



## Unite Retired Members Newsletter Summer 2023

### *Comment from the editor*

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The readers' response to Unite's decision to make the March edition of the newsletter available to all members with an email address has been outstanding.

We have received letters and reports from many areas of our retired members sector of the union. It has been a very important step for the purpose of keeping our members informed of the issues that currently confront our members and the campaigns that we are putting together for the purposes of defending our members.

It is our intention that this newsletter will belong to our readers and be their vehicle for making their views heard and listened to.

Since November 2022 we have also had our own retired members website, which is now developing nicely as the amount of material submitted to it by members is increasing steadily.

I am looking forward to receiving

more emails, letters and reports after the publication of this edition.

This period has been very busy. We have published a special bulletin for the NPC conference in Blackpool from June 27th/29th and have also produced a special supplementary newsletter to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the arrival of the Windrush generation on June 22nd 1948 and the victory of the Shrewsbury 24 who were tried for conspiracy arising out of the 1972 builders' strike.

The great news is that I have been contacted by our retired members in Gibraltar who have forwarded much material to me. Their materials will be published in the September newsletter and on the website.

*Mike McLoughlin, Editor*

**Contact the editor by email:  
[Retired.Members@unitetheunion.org](mailto:Retired.Members@unitetheunion.org)**

# National Committee Reports

## ***Report of the National Retired Members Committee Meeting***

This report contains only some of the items that were discussed at the meeting on 3rd May.

State pension age: 68 is too late campaign. Demonstrations took place in London and Edinburgh on May 2nd, petition signatures have now reached 42,050.

Better Buses Campaign Conference: The Yorkshire & Humber Pensioners Convention is bringing together transport activists from across the country on June 17th. The intention is to develop a National Better Bus Campaign.

The Terry Renshaw interview about the Shrewsbury 24 Campaign has now been published on the retired members website, it has also been circulated to all regions.

Retired Members School 2023: This was well attended. In 2024 the school will be held in Eastbourne from March 7th to the 11th.

Retired Members Motions to 2023 Policy Conference: The National Committee submitted a motion on climate, Scotland submitted one on the NHS and Wales submitted one on care in the community.

An update on this will be provided in the Policy Conference Report, in the next edition of this newsletter in September.

*Mike McLoughlin, Editor*



*68 is too late demonstration, London, May 2023*

## ***NEC members' report***

Four of the big banks have indicated that during the 6 months they will be closing branches and the total number of branches affected will reach 242.

During the last year 5 or 6 of the big banks were carrying out work and looking for premises in conjunction with the Post Office for the purpose of opening up hubs in towns and areas where they no longer have any branch facilities under the auspices of the Post Office.

All of this was supposed to happen last October or at the latest very early in 2023. We have now been informed that there is no way that these hubs are going to be set up by the banks until such time as the Government passes appropriate legislation in this Parliament.

*Phil Wiseman, NEC member for Retired Members*

## ***National Labour Party Liaison Committee***

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This was the first meeting of the year.

Diana Holland gave her report stating that the Labour Party's Joint Policy Making Body had produced six new policy documents which will go out to the constituencies and affiliated organisations for their opinions and necessary amendments. The outcome will be the basis for the 2024 General Election Manifesto.

Hannah Reed gave an update on the political fund ballot, all members in England, Wales and Scotland will be included in the ballot.

Tony Woodhouse reported that the Labour Party will be hiring a number of new political organisers drawn from all the equal opportunity sections of the Party.

*Bill Moores*

## ***The National Pensioners Convention***

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A three day NPC event will be held in Blackpool from June 27th to 29th. There are two events: A one day policy conference re-constitution followed by a two day NPC convention.

We will be represented at the one day conference by Monica Taylor, Maggie Roberts, Roy Rix and Tony O'Brien, with Alan Sidaway on the Standing Orders Committee.

The NPC has vigorously contested the forced installation of energy pre-payment meters to more than half a million homes. The NPC is working with the "END Fuel Poverty Coalition" to take more action to help those

## ***TUC Pensions Conference***

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Paul Nowak TUC General Secretary opened, stating that we need a pension that rewards people, not the Tory rhetoric of get off the golf course and return to the labour market.

2.5 million people cannot work due to ill health.

Pensions sit at the centre of the financial world. Most capital comes from the pensions system.

People save in pension funds for a better life in retirement. Pension payments are becoming too much for many people. State pension is too low.

Teachers are a typical case, a young teacher pays 20% income tax and 11% in pension, the costs are so great that many are opting out.

Employers should pay more so that fewer opt out.

*Roy Rix*

struggling with fuel bills, and to ensure that the energy firms do not forcibly switch people onto PPMs.

Evidence on digital exclusion has been given by the NPC to the House of Lords.

A letter has been sent to the Electoral Commission explaining how older people can be excluded from the voting process because they are not online or may not have photo ID.

The Freedom Pass in London has now been changed so that older people cannot use it to travel before 9.00 AM.

*Tony O'Brien*

## Gender Pension Gap

The cut-off date for the former state pension was 6 April 2016 for women born before 1953. The Basic State Pension pre 2016 was very complicated and outdated because married women could build up a pension based on their husband's working life – though this assumed they would not be divorced or widowed. There was simply too much complexity partly because it was based on previous NI contributions and earnings. It was difficult to work out how much pension would ultimately be available on retirement for any individual. The New State Pension simplified this making it easier to work out how much pension an individual can claim. The full credit is 35 years of work with 10 years minimum. It is based on the individual and there is no widow's pension.

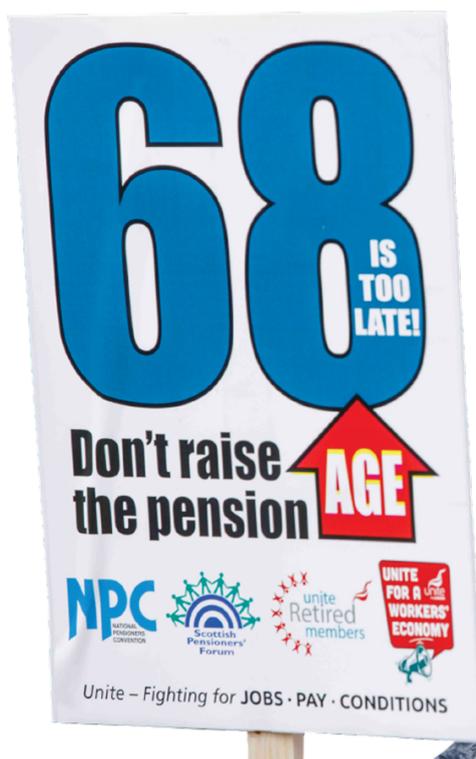
The biggest fault with both the old and new pension is that they simply aren't enough to live on. Women have been, and continue to be, badly let down by the pensions system and there is a large disparity between the income of women pensioners and that of men. Due in part to breaks in employment for caring responsibilities.

For the low paid, mostly women, greater reliance is placed on the state pension because they simply cannot afford to make contributions to occupational pensions.

We must continue to campaign for improvements to the State Pension and overcome the growing disparity between the basic old state pension of £156.20 a week and the new state pension of £203.85 per week. Add to this the scandal of WASPI women and the tens of thousands of women who were underpaid their state pensions by up to 60%. It just builds injustice on injustice.

The NPC Pensions and Incomes Working Party is currently working to revise its guidance book on the State Pension.

*Monica Taylor  
Chair, National Retired  
Members Committee*



# Letters to the editor

## *Terry Renshaw speaking to Unite Swansea Retired Members Branch*

Dear Editor,

Terry spoke at our meeting of the experiences of the 24 building worker pickets who had to fight for 47 years to get their names cleared. Some have died during that time but their families now know they were innocent. Prosecuted on made up Police evidence (which then got conveniently "lost").

They suffered years under successive Governments and Home Secretaries (including Labour ones like David Blunkett & Jack Straw) who defended the establishment at all costs.

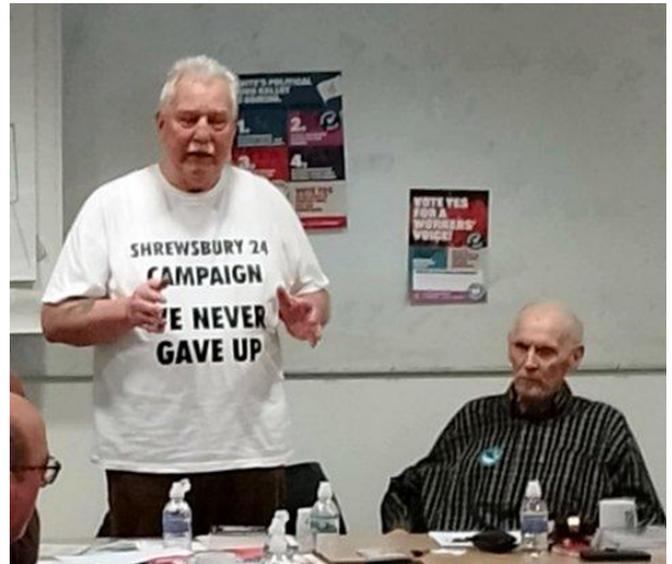
Until finally the Criminal Cases Review Commission, the official body that looks at potential miscarriages of justice, sent the case back to the court of appeal after Eileen Turnbull, a researcher for the justice campaign, uncovered a potentially crucial document in the National Archives.

That document revealed for the first time that police had destroyed some of the original witness statements.

On Tuesday 23rd March 2021 the High Court overturned their convictions for "conspiracy". So can we have confidence in our police and state institutions of justice?

Terry's story just shows how important trade unions are in defending OUR rights – BEWARE those who would attack OUR rights.

*Dereck Roberts*



*Terry Renshaw addresses Unite Swansea Area Retired Members branch meeting, held on 20th March 2023*

Dear Editor,

On the 18th March 2023, I celebrated my 60 years in the union. I joined the ETU as an apprentice and I remember, having entered a smoke filled room full of members of the then Wythenshawe Branch. The various forms of the union that I have been in during my working life include the ETU, EPIU, T&GWU and finally Unite, it has been an honor to have been a member of this organization.

*Barrie D Eckford  
NM/102999*

### *Editor's response*

I will be reluctant to publish statements like this in future unless accompanied by a photograph. **Editor.**

## State Pension age

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Dear Editor,

Being within five years of my current state pension age, I think that I can work until that time, but this is only because my normal employment is office-based; if it involved manual activity, then the situation would be very different for me.

The additional irony to this, is that office-based work tends to be paid more than manual work. So, those who are able to get paid more, will not only be more likely to be able to work until state pension age, but will also tend to be able to retire before then anyway.

When will the delays in state pension age allow for this difference in expectations of longevity in the work place?

*Peter Swadling*

*Editor's response:*

One of the best ways in which to help build the 68 too late state pension age campaign would be to become a regular attendee at your Unite local branch (if not already an attendee) and to actively participate in this campaign. **Editor.**

## Bus services

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Dear Editor,

I have been trying to retain the Spalding to Peterborough No. 37 bus service in Lincolnshire. The provider reduced the timetable last October from hourly to once every two hours. This has made getting to work hospital appointments, and getting into town very difficult. Also retired people who rely on the bus service as their lifeline have been affected.

I launched an online petition and contacted the provider, local MPs and council representatives. There is going to be a transport summit between the authorities and the providers to find the best practice going forward. But I still feel Lincolnshire needs a stronger voice around the negotiating table. Since my campaign started it's been six months, where the government has provided more financial support but the timetable still remains drastically reduced. I understand that under a Labour government community transport will be addressed, but how long must we wait for a fairer deal for local communities?

*Rodney Sadd, LE/RM016*

*Hugh Rafferty, Chair of the Belfast Branch on the picket line January 18th 2023 supporting the nurses' strike and supported by the branch dog, this branch is clearly never short of new ideas such as biting back. **Editor.***



## ***Pension Protection Fund***

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Dear Editor,

I do hope you can help many retired Unite members regarding the PPF. Myself (and others) are trying to correct the serious anomaly with the PPF, which means that older members do not receive any indexation to their compensation payments.

Whilst we appreciate the fact that the PPF has been very successful in protecting members of failed Pension Schemes, we have been trying (with our MPs) to persuade the Pension Minister to review the legislation which precludes indexation for schemes before 1997, even though our own (the Polestar Scheme) was paying indexation until it failed!

We would like the NPC to consider this injustice and lobby the Government to reconsider this matter. I would be happy to help in any way. There will be many more retired Unite members in other schemes who are also losing out.

For your information, indexation is paid (2.5%) to all PPF members post 1997!

*Barry Dixon*

*Editor's response:* This issue has been raised at a recent national campaign team meeting, it was felt that we required more information on how the scheme is supposed to work in practice, there will be further discussion on this issue at the next campaign meeting (any recommendations made by the Campaign Team have to be approved by the RM National Committee). **Editor.**



## ***Long service***

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Dear Editor,

I was at a South Yorkshire retired members branch meeting recently, where we celebrated two members with long service.

Robert Kirkham (left) reached 70 years membership in March 2023. He joined the electrical trade union as an apprentice at Lincolnshire airfields, and was later a shop steward at Thorpe Marsh power station. In his long working life, he was once questioned by Scotland Yard in relation to the Great Train Robbery! Not as a suspect, but as one of three British Rail engineers in Doncaster who could answer questions about the Automatic Train Control system which had been tampered with.

Tony Cowley (right) reached 60 years membership the same month. He first joined as an apprentice at Tarmac Civil Engineering in Rotherham, and remained in the union at Rockwire Glass. Though not a shop steward, he has been an active member for 60 years.

*Heather Blakey, NEY&H  
Retired Members Officer*

## ***Digital exclusion***

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Dear Editor,

The West Yorkshire Retired Members branch (999/3) recently agreed to campaign against the growing problem of inequality brought about from digital applications. We are daily experiencing growing barriers. These include doctor's appointments, other NHS appointments, even the requirement to obtain photo-ID for voting is available online. Included among many other examples are the services of banks, public bodies such as the local council, bus and train tickets and most recently the television service ITV player has changed to ITVX and is only available on smart TVs and similar devices. The processes of digital encroachment are considered in a report (Pensioners and digital technology), which the branch discussed.

This report gathered evidence from established sources, including from research in adult learning, reports from the Office for National Statistics and from branch members. It was noted that resistance to digital, rescuing the experience of adult learning, was gradually more prevalent among older cohorts. It was further noted that two of the principal sites for learning, formal education and employment, were also the principal sites for learning digital applications

and the evolution of digital adoption coincided with the exit of older people from those sites. These may be described as organic processes and they are augmented by reduced access to digital applications either by cost or familiarity or personal reluctance, and the natural processes of ageing.

The digital divide adds to other factors and reinforces the growing inequality for older people. It is sharply experienced in daily contact with formal organisations in which the newest employees are frequently given the task of dealing with customers or general public. These young people are usually very familiar with and enthusiastic about digital applications and expect others to share their familiarity and enthusiasm. This is contradicted by the ONS statistics and confirmed by older people.

*Malcolm Ball, NE999/3*



## ***Managed decline***

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Dear Editor,

It is with interest that new government ideology is to entice the older populace of retired people back to the work place to assist in 'shoring up' the depleted stock of experienced workers.

I am a retired Rolls-Royce Defence Aerospace engineer (Bristol) with 43 years' service, and having been 'put on the spot' in 2015 to consider retirement at the age of 60 to aid Rolls-Royce's funding of the massive out of court fraud settlement, my options were zero.

At the time I was really too young to go (I would miss out on pension contributions of the final 'prime' years). However all my older colleges who were also 'put on the spot' considered it excellent timing as they were 5 to 6 years my senior and the redundancy package was a bonus prior to the retirement pension. Consequently they accepted and because my expertise (Prognostic engine health monitoring) was not understood, due to being moved around by management changes I was now being asked to work where sudden needs arose to find skills in the company to cover

Derby capability losses; I decided I had to retire as well to avoid further 'down treading'.

Now suddenly the government seem to want us back with our extensive knowledge and they now ask the question, 'why no one wants to go back to work'! This whole mess up of the fraud by seniors was declared 'not in the public interest' to pursue for 'seniors' illicit dealings, most of whom are probably Conservative supporters. This whole scenario of the demise of Rolls Royce Bristol DA is a sad reflection on company management and my need to get away from this new depressing management culture.

As a STEM ambassador it is hard to encourage youngsters into this environment. I was one of 22,000 employees in 1971 when I joined Rolls Royce DA Bristol; I left the place in 2015 with 6,000 employees, no real apprenticeship scheme, a depleted manufacturing base, lots of outsourcing, an ageing product base to learn on and so much more degradation. Things are not what they used to be. There is so much more to say but who really cares?

*Chris Burden BSc, IET  
ex Rolls Royce Bristol*

Dear Editor,

I would be grateful if you could publish my photo as I have been awarded on the King's Honours list for 2023 British Empire Medal.

*Tony Aslam*

Tony Aslam (right) was recognised for services to the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.





Retired Members stall at the East Midlands Health & Safety Conference.

L to R Mrs. N Hodkinson, Neal Hodkinson, Mike McLoughlin and John Wallace (RCC Chair).



In the photo on the right John is in conversation with delegates, we had a really busy day, many people did not know that our sector of Unite existed.

*Editor*

Dear Editor,

The Newcastle Area Retired Members branch is a very active branch. Meeting regularly at the Tyneside Irish Centre, they have short meetings followed by a speaker and a social club (with bingo and a raffle). The most recent topic was digital safety online. The branch also organises social events, including 5 day trips a year, a few

days in Blackpool, and a Christmas party open to members and their partners. Branch Secretary, Bob Pinkerton, says: "it's about giving something back to our members who've worked hard all their lives".

*Heather Blakey, NEY&H Retired Members Officer*



Dear Editor,

I was born 1949, joined Radio Rentals in 1971 and retired in 2014. Got married 1974 and have three children, a girl, two boys and seven grand children. I live in Newry.

Unfortunately I don't have any

photos as I don't like getting my photo taken. On retiring I took up art as a pastime painting local scenes and old images of Ireland's past. I post them on local and Irish / American sites.

*John Barry*



*Belfast Retired Members Branch Christmas Dinner at the Clayton Hotel, in December 2022.*