



## Unite Retired Members Special Supplementary Newsletter July 2023

### *Comment from the editor*

This special supplementary newsletter has been issued to commemorate two very important events in our lives.

The 75th anniversary of Windrush. The following article throws some light on the very rough reception that they received in this country on arrival and afterwards.

The Shrewsbury 24. The other issue dealt with in this newsletter is the victory of the Shrewsbury 24 who were tried for conspiracy resulting from the 1972 building workers' strike by the then Conservative Government, some of those tried served prison sentences, the longest sentences were handed out to Des Warren - 3 years - and Ricky Tomlinson, well known to those who watch TV - 2 years. Finally, after 47 years of campaigning the conspiracy convictions have been squashed. This has been a very important victory for the trade union movement.

*Mike McLoughlin, Editor*

“Unite are proud that our national retired members committee have created such an excellent supplementary newsletter to highlight the important issues of both the Windrush 75th anniversary and the Shrewsbury 24 campaign. The injustices of each issue should never be forgotten to ensure they never happen again.”

**Caren Evans**  
Unite National Officer



# The Windrush Generation – Happy 75th Anniversary

By **Monica Taylor**, Chair of Unite's National Retired Members Committee

## *Invitation to the United Kingdom*

The West Indies consists of more than 20 islands in the Caribbean, including Jamaica, Trinidad, and St. Kitts.

An invitation came from the United Kingdom for families to immigrate and settle for social, educational, and economical reasons.

75 years ago, on 22nd June 1948 the ship Empire Windrush arrived at Tilbury Dock Essex, which is best remembered today for bringing the first group of post war West Indies immigrants to the United Kingdom.

It carried 1027 passengers and 2 stowaways from Jamaica to London in 1948.

These citizens who became known as the Windrush generation were invited to Britain to lay roads, drive buses, clean hospitals and nurse the sick, helping to rebuild the country after the devastation of World War II.

They came to symbolise the demographic changes in Britain that started after World War II. and continued into the late 20th century as hundreds of thousands of people arrived from former British colonies, known as the commonwealth.

They arrived in Britain legally as the British Nationality Act 1948 states that all subjects of the crown had the right to enter Britain and these workers through their commonwealth citizenship,

had the right to live and work in Britain without restrictions.

***These citizens had the same political and legal rights as British citizens.***

And because the British Nationality Act 1948 cemented the rights of settlement to everyone in a British colony nearly half a million people took up the offer of nationality between 1948 and 1970.

However, far from finding a welcome hand of friendship the new arrivals were embraced with “No blacks! “No dogs!” “No Irish!”

Places to live and rooms to rent were a scarce commodity, living conditions were low in standard but high in rent.

Many families were living in one or two rooms frequently having to double up to share beds depending on shift patterns and having to cook on landings.





But as the years passed the Windrush generation's resilience to hostility only strengthened their resolve and hardened their endurance to work harder, settle, marry, bought their own homes, some started businesses and forged communities and make significant contributions at all levels of society for the next generation of black children.

The Windrush Generation laid the foundation for Black British society we are today, and while we celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the Windrush Generation it is an opportunity to reflect on the difficulties faced both by past and present generations.

***The Windrush had turned a slow full circle and become a scandal!***

### ***In Conclusion***

The Windrush generation brought with them their solidarity and their joy, but above all after having coped with the open hostility that they faced from

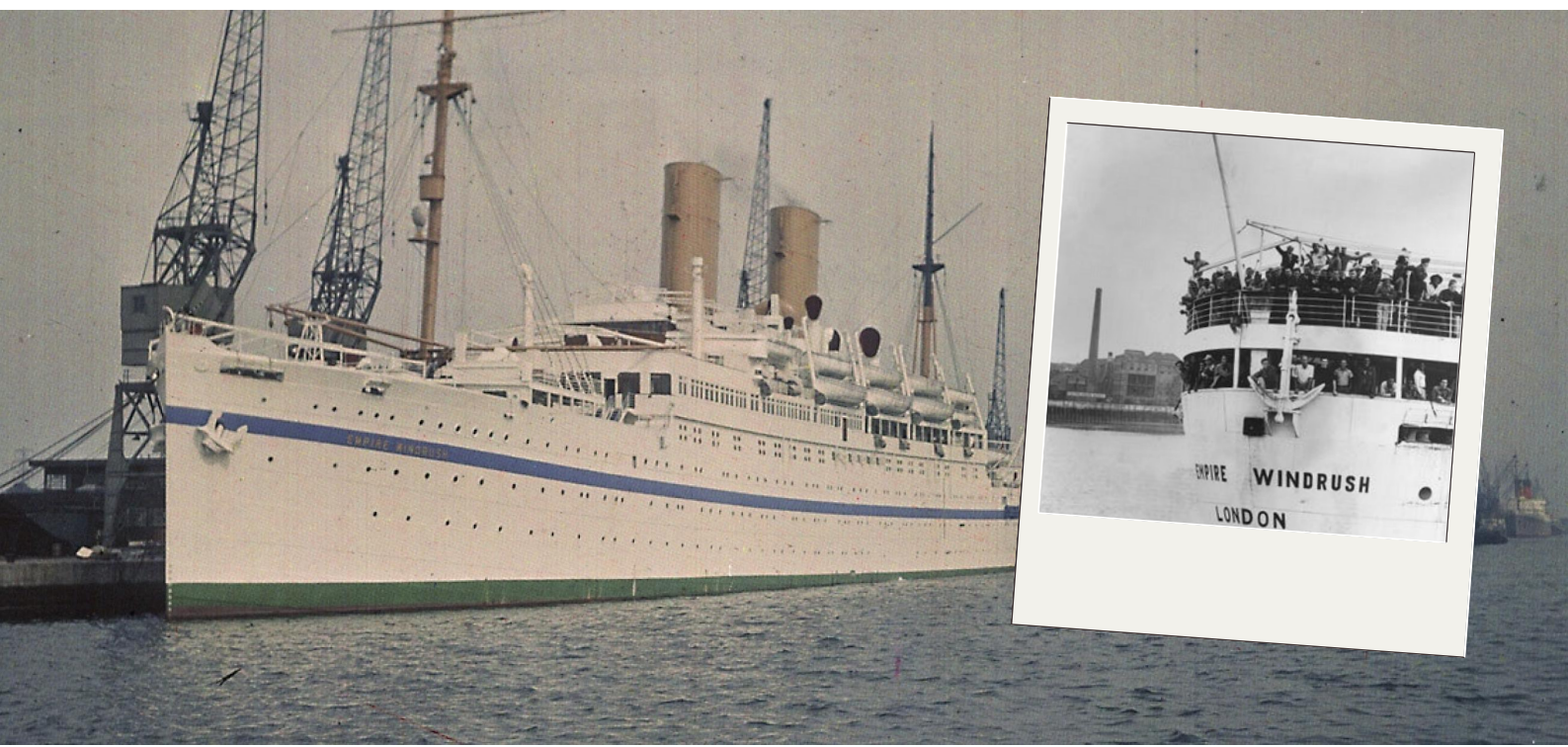
many, the Windrush Generation survived and faces the future with dignity and hope.

But the United Kingdom has been slow to remember the hundreds of thousands of men and women from former British Caribbean colonies who when told “your country needs you” came forward not once but twice, signing on the dotted line in defence of motherland England and ready to put “Great” back into Great Britain during both World Wars.

These heroic young men from the Caribbean some as young as 18 volunteered to defend King, and Empire, and an England they had never set eyes on and had only dreamed about but told they were part of.

We have come a long way during the past 75 years but more needs to be done, we must keep raising awareness of the plight of the Windrush Generation.

***They were uprooted – overlooked – and ignored.***



# The 1972 National Building Workers' Strike and the 50th Anniversary of the trials of the Shrewsbury 24

*This article has been adapted from UniteLIVE. You can read the original, and watch the film, here: [www.unitelive.org/a-lesson-in-tenacity](http://www.unitelive.org/a-lesson-in-tenacity)*

Unite has this year released a new film about the Shrewsbury 24 pickets and their nearly half-century long fight for justice. Their brave fight culminated in victory in 2021 after a concerted campaign led to the Court of Appeal quashing the pickets' convictions.

The Shrewsbury 24 were among those participating in the UK's first-ever nationwide building workers' strike in 1972, over pay and health and safety. In September 1972, a group of construction workers from North Wales traveled down to Shrewsbury and Shropshire to picket several sites that were still working.

They were supervised by police, who on the day congratulated the pickets for their good conduct. Then, five months later, 24 of the pickets were suddenly arrested at their homes, charged with unlawful assembly, conspiracy to intimidate and affray.

The Shrewsbury 24 were tried in three separate trials. In the end, most were convicted without a shred of credible evidence – six of the 24 received prison sentences, 16 received suspended sentences, and only two were acquitted.

The nightmare that the Shrewsbury 24 faced did not end after completing

**By Hajera Blagg, for UniteLIVE**



their hellish prison sentences – their good names tarnished, they were all blacklisted from the construction industry and forced to seek work in other industries to make ends meet.

*UniteLive* caught up with filmmaker Morag Livingstone, who tells their story in Unite's new film about their quest for justice.

Morag said she was "honoured" to have interviewed two of the Shrewsbury 24 featured in the film, Terry Renshaw and John McKinsie Jones, as well as Eileen Turnbull, researcher and secretary of the Shrewsbury 24 Campaign.

Morag says she sees many parallels between 1972 and now, which makes the story of the Shrewsbury 24 especially instructive.

"In 1972, trade unions were winning. The miners won, and brought down the government. The Pentonville 5 were arrested and released just a week



later. And so the government and police then stepped it up a level and took the Shrewsbury 24 to a very dark place.

“It’s the same now – we are winning, and the government has taken note of this. It’s no coincidence that they’re rushing through ever more draconian legislation against trade unions. The Strikes Bill is especially worrying because it leaves the interpretation of the legislation totally up to ministers and the police. When they can interpret in that manner, we have to be very clear about who we are, where we stand and what we’re fighting against.”

The Shrewsbury 24’s ultimate victory is a lesson for all trade unionists, Morag added.

“It’s a lesson in tenacity,” she said. “Their exoneration highlights that even though the state can come down on people very hard, you can win if you keep going, if you don’t give up on seeking the truth. It’s also a lesson on the importance of trade union solidarity. Both Terry and John said that they wouldn’t have been able to win their fight had it not been the unwavering support of the trade union movement.”

And it’s not just trade unionists who can learn from the story of the Shrewsbury 24 – it’s a lesson for all in how power operates and can undermine the will of the people.

“What happened to the Shrewsbury 24 is only one of a number of examples that shows the state for what it really is,” Morag said. “Everyone should learn as much as they can – and this goes for people across the political spectrum, not just the left – to fully understand the mechanics of the people who are meant to be representing us, but who are often only working in their own best interests.

“It makes me very angry the duplicity of the government, who say they are doing one thing, but they are actually doing another thing behind the scenes,” she added. “And if we aren’t informed about this, then their bad behaviour will only continue. It is up to us to hold them to account.”

You can find out more about the Shrewsbury 24’s campaign for justice in Eileen Turnbull’s book *A Very British Conspiracy*.

Morag Livingstone has also co-authored the book *Charged: How the Police Try to Suppress Protest*.



## Building workers' strike podcast

Actor and imprisoned picket Ricky Tomlinson, alongside Unite Retired Members Committee member Tony O'Brien, spoke to the Working Class History podcast about the 1972 building workers' strike and the Shrewsbury backlash. Listen here:

[www.workingclasshistory.com/podcast/e65-66](http://www.workingclasshistory.com/podcast/e65-66)