need support the most.
- While very much appreciating the lively heartfelt and very strong views on these and other issues, I personally am concerned that the impetus will get lost in the slow juggernaut of the union structures and procedures. Motions passed at Eastbourne next go to Executive committees before they may or may not eventually arrive at the National Conference.
- Real, actual action is needed much more quickly before I fear it will be too late. Recruitment drives to build a stronger union and materials immediately provided to help action on current issues should be a priority rather than dragged out by planning meetings and processes that may be correct ("the wheels of democracy grind slowly, but surely"), but seem to take too long.

Rowena Dawson

13. UCU Retired Members Branch

The branch has been underway for four years with *ca*. 300 members. The aims are diverse, but include bringing together retired members of UCU in the East Midlands, giving advice to branches on pension and retired members' matters, campaigning on issues relating to retired members and representation to the UCU national congress, National Pensioners Convention (NPC), Local and Regional TUCs. If you worked outside the East Midlands, but lived or now live in the East Midlands, please join our branch.

Meetings: We hold meetings three times a year, in places of interest to make part of a day and lunch out. The meetings centre round important issues for UCU pensioners and give a chance to chat to other retired members.

Newsletter: A termly newsletter with useful articles for retired UCU members is sent to all branch members for whom we have email addresses and to UCU branch secretaries in the East Midlands.

Email addresses: We encourage retired members to use their home email for when you give up your work email address. Please let us have your email address and also changes to your email address.

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Newsletter: Russ Bowman bowman@dorothyruss.plus.com
East Midlands regional UCU committee representatives:
Brian Hambidge, Russ Bowman

Roles and functions for retired members branches

The branch committee has drawn up a list of roles and functions of the retired members branch. These will be discussed at the next branch meeting in March.

- To represent the interests of retired members within the union.
- To represent the interests of retired union members within the wider union and pensioner movements.
- To provide a forum within the union for retired members to come together to consider and debate matters of mutual interest.
- To provide a resource of collective memory, advice and expertise in support of the union, in particular to those still in active employment.
- To provide active support, where appropriate, by involving the broadest section of the branch in support of the wider interests of the union and its members, including support for those still in active employment.

14. Branch activity

The branch is involved in various activities in the labour movement and sends representatives to various committees and organisations. We are active in several UCU national activities, e.g. Retired Members committee, Equality Committee activities for black members, LGBT members, disabled members and women members.

We are represented in local TUCs, the Regional NPC (National Pensioners Convention) and the Regional TUC Pensioners' Network. We have been involved in local May Days and in campaigning for the NHS and against casualisation of employment. The newsletter will give reports on all these activities from time to time.

Longer reports will be put on the UCU East Midlands Retired Members Branch website in future.

Notts Trade Union Council report

Council supported the Taxi Cab Drivers (Unite) in opposition to Nottingham City Council's plan for a "café culture" development by the Midland Train Station. This would involve the taxi cab rank being located to a car park and inferior access for disabled passengers.

A report was received about the hugely successful march at the Tory Party Conference – reports were received that attendance may have been in excess of 80,000. Likewise the Notts Nut showing of "Still The Enemy Within" on Saturday October 2nd and the Banner Theatre's presentation of the "Chicago Teachers' Strike" on Wednesday October 7th were welcomed as important contributions to our understanding of the labour movement.

Council also received a presentation by a group of New College Nottingham students, who had joined together to form a theatre group, called "Bread and Roses". They performed a very effective sketch illustrating the lives of people who were forced to attend food banks. The Council gave a donation of £100 to support their work as it was anticipated that branches may wish to call upon them to perform at Branch Meetings and other events.

Council received a report from Richard Buckwell on the successful completion of his bike ride for Medical Aid for Palestine. He had exceeded his target aim of raising £3,000. He emphasised the importance of this event for raising the profile of developments in Palestine, which were currently deteriorating.

Support was urged for the Midlands TUC, "Protect the Right to Strike" Event, which was held at the Polish Club, Sherwood Rise, Nottingham on Thursday, October 15th at 7.00 pm. This was a very important event to launch the East Midlands trade union movement's resistance to the Tory Government's draconian anti trade union laws.

Barry Donlan, delegate
from UCU East Midlands Retired Members Branch

Chesterfield TUC report

On 20th June, Chesterfield TUC took two bus loads of union members, their families to the hugely successful People's Assembly demonstration against austerity, in London with 150,000 people marching in London against the Government's programme of austerity. During the summer and early autumn, Chesterfield TUC has been focusing on the fight against austerity including establishing a People's Assembly in Chesterfield to unite and motivate people against government cuts. The meetings have been well attended by representatives from various organisations.

On 9th September, Chesterfield TUC supported Unite Community Branch members and other union activists for a day of action outside the Sports Direct factory in Shirebrook, demonstrating against austere working practices. Activists dressed up in Victorian costume held placards stating 'This is a Workhouse, not a Workplace'. The action coincided with the organisation's AGM, when shareholders were meeting at the Shirebrook premises. For that day only, as the press and TV were present, Mike Ashley, chief executive, discontinued the practice of employee searches as they left the workplace. Subsequently, a TV documentary about the dreadful working terms and conditions has been shown on Monday 5th October. Unite the Union are working hard under difficult conditions to organise the staff with only a few permanently employed staff; the rest are on precarious agency contracts.

Chesterfield TUC organised two buses to take trade union activists to the 4th October demonstration outside the Tory Party Conference. The demonstration was huge, reportedly 100,000 people. Chesterfield TUC held a very successful open meeting 12th October with Lee Barron, secretary of Midlands TUC, to discuss the anti-union legislation proposed by the Tory government.

Lucretia Packham, delegate
from UCU East Midlands Retired Members Branch

15. More information and news

can be obtained from these websites. We suggest you have a browse.

UCU East Midlands Retired Members Branch: ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
UCU National Website: http://www.ucu.org.uk
AgeUK: http://www.ageuk.org.uk/
Independent Age: www.independentage.org.
68 is too late: www.68istoolate.org.uk
National Pensioners Convention (NPC): http://npcuk.org
East Midlands NPC: http://leicesternpcgroup.btck.co.uk/

We have added another invaluable reference website. You may wish to look at the link to Independent Age: www.independentage.org. Their fact sheets are the best some members have seen.