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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.

1. Branch meeting

Monday March 3rd 2015

10.30 a.m. – 12.30 p.m.

(Speaker at 11.30 a.m.)

**Please note the earlier time
due to the booking requirements**

Speaker: Val Wood

Nottingham Women's History Group

**“Celebrating the contribution of Women's Trade Union
Activism in Nottingham - a historical perspective”**

May Branch Meeting:

Tuesday 5th May at 11.00 a.m. in Cromford

Speaker: Sandra Barker,

Age UK Derby and Derbyshire

2. More information and news can be obtained from these websites. We suggest you have a browse.

UCU National Website: <http://www.ucu.org.uk>

AgeUK: <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/>

68 is too late: www.68istoolate.org.uk

National Pensioners Convention (NPC): <http://npcuk.org>

East Midlands NPC: <http://leicesternpcgroup.btck.co.uk/>

3. USS Dispute

The actions by the Government and Employers over the diminution of the USS are to be severely criticised. The Union has found itself in a very difficult situation in trying to defend the final salary scheme and argue against the unusual method of undervaluing the pension fund. Unfortunately, UCU does not hold a majority of the USS Board and has had to resort to industrial action. There have been several strikes and actions short of a strike. While members have found the new proposals unacceptable, it has been balanced by the willingness of members to continually take industrial action. 87% of the UCU members in USS voted for industrial action.

Action and ballots

The HEC (higher education committee) decision suspended industrial action and put the slightly amended USS proposals to ballot of the members. As retired members we report the events and decisions without taking sides. The choice has been between a rotten deal, on the one hand, or, on the other, industrial action short of a strike. Members will have had to face down punitive employers and could still be defeated. In the ballot which closed on 26th January, 68% voted to accept the slightly improved employers offer, a rotten deal. This is the crunch when action short of a strike actually starts and members start getting threatened. Members are very hard-pressed with work, long hours, stress, over-high expectations of research output etc. and then the dispute on top.

What was this ballot about?

The detrimental proposals to change USS benefits were made by Universities UK on behalf of the employers in autumn 2014. The proposals were tabled by the employers in response to a purported worsening of the fund's deficit as measured by USS, which showed a deficit of £12.3bn. UCU has opposed these proposals and the methodology used.

The original proposals UUK circulated for consultation to employers included:

- * the closing of the final salary section of USS.
- * for members currently on the final salary scheme, CPI indexing of the 'final salary' from 1 April 2016, rather than the actual final salary when they retire
- * the move of all members into the current career average scheme based on an accrual rate of 1/80th.
- * setting a £40,000 earnings cap above which **defined benefit (DB)** career average benefits will not build up.
- * establishing a new **defined contribution (DC)** pot for contributions on salary over the £40,000 earnings cap, the income from which would depend upon investment performance and would not be guaranteed.

Analysis produced for UCU by First Actuarial showed that the proposals would give a range of losses in the value of members estimated annual pension benefits of up to 27%.

UCU members voted for industrial action in the form of an assessment and marking boycott and gave the Higher Education Committee a mandate to call action if they felt it could further our objectives. This UCU boycott was suspended in November 2014 when the employers agreed not to press ahead with their proposals, but rather agreed to engage in a series of meetings with the union aimed at discussing each side's proposals and trying to reach agreement. These meetings resulted with the higher education committee balloting members on a set of proposals which, if accepted, would form the basis of agreement.

What improvements were made?

- * an improvement in the accrual rate from 1/80th to 1/75th
- * an increase in the earnings cap to £55,000 (above which defined benefit career average benefits will not build up). This means that 100% of salary is now within the defined benefit scheme for more than 75% of USS members, up from 39% of members covered by the originally proposed £40,000 threshold.
- * a guarantee that the employers will maintain an increased contribution (from 16% to 18% of salary) for two further valuations for at least the next five years.
- * an agreement with the employers that any improvement in the USS funding position should be used to improve benefits.
- * an agreement to continue a review of the contested funding methodology adopted by USS.

What is the union's view of the proposals?

This final position does represent improvement on the opening proposals. The shift in the earnings threshold from £40k to £55k and the improvement of the accrual rate from 1/80th to 1/75th are the two main changes. It should also be noted that the positive accrual rate change represents an improvement on current terms for new entrants to the scheme. The package still includes a defined contribution scheme above the £55,000 cap.

Many members will still see their estimated annual pension income fall (albeit by less than under the original proposals) and all members will see their pension contributions rise by between 0.5 -1.5%. There will be the option for members to make an additional contribution of 1% to the defined contribution which will be matched by the employers.

The Higher Education Committee (HEC) believed that this was the best that could be achieved through negotiation given the constraints imposed by the funding environment. Further improvement was unlikely without sustained industrial action by members targeted against student assessment.

Politics of USS

The fundamental point is about the politics of the valuation that the USS trustees have adopted; we need to press the following question: "why has USS chosen a self-sufficiency valuation that makes sense only if our defined benefit scheme is to be wound up, rather than an ongoing valuation for an enduring scheme? The answer, it appears, is that they had already decided that they would like to close down **DB**, given their "marked preference for **DC** benefits over **DB** benefits" that UUK reported in their 22 October JNC submission". Now they're fitting the valuation to their desired outcome."

And as well as lowering the "burden/risk" on the employer it makes outright privatisation of education easier. Needless to say "USS today, TPS and other public sector pensions later."

Russ Bowman

4. Why Britain's state pension is 'one of the worst in Europe'

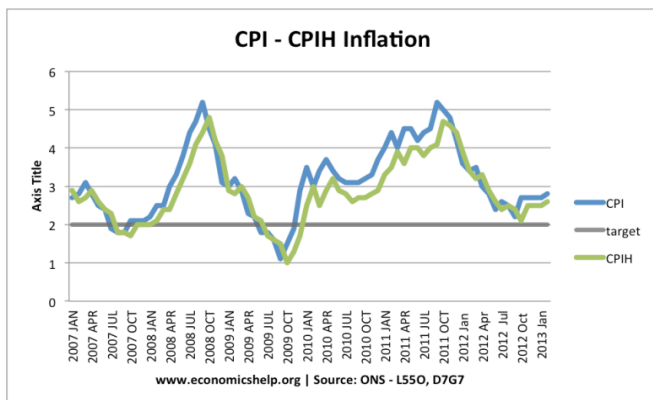
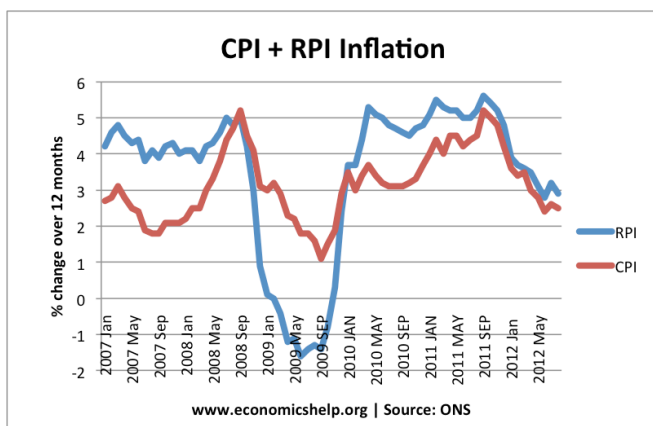
Workers in Britain face a larger financial shock in retirement than European counterparts because their state pension is "one of the least generous in Europe", a study has found.

The state pension is worth less than a quarter of the ONS (Office for National Statistics) estimate of gross weekly median earnings of £517 in 2013? of £113.10 a week is worth just a third of the average salary of someone in work, the **International Longevity Centre (ILC)** said. The "replacement" figure was far below the average for the rest of Europe, where state retirement payments were worth nearly half national average earnings. Britain ranked 21st out of 27 countries in the list, the **ILC** found, giving it one of the least generous pensions in Europe. As a result, workers who failed to amass private savings would see their incomes drop further than European counterparts when they stopped work.

5. Simple Understanding of Indexation

The Retail Prices Index has moved from intensive care towards the mortuary. Institute for Fiscal Studies Director Paul Johnson has recommended it should no longer be used as a measure of inflation. It had already been de-designated as a national statistic from March 2013. It still, however, is being used as a measure for increasing train fares where it has the important advantage of being greater than CPI. CPI is however used for up-rating public sector pensions since it has the advantage of being lower over the long term by nearly 1% than RPI.

The Office of National Statistics uses two other inflation indicators. One is CPI-CT – this is a measure of inflation at constant taxes. There is also CPIH which is based on CPI, plus it includes housing costs, such as mortgage interest payments. Several commentators have suggested that this might supersede CPI. However, CPI-CT also lowers the rate of indexation. The graphs below explain the changing fortunes of inflation indicators.



Julian Atkinson

6. End casualization at work

Of course things were better when we were younger: pop music, the behaviour of the youth and other things too numerous to mention. Derision has made us more cautious about enunciating such truths. But there is one topic that we should and must raise: working conditions and work load were better in both further and higher education in the past. One of the major reasons for this deterioration is the casualization of the workforce caused mainly by zero hours contracts and agency working. Even some of our political leaders have raised doubts about **exploitative** zero hours contracts. I refuse to deny the theoretical possibility of non-exploitative zero hours contracts; like vegetarian leopards

and military intelligence they may exist. It is just that the evidence is slim.

The TUC “Decent Jobs Week” and the UCU “Stamp Out Casual Contracts” campaign have shone a light on the extent of casualization. UCU research found that universities and colleges **are twice as likely to use zero-hour contracts as other workplaces.**

61% of further education colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, that responded to the union's Freedom of Information request, use them have teaching staff on zero-hours contracts and 53% of UK universities, use them. Whereas only a quarter (27%) of all companies use zero-hours contracts, according to research from the Recruitment and Employment Confederation.

The problem becomes clearer when the proportion of staff on these contracts who are actually in work is considered. In universities just 24% were currently in work. Zero hours contracts account for nearly half of “teaching-only” posts. In both FE and HE women are more likely to be offered these contracts. Of the universities using zero hours contracts nearly half employed over 200 on this basis. Five of them had each more than a thousand so contracted.

The impact of these contracts is overwhelmingly negative. Hours vary sometimes with little notice, so financial planning is very difficult. Lecturers feel insecure and power is dramatically tilted in favour of management. The [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development \(CIPD\)](#) makes the point, “the system can lead to fluctuating wages and a risk that managers may use their contract as both reward and punishment.” The extent of such contracts has been underestimated. The [Office of National Statistics \(ONS July 2013\)](#) estimated only 250,000 on these contracts. The [CIPD](#) found four times this number! (“Zero hours contracts: myth and reality” November 2013). A further point that might explain why Government is loath to act is that someone on a zero hours contract but with no work does not figure on unemployment statistics.

The issue of agency workers is more of an FE problem. Such workers may even not be classed as employees but are given inferior legal protection. Hannah Reed, a Senior Policy Officer at the TUC, produced the following interview: “Tina is a qualified further education lecturer employed through an agency which forced her to sign a permanent contract of employment. She is only paid for the time she spends teaching, but not for planning or attending meetings. Because she only teaches 24 hours a week she can't claim working tax credit. Her colleague, who is unqualified but on a permanent contract, is paid double Tina's salary. “I do the same job and am treated the same as a permanent FE lecturer but I receive half the pay,” says Tina.” Often the increase in this kind of employment has been fuelled by employers' desire to outsource their employment rights obligations, to drive down wages and, in particular, to undercut the pay and conditions negotiated by trade unions. One way that this happens is by employers and agencies exploiting a loophole in the Agency Worker Regulations which means that agency workers employed on permanent, pay-between-assignment contracts lose out on equal pay.

As we approach the General Election, prospective candidates wish to give the appearance of listening. We have to raise these issues to support our working colleagues.

Julian Atkinson

7. Reflections of the UCU Women Members' Annual Conference

Women against oppression

This report engages with two areas of discussion raised at the recent UCU Women Member's Conference, held in Manchester on 18th November 2014. The selection highlights some issues related to women's oppression.

Care UK

Diane Marsden, a Unison union rep, employed by Care UK, gave a heart-felt introduction to the recent Care UK industrial action, which after 91 days on strike, had been called off after a 6% pay offer, over three years, had been accepted by members. Although this was not totally satisfactory to the members, it was agreed that the employer had gone some way to meeting employee demands. Despite being new to public speaking since her recent union role, spoke enthusiastically about the part solidarity played in her union's fight against women's oppression in the work place. Unison members went on strike because shortly after being TUPE'd across to Care UK, they found their previous National Health Service terms and conditions were slashed; their hours were increased, holiday entitlement and pay was reduced. Some employees' pay was reduced by as much as £5,000 per annum, preventing them from paying their mortgages or maintaining and running their cars. Most Care UK employees are women caring for vulnerable elderly and disabled clients in a range of care settings including private homes and care homes.

As retired UCU members, we not only stand in solidarity with members from other unions engaged in struggle, we have a vested interest in ensuring that social care is properly funded and resourced so that vulnerable people can live in dignity. Chesterfield Trades Council and other organisations local to the Care UK strikers in Doncaster were able to raise significant sums of money and actively support our brothers and sisters experiencing and resisting oppression. It was very satisfying to see that not only had we been able to support the Care UK strike, we had been instrumental in developing the union organising ability of women in the workplace, helping them to resist oppression.

The English Collective of Prostitutes

Prostitution, or sex work, is a very emotive issue which highlights some important points for discussion and debate for retired union members. Laura Watson, representing the English Collective of Prostitutes, presented a very articulate case for the organising of sex work to minimise the oppression and maximise the safety of the women involved in this occupation. Laura Watson's talk firstly opened up the debate as to whether prostitution could actually be classified as work. What is undeniable, however, is that large numbers of women are actually making their living this way and experience extreme oppression, both from the law and from clients. Laura Watson also made the point that 70% of sex workers were mothers. Some worked in the sex industry by choice, believing other forms of employment to be more exploitative in terms of low levels of remuneration which did not allow them to pay for the child care necessary for them to work and bring up a family. She stated other women were forced into the occupation through dire necessity, not being able to support their families in any other way.

Whether one believes prostitution is work or not, and whether there is an element of choice in the occupation, the

fact that women are involved in a dangerous and oppressive occupation for monetary reasons, speaks volumes against capitalist society in one of the richest countries in the world. Whatever the personal reasons for being a prostitute or sex worker, these women are oppressed and vulnerable. From a retired unionist's point of view, one can draw an unpleasant parallel between the way in which the state treats older people as they become more physically vulnerable and the way other vulnerable groups are oppressed.

At the conference, the president of UCU, Elizabeth Lawrence, asked if there was any way that education and learning needs of sex workers could be supported. This seemed a positive response to a difficult problem.

Lucretia Packham

8. The impact of rising pension age and those who profit from ill health

Our branch has long been of the opinion that increasing pension age – and remember that now the Normal Pension Age of occupational pensions rise with state pension age – will mean that presently working UCU members may be forced into the benefits system. Already a rise from a target of 68 years to 70 for getting the state pension has been discussed. Now people living on the Isle of Man won't receive their state pension until the age of 74, under proposals by The Treasury Isle of Man Government. Pensions experts are warning that, if adopted, it could lead to a rapidly increasing state pension age in the UK.

So the operation of working age benefits becomes a matter of vital interest to UCU since some members in their sixties will not be able to cope with the increasing demands of work. For those with health problems, the [ESA \(Employment and Support Allowance\)](#) or [PIP \(Personal Independence Payment\)](#) with their assessment of level of disability are the most likely benefits. The Work Competence Assessment has been run, so far, by ATOS whose callous incompetence caused the Government to raise questions and ATOS to prematurely bow out of its contract. Initially G4S, Serco, Capita and A4E were considered likely replacements. The first three named had a scathing National Audit Office report dealing with misleadingly low bidding for public sector contracts and they also massively avoided tax payments. G4S, Serco and A4E are being investigated for fraud.

We may have been relieved when Ian Duncan Smith announced that a 3.5 year contract from March 2015 would go to none of these; an American firm Maximus would run the assessments. In July 2014 Maximus had been given the contract for the Health and Work Service where they will interview workers who have the effrontery to take four weeks' sick leave. Sadly, Maximus will not give us much of a change. their record in the USA is dismal, e.g. medical workers allowed to keep practising despite failing drug tests, \$500K fine for improper spending of public money, violated minimum wage law, pay \$50K for disability discrimination, settled fraud case for \$30.5 million, \$30.5 and \$22.8 million fine for false Medicaid billing, \$2.5 million settlement for contract disputes over computer system and more.

Maximus also has given a lot of money to right wing politicians in the US – especially ones who are keen to hand over massive state or federal contracts to it. Thankfully, that could not happen here?

David Cameron – Prime Minister handed a peerage to nursing and care home tycoon Dolar Popat, who has given the Tories more than £200,000 in donations.

Andrew Lansley - Former Health Secretary & architect of privatisation received a £21,000 donation in Nov 2009 from John Nash, the former chairman of Care UK.

Iain Duncan-Smith – Work and Pensions Secretary has shares in hygiene technology company Byotrol plc, which sells products to the NHS.

But let us not forget **Patricia Hewitt** who ceased being **Minister of Health under Tony Blair** and became special adviser to Cinven that owns Spire Healthcare (previously known as BUPA hospitals).

Both **Alan Milburn and John Hutton** were Labour Ministers. Both have recently opposed Labour plans to lessen private involvement in the NHS.

"Two years ago PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) announced that Alan Milburn would chair their new Health Industry Oversight Board. Commenting on his appointment, Milburn claimed that there were "strong opportunities for growth" in the private healthcare sector, which he would help PWC to exploit. Among his other interests, Milburn also sits on the strategic advisory board for private healthcare company WellDoc, has been a vice-chairman of the Lloyds Pharmacy advisory board and chairs the healthcare industry company I Want Great Care.

John Hutton is also far from an independent commentator on the issue. According to his register of interests, Lord Hutton is currently a director of private healthcare firm Circle Holdings. Like Milburn, he is an adviser to PWC."

Julian Atkinson

9. The People's History Museum

A visit to Manchester will not be complete without a visit to the 'People's History Museum'. Indeed, a special trip would definitely be worth the trouble.

Previously known as the national 'Museum of Labour History', the museum tells and records the story of democracy in England through ordinary and extraordinary people's lives and work during the last 200 years or so. It originates from the Trade Union, Labour and Co-operative History Society which in the 1960s and 70s formed a small collection. Eventually, this moved to Manchester from London in 1990. A more recent re-development finds it housed in an impressive modern building in the city centre.

The museum holds one of the largest collections of political material in Britain today, focussing on the history of democracy. It was described in The Guardian recently as a "treasure trove ... spanning four centuries of the often bloodstained journey to democracy in Britain". The displays record and inform on topics such as the Peterloo Massacre, Trade Unionism (including the Tolpuddle Martyrs), the Women's Suffrage movement and the Co-op Retail Movement. Fascinating objects such as badges, cartoons, photographs and a very large and important collection of banners including the oldest trade union banner in the world, are there, together with historical documents including the minutes of the first meeting of the

parliamentary Labour Party and items such as Michael Foot's famous 'donkey jacket'. Ongoing conservation work on the banners can also be seen through a viewing window in one of the galleries.

As a very interesting resource for teachers and students of all ages, the museum can sometimes be a lively and noisy place, with groups of primary and secondary and even adult ESOL learners rushing around, excitedly chatting about what they have seen.



*The Workers Union, Watford Branches Nos 287 & 632
Est. 1st May 1898*

Unity is Strength, Workers of the World Unite, You have everything to gain and nothing to lose but your chains.

This is a registered charity and independent limited company, but together with the 'Working Class Movement Library' in Salford it is facing drastic funding cuts in the near future. One aspect of the campaign to raise funds has been to ask people to sponsor 100 'Radical Heroes'. This was recently launched by Alan Johnson MP, but surprisingly, perhaps, the list contains such contrasting names as George Orwell and Margaret Thatcher! Len McCluskey of UNITE is predictably unimpressed by the potential loss of funding, suggesting that the Tories are trying to erase working people from history and calling the museum "a rare gem". He says "History is not just about those who write it, but about those who live it ... We must defend ... and safeguard the one museum dedicated to telling the story of us all".

The current exhibition "A Land Fit for Heroes: War and the Working Class" considers how WW1 changed society, radically altering the economic, social and political outlook of the British people.

Nottingham University School of Politics and International Relations houses the Centre for British Politics and is a "partner of the museum providing access to current academic research and helps to inform exhibitions and events at the museum".

Peoples History Museum: www.phm.org.uk

Rowena Dawson

10. UCU Retired Members Branch

The branch has been underway for four years with over 200 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 previously 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.

**For more information
please contact Julian Atkinson**
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East Midlands Branch officers and committee

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Membership: Greg Cejer greg@greggthebuilder.plus.com
Newsletter: Russ Bowman bowman@dorothyruess.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.

11. TUC low pay day of action

The low pay event in Nottingham was a modest success. Helen, Rowena, Brian, Barry and Julian were present. The CWU the biggest contingent. Clarion Choir sang and leaflets and chocolates were handed out. CWU had Santa outfits. Shamefully, UCU did not; a Congress resolution? More seriously, I have written to our campaigns team asking that the UCU produce flags with our logo on. Both Ann and Lucretia have asked for this.



Helen Chester from the UCU retired members branch at the TUC low pay day of action rally

12. Nottinghamshire, Mansfield and Nottingham TUC Report

The Nottinghamshire, Mansfield and Nottingham Trades Union Council has been very busy on a wide range of campaigns and at the October meeting it was agreed that it was necessary to concentrate the efforts on core trade union business.

In November, Council heard Andrew Brown from the NHS Better Together Programme. Council supported the principle of a "more joined up NHS provision". Attention was drawn to the importance of branches' involvement in Patients' Participation Groups at local surgeries. At the same meeting Sean McCallum, FBU, spoke on the ongoing Fire-Fighters Dispute, the latest four-day action having just ended. The Government is seeking to force fire-fighters to work until 60, though most of them will not be fit to do so, so they will lose significant pension rights. During the strike only 6 appliances were available to cover the whole of Nottinghamshire County instead of the usual 30, resulting in the Army being called out after just 48 hours. Buckinghamshire has victimised the local FBU leader, but in Scotland the Government has agreed to honour the current arrangements. Council voted unanimously to donate £400 to the strike fund.

The December meeting heard speakers from the Kurdish Solidarity Campaign. There is an active Kurdish Community in Nottingham. In August in Mansfield, the local Kurdish restaurant donated the evening meal to all of

the Darlington mums on the People's March for the NHS. Council made a donation to the Campaign and the Notts NUM agreed to print an article in their journal. Support was urged on picket lines for the NHS strikes on January 24th. TUC Jobs Week activity was held on December 16th in Nottingham at the Brian Clough statue. This was supported with a good turnout, with the Communication Workers Banner and the Clarion Choir present. Petitions were collected and some 2,000 of the TUC Jobs for Christmas Cards were distributed to the public to a good reception.

Two events have been arranged for International Women's Day. The first event is being held at the offices of Thompson's Solicitors on Thursday March 5th, 5.30 – 7.30 pm. Speakers include Gloria De Piero, MP and Shadow Women's Secretary, Philipa Harvey, NUT National Vice President, and Rehana Azam, GMB National Officer. There will also be food, drink, music and entertainment. On International Women's Day itself, on Sunday 8th March,

an event will be held in Nottingham at the Brian Clough Statue, 12.00 – 2.00 pm. This will have a Suffragette theme and people are encouraged to wear the suffragette colours of green and purple.

Council has agreed to a speaker from Citizens UK who are campaigning on raising locally identified issues in the General Election; this is to include a 'reversed hustings' at the Royal Concert Hall on the 24th March and also in Mansfield at West Notts College on the 20th April.

Arrangements are under way for May Day in Nottingham on Saturday 2nd May, at 10.30 am from The Forest, via Mansfield Road. Labour Movement speakers are being arranged and repeating the success of last year, time will be made for representatives of local workers involved in disputes.

[Barry Donlan, UCU Retired Members
delegate to Notts Trades Union Council](#)
