

Retired from work... **BUT NOT THE FIGHT!**



Unite Retired Members Newsletter Spring 2026



Report from the
Together march p.10

From the editors



**Mike
McLoughlin**



**Irene
Graham**



**Joyce
Still**

✉ *Get in touch:* Retired.Members@unitetheunion.org

On New Year's Eve our National Committee members were all looking forward to a better 2026, bearing in mind that our proposed Unite campaigns for the next 18 months would include Social Care as our priority. Campaigning around the state pension system would be our second priority. Our third priority would be to assist in the campaign to raise the tax threshold by Unite, thus materially assisting all low paid members irrespective of whether they are in work or retired.

Another important issue that our National Committee will be involved in during 2026 will be the discussions taking place in the National Pensioners Convention (NPC), which since April 1st is now a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLbG), to ensure that the NPC democracy will be maintained and

improved upon within the CLbG; thus preserving the Jack Jones legacy.

Unfortunately, thanks to the US and Israeli attack on Iran, our aspirations for 2026 will be badly dented as the fallout from that conflict is going to hit our members very hard. Many of our members are already in financial difficulty and they are now going to be hit by increased fuel and heating costs, food shortages with increased prices, and a government that has a proven record of being indifferent to the worse-off members in society. We are going to be faced with difficult times ahead and our campaign priorities may have to change to ensure that we do the best that we can to protect our members.

Mike McLoughlin
**Editor & National Committee Lay
Coordinator**

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Campaigns and reports from across the union

Executive Council Report, Monica Taylor

As we finally celebrate spring arriving in 2026, we approach May's local and parliamentary elections in England, Scotland, and Wales. Their results will have a profound impact on the political outlook across our regions, with predicted losses for the Labour Party across the board.

We have a government which is hostile to pensioners, as demonstrated by our successful campaign against Winter Fuel Payment cuts. The last 12 months have shown that we have a government which is also hostile to workers, with the Birmingham bin dispute seeing

workers in a Labour-run Council threatened with £8,000 pay cuts.

This was the subject of our most recent Executive Council meeting, where General Secretary Sharon Graham noted that the current Labour Party seem to lack any real vision to fight for a better deal for the workers and trade unions that founded them. While any disaffiliation from Labour would require a rule change, at this Executive Council meeting our affiliation fee to the Party was due - £1.450 million.

Our union has historically been the biggest affiliate to Labour.

Executive Council report continued

On reflection of the struggles of our members under this government, including those in the Local Government and Defence sectors, the Executive Council resolved that Unite would reduce our affiliation to the Labour Party from 500,000 members to 300,000 members: cutting our annual affiliation fee by £580,000. A vote was taken and there were only 2 members who abstained.

Our union's successful focus on jobs, pay, and conditions has delivered a dispute win rate of 81% with over £638 million in members' pockets in headline pay awards and much more in improved benefits, pensions holidays and reduced working weeks. We have also now paid out well over £65 million in strike pay; a contrast to about £1 million a year under the previous administration.

It was reported that the independent investigations that were commissioned surrounding the Birmingham hotel and Conference Centre and our affiliated services, to uncover the truth about potential historic corruption, are now with the police.

For Retired Members, the National Officer and Organisers have been concentrating on planning priority campaigns and ensuring motions from the 2024 Retired Members' Conference have been/are being

actioned. Campaigns planned for the next 12 months:

- Campaign for social care funding
- Defend the triple lock and for an increased state pension
- Campaign around stealth taxes (alongside wider campaigning by the union)

The meeting also heard that a Parliamentary inquiry has been launched to examine the pre-pension income gap, especially as the State Pension Age is increasing from 66-67. The new Work and Pensions Committee will examine the reasons for early retirement, inequality and impact on pre-pensioner and pensioner poverty of upping the State Pension Age, and what support to smooth the transition could look like.

Finally, it was announced that the National Retired Members Conference will take place on Wednesday 11th November alongside the National Industrial Sector Conferences in Brighton.

Monica Taylor
Executive Council Member

**If you would like to contact me,
please email:
monica.taylor@unitetheunion.org**



Report from Retired Members' Education Course, Eastbourne

This course is aimed at members who are interested in becoming more active in retirement and it concentrates on the basics of our Unite structures, how branches work and how we can organise and campaign as retired members. It also looks at what legal services are available to retired members and considers issues related to the State Pension. The course design includes presentations and group activities, and it provides lots of formal and informal opportunities to meet members from across the Regions and opportunities to take on roles that members may not have taken on at branch level. These include chairing the group session, taking notes and reporting back.

The team organising the course finds it useful to get feedback.

A delegate from last year said that a glossary of abbreviations would have been useful, so we included one this year. We also added a short group session on the Friday morning based on comments from last year.

We learned a very valuable lesson this year about the gap between members who are active at every level and those who aren't. It's too easy to assume that everyone knows as much as you do, and to assume that all retired members branches are active and engaging their members - and that those approaching retirement know they can still be in the union after retirement.

This course showed that's not the case. We have a job to do to improve communications and to reach out to members who are about to retire.

Here's some of their ideas:

- Create a video on the breadth of activities that RMP, (Retired Members Plus), members engage in and send to industrial branches.
- Develop the idea of a yearly Combine meeting.
- Talk to members in industrial branches who are approaching retirement about the benefits of remaining in the union.
- Make sure all shop stewards and secretaries of industrial branches know about RMP.
- Promote the message that “the union is for life”.

We will look at all the suggestions and adopt as many of them as possible. We introduced more opportunities for delegates to socialise starting with a meet and greet. We also held a political song session, a quiz and a moving one-man play about Orgreave.

We were disappointed that not every Region had delegates on the course and we want to see all Regions there next year. We want to build on the success of the course to encourage a new generation of activists who in retirement will continue to make a valuable contribution to the trade union movement.

We'd like to thank everyone involved in creating the course. It was a team effort from Lynette, from the Education Department, tutors Gareth & James, the facilitators Chris, Joyce, Mike, Monica and our chairperson Maggie Roberts. All our planning would have been for nothing if it hadn't been for the active participation of all the delegates who attended and made the course a great success. Irene Graham, Facilitator and Vice-chair of the National Committee.

Irene Graham, Facilitator and Vice-Chair of the National Committee.



Learning in action at the Education Course

Celebrating the Centenary of the General Strike

Like all great events in working class history, the General Strike and Miners Lockout of 1926 live on in the heads and the hearts of trade unionists a hundred years later. "Not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay" is a slogan burned into our collective consciousness.

1926 saw more than 2.5 million workers withdraw their labour; an estimated 1.7m+ on a nine-day solidarity strike against pay cuts and increases to working time that would affect 1.2m+ miners, who were locked out of their workplaces. At the end of those nine days, new relief committees and funds had formed; the Flying Scotsman train had been derailed; activists and strikers were imprisoned up and down the country; and the devastating poverty of working communities had been revealed to all of Britain in publications like the Labour Woman, established by Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson. The miners continued their strike for a further 6 months.

The strike is often seen as a failure of the labour movement: the TUC called off the action after meeting with the government, urging miners to accept revised terms which they had already rejected (and negotiating no further protection for strikers).

But this astonishing feat of class solidarity deserves

to be commemorated for the risks taken by every worker, activist, politician, and family member who acted together and brought the nation to a standstill over those nine days.

Through this strike, we established that trade unions are the collective voice for workers and to this day, the strike remains a powerful reminder that when we stand together, we can affect change. The legacy of the strike lives on and we've recently seen council bin workers in Birmingham striking over a pay cut that is worse in percentage terms than that forced on miners in 1926. Income inequality climbs while the need for union membership has never been stronger. The gig economy has turned back the clock on secure employment and resurrected mass casualised labour.



On the 2nd May 2026, Unite will hold a centenary commemoration event in Barnsley, organised in conjunction with Durham Miners' Association and the National Union of Mineworkers. It is no coincidence that we chose this date and location, shortly before Barnsley goes to the polls for an all-out local election at which Reform is projected to take control of yet another council in the post-mining north.

Life must improve for working class communities in our country, rapidly and tangibly. The labour movement must answer that call, to first and foremost improve the jobs, pay and conditions of workers.

The thought of mass industrial action on a scale of millions sets the imagination racing. What if? Could we? Those thoughts give us a little dose of something that is sorely missing in 2026 – hope. We all need that hope now, facing the very real threat of fascism rising in Britain.

Join Unite on 2nd May in Barnsley – all details are available on the Unite website, Unite for a Workers' Economy social media and on the advert below. We hope to see you there.

Daisy Crump
Unite for a Workers' Economy & Retired Members Organiser

**NOT A
MINUTE
ON THE DAY**

**NOT A
PENNY
OFF THE PAY**

Visit:
<https://tinyurl.com/UniteGeneralStrike100>
For more details



10.00 to 12.30 - Barnsley Civic for breakfast and talks by leading historians of the General Strike and Miners Lockout

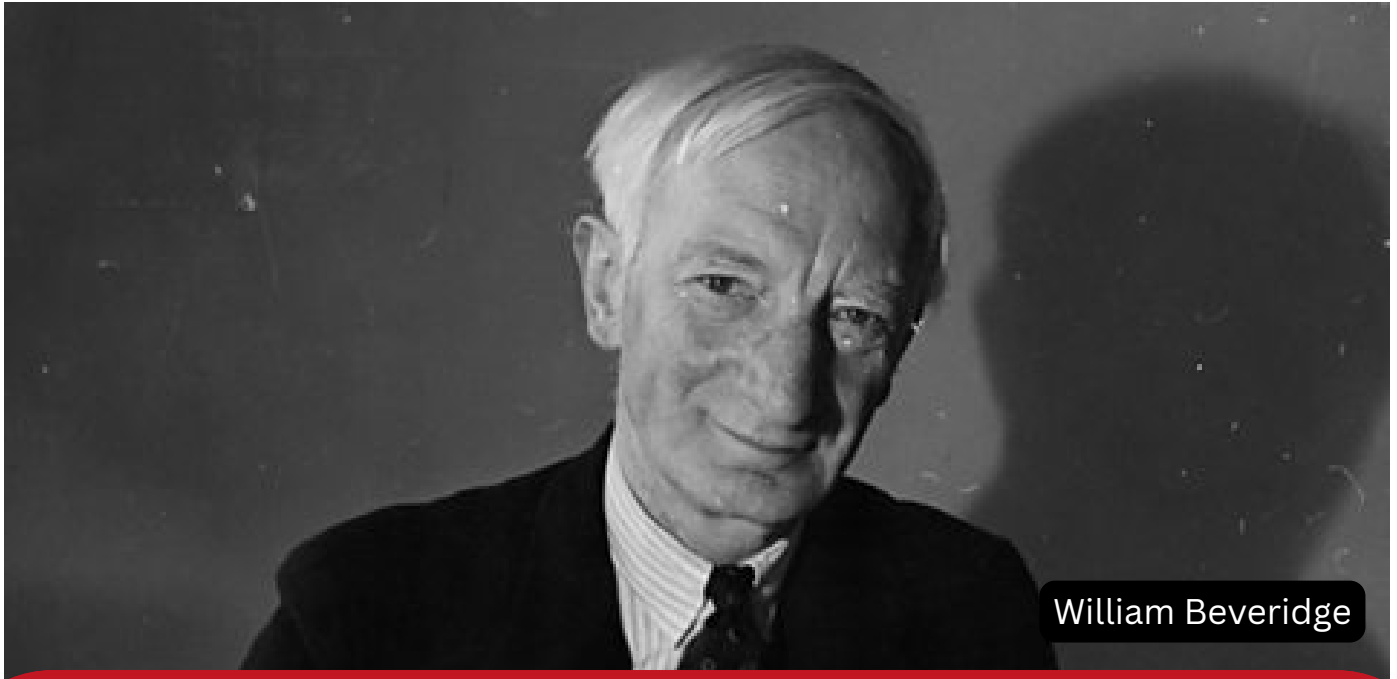
13.00 - Meet at Glass Works Square

13.45 to 14.30 - March with brass bands from town to the NUM building

14.30 to 16.30 - Keynote speakers at the NUM building and a performance by COMMONERS CHOIR

17.30 til late - Evening gig at VAULT 27 featuring KATRINA TIA CHARLES, THE PRIMEVALS, THE WAKES and FEROCIOUS DOG (acoustic)

Evening tickets £15 + booking from tinyurl.com/Barnsley-GS100-gig - everything else free of charge.



William Beveridge

Features

The State Pension (as we know it) is 100 this year!

Before 1909 elderly people relied on the poor laws, or being the ‘deserving poor’ to survive, but in 1909 the first ‘state pension’ was introduced. It was paid from age 70, when the average life expectancy was to 50/55. People claiming it had to have lived in the UK for 20 years, be of ‘good character’ and have an annual income of £21 or less.

In 1926, the first contributory pension came in with the passing of the ‘Widows, Orphans and Old Age Contributory Pension Act 1925’; this was paid from the lower age of 65. Both employees and employers had to pay into the scheme, but again this

was means tested and payable to people on an income of below £250 per annum. The 1942 Beveridge report, ‘Social and Allied Services’, was where the idea of a universal state pension, to provide a safety net in old age against poverty, came from.

The National Insurance Act 1946 gave a basic state pension based on NI contributions paid by workers.

Pensions were paid to women aged 60 and men aged 65, but married women were able to opt-out which caused problems at retirement. There were also ways to increase your state pension by contributing into SERPs/S2P, but employers often

contracted employees out of this if there was a work pension. This is now called the 'Old State Pension' because in 2016 the 'New State Pension' was introduced. Since 1946, the state pension has been a 'contributory benefit'. It means we have all paid into it and so are entitled to receive the pension.

We must be wary of political parties that think they can means test our state pension. The Reform Party has already targeted the pension as one of its aims if it gets into power.

In Unite we have clear policies on pensions, including the retention of the triple lock until we get a level of state pension that reaches 70% of average earnings, and we have the 68 is Too Late campaign. We need and will continue to fight for future generations and make sure Beveridge's dream of a basic state pension for all is kept alive. We will campaign for the state pension to be at a level that means no pensioner will be living in poverty.

Maggie Roberts, Chair, National Retired Members Committee



Marching Together Against Hate: 28th March, London

History was made on 28th March. Half a million people from across the UK gathered in Park Lane near London's Hyde Park to march to a rally and a carnival that saw Trafalgar Square filled to overflowing. Organised by the new Together

Coalition, this joyous, peaceful protest was the largest anti far right demonstration Britain has seen. It was astonishing not just for its size but also for its diversity. The range of age groups, backgrounds and affiliations represented was striking.

There were big contingents from every major union – including Unite, with Sharon Graham one of the key speakers before the march set off. Members of the Royal College of Nursing carried placards that read, “Immigrants made the NHS”. There were blocs from groups like CND and Care for Calais. Climate campaigners brought a huge model lifeboat on wheels – a symbol of the climate emergency – but also a sharp dig at Nigel Farage, who denounced the Royal National Lifeboat Institution for rescuing asylum seekers in the English Channel. When the front of the march reached its destination, the end of the march was still at the Hyde Park assembly point. The Palestine bloc, which included many Jewish activists, was a huge feeder march, which joined the main march enroute. There were large contingents of Women Against the Far Right from different parts of the UK, all of them well capable of debunking far right lies about ‘defending our women’. There were enormous numbers of young people and for many it would have been their first march.

I was proud to march with our Unite Glasgow & Renfrewshire Retired Members banner. We travelled as part a large Scottish bloc who met in Glasgow Central station at 4am on Saturday morning to be in London on time. It included the Falkirk for All Group that have been defending asylum seekers housed in a local

hotel from an aggressive far right. There was also a big Scottish contingent that travelled early on Saturday morning by train from Edinburgh. It had been a long day, but well worth it. Yet there can be no complacency. The far right is growing out of the crisis of the mainstream parties that have devastated working class lives with neoliberalism and austerity. Racism is the glue that holds together Reform UK’s narrative of “British decline” and we must win people away from the lie that migrants and Muslims are to blame.

The huge turnout on 28th March can be both a game changer and an inspiration. Tommy Robinson’s Unite the Kingdom march in London last September made his forces look unstoppable.

The Together demonstration was four times bigger. That means that if you’re campaigning against Reform in next month’s elections you can mobilise many more people. It opens up the opportunity to build anti-racist organisation at work and in the union; networks of council, health, care, education and other workers organised from the bottom up. The unions, which mobilised much larger blocs on the 28th of March than ever before, must be part of building those networks in every town, city and workplace.

Dave Sherry
Vice Chair of Glasgow & Renfrewshire
Retired Members



Opinion

In this new section of the newsletter, readers offer their opinions on issues relevant to Retired Members.

Please note: opinion pieces reflect the views of members, not necessarily the union or editorial team. Articles may be abridged.

Despair at the United States' Actions - and How the UK Should Respond

The USA-Israel War on Iran – what is to be done by us? The reasons that the current US President decided to declare war on Iran lie back in the 1990 Iraq invasion of Kuwait the United Nations voted in the UN Security Council and demanded Iraq's immediate withdrawal and imposed a total embargo on products from Iraq and Kuwait. The Security Council issued an ultimatum to Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, with member-states thereafter empowered to use "all necessary means" to force withdrawal. That triggered a military buildup in the Persian Gulf region. The broadest military alliance since World War II, its largest contributors were the US,

Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, and Egypt. In 1991, the coalition launched a decisive ground assault liberating Kuwait and promptly advancing into Iraqi territory.

The coalition halted its ground advance after one hundred hours and declared a ceasefire and did not occupy Iraq. In 2001 the US was attacked by, al-Qaeda, who hijacked planes which were flown into the World Trade Building in New York. Al-Qaeda's base was in Afghanistan. That triggered the use of NATO Article 5 (an attack on one is an attack on all) and the NATO coalition, including the armed forces of the UK invaded

Despair at the United States' Actions - and How the UK Should Respond cont.

Afghanistan. In 2011 bin Laden the leader of Al Queda was killed in a US raid into Pakistan but the war in Afghanistan went on to become a war against the Taliban. The Taliban won that war and there were a lot of UK casualties.

By 2003 the US had decided to go for regime change in Iraq and the US and UK forces invaded Iraq. Many of us marched against the involvement of the UK in that war, in 2003, but Prime Minister Blair used a series of lies about Iraq holding "weapons of mass destruction". Saddam Hussein was captured in 2003 and executed in 2006. But the occupation of Iraq was an entirely predictable disaster. It created a power vacuum, attempts at colonial "nation rebuilding" fuelled a sectarian civil war between Iraq's Shia majority and Sunni minority. Iran was involved supporting that Sunni minority. Iran has also openly declared its policy to eliminate the state of Isreal for many years and has attacked Isreal using proxies like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis in Yemen.

So here we are in 2026 with US President Trump having declared war on Iran with no justification whatsoever Iran has responded with missile and drone attacks on Isreal and the gulf states including attacks designed to shut down oil shipment movements to provoke an economic crisis.

No one can predict the outcome as President Trump's war aims which vary from day to day apart from the fact that the US has the greatest military power on the planet and "is going to use it". Iran regime change is left to the Iranians, and the Islamic Republic of Iran has responded by killing dissidents and demonstrators and supressing any form of opposition. Russia has benefitted as Europe has agreed to buy Russian oil and gas to cope with the loss of supply from the gulf. Isreal has taken full advantage seeing an opportunity to destroy Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran and continue the annexation of the West Bank.

Dereck Roberts
RM National Committee

Do you wish to contribute to the debate?

 *Get in touch:* Retired.Members@unitetheunion.org

Letters to the editor should be kept as brief as possible and deal with just one subject. Articles and reports should not normally be more than 500 words and please enclose a photograph, if possible.



Letters and obituaries

Views from the Retired Members' Education Course, Eastbourne

Dear Editor,

I found the educational course for retired members very enjoyable. Travelling down on the Monday morning from Scotland was a lengthy journey with only a minor hiccup (due to the recent fire which closed Glasgow Central for several days). So, it was great that the Monday evening session was just a welcome with a meet and greet session before retiring for dinner with Tuesday morning the start of a very full and interesting educational programme. Having 'broken the ice' with colleagues from other regions the night before made it a lot easier when we were put into smaller groups for the various sessions throughout the week.

I've certainly come away with a better knowledge of Union sectors and structures and the role that the RM Branches can play in organizing its activity and campaigns to either canvass on behalf of retired members or support the many different sectors in their campaigns for fairer treatment.

I also appreciate the efforts of all the tutors in putting the course together. All the delegates worked well in the various group activities, and I learned much from both the tutors and other colleagues' experience and views whether it was on preparing motions, organising a campaign or trying to find group leaders. Lastly, I cannot overstate that the evening events put on for members were a great hit in socialising and building rapport. The play about Orgreave was powerful and very emotional about the experience of miners and their communities during the strike.

***Kate Waddell,
Glasgow & Renfrewshire
Retired Members' Branch.***

Dear Editor,

Union for life! "Union for life" was a quote made by a fellow retired + member on the recent education course in Eastbourne and how true is that!

Views from the Retired Members' Education Course, Eastbourne cont.

I joined Unite in 2012 when I began work for a big global company and realised the benefits in case something untoward happened not realising the positive impact it would have on my life! I have become more involved over the years making friends and having some amazing opportunities! I did panic when I was heading towards retirement until I discovered my involvement with Unite didn't have to stop as Retired Members Plus was my next step! Again, the events and committees have been amazing! The Retired Members Plus education course was so useful to reaffirm my knowledge of the way in which our union works, learn more and make new like-minded friends! If you get the chance to attend grab it with both hands, you won't regret it!

***Rosalind Morcombe,
Northern Ireland Craigavon Branch.***

Dear Editor,

I wish to share my experience of the retired members 2026 Education Course with fellow members. I am relatively new to the Retired members, having retired in 2024. I was asked by our Branch Chair, if I would like to attend the Education Course and I accepted, with a bit of apprehension, as I have not previously been involved in activism during my

working career. When I arrived, I was welcomed by a very friendly Maggie, who invited me to the Meet and Greet session later that day.

I have learnt so much about how our Union works and how as Retired Members we can still be active campaigners. By day 3, I felt confident enough to volunteer to take on the Role of Reporter, standing up in front of everyone with the microphone was a bit nerve racking, and deliver the results of our Groups Task, Organising a Campaign. The Social Events that took place in the evenings, were excellent, especially The One Man Play- Orgreave, they really are so important. They also triggered discussions around the day's activities and many other subjects. Talking with other members from all over the country is very interesting and I have made some great connections. The Hotel is lovely and the food is good and plentiful. I would recommend attending this course. After attending this course, I feel informed and motivated, and my self-confidence has risen enormously.

***Felicity McGoldrick,
Doncaster Branch***

Call for Future Newsletter Topics and Discussions

Dear Editor,

Could we see how we can have a constructive discussions in the Unite Newsletter on ways to build yet be critical of issues having day to day effects on retired members. For poorer is housing, saving, heating and feeding. Then family support of the children and education. Help and where together it. Free or cheap hobbies. The government and our freedoms. Hope that we can help one another by debating these important issues.

Fred Anderton

Fred has raised many issues in his letter that are ripe for discussion. I am hoping that many of our readers will give us their constructive views on many of those issues raised. **Please note that all letters to the Editor must contain branch and membership number, and future letters won't be able to be published without these details included.** Thanks to Frank for taking the time to submit this to us.

Mike McLoughlin
Editor

Do you wish to contribute to the debate?

✉ Get in touch: Retired.Members@unitetheunion.org

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<https://actionnetwork.org/forms/cable-street-90th-anniversary-save-the-date/>

More information coming soon...



**1926 GENERAL STRIKE SATURDAY
2 MAY 2026
BARNSELY**

100 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

SCAN THE CODE TO REGISTER YOUR INTEREST



10.00 to 12.30 - Barnsley Civic for breakfast and talks by leading historians of the General Strike and Miners Lockout

13.00 - Meet at Glass Works Square

13.45 to 14.30 - March with brass bands from town to the NUM building

14.30 to 16.30 - Keynote speakers at the NUM building and a performance by COMMONERS CHOIR

17.30 til late - Evening gig at VAULT 27 featuring KATRINA TIA CHARLES, THE PRIMEVALS, THE WAKES and FEROCIOUS DOG (acoustic)

Evening tickets £15 + booking from tinyurl.com/Barnsley-GS100-gig - everything else free of charge.

Visit:

<https://tinyurl.com/UniteGeneralStrike100>

For more details



9th MAY 2026

SOLIDARITY YESTERDAY SOLIDARITY TODAY

REMEMBER & CELEBRATE HOUNSLOW'S GENERAL STRIKE MAY 1926

'Don't let the coal miners be starved back to work'

Around the country men and women, young and old, faced a crucial decision back in May 1926 - do we answer the TUC's call to strike? By their millions, the answer was 'yes'. Their answer was solidarity.

In West London, transport and manufacturing workers led the way. With the strike still at its height, rail and bus workers linked hands in a solidarity march through Hounslow High Street, drawing moral and political support from their community.

Hounslow Trades Council will celebrate that moment on Saturday 9th May with a **solidarity walk** and a **solidarity social** with live music from **The Publicans**. Bring union flags and solidarity stories to share if you can. For more information (or just to tell us you are coming): secretary@hounslowtradesunion.org

Assemble at Bell Square, Hounslow TW3 3HH 1:00pm for 1:30pm start. Social from 2:30pm at Hounslow United Reformed Church hall, 114 Hanworth Road TW3 1UF.

