University and College Union

Newsletter

East Midlands Retired Members Branch

No.31 September 2017

In this newsletter

1. Branch meeting

Wednesday October 18th 2017

11.00 – 13.00

(Speaker at 12.00)

Speaker: Alan Tuckman

The Impact of the Trade Union Act.

The Swan in the Rushes, 21 The Rushes
Loughborough, LE11 5BE

2. More information and news can be obtained from these websites. We suggest you have a browse.

UCU National Website: http://www.ucu.org.uk
AgeUK: http://www.ageuk.org.uk/
68 is too late: www.68istoolate.org.uk
National Pensioners Convention (NPC): http://npcuk.org
East Midlands NPC:

Please inform us of change of address or email

We encourage retired members to use their **home** e-mail for when you give up your work e-mail address. We send out a quarterly newsletter by email, but only an annual newsletter by post. Sending the newsletters by post is increasingly expensive.

http://leicesternpcgroup.btck.co.uk/
Your branch website is at
http://www.ucu-em-rmb.org.uk

3. Gerry Hardy

Gerry Hardy was a good man. He not only devoted his life to a severely handicapped child but found the time to fearlessly defend others at work through his union work. Gerry served respectively as chair and then as secretary of the NATFHE Nottinghamshire Liaison Committee over two decades. He did this with principle, courage and integrity. He later joined the Retired Members Branch.

He was also a regular attender at the (then) NATFHE Regional Committee, at which he made regular, well considered and sometimes passionate contributions.

After he retired, he continued to serve on the Committee by taking notes and producing the minutes. In this role, he deliberately gagged himself, believing that it was not for a retired member to influence the positions and policies developed by working members, even although this must often have been hard for him. He was always supportive and encouraging towards new activists. He will be much missed and remembered as a gentle as well as principled man.

4. Congress Report

The highlight for me was my room at the Queen's Hotel. I had a Tower room on the first floor which looked out on the promenade and Brighton pier. I could have comfortably put the Branch Committee up in there. What a change from the usual view of a brick wall! The bathroom was a similarly generous size with a large quarter-circle bath as well as the shower and double wash-hand basins. I know you will all be pleased for me. My son suggested they knew how important I was, but I thought it was more likely they mistook me for someone else. Anyway, I thought the least I could do to show my appreciation was to present you with a report to commemorate my good fortune.

The Retired Members' meeting was, largely, a disappointment. In the past, we have received a report from each region on what they have done during the year which the genuinely lamented Geraldine Egan used to elicit from each Regional Branch Secretary. She used to send us the reports and an agenda for the meeting and, compared to this year, really spoil us. It just proved how much she deserved our flowers when she retired at last year's Congress.

This year, Ken Childerhouse from South East, on his valedictory appearance at Congress, chaired the session and made it clear at the start that he intended to get it over with by lunch-time whereas we had always previously continued into the afternoon. I think his main aim was to ensure that contributions were focused on outcomes as much as principles. In the circumstances that may have been long enough.

I took the opportunity to attend the FE Sector afternoon session. I think it was the first time since the turn of the century. That and the Congress as a whole served to underline once again how Education, in general, and FE, in particular, has declined immeasurably since I started at Clarendon in 1973.

I have always felt that Congress has been well-chaired. Liz Lawrence was especially good last year. Maybe the usual support mechanisms weren't there, but this year it did not feel that business was being dealt with as effectively as it should. Next year's President (this year's President elect) needs to be given more guidance and support.

As a pedant, I was also irritated by the fact that an Observer was allowed to speak no fewer than 5 times in Congress and, I believe, twice in FE Sector. If you want to be a Delegate, you shouldn't masquerade as an Observer and then expect to speak; well, once may be. I was hoping a braver, more self-centred pedant would object, but none emerged.

We were nearing the end of Congress and the Chair was trying to squeeze in as much business as possible, so I acceded to a request to move our motion formally as it was non-contentious. There was also an earlier motion to have a report on a review of retired members branches ready for next Congress so we shall need to keep our eyes and ears open in case they propose to clip our wings. We are meant to be consulted as part of the review.

Brian Hambidge

Chesterfield Mayday 2017.
(Photo: Helen Chester)

5. The Rise in State Pension Age

The Cridland Report on State Pensions turned out to be a damp squib. Its conclusions ignored the differential impact of bad health on various occupational groups from physical illness amongst those carrying out heavy labour to the very high burn out rates in health and education. This was despite the highlighting of these statistics within the text. Cridland's interim report announced that it would examine the interface between rising State Pension Age (SPA) and the benefits system. The final report make one cringingly inadequate conclusion: in the final **year** before SPA the Universal Credit rules should be tweaked to allow a partial benefit payment to be made if working hours were reduced. And that was it.

One proposal of Cridland was taken on board by the Government; and that was to accelerate the rise in SPA. The state pension age will rise to 68 between 2037 and 2039, affecting everyone aged 46 or under now. The Government decision jettisons existing legislation which anticipated the increase to 68 happening far later, between 2044 and 2046.

The changes were announced by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, David Gauke, who told MPs: "As life expectancy continues to rise and the number of people in receipt of state pension increases, we need to ensure that we have a fair and sustainable system that is reflective of modern life and protected for future generations." Such bad luck that on the very day that this decision was implemented the news came out that the projected increase in life expectancy had stalled.

It was announced that England's average life expectancy rates are slowing dramatically.

- Improvements in England's life expectancy have been slowing for years and are on the verge of stopping completely
- The threat posed by dementia is likely to have contributed to this.
- Austerity and spending cuts could also have affected the health of our older population.

University College London expert Sir Michael Marmot has conducted a review into life expectancy, which has been increasing at a continued rate since the 1920s. From 2000-2009, men saw a one year increase in their life expectancy every three and a half years and this was every five years for women. However, the rate of increase has slowed dramatically since 2009, to the extent that it might no longer continue to rise at all. Marmot said this goes against the continued increase which he had anticipated, leaving him 'deeply concerned'.

Age UK commented: "UK Austerity measures following the 'credit crunch' have resulted in cuts to education, employment and NHS health and social care. If these services have not been able to deliver as much for our population, they could be influencing the quality of health care older people receive."

Millions of people in their 60s today who are unable to work because of ill health, caring or unemployment; who are having to wait longer for their State Pension than they had reasonably hoped and expected; and are being thrown back on a benefits regime that was not really designed for them, or forced to draw down savings put away to see them through their retirement. The rise in SPA worsens this situation. The Government however is resolute in ignoring need and imposing austerity.

Julian Atkinson

6. WASPI (Women Against State Pension Inequalities)

Latest News

The 1995 Tory Government's State Pension Act included plans to increase women's state pension age. Woman Against State Pension Inequality [WASPI] does not ask for the pension age to revert to 60 but does not agree with the way the changes were implemented. Because of the way increases were brought in, hundreds of thousands of women born in the 1950s (in or after 1951) have been hit particularly badly, many suffering financial hardship. Significant pension changes have been imposed upon women, with many women reporting little or no notice. The WASPI campaign is committed to seeking transitional compensation for the lack of notice women were given to these changes.

At present, there is a WASPI All Party Parliamentary Group, chaired by Carolyn Harris, Labour MP for Swansea East, which is pushing for reform to put pressure on the Government to review the current arrangements. The Group put forward an Early Day Motion on 7th September calling on the Government to bring forward transitional arrangements to 'provide pension certainty for women.' The motion has the support of around 200 MPs, drawing support from across Parliament, including 37 Conservatives, and some from the SNP and even the DUP!

Recently, Dennis Skinner MP gave a typically rousing speech in Parliament supporting WASPI, warning the Government that the campaign would continue until concessions were won. He indicated that a Labour Government would work quickly to resolve this issue.

A key activity to take the campaign forward is the Mass Action Complaint that WASPI is currently coordinating. WASPI are helping and encouraging women to write to the DWP to put in their compensation claims. They have composed a model letter for this, which is available to download from the national WASPI website or from the local North and South WASPI group. Contact Colleen (details below) who is happy to help wherever you live. She also regularly gives talks at Labour Groups, UNISON and any groups that want information.
Contact: Colleen Eales
Email: colleeneales@icloud.com
Phone: 07813-203518 or 01623-403825
The local campaign is also active on Facebook and can be found at:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/678360618968671/

To take the campaign further, WASPI has demonstrated at the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester on 3rd October. The official website of the national WASPI organisation can be found at: http://www.waspi.co.uk/. This includes full news of the campaign, including contact details for all local groups.

The Early Day Motion in full:
"That this House believes it has a moral duty to ensure that there is a fair transition for women born on or after 6 April 1951 regarding their pensions; recognises the need for a non-means tested bridging pension that will secure the financial stability of those affected by the 1995 and 2011 Pension Acts and compensation for those at risk of losing in the region of £45,000, creating a fairer pension system for all; and calls on the Government to bring forward transitional arrangements to provide pension certainty for women disproportionately affected by this system."

Judy Wills

7. Winter Fuel Payments Examined

Thanks to the DUP (whoever could imagine such a phrase in this newsletter!) the Government has "lost" its proposal to change the eligibility for the Winter Fuel Payment. Independent Age and the Institute of Public Policy Research have produced an interesting report on the various options that had been considered. (Analysis of Winter Fuel Payment Reforms June 2017) The Government, The Sun and The Mail had been clarity itself on the reasons for the proposed change. The thought of millionaires like Richard Branson getting the benefit outraged their egalitarian instincts. Their usual sensitivities to the perils of the "politics of envy" were conveniently ignored. The actual options were covered over.

1. **Withdrawing WFPs from older people who do not receive Pension Credit:** Older people in the top household income decile would lose on average 0.9% of their income which represents £160 of their annual income, but people in the bottom household income decile will lose on average 7.2% of their income, representing £190 of their annual income.

2. **Withdrawing WFPs from higher and additional rate taxpayers**: Older people in the top household income decile would lose on average 0.2% of their income which represents £90 of their annual income.

3. **Taxing Winter Fuel Payments for all older people who pay tax** Older people in the top household income decile would lose 0.1% of their income or £50 per year and people in the bottom household income decile will lose 0.1% of their income or £10 per year.

4. **Restricting WFPs to those aged 75 and over**: Older people in the top household income decile would lose 0.7 % of their income or £110 per year and people in the bottom household income decile will lose 5.1% of their income or £100 per year.

The overall fiscal impacts are crucial. Withdrawing WFPs from older people who do not receive Pension Credit results in an overall saving of £1.7bn. Withdrawing WFPs from higher rate and additional rate taxpayers results in an overall saving of £100m. Taxing Winter Fuel Payments for all older people who pay tax results in an overall saving of £350m. Restricting WFPs to those aged 75 and over results in an overall saving of £1.05bn. The options which raise the most money are restricting WFPs to those on Pension Credit (saving of £1.7bn) and restricting WFPs to the over-75s (saving of £1.05bn). However, while older people in the top household income decile stand to lose on average 0.9% of their income, or £160 a year, those in the bottom income decile will lose 7.2% of their income, or £190 a year.

The option that appears to have been the clear favourite with the Government before its bad election was option 1, simply because it would save more money in line with the austerity target. **But the poorest would have been hit hardest**. Indeed the impact on the poorest decile of pensioners would be worse than the report suggests since the take up rate for Pension Credit is only 60% and non-universal benefits always miss a significant section of the ostensible target group. So Sir Richard can keep his £90 but the poorest will not lose £190.

Julian Atkinson

8. The Trade Union (Wales) Bill

The Trade Union (Wales) Bill – which is now awaiting Royal Assent – will disapply three core sections of the UK Government's 'divisive and pernicious' Trade Union Act 2016 in relation to the devolved public sector.

It will scrap:

1. The 40% ballot threshold for industrial action affecting important public services
2. Powers to require the publication of information on facility time (the time union reps are permitted to spend on union duties while working) and to impose requirements on public sector employers in relation to facility time duties
3. Restrictions on deduction of union subscriptions from wages by employers ("check-off"). This was arguably an attempt to slash union membership in public services – if you make it harder for members to pay their union dues, numbers are likely to fall.

According to the TUC, the Bill also makes clear the current law on hiring temporary/agency workers during industrial action – a union-busting tactic – meaning any threats from the UK Government to alter the current law in this area won't apply to Wales.

9. Transport Matters

A recent meeting of the Midlands TUC pensioners group heard speaker Rob Johnson talk about current transport service developments.

It seems buses are the most popular and best used transport option, being able to reach many people in a range of different situations including town and country services.

The 2017 "Bus Services Act" is an attempt to address the problems of our transport system or lack of. It is intended to "make provision about bus services and for connected purposes" and includes statements about Advanced Quality Partnership Schemes, Franchising Schemes, Advanced Ticketing Schemes and Enhanced Partnerships etc.

He suggested there should be a co-ordinated transport aim and that there may be a potential for campaigning. For instance, for linked town and country services, new West Midlands services and even community owned services where necessary. "Economic Geographies" are important here such as better links between Nottingham and Derby, Mansfield and Manchester for example, which could help people needing to travel around the region or commuting for work perhaps.

Issues raised in discussion included Air Quality, HS2 and financing of such schemes. A couple of members from Nottingham and NW Leicestershire were very sorry to hear that the TUC is supporting the development of HS2. This is because of the potential for employment it may bring for workers in the region, but does not seem to be taking into account the damage to local environments and the expense which perhaps could be better used elsewhere.

Rowena Dawson

10. USS Update

As colleagues will be aware, the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) is under attack again, following yet another (in the view of UCU and many others) flawed valuation, which implies that it has a £17.5 billion deficit.

USS has launched a consultation with higher education institutions based on the trustees' view that a further 6.6% increase in contributions is required in order to maintain pension benefits at their current level. The employers' position is that they will not pay any more than the current 18%.

UCU has continued to vigorously challenge the basis upon which the latest USS deficit has been arrived at. The union's actuarial advice is that the fund is healthy, growing and secure in the long term. However the consultation with employers means that, while continuing to challenge USS's methodology, we also need to urgently prepare for negotiations with the employers aimed at defending members' pensions.

Following discussions between the general secretary, the negotiators and the officers of UCU's higher education committee, the union has opened a consultative ballot of members in majority USS institutions, starting from 19th September. The aim is to secure a substantial mandate in favour of UCU's position timed to conclude just prior to the joint negotiating committee (JNC) meeting between UCU and the employers on 19th October.

It is very possible that, if negotiations break down, the union will need to conduct a statutory ballot in which a 50% turnout will be necessary. Branches have therefore been asked to regard this consultation as a dry run for a formal ballot and use every available opportunity to discuss the issue with members.

The union will be running a social media campaign in defence of our pensions. Please share Facebook posts and tweets with friends and colleagues, especially those who are still at work, to encourage them to participate in the consultation ballot.

The General Secretary has recently written to vice-chancellors and principals setting out UCU's position with regard both to the trustees' valuation of the scheme and the employers' obligation to ensure that existing benefits are protected. She makes a number of points, some of which we highlight below.

As the General Secretary points put, the Teachers' Pension Scheme already offers superior benefits for academics in Post-92 institutions (£200,000 more for a young academic over an average retirement). Any further reduction in USS benefits is wholly undesirable for the members affected and will also damage the ability of USS institutions to recruit and retain staff.

There is still time for UCU and UUK to work together to persuade USS against some of the overly prudent assumptions made in the valuation of the scheme. As we all know, USS is built on a solid foundation. The General Secretary has met the Regulator's team on USS and believes that although they do want a prudent approach, they are not specifically committed to the current methodology. As many commentators and pension experts have noted, this insistence on tying valuations to historically low gilts yields is creating artificially inflated deficits in many defined benefit pension schemes, not just USS.

UCU has commissioned its own actuarial analysis from First Actuarial. This shows that future service cost in USS declines and that cash flows should remain positive, with an appropriate investment portfolio. At the very least, this demonstrates that far from being fixed these issues are highly contested. This is now urgent as the scheme is on the cusp of fundamental and wholly unnecessary changes.

Rob Kirkwood

Mansfield Mayday 2017
(Photo: Helen Chester)

11. UCU Retired Members Branch

Our branch has been meeting since 2008 and now has over 300 members. Our aims are listed below. We meet three times a year, often in places of interest to make part of a day out. Meetings focus on important issues for UCU pensioners and provide a chance to talk with other retired members.

A termly newsletter with articles of interest to retired UCU members is e-mailed to all branch members for whom we have addresses and to UCU branch secretaries in the East Midlands. Please let us have your personal e-mail address and let us know if it changes.

RMB Roles and Functions

- To represent the interests of retired members within the union.
- To represent the interests of retired union members within the wider union and pensioner movements.
- To provide a forum within the union for retired members to come together to consider and debate matters of mutual interest.
- To provide a resource of collective memory, advice and expertise in support of the union, in particular to those still in active employment.
- To provide active support, where appropriate, by involving the broadest section of the branch in support of the wider interests of the union and its members, including support for those still in active employment.

For more information
please contact Julian Atkinson
e-mail: secretary@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
telephone: 01773 532105

East Midlands Branch officers and committee
Chair: Angus McLardy chair@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Vice-Chair: Rowena Dawson vice-chair@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Secretary: Julian Atkinson secretary@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Assistant Secretary: Rob Kirkwood asst-secretary@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Treasurer: Brian Hambidge treasurer@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Equalities officer: Judy Wills equalities-officer@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Membership: Greg Cejer membership@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
Newsletter: Bob Haskins newsletter@ucu-em-rmb.org.uk
East Midlands regional UCU committee representatives: Brian Hambidge, Rowena Daw