

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



## Unite Retired Members Newsletter

Summer 2025



Our campaign forces major u-turn, p.6

# From the editors



✉ Get in touch: [Retired.Members@unitetheunion.org](mailto:Retired.Members@unitetheunion.org)

2024 has been a momentous year for our Retired Members in many respects.

Firstly in April the East Midlands Retired Members held a very successful Conference for senior shop stewards and Convenors to explain how retired members branches operate. The issues that they campaign on including recruiting and the retention of members. It was made clear that shop stewards have a big role to play.

In the summer our delegate on the Executive Council (EC) Phil Wiseman stood down after 12 years. Phil did an excellent job on behalf of the Retired Members Plus whilst on the EC and in particular during his early years as an observer when we had to fight many battles to establish the status that we now have in the Unite Rulebook.

Joe Rollin and his team of Unite organisers have done sterling work supporting Retired Member campaigns, especially the campaign to

Defend the Winter Fuel Payment which succeeded in forcing a major u-turn from the government.

Unite participated in the Lobby of Parliament organised by the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2024 against the removal of the winter fuel payment. Unite was represented by hundreds of its retired members and the Unite speakers included Mike McLoughlin, Monica Taylor and Sharon Graham.

In late September we lost one of our stalwart members of our National Committee Ronnie Morrison from the Yorkshire and Humberside Region.

During November an election was held to replace the retired member delegate Phil Wiseman on the NEC, Monica Taylor who was our National Chair was the successful candidate winning with a massive majority.

**Mike McLoughlin, Editor**

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# Campaigns and reports from across the union

## *Birmingham bin strike*

Birmingham's refuse workers have been on strike for over six months in opposition to pay cuts of up to £8,000.

The council has claimed that this is necessary to avoid equal pay liabilities. Cutting men's pay to avoid paying women more is not a labour movement approach to equal pay.

The Council Leader has been missing from negotiations throughout the entire strike, as have the Commissioners who effectively run the council following its declaration of bankruptcy.

Now, the Council has withdrawn from negotiations entirely and says it will be pressing ahead with the cuts by firing and rehiring the workers.

Throughout the dispute the Labour

government has been funding bin lorries from other councils to come into Birmingham and break the strike. Any deal to end the strike must be approved by the government commissioners, who are directly answerable to Angela Rayner's department.

And the government recently tabled an amendment to its Employment Rights Bill, exempting councils under government intervention from the ban on fire and rehire.

It is critical that the bin workers win their dispute. Other councils will follow Birmingham if they lose.

Please donate to the strike fund:

**Unite Solidarity Fund**  
**60-83-01 • 20502672**  
**Ref: BCC strike donation**

# Executive Council Report

In November last year, I was elected to represent Retired Members on Unite's Executive Council (EC). I received over half of all votes cast and I am grateful to every person who supported me. Thank you.

I promised to make sure that the retired members' voice is heard loud and clear on the EC and that our section is involved in all union campaigns that affect us.

Our Winter Fuel campaign has forced major u-turns for pensioners in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. These are major victories that could not have happened without Unite's determined campaigning.

I have also been in touch with disabled and community members, to coordinate a campaign against the

government's cuts to disability benefits. We have successfully forced a u-turn on some of the worst parts. If the government had pushed through its cuts in full, they would have affected pensioners as well as workers and the unemployed. It is important that our union continues to be at the forefront of opposing this government's cuts.

The increasing strength of our union continues to win at the bargaining table.

The Birmingham bin strike is escalating as the Council and Government becomes increasingly hostile. The workers are facing pay cuts of up to £8,000 and our GS has committed to always use our resources to support our members on the front line.



The union's auditors presented their report for 2021 to the EC. Most notably, as Sharon Graham outlined in her speech to Policy Conference, the re-audit had uncovered a £66 million impairment related to the difference between the original valuation of the Birmingham project and the real value. A redacted version of the interim report has been published which you can read online on Unite's website (see link below.)

Unfortunately, I must also address behaviour of other EC members. At the March meeting, a group of EC members walked out after losing a vote of

no confidence in the chair, purposefully making the meeting inquorate. They then took the union to court and lost on all counts. I have been extremely disappointed to see this group of EC members undermining our union. However, our union, and especially our retired section, continues to go from strength to strength.

The term of Office for the current EC comes to an end on 30th April 2026 and there will be new elections.

If you would like to contact me, email [monicataylor4ec@gmail.com](mailto:monicataylor4ec@gmail.com)

**Monica Taylor, EC member**

Read the redacted report into allegations of historical corruption within our union, on the Unite the union website. Click the link below:

[www.unitetheunion.org/work-voice-pay/work-voice-pay-monthly/unite-project-clean-up](http://www.unitetheunion.org/work-voice-pay/work-voice-pay-monthly/unite-project-clean-up)



## Project Clean Up

### Interim Report into Allegations of Historical Corruption



Doncaster winter fuel protest, February 2025.



## ***Winter Fuel Payments U-turn***

We welcome the change of direction, but the government still does not acknowledge the devastation it caused over the winter months. Older people were switching off appliances, rationing energy and food to be able to pay bills. Many are in debt to their suppliers with some taking out loans at enormous interest rates.

Older people deserve better. However, the change in direction of the winter fuel payment has now undermined the universality of benefits. This is the second time a government has means-tested pensioner benefits. Starting with the free TV licence for over 75s and now winter fuel payments. Where will it end?

We urge the government to commit to universal benefits, tax the rich and give ordinary people the benefits they have paid for in full.

***Jan Shortt, National Pensioners Convention (NPC) General Secretary***

Jan Shortt, far left, on panel with John McDonnell, far right, at winter fuel payment mass lobby of Parliament in October 2024

The Winter Fuel Payment will now be paid to nine million pensioners whose income is less than £35,000 per year, a considerably more generous giveaway than what we had expected. Under the new policy, all pensioners will automatically receive £200, or £300 for the over 80's. These payments will then be clawed back through the tax system for higher earners.

This U-turn is significantly due to pressure from the NPC and Unite. However, it's only a partial success as they have undermined universalism.

We need to keep campaigning vigorously. It beggars belief that a government that claims to represent working people can only think in terms of placing the financial shortfall on the shoulders of the most vulnerable, claiming that it is too difficult to tax the wealthy; what utter nonsense.

***Mike McLoughlin, Editor and National Committee member***

# TUC Pensioners Committee report

The TUC Pensioners Committee brings together a broad spectrum of unions from across the UK. It receives updates and reports which paint a picture of the important issues facing retired members in different sectors and in different parts of the country. It is not regarded as one of TUC's permanent bodies although it receives excellent support from Jack Jones, TUC's Pensions Policy Officer.

Unite has two members elected from the National Retired Members Committee, Irene Graham and Roy Rix. One of the most valuable aspects of the committee is the opportunity to provide feedback and contribute to important reports and to receive presentations on key topics affecting today's and future pensioners. An example of this is the presentation we received at the March meeting from

Saskia Otto from the Fabian Society on Pensioner Poverty and Social Security. [Click here for her report.](#)

Her presentation showed clearly the inequalities that are built into the state pension system, and she suggested that we need big ideas for the future to protect the poorest and most vulnerable pensioners. The Committee will only ever be as strong as the participating unions and local TUCs chose to make it and although it often seems that unions don't come together to fight in common cause, the TUC Pensioners Committee is a vehicle for sharing common concerns and inviting common actions. How effective it is in our, and other unions' hands

***Irene Graham, Unite National Committee delegate to the TUC***

Swansea Retired Members have actively supported our steel workers' campaign at Port Talbot. Pictured are Dai Badger and Jeff Burn with our General Secretary, Sharon Graham.

***Dereck Roberts,  
Swansea Retired  
Branch and Unite  
National Retired  
Members  
Committee.***



# Scottish Pensioners' Forum

The Scottish Pensioners' Forum (SPF) held its 33rd annual conference and general meeting in the Glynhill Hotel, Renfrew on Tuesday June 10th, 2025. Invited speakers included Richard Leonard MSP and Shirley-Anne Somerville, Scottish Government Minister for Social Justice.

The SPF also held a fringe meeting at the STUC congress in Dundee on Tuesday 29th April. A range of issues were discussed including the campaigns against fuel poverty and benefit cuts affecting the poor, sick and disabled.

It has been a challenging year for the SPF following the disengagement with the STUC and the necessary transition to become a stand-alone body in the form of a not-for-profit Private Company Limited by Guarantee.

Organisational changes notwithstanding however, the SPF stands proud to maintain its links and actively campaign and work with the Trade Union movement on issues of critical importance to working people, both young and old. The SPF has collaborated with Unite for a Workers' Economy on several issues, in particular the campaign against fuel poverty and the means-testing of



winter fuel allowances.

The SPF continues to engage with OFGEM, demanding action against ever-rising fuel bills and profiteering by energy suppliers. Figures obtained from OFGEM show that energy consumer debt is spiralling out of control. In 2024, a total debt of £3.7 billion is owed by domestic consumers, compared to £1.8 billion in 2021. As a result, millions of people, including the poorest and most vulnerable in society, are forced to cut back on life's essentials, like keeping warm and eating sufficiently and healthily.

The SPF will continue to fight the good fight along with the Trade Union movement.

**David Edwards, SPF Executive Committee member**



## Features

### ***Josephine Butler (née Grey), 1828-1906***

Josephine Elizabeth Grey was born on 13th April 1828 in Millfield, Northumberland, seventh of nine children of John Grey and his wife Hannah. He was an agricultural reformer, a supporter of the anti-slavery campaign, a leading Liberal and a relative of Lord Grey, the Whig Prime Minister (1830-1834) who helped to secure the Reform Bill which extended the franchise and improved the fair distribution of parliamentary seats. Josephine had a happy childhood: the family lived in a large house in beautiful Northumberland countryside where the children had plenty of freedom and many pets. Music was encouraged and she became a talented pianist. The sisters were educated at home by their mother

with minimal formal schooling. Josephine's feminist instincts were early aroused by stories of slaves made pregnant by their masters then forced to give up their babies.

In 1850 Josephine met George Butler, then working at Durham University and hoping for an academic career at Oxford. By the end of the year, George had moved to Oxford, and he and Josephine were corresponding regularly. George was nine years her senior: she was attracted by his status as a teacher. The couple married in January 1852, and their first son, George Grey Butler, was born in November. Josephine found life in Oxford difficult: during a discussion of Gaskell's novel *Ruth*, which centred around an unmarried mother, the men

of their acquaintance (mainly unmarried dons) argued that Ruth was far more culpable, more immoral, than the father of the child. The double standards of Victorian Britain, where women were blamed for the actions of men, Josephine could not abide. Oxford's damp and unhealthy air also took its toll on her health – her lungs had not been strong since serious illness in her teens. George's move to a post in Cheltenham College in 1857 suited them both.

Josephine and George went on to have two more sons and a daughter, Eva. Tragically in 1864, Eva, then five, was killed in a fall at their. In 1866 the family moved to Liverpool, where Josephine worked with women imprisoned in the Bridewell, part of Liverpool Workhouse. Many were individuals engaged in prostitution whose circumstances she improved: she and George raised funds to establish a House of Help and an Industrial Home, both of which they actively managed. Josephine became the President of the North of England Council for the Higher Education of Women and was also involved in campaigns to make marriage law fairer. Despite minimal formal education, she became a prolific writer of books and pamphlets and a competent speaker of French and Italian. She devoted herself to campaigning to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, which allowed the police to detain any woman they suspected of prostitution and subjected them to regular degrading physical examinations by police surgeons. Women described this indignity as 'instrumental rape'. For Josephine,

it was another shocking example of double standards and an infringement of all women's civil rights.

In 1869, Josephine became the Secretary of the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, engaging in a campaign of pamphlet and letter writing, Parliamentary lobbying, petition gathering and nationwide speaking, until the acts were repealed in 1886. Despite her devoted group of followers, the campaign aroused hostility – for example in Pontefract the barn in which she was speaking was set on fire. She then became involved in W.T. Stead's campaign against child prostitution in London. Josephine persuaded a woman who had worked as a prostitute, to obtain a child 'for sale' to Stead, who was arrested and imprisoned, not being believed that this had been undertaken to show how easy it was to obtain a child prostitute. However, sensational headlines ensured that the facts around child prostitution became public knowledge. Within weeks, Parliament voted to raise the age of consent from 13 to 16. George's support was unwavering, though it must have damaged his career: he was shouted down when he tried to make a speech about the Contagious Diseases Acts at the Church of England Congress. After retirement to Winchester, and a long illness, George died in 1890, however Josephine continued to write and campaign until she died in 1906, in Northumberland, not far from where she was born.

**Joyce Still, Unite National Committee**



## *The myth of 'intergenerational inequity' is used to divide and rule*

A recurring theme of right-wing economists and finance industries is that older people have an unfair share of national resources, to the detriment of younger people, a zero-sum game in which the interests of pensioners are opposed to those of workers.

US economists led the way (Samuelson 1958, Preston 1984; Americans for Generational Equity 1988), the latter funded mainly by the finance and insurance industries, to encourage replacing state Social Security by private insurance. By 1992, Kotlikoff formalised the idea as 'Generational Accounting' while in Thatcher's Britain 'Workers versus Pensioners. Intergene-

rational conflict in an ageing world' (Johnson et al. 1989), 'Jilted Generation: How Britain has bankrupted its children' (Howker and Malik 2010) joined the chorus.

The 'Intergenerational Fairness' think tank also argued that the cost of pensioners' state benefits, use of NHS and social care were unfair to younger generations. Clearly, every age cohort of workers and pensioners has suffered from neoliberal UK austerity policies since the 1980s: state pensions declined from 25% of average earnings in the 1970s to a low of 16% before rising after 2000 through re-linking with earnings and the triple

lock. Nevertheless, the UK state pension remains one of the lowest in Europe. Also, poverty among older people is more persistent than for younger people.

Treating each generation as homogeneous ignores the structural inequality of income and wealth by class, ethnicity and gender. Earnings, years of employment and access to a private pension vary starkly within every generation. In 2010, 75% of men over 65 received some private pension (median amount £128,000), but only half of women did so (median £61,000). This stark financial disadvantage of older women reflects their earlier role in reproducing, caring for and socialising the children who will eventually be workers, then pensioners. However, state pensions allow credits for certain periods of caring, helping to reduce the motherhood/carer penalty. Yet NI contributions were reduced by the recent Tory government, threatening the viability of state pensions.

Private pensions, which allow tax relief (most generous to the richest

and at cost to us all) would be redundant if the state pension – available to everyone, redistributive and fully portable – were substantially raised. Successful campaigns for better state pensions not only lift pensioners out of poverty but will benefit all younger cohorts, just as workers' successful struggles for decent earnings benefit future employees. The claim of intergenerational inequity is used for political purposes, to divide us, to legitimate neoliberal policies and to divert attention from governments policies that rewarded their donors through privatisation of energy, water, tuition fees, rail travel and the massive loss of social housing through Thatcher's Right to Buy policy. Both workers and pensioners would gain from shaking the Magic Money Tree' (currently always available to fund wars and weapons) to instead revive the cash-starved NHS, education, social services and social housing.

***Dr Jay Ginn is Chair of Croydon  
Unite Retired Members Branch***





# Letters and obituaries

## ***Tribute to the late Ronnie Morrison***

Ronnie Morrison from the Yorkshire and Humberside Region passed away on September 28th, 2024. He joined the TGWU in 1968, he became an officer in 1984 and served until retirement in 2004. He was a member of the Unite Retired Members Committee from its inception in 2008 until a few years ago when he stood down due to having a leg amputated.

Ronnie was a real character, a great debater, was a passionate supporter of pensioners causes and campaigns. He was always very supportive of educational opportunities for retired members. He was a staunch supporter of the National Pensioners Convention

(NPC) and used to organize the Unite stall at the annual Blackpool Pensioners Parliament, he also organised the Unite Social evening for delegates to the Parliament at the Blackpool British Legion Club. Ronnie was a great campaigner, articulate, and hardworking, he was always supported by his wife Val, together they were a formidable pair of activists.

Ronnie was also a very sociable person and had many friends, he will be sorely missed, and we will not see his like again.

***Mike McLoughlin***

## ***Tyrone O'Sullivan***

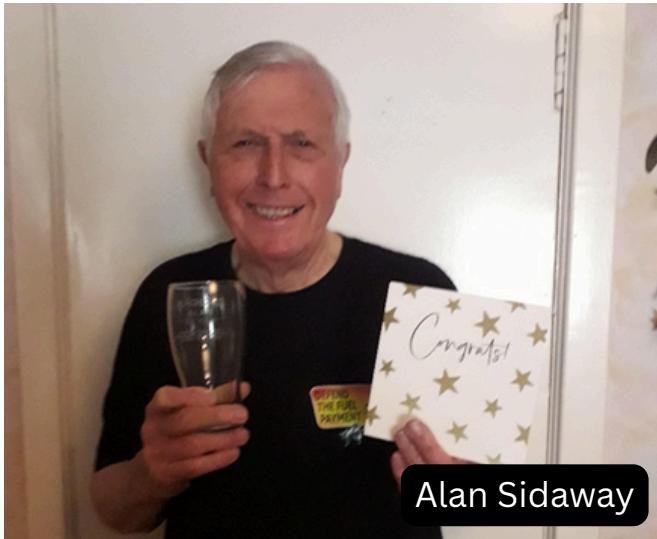
Many of our members were involved in supporting the South Wales miners back in the 1984 strike and when Tyrone O'Sullivan, of Tower Colliery fame died on 27th May 2023 they helped to organise a celebration of Tyrone at his beloved Mumbles Cricket Club which involved a visit from Arthur Scargill and Jeremy Corbyn.

***Dereck Roberts***



**Tyrone O'Sullivan**

## **Long service awards for Alan Sidaway and Colin Hensby**



**Alan Sidaway**



**Colin Hensby**

The Dumfries Area Activists Committee made an award to Alan Sidaway for 60 years dedicated service to our union, first with the TGWU and then with Unite. He has worked tirelessly since moving to Dumfries. He has done much with helping pensioners in the area to achieve a better lifestyle for them. He has organized branch outings and meals to give a chance for retired union members to enjoy life in their later years.

**Irene Graham**

Our branch was pleased to present a long service badge to Colin Hensby. Colin started work on the local farm aged 16 and retired from work in 2009 aged 65. In 1969 he joined the National Union of Agricultural & Allied Workers which became part of the TGWU. He has therefore been a member of Unite and predecessor unions for 55 years. Over the years he did much good work for the union including collecting subs from around the area.

**David Ryder**

## **Tax thresholds**

Dear Editor, please would you consider campaigning to get our government to increase the tax threshold, which is currently set at a very low £12,570. This is well below the minimum £29,000 that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation says single people need to live on. Personally, my tiny private pension plus the State Pension, adds up to under £13,000pa but I'll have to pay tax for the first time in decades! It's not right that people on such low incomes should pay tax.

As we have a Sovereign currency, our government doesn't need to use taxation to fund expenditure. Taxation should be used to balance the economy, control inflation, control expenditure, etc. If they still want to tax people then they should tax the rich, as it is they who are causing prices and costs to rise for everyone else. Taxing the poor is actually bad for the economy.

**Wanda Lozinska**

## ***Introduce rent controls to cut welfare spending***

Dear Editor,

If Government wants to really cut its welfare spending, why does it not introduce rent controls?

We seem to be the only country that doesn't have some form of rent controls. Europe and even the USA have rent controls. So why not here?

Rent controls do not mean freezing housing benefits. It means freezing what landlords can charge. It's outrageous that people are allowed to "Buy to Let". Since the tenant is simply paying the 'buy to let' owner's mortgage for them. This practise must be prohibited, as it was previously.

I remember when renting was always lower cost than buying. Now it's reversed and if the tenant gets housing benefit, then Government is also paying the property owner's

mortgage as well. So, Taxpayers are simply subsidising buy to let owners, who use these properties as an investment for retirement. If they want a retirement nest egg, they should be paying into a pension scheme like the rest of us, not getting taxpayers to subsidise their retirement.

Rent controls, where rents are frozen well below mortgage payments, will gradually lower welfare costs over time. Don't penalise the sick and ill with cuts. Target the real rip-off swindlers who are really fleecing taxpayers, the private landlords, because they are not providing a public service but lining their own pocket at taxpayers' expense.

***Mr A C Buck, retired electrical engineer***

### ***Do you wish to contribute to the debate?***



*Get in touch: [Retired.Members@unitetheunion.org](mailto: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.