

Retired from work... BUT NOT THE FIGHT!



Unite Retired Members Newsletter Spring 2024



Save UK Steel campaign

The campaign to save thousands of steel jobs and secure the future of UK steel production continues apace. In all steel towns Unite retired members have played an active role in the campaign.

Following pressure from the campaign the Labour Party has made a £3 billion promise of investment and it has urged Tata Steel to wait until the general election before making any decisions about jobs cuts.

Unite members at Tata Steel sites in Port Talbot and Llanwern, Newport are

now being balloted for strike action. The wider community has been mobilising to support them with two massive rallies on 17th February.

As Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: “together our politicians have sat by and watched our steel industry be decimated. They have handed our steel to overseas corporations, undermined our economy and our national security. They have let communities wither on the vine. They have failed us all. Well, we say here together - no more!”



Find out more here: www.unitetheunion.org/campaigns/the-fight-for-steel

Campaign Reports

68 too late campaign

Unite meet with Labour Party as campaign progresses

Unite officials met with Gill Furness, Labour's Shadow Pensions Minister on 16th January 2024. The aim of the meeting was to clearly state the campaign demands of Unite's Retired Members – including the campaign to stop further rises in the state pension age to 68.

So far in the campaign there have been demonstrations in London and Edinburgh, a petition with 44,000 signatures, and 3,000 people emailing Rishi Sunak.

The Labour Party do not currently support Unite's campaign. The meeting was positive, and Gill Furness has agreed to meet with the Retired Members National Committee in April in order to continue the dialogue.

Pendle and Clitheroe CLP pass 68 Too Late Motion

Unite Retired Member John Boardman brought a motion to the Pendle and Clitheroe Constituency Labour Party (CLP) supporting Unite's campaign to not raising the pension age any further. The motion was endorsed by the CLP.

Contact the campaign organisers at Retired.Members@unitetheunion.org

Find the model CLP motion here:
www.unitetheunion.org/68-too-late



Labour's Shadow Pensions Minister Gill Furness (left) met in Westminster with Unite officials Aidan Harper (organiser), Caren Evans (Retired Members National Officer), and Claire Peden (organiser) to discuss campaign demands.

Unite highlights “recipe for more pensioner poverty” over pension provision failures.

In February, Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham commented on new statistics revealing the decline in the number of defined benefit pension schemes:

“There is a real problem in this country with workers facing misery in retirement because they don't have decent pensions. This is clearly linked to the closure of final salary and other defined benefit pension schemes. We really need employers to start opening these schemes instead of closing them. The current situation is just a recipe for more pensioner poverty and that is simply not acceptable.”



The Yorkshire and Humberside Asbestos Victims Support Group (SARAG)

Our independent charity was established in 1999. Since then, we've helped thousands of Asbestos Victims and their families access £32 million in Government benefits and compensation. Our service is free and confidential. This year, we expect to receive 350 referrals of individuals diagnosed with Asbestos-Related diseases. Around 60 of those will be either past or present Unite members. Our Charity supports all individuals with asbestos related conditions in three ways.

Expert benefits advice. Last year alone, we helped 311 asbestos victims access £4.3 million in Government benefits and compensation. Asbestos victims are on average £13,500 better off because of our help.

Emotional support. We provide peer support in monthly social groups across the region (Sheffield, Doncaster, York, Hull, Wakefield, and Bradford), and one-to-one bereavement support.

Legal signposting. We signpost to expert asbestos case lawyers who all provide a no win no fee service. We do not take a success fee. It is extremely unlikely an individual would receive this level of service from a high street solicitor.

We are a campaigning charity and a founding member of the Asbestos Victims Support Group Forum. The forum is a UK wide body of asbestos victim's support groups founded to seek justice for asbestos victims.

How can you help others suffering from asbestos-related conditions?

If you know anyone with an asbestos-related condition, please ask them to get in touch with us through the details below.

enquiries@saragasbestossupport.org
01709 360 672

We are happy to attend branch meetings, explain how we can support your members and update you on campaigns we are involved in. Please contact Nevyn Stevenson to arrange at nevyn@saragasbestossupport.org or call on 07749 384517.

For a one-time donation of £500 your branch could support an individual at every step of their journey. This would guarantee they receive expert benefit advice, emotional support, and legal signposting. A donation of £300 would guarantee expert welfare advice, or £200 would guarantee emotional support. Individual donations are welcome, and a £25 donation would help towards the cost of one of our support groups.

Our bank details are: Yorkshire Humber ASBSTS VCTMS SUPP GRP. Sort Code 089299 / Account No: 65467785, or cheques can be posted to Unit 37, Moorgate Crofts Business Centre, South Grove, Rotherham, S60 2DH.

Jane Aitchison



Photo taken alongside Unite's South Yorkshire retired members branch during the 'Cape Must Pay Campaign'. The campaign demands that the Cape Corporation should pay towards the cost of achieving justice for the victims. More on the campaign here: www.asbestosforum.org.uk/cape-case/

Branch reports

LE/RM004 branch January 2024 report

We heard from John Dunn, a Yorkshire miner speaking on behalf of the Orgreave Trust and Justice Campaign (<https://otjc.org.uk/>). John told us about the vicious police attack on pickets at the Orgreave Coking Works on 18 June 1984, and his campaign's demand for a public inquiry. We thanked John for his rousing (and moving) talk and agreed to donate £100 from our branch funds to the campaign.

We also agreed to affiliate our branch to the International Brigade Memorial Trust (<https://international-brigades.org.uk/>).

We were pleased to be visited by Sis. Jackie Finn, senior administration officer in the regional office. Jackie retired in February after serving the union for 33 years. Jackie came along to take her leave of us. Over the years



L to R Carolyn Simpson and Jackie Finn

she has provided our branch with sterling support, frequently going above and beyond the call of duty. On behalf of the branch, Sis. Carolyn Simpson presented Jackie with a gift card and flowers. As a regional officer, Carolyn worked closely with Jackie, and on her own retirement not long ago transferred into our branch. Below is a photo of the presentation, with Jackie on the right. We are sad to lose you, Jackie, but wish you a long and happy retirement and hope to see you again.

*Tony Briscoe,
LE/RM004 Branch Secretary*



National Demonstration in Support of Palestine

The photo above is from the National Demonstration in support of Palestine and calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. It features the banners of both our Lothians RM Branch and Glasgow RM Branch. It was a great demonstration, and the weather was kind to the marchers.

Ian Watson, Branch Secretary, Lothians RM Branch SC/162/RM

Glasgow Retired Members' sponsored walk for Palestine

Unite Glasgow Retired Members recently undertook a sponsored walk for Palestine, raising money for Medical Aid for Palestine. It was a great success - picture to the right.



Aberdeen & District Retired members branch report

We have held monthly meetings at the Unite Aberdeen office. They have been very well attended. During our October branch meeting we discussed the 68 too late campaigns.

At our November branch meeting we had a very helpful and informative talk from Hayden Bain, a Thompsons Solicitor, about arranging a Power of Attorney and the process of setting up a legal Trust to protect your property and any other assets in the event of having to go into a care home.

We have supported the Unite members in Scottish Water and A G Barr dispute and made £100 donation to their strike funds.

We have now affiliated to Moray TUC and made a £100 donation to their general funds. We have written to our members in the area encouraging them to become a delegate and to support and participate in Moray TUC.

We also made a £100 donation to Lee Gamble's local fundraising initiative for the Alzheimer's Society.

Some of our members along with other Aberdeen TUC delegates joined the EIS striking members picket line at the Northeast College Aberdeen.

Branch members attended and spoke at the Scottish Pensioners Forum meeting held in the Scottish Parliament on 27th September 2023.

We helped to organise a very successful Shrewsbury 24 commemorative event in Aberdeen. Over 30 people attended and heard directly from Eileen Turnbull and Terry Renshaw who both gave a good

account of their successful campaign to have the convictions overturned of the striking building workers wrongly convicted and jailed in 1973.

Alongside branch activists from Dundee, Fife and the Highlands, we have been discussing with the Regional Secretary Derek Thomson how our retired members can be more involved with Unite campaigns such as Just Transition and more involved in anti-poverty campaigns via Unite and our local Trades Council.

The ATUC lay a wreath on Remembrance Day in honour of Trade Unionists who fought and died during World Wars I and II. We have agreed that at future Remembrance services in Aberdeen Unite should also lay a wreath.

Our branch members have been supportive and in attendance at the Aberdeen Women's Alliance Reclaim the Night march on 25th November, Scottish Palestine Solidarity rallies each Saturday afternoon and the ATUC St Andrew's Day Rally on 25th November.

At our November branch meeting we discussed concerns about the union leadership's slow response to show solidarity with the Palestinian people. The branch noted its disappointment and have agreed to write to the General Secretary asking why there appeared to be a reluctance to be involved in and speak at the National UK Palestine solidarity rallies.

Tommy Campbell, branch chair



Obituary: Susanna Rice, Glasgow RM Branch

It is with sadness that the Unite Retired Members Branch Glasgow mourns the passing of Susanna Rice.

Susanna was active in the branch and was on the committee until her progressive illness made her participation at that level impossible.

As well as being on the committee, she was one of the organisers and a great supporter of the Union Song Club. When Susanna was unable to

speak, she used an assistive device to even a small part in meetings, latterly only by zoom.

Susanna had a career at a senior level in health and social care in both Birmingham and Glasgow and settled in Blairmore near Dunoon in Scotland. Susanna will be missed, and our thoughts go to her husband Mick and all her family.

RIP Susanna.

Commissioners Sent into Nottingham Council

Nottingham City Council, a Labour Council, are up against the Secretary of State Michael Gove who says that he is sending commissioners in because the council are being too slow in tackling the budget deficit. This deficit was caused by the Tory government, reducing funding for Nottingham of £1 million per year for the past decade.

The unelected and undemocratic commissioners will replace the Improvement and Assurance Board which was appointed by the government two years ago. Despite cuts to services since 2021, there is still an overspend of £23 million.

Unite policy is to oppose cuts to services. On March 4th City Council will be deciding on an extensive budget saving package which will have a significant impact on local services. This includes: the closure of the only remaining Care Homes owned by the council; cancelling home services for older people and those with complex needs; closing of Youth Centres and adventure playgrounds; ending welfare rights services; job cuts in museums and libraries. Those working in the Arts in the city and the Playhouse could see funding reduced to zero. All these cuts will threaten the fabric of our city's culture.

Prior to the commissioners coming in, a public consultation was overwhelmingly against the cuts. This was ignored by the Labour Council who were prepared to still carry out the Tories' wishes.

Nottingham & Notts Trades Council, along with Unite, Unison and others, called a meeting to set up a 'SAVE OUR SERVICES' campaign under the banner of NO UNELECTED COMMISSIONERS, NO CUTS TO SERVICES, NO JOB LOSSES. Lobbying of councillors is underway and we are building for a demonstration on 4th March budget.

Labour Councillors must not accept and pass on these cuts, but mount a political challenge to central government to fully fund local services, starting by voting against the budget cuts. The Labour Party has said that if they vote against, or do not turn up, or abstain, then their membership of the party will be removed. This is undemocratic!

Finally, these Commissioners are not independent. The Lead Commissioner will be Tony McArdle OBE previously Lead Commissioner for Northamptonshire C.C. and currently Chair London Borough of Croydon Improvement & Assurance Panel, and Best Value Inspector at Thurrock Council. He will be supported by Margaret Lee as Commissioner for Finance who 'surprise-surprise' was head of Finance for Croydon and Best Value at Thurrock Council! The government has determined Commissioners fees of £1,200 per day for 150 days annually for two years plus any expenses. Paid for by Nottingham taxpayers!

*David Jones Unite RCC &
East Midlands NPC EC*

Letters to the editor

Two-tier state pension

Dear Editor,

I am writing to you to draw your attention to the fact that in this country we have two state pensions: the old basic pension, and the new state pension. All the older and most vulnerable pensioners are on the Basic state pension.

Could anything be done about this outstanding discrepancy between the old basic pension and the new state pension? The percentage increase between them is getting worse from £2,500 per annum and increases even

more by the percentage increase added every year. For example, 10% of £100 is equal to £10; and 10% of £0 is equal to zero.

Barry Lowdell, Retired Member

Note from the Editor: This issue has been discussed at our National Retired Members Committee and we have asked our EC to approach the Labour Party and get the message to them that older people are expecting this issue to be tackled by them if they form the next Government.

Letter from the DWP

Dear Editor,

On receiving your last newsletter, I thought it would be useful for retired members to be made aware of the situation I found myself in.

I got a letter from the Department of Work and Pensions saying they owed me over £12,000. This was because they had not considered my wife's NI contributions when she died in January 2017. It was not usual for women to pay the full NI dues, but my

wife was 5 years older than me and would not get a pension until age 70 if I retired at 65. The weekly amount due to me varied from £11 to £18 over 16 years. There is tax to pay on the money I received, but HMRC can only take what is due for this year and the previous 4 years.

Hope this may make it a very MERRY CHRISTMAS for some retired members!

*Douglas Clarkson,
Unite Retired Member*

Support the NHS workers

Dear Editor,

I did not want to start the year off fighting, but we need to be heard. If this government wanted to fix the NHS or any other company on strike it could do so. It's not only about money but working conditions and contracts of employment.

Contracts of employment were altered to consider the pandemic where people were told to stay home and were encouraged to work from home. That was then this is now. People lost loved ones, parents, and children during the pandemic. Workers in the NHS went to work knowing that their patient may not still be alive. Or that they stayed in work so as not to infect their own family.

Is this how we "level up" and pay these people who lost so much? Even survivors have traumas of what they went through. Would you have played Russian Roulette with your life to be rewarded like this? This government should never have been given any control over the NHS and certainly not over the issue of contracts to supply PPE.

Outsourced NHS workers have still not received their front-line COVID

payments of £1,600 each. It was only paid to directly employed NHS staff. Why is the country not up in arms about how long they have waited for the compensation they deserve? They should be given the compensation payment, and they should be brought in-house and directly employed by the NHS.

All NHS workers are suffering from overwork and long hours. Deteriorating working conditions directly impact on patient safety. How can an exhausted nurse be expected to provide quality care when they are exhausted?

The people of this country should be out the front banging their saucepans and banging the doors and windows of every MP in the country every day till they realise we support the NHS workers and want improvements to their pay and conditions. Now it is time to put an end to a government that will supply bullets and rockets to other countries but won't stand up and say, enough is enough.

*David Simpson, Retired Members
Plus, Cardiff RM Branch*



Unite members protesting at the Department for Health, 21 Feb, demanding their missing COVID payments.

Upcoming events

11th - 15th March: Retired Members 2024 Education Course

The Retired Members 2024 Education Course will be held at the View Hotel in Eastbourne from March 11th to the 15th. The Tutor will be Gareth Griffiths. The course will be chaired by Retired Members National Committee Chair, Monica Taylor. This course can accommodate 40 attendees, preference is always given to first time attendees.

27th April: East Midlands Regional Retired Members Hybrid Conference

This Conference will be for Regional Senior Representatives and shop stewards who are in work. The aim of the Conference will be to explain the role of RM branches, how they operate, and the campaigns that they organise on behalf of pensioners and future pensioners.

The main aim of the conference is to ensure that members on the eve of retirement are encouraged to retain their Unite membership and transfer to their local Retired members Branch.

The following speakers have been confirmed (some will attend on zoom): Paresh Patel Regional Secretary; Sharon Graham General Secretary; Caren Evans National Officer for Retired Members; Neelam Verma Regional Equalities & Retired Members Officer; Monica Taylor RM National Chair; John Wallace RCC Chair; David Jones RCC & EMNPC Delegate; Mike McLoughlin RCC & National RM Committee Lay Coordinator; and Janice Duffy Northamptonshire RCC Delegate and Councillor.

26th - 27th March: National Pensioners Convention (NPC) Biennial Delegate Conference

The NPC's Biennial Delegate Conference will be held at Yarnfield conference centre, Staffordshire. The Unite delegates will be Monica Taylor National Chair West Midlands, Roy Rix Northeast Region, Tony O'Brien London & Eastern Region, and Mike McLoughlin East Midlands. Tony O'Brien is standing for the position of NPC president, and Tony O'Brien, Mike McLoughlin and Roy Rix are standing for the positions of Vice Presidents. They will hopefully be supported by all Unite members attending the Conference.

Editorial

It's good to see reports and letters continuing to arrive for publication. However, there are sometimes problems. The reports can often cover several subjects. This is fine if they are clearly defined and succinct. Some of the letters received cover one subject and are brief and to the point. Others are very long, cover a multiplicity of subjects and can be confusing. I received three letters for this edition from the same writer which if published would take up at least seven pages of this publication.

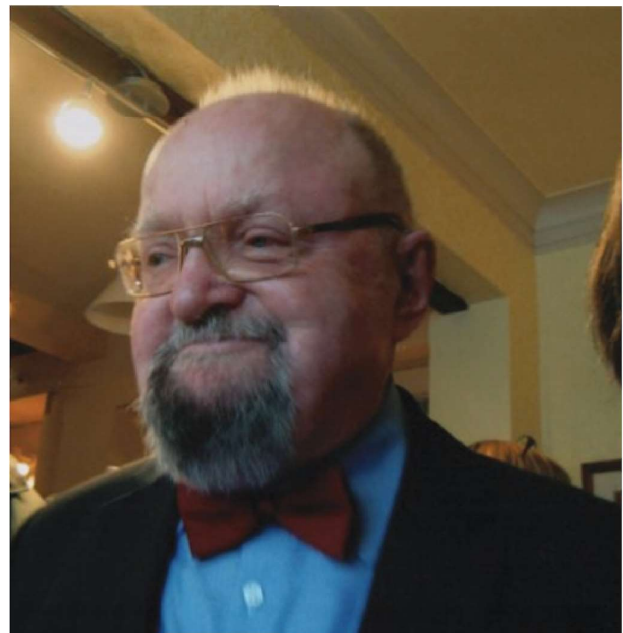
Here is some advice for those thinking about submitting a piece:

- Letters should cover one subject and be no more than 500 words. The intention is to publish as many letters as possible from our members.
- We actively encourage more letters from our women members. We have only had one letter from a woman which was published in the Christmas edition. That was a start. It is your newsletter so please make use of it.
- Whenever possible we like to receive photographs with the letters and reports. A picture is often worth a thousand words.

We are going through difficult times prices are still rising. Wages for many people are not keeping pace with the cost of living. Electricity and gas costs have driven many pensioners into poverty. The government has done

virtually nothing to restrain the massive profiteering of the 6 giant energy companies or give adequate assistance to those who are struggling to pay their energy bills. But with a bit of luck and hard work we should hopefully have a new government in power by the autumn, who hopefully will listen to the ordinary people and try to create a fairer society. We need to help Labour to win the forthcoming General Election.

The Campaigns that will keep us fully occupied during the coming months will be 68 is too late and Save UK Steel, where we must give as much support as possible to our fellow trade unionists.

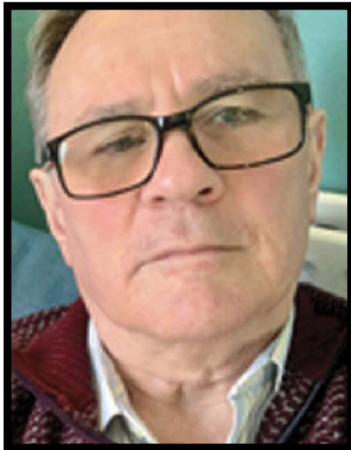


*Mike McLoughlin
Editor & RM National Coordinator*

NPC Biennial Delegate Conference 2024

For all Unite members attending NPC BDC 2024 at delegates: the three candidates below are supported by your National Retired Members Committee. Please find details of the platform they are standing on.

Vote for a fighting, growing NPC



For President:

**Tony
O'Brien**



For Vice-President:

**Roy
Rix**



For Vice-President:

**Mike
McLoughlin**

Vote for us to renew the NPC's founding mission: to advance the interests of pensioners through campaigns and political action.

The NPC was founded by Jack Jones, our union's former general secretary, with the vision of co-ordinated action between pensioner groups and trades unions to advance the interests of pensioners in politics and society. We believe that the NPC must return to this vision in order to grow and succeed.

Our priorities for the NPC are to:

- **Grow the NPC through campaigns on key issues**
- **Defend the rights all older people - regardless of gender, race or ability**
- **Renew and rebuild links with trades unions**



Steelworkers rally in Port Talbot to defend jobs and secure UK steelmaking capacity, 17th February