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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>

Your branch has its own website at

<http://www.ucu-em-rmb.org.uk>

Follow your Branch on Twitter:

@ucu-em-rmb



Branch meeting Wednesday Feb 12th 2020

10.30 – 12.30
(Speaker at 11.30)

Speaker: Maria Cook

“The future of Social Care.”

The Mechanics Institute,
3 North Sherwood St., Nottingham, NG1 4EZ

1. Nottingham College Industrial Dispute

After 16 days of strike action, and with another 14 to come, UCU members at Nottingham College finally called off their magnificent action last November after a titanic struggle forced a comprehensive climb down by CEO John van der Laarschot. This man, appointed by a self-selected Board of Governors arrived at the college in June 2016 promising a 'revolution' in FE. He promised a curriculum led by employers and 'tough love' for the apparently mollicoddled youth of Nottingham. He promised a 'modern' approach to staff contracts. In the process he routinely castigated his teaching staff, who like all teachers in the sector routinely work unpaid overtime for ever-decreasing financial rewards. 'You are no different from bartenders' he told an astonished body of hard-working professionals, as he sought to justify a singular pay scale for all college staff. Some chutzpah indeed from a man with no previous experience in, or detailed knowledge of, the sector. In the face of clear opposition from the UCU branch van der Laarschot chanced his arm and in May 2019 imposed a new contract and pay structure on the back of a dodgy job evaluation that would have seen some staff losing £1600 pa, a contract with no upper teaching limits, fewer holidays and with sick pay entitlements halved. Increments would be paid on a whim and all other agreements would cease to be collectively negotiated. This was a contract designed to make people ill through workload and stress while it brutally chopped sick pay entitlements by half. This was a contract so outlandish relative to the rest of the sector that the branch, and the national union, were left with no choice but to fight. When he sought to impose it through the nuclear option of 'sign or be sacked' this became a fight not just for decent pay and conditions, but for the protection of the union itself.



Another packed branch meeting says 'No Deal'

Led brilliantly by long-standing branch officials Kitty Howarth and Rob Peutrell, and assisted by retired members of the branch not only 'got the

vote out' but also achieved an overwhelming strike ballot last June after van der Laarschot's malevolent plans were formally announced. He had already alienated himself from his staff as a result of a style seen as aloof and arrogant as well as ignorance of the sector itself. To ask, as he did, why lecturers were so hung up about a teaching limit in their contracts when they had many other hours in the week to fill revealed just how little, in over two years, he had engaged with these staff, never mind reality itself. At over £200,000pa that sort of talent doesn't come cheap.

The 'sign or be sacked' approach was a difficult one for the branch leadership, but they played that hand very effectively by refusing to castigate those members and non-members who chose to sign. That way the branch held together and indeed grew as the lines of the dispute were drawn. During the initial ballot itself UCU members sported fetching pink armbands and other pink symbols as visible demonstrations of UCU solidarity. They then adopted a mascot in the form of Robbin' Fairbear, a nod to the legendary Nottingham outlaw, and used these visible symbols to create impressive solidarity.

On the very first day of the strike, way back in July, the branch responded to the college's CPD Day - amusingly entitled the 'Festival of Learning' - with a mass rally inventively badged as the 'Festival of Yearning'. The music and singing, the dancing and cake-making meant that the dispute started with a real buzz. The atmosphere on that first day was one of energy and determination, with a fair smattering of relief that a fantastic turnout had sent a clear message to management. But there was also a palpable nervousness of many members, who were about to embark on a challenge that seemed daunting at best.



The Festival of Yearning gets the strike off to a lively start.

When you can get 130 members at branch meeting you have a chance. When those present have either been forced unwillingly into signing away their precious protections or are under notice of termination, you have a decent chance. And when UCU, learning from the successful USS action in the universities, provided encouragement and support for a 15 day escalating programme of financially sustained action, you have an even better chance. Despite this, though, van der Laarschot and his senior managers made very little effort to negotiate throughout the summer, banking on the fact that as most staff had reluctantly signed the new contract the dispute would fizzle out. But the more van der Laarschot painted himself and his senior staff into a corner the more the branch was forced to resist – a dialectic that this myopic bully failed to grasp.

From 11 September on, and with no serious attempts to meet the branch's central demand of 'no detriment', the arrogant calculations of van der Laarschot and his Board were soon dashed. The real problem for the branch though was always going to be about maintaining enthusiasm and solidarity and they did this with brilliant imagination and inventiveness. Each day on the picket lines was very well planned by a Dispute Organising Group that drew in new activists. Diverse talents were employed to make each day uplifting and even joyous. The programme of escalating action allowed members the 'lead-in' time to acclimatise to their own strength and solidarity. When college managers resorted to the cheap trick of offering free tea and biscuits to those crossing picket lines the branch responded with a Mad Hatters Tea Party at the iconic Robin Hood Statue. When it became clear that van der Laarschot simply wasn't listening pickets stood in powerful silence wearing zipped face masks. More brilliantly effective news copy.

There were noisy marches through the streets of Nottingham, mass rallies and cleverly targeted mass pickets which meant that pickets at the college's many disparate sites weren't left in isolation. A resident strike band quickly emerged, ready to lyrically adapt many well-known songs. The Specials' ska classic became emblematic. 'A message to you Jonny' re-iterated the branch's continued determination and created some very emotional moments

But it took far too long for our Jonny to understand that message. It took an astonishing and wasteful 4 months of stand offs, exploratory talks and management renegeing. But by this time the dispute had achieved *cause celebre* status locally, with picket lines swelled by local Labour MPs, councillors and trade unionists. 33 of the city's 52

Labour councillors became so exasperated by what was happening to their local college that they wrote a damning open letter of no confidence in van der Laarschot and the Board. Still no response. But as one member said to a packed branch meeting; 'They have already lost. They just don't realise it yet.' In the end, the net closed in on van der Laarschot. As students increasingly complained and rebelled, not against the strikers but the college, as the branch added more than 100 new members to its ranks and as disruption to courses reached crisis levels he and the Board were forced into realising he had certainly wasn't going to win.



Listen to your staff Jonny!

Finally, the branch had secured the aims of the dispute. They were able to return to work with no detriment and a commitment to negotiate on all substantive points. Better still, there were some big salary uplifts for several staff who had been previously seriously undervalued. Van der Laarschot's new pay scale has been abandoned for teaching staff, at least for now. Despite this, members are acutely aware that the end of the dispute is the start of a wider fight. Workload and pay issues have not gone away. Stress remains a major concern. And the branch knows that winning this legally confined dispute still leaves a Board and senior management that is despised intact. Neither does it directly address the issues of the degradation of the sector nor the unaccountability of its governance. This, though, is a branch transformed, activated, aware of its own potential, and aware of these wider issues - and as a result far better equipped in the fight to save FE.

Footnote. Members of the East Mids RMB are proud to have made a contribution to this dispute. We helped to get the vote out in the initial ballot. We used our contacts in the labour movement to help build wider support. We regularly attended picket lines and we lent our advice and experience. We have now agreed with the branch to help to compile a more complete history in pamphlet form than the one presented here. This really was a dispute that deserves more than just a footnote in history.

Paul Wilkinson

2. UCU Retired Members' Branches AGM



The annual meeting for the Retired Members' Branches (RMBs) took place on 30th October 2019 at UCU Headquarters in London. This is a delegate meeting, and the elected representatives for the East Midlands Branch were Julian Atkinson and Bob Haskins. Alastair Hunter was re-elected as Chair for 2019-20, with Vice Chair Norman Jemison, and the meeting was supported by Paul Cottrell, Kay Metcalfe and Sue Bajwa.

In reviewing the minutes from 2018, any progress on motions carried was reported, though unfortunately there had been little progression. A motion (9.2), requesting that the NEC investigate free academic library access for all retired staff had determined that this needs to be done at Branch/Institution level. A modified set of model Branch Rules for RMBs had not moved forward.

Branch Reports bought out issues with poor attendance at meetings (often due to geography), and lack of email addresses of members which hinders communication. It was pointed out that there are no RMBs in Northern Ireland and it was suggested that representation to the NEC be made on this issue. However, Branches did report that there had been involvement in supporting disputes.

There were also reports from the National Pensioners Convention (NPC), the TUC Pensioners' Committee and the Health and Care Working Party. The NPC position is that pensions should be 70% of the living wage, but a return to incomes indexation is needed. This link was broken by the Thatcher Government in 1980, and since then there has been

a big deterioration. Calculations have been carried out which estimate that if the link had not been broken, then the state pension would be £63 per week higher. It was pointed out that the NPC is very short of funds.

Philip Burgess provided a lengthy report on the activities of the Public Services Pensioners' Council and the NPC, including sections on Indexation Issues, the methods designed to compensate for inflation (RPI, CPI and CPI(H)). The Government's practice of "index shopping" is deplored, i.e. by using RPI when taking revenue in and CPI (which is invariably lower), when paying out to claimants. CPI does not safeguard pensions against inflation, whereas RPI does.

Thirteen motions were submitted for debate, and all were carried, mostly unanimously. They covered a range of topics, and one with much pertinence to our Branch was calling for solidarity with Further Education Members. Julian made a fitting contribution regarding the situation at Nottingham College. Others included: support for a nuclear weapons ban; retired EU citizens; a just transition from fossil fuel to renewable energy; the hostile environment and right-to-work checks; justice for women facing retirement; generation rent and housing provision, and level of the state pension.

Our own RMB motion, proposed by Julian, was carried unanimously. Its subject was the involvement of members and the opportunities (like GTVO) to get involved in support of branches and to "provide active support, where appropriate, by involving the widest section of the RMB in support of the wider interests of the union and its members, including those still in active employment".

A topic that occurred a number of times in the meeting was that of Intergenerational Fairness. Two fairly recent reports have been written, one from the Resolution Foundation (www.resolutionfoundation.org) is entitled "A new generational contract and the final report of the Intergenerational Commission" (8/5/2018). The President of the Intergenerational Centre is the Rt Hon. Lord David Willetts and the Commission was convened to explore questions of intergenerational fairness that have risen up the national agenda. The second report comes from the House of Lords Select Committee on Intergenerational Fairness and Provision, entitled "Tackling Intergenerational Unfairness" (25/4/2019) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldintfair/329/32902.htm>.

It is not possible to distil the content of these reports in a couple of sentences, but Motion One at

the AGM quoted a proposed end to the triple lock on state pensions, and a postponement for future generations of the right to the bus pass and winter fuel allowance until five years after the State Pension age (and possibly to tax these benefits). The report from the NPC also listed the phasing out of free TV licences and extending National Insurance contributions to individuals over State Pension age, but with the NI thresholds aligned with the income tax allowance.

Inevitably, Motion One was carried unanimously, my favourite quote from the body of the motion being “this meeting rejects the view that intergenerational fairness should mean equal misery for all, or that future pensioners should have no benefit to look forward to in old age”. The motion also saluted the work of the NPC in exposing the myths around intergenerational fairness and resolved that awareness should be raised among all UCU members.

At the end of the meeting, the following nominations were accepted: Norman Jemison to the TUC Pensioners’ Committee; Phillip Burgess to the Public Services Pensioners’ Council NEC, and Norman Jemison to the PSPC AGM. Pleasingly, the meeting finished on time.

[Bob Haskins](#)



East Midlands Retired Member Branch at Nottingham University Picket Line.

3. Pensions and the threat of Inflation

Even in these days of low inflation, pensions can be eroded by the steady rise in prices. Many of us can remember a time when inflation roared away dramatically threatening the real value of both wages and pensions. Indexation is a way of mitigating, if often only partially, the erosion of pensions. From the 1950s the Retail Price Index (RPI) was used but in 2011 the Government imposed the less generous Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Neither of these forms of indexation is relevant to pensioners. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) assembles a “shopping basket” against which inflation is judged. Currently the basket included such pensioner necessities as dating agencies, entrance prices to night clubs and teen fiction. There is clearly the need to establish a pensioner index to cover pensions and age related benefits. In Australia a series of Analytical Living Cost Indexes is produced including the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index. But work has been done closer to home with the Silver Price Index. This index has been produced for Age UK by Fathom Consulting who has done the work on Price Indexation for the Bank of England. This is the most complete measure of cost increases in later life. It uses information from the Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) to re-weight the 78 items that make up the official index and better reflect the expenditure patterns of over 55s. The measure is the first to consider inflation at five year age bands above 55 years of age and unlike existing ONS pensioner measures it includes all housing costs and households at all income bands. The Silver RPI was first launched in November 2010 and is updated quarterly, with the methodology adjusted for the February report to include more up to date information on expenditure patterns. Overall the Silver index is some five times more generous than the now discarded RPI and overtops the CPI by nearly six times!

The ONS has outlined that there were technical differences in calculating the two Indices: the RPI uses the arithmetic mean whereas the CPI is calculated using the geometric mean. This produces a difference between them termed the “formula effect”. The ONS backed the use of CPI since an advantageous property of the geometric mean is that it can better reflect changes in the price of goods and services.” It is difficult to suspend disbelief since poor old disbelief is not only being hanged by the neck but then having the rope jerked about. CPI is on average 1% less per year than RPI; and so will be your pension. Over the 15 years since CPI was introduced, the cumulative inflation rate shown by RPI since 1996 is 53.6% while that for CPI is 35.6%. But when money is being extracted from us, as in the annual uplift in train fares, the “discredited” RPI is used. There is a further twist of the knife. Many other countries use CPI but they calculate it differently. The UK uses the “average of relatives” version of the arithmetic mean which increases the size of the formula effect. When other countries (e.g. USA, some other EU countries) have changed calculation systems from arithmetic to geometric means, reported differences in annual inflation rates have

been only around 0.1 to 0.2 percentage points. The UK Government's little tweek ensures that CPI is a full 1% lower than RPI! Clever isn't it.

The experts have begun to worry how accurate is the CPI measurement. In 2010 the Royal Statistical Society raised a number of concerns about the Consumer and Retail Price indices with the UK Statistics Authority. Recent work has been done on producing a Household Inflation Index (HII) which would aim to be a consumer price index with public credibility. The HII's ancestry can be traced back to the RPI but would iron out some of the problems associated with RPI. Even if a more appropriate index were created the fundamental issue of the basket of goods and services appropriate for pensioner households would remain untouched. Only the use of a Silver Index is an appropriate way of protecting pensions against the impact of inflation.

Julian Atkinson



East Midlands Retired Members Branch at the Open University Picket Line.

4. CDC schemes get closer

The Pension Schemes Bill now moving through Parliament will enable the creation of a new breed of pension scheme 'Collective Defined Contribution' schemes. The Pension Schemes Bill was originally announced in the Queen's Speech of October 2019, but has now formally entered the parliamentary process. CDC pension schemes are only a part of it, but one that could change the whole landscape of workplace pensions – in some cases for the better, and in some for the worse.

They are currently used in a number of countries including Canada, Denmark and The Netherlands, and involve a 'money purchase' arrangement, whereby the scheme member and the employer both pay into a pension pot that grows over time. The key difference is that, with a CDC scheme, this

pot is shared between all scheme members, instead of each member saving into their own individual pot.

Primary legislation to introduce CDC schemes was first put in place in 2015, but other government business since then has delayed its completion. The 2015 Act allows for two types of CDC scheme, called 'defined ambition' (or DB-) and 'defined contribution collective benefits' (or DC+). As the name implies, DB- schemes would have something in common with defined benefit (DB) schemes, in that certain retirement benefits would be guaranteed (though not to the same extent). DC+ schemes would offer no such guarantees, but the 'plus' element refers to the presumed greater stability of the investment pot.

After a five-year delay, the secondary legislation for CDC schemes is finally moving through Parliament, though as yet there is no firm date for Royal Assent. The UK's first CDC scheme will be Royal Mail's, and this will be a case study as to how this new-style pension will be received by UK workers, and how successful these schemes can be in practice.

The main advantage claimed for CDC schemes is that the investment risk is spread across all members. This has the effect of reducing volatility. A 2013 study by AON Hewitt estimated that CDC schemes would have delivered a steady 28 per cent of salary over the past 50 years, whereas DC schemes varied between 17 per cent and 61 per cent. The maximum returns are therefore lower with CDC, but very low returns become less likely.

There is another significant upside when members near retirement. With an ordinary DC scheme, a pension saver will usually move their investments from volatile equities into more stable bonds, to guard against a sudden dip in value just before they access their pension pot. However, this also tends to reduce growth opportunities in the final few years. With CDC this moving of assets becomes unnecessary, since the shared pot is always invested for growth.

Similarly, members of ordinary DC schemes will use their pot to buy either an annuity or a drawdown product, and there is a risk that the market can fall just before they make their decision. A CDC scheme would not be vulnerable to this risk, since benefits would not depend on a single decision made at one point in time.

If CDC schemes become widespread in the UK, then a likely effect will be the faster decline of initially private sector DB (final salary) schemes. But the contagion could spread to the public sector. One of

the reasons the government is keen to push through the Pension Schemes Bill is the number of crises involving DB pension schemes, in particular Royal Mail. Following the dispute over the closure of its DB scheme, the Royal Mail and its union expressed a wish to move to a CDC pension scheme for its 140,000 employees.

CDC schemes would generally be much more attractive for employers than DB schemes, as DB schemes can place a “burden” on a company’s balance sheet, while with CDC schemes **there is no such employer liability**. Benefits are paid out of the scheme’s central fund, which is funded by employer and employee contributions, so even if the fund is exhausted the company’s other assets are safe.

CDC schemes, when compared to DB schemes, are clearly less attractive to members as the income they offer is not guaranteed and may fall, **even after payments have commenced**. Conversely, they are more attractive for employers, since there is no chance of creating a pensions ‘black hole’ that could eat up their company. Previously both the TUC and Labour Party have been very enthusiastic about CDC schemes since they offer a far better deal to workers on DC schemes. Sadly, this meant that they were both less enthusiastic for DB schemes. The struggle over the USS has meant that their support for DB has been rekindled. Our working members must be aware that the CDC model could be a danger to our superior DB schemes.

[Julian Atkinson](#)

5. Equalities Conference

UCU Equality Conference 2019

This year’s conference was held in Birmingham in November. We attended representing the East Midlands Retired Members Branch.



Campaigning for Equality

Report from Women’s Annual Conference – Building and Sustaining Activism in the Workplace.

For this session of the conference there were three keynote speakers:

Deepa Driver, from the University of Reading, spoke about the two HE disputes and the casualisation of the academic researcher. She placed this in the broader context of austerity, structural issues of inequality, social welfare and

the social contract. She described the “financialisation” of society, a personal responsibility narrative and of people having to demonstrate their worth to deserve help from the state – this is determined by others tick boxes and society’s largesse, rather than any right, and that citizenship is determined by access to financial capital rather than more collective values. Deepa ended her excellent talk by emphasising how this agenda has been creeping in to FE and HE Institutions.

The second speaker, Dr Claire Butler, a Senior Lecturer in Work and Employment at Newcastle University Business School, reported on her qualitative research about gendered ageism in the workplace, and how women experiencing the menopause have to use various strategies (including hiding symptoms) to navigate this. She called on workplace management to recognise how menopause can impact on women and to have a more empathetic and practical approach to supporting them.

Ann Alexander, from the University of Cambridge spoke about issues concerning academics in the Middle East, the “hostile environment” in the UK, deportation of academic colleagues and a solidarity network called MENA with workers in the Middle East, especially women’s actions in Sudan. She raised issues about Tier 2 visa restrictions on overseas HE staff in UK Universities, which was a theme taken up by the UCU general secretary at the plenary session of the conference.

Report from Plenary Session of Full conference. Day Two

The main theme of this session was “Othering”: How we exclude and discriminate against certain groups.



Jo Grady the General Secretary opened this part of the conference with a speech about migrant rights and the plans to have two dedicated seats on the NEC for migrant lecturers. This initiative is in response to members’ demands and the context of

the “hostile environment” (especially the xenophobic atmosphere in some HE institutions) and the wider context of the deportation of academic staff because of the Tier 2 visa issue. Jo also spoke about the sexual violence in some UK Universities. UCU has responded to the victim-blaming culture by carrying out a survey and setting up member led task groups on Sexual Violence and the ‘Rape Culture’ that is “alive and well” on some campuses.

Her third topic was about Transgender rights and Congress policy of self identification. The experiences of transgender members in HE was discussed in more detail by one of the keynote speakers in the session.

The first keynote speaker was Michael Braithwaite, a member of the Windrush generation, who told us his very moving story about his life in the UK, since he arrived in the 1960’s and how suddenly a few years ago he discovered he had no right to be here, despite working as a teaching assistant in a London school for 15 years and raising a family. Particularly shocking was Michael’s account of being escorted off the school premises and his subsequent lengthy attempts to gain British citizenship. It was only after he went on national television, interviewed by Simon Israel, that he got a call from the Home Office to say he had been granted a biometric card. Michael’s hope for the future is that nobody should have to suffer this uncertainty, desperation and humiliation which almost “broke me”.

Sam Heyes, a PhD research student from Essex University, spoke about Transgender issues and the emotional experience of being denied the right to self-identify, whilst waiting for trans healthcare. Sam drew attention to “institutionalised homophobia and transphobia”, calling for a greater understanding of trans people’s needs and the acceptance of non-binary people in the healthcare system. He asked us to consider how Academia denying gender identification and a hostile media also contribute to mental health issues and encourage “othering”.

The third speaker was the current NUS president Zamzam Ibrahim, the daughter of Somali refugees, who came to the UK age 9. She discussed the experiences of living in a predominantly white area and being the only person of colour in school, sensing her “differences” to other children. But she was determined to progress to university through hard work and persistence. After she eventually became NUS Vice President, then President, she became the target of death threats, Press witchhunts and attempts to influence her to step down. She says as a Muslim woman: “These spaces

were never created for me to occupy.” But occupy them she rightly and successfully does. The plenary session closed with a discussion about bargaining in workplaces to end the pay gap for black members, disabled members, LBT+ members and Women members.

Overall, Conference was an interesting opportunity to debate and discuss a range of important issues and to meet with UCU colleagues from a variety of educational institutions.

Margaret Davies and Judy Wills

6. Intergenerational Inequality

What’s Fair About Spreading Inequality?

The last Government’s response to the House of Lords Committee’s investigation into “Intergenerational Fairness, published in July 2019 – (1), tried to appear non-committal to the point of being even-handed (2). This is understandable as the minority government with a slippery hold on Commons business was no doubt aware of a potential election during which it wished to avoid alienating older voters as Teresa May’s “death tax” did. However, we should remember that this whole idea of ‘unfairness between the generations’ is an ideological weapon that can still be deployed to worsen the lives of retired people now and in the future.

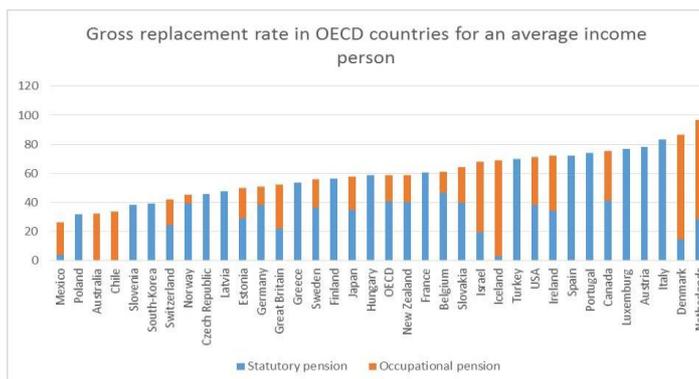
A *Guardian* article of 23 April 2017 ascribed the background to parliament’s deliberations of this notion of inequality between the current generations to (Lord) David Willetts’ “*The Pinch: How the Baby Boomers Stole Their Children’s Future*”. The idea of older people holding back, even exploiting, young people is familiar to those of us who thought we were part of a ‘youth culture’ and listened to the *Who* in the 60’s and it is a part of a longer tradition of perceived or manufactured generational conflict going back into the 19th century. The difference here is that previously it was often ‘youth’ that was seen to be challenging the older generation.

Willetts, and those who have latched on to his superficial observations, seem to be *encouraging* younger people to blame the old for the worsening life conditions they experience. His arguments are now common parlance. “Baby boomers” (born 1945-1965) have benefitted from the best of the welfare state and continue to draw down disproportionate age-related benefits. They are more likely to own their own houses, benefitting from their rising value. They have “generous” defined-benefit occupational pensions. This is in contrast to the younger generations, including

'millennials' (1980 – 2000), who increasingly find it difficult to get onto the housing ladder (the proportion of 25 to 34 year olds owning their own homes has fallen by a third in the last ten years alone). Young people have increasingly insecure and lower paid jobs, are likely to have inadequate pensions and some are burdened with huge student loans.

Despite a range of positive recommendations regarding further and lifelong education, tackling age segregation in the locality along with vaguer statements on housing and taxation, the report remains wedded to generational redistribution in what it states will be "100-year lives" in the future. It accepts the raising of the state pension age (SPA) to 68 by 2036-38 despite growing recent evidence that life expectancy increases are stalling or even falling. Partly because of this, it has targeted "age-related benefits" as follows.

It recommends that the triple lock (the best of average earnings, CPI or 2.5%) as a means of annually reviewing state pensions be ended. It does not acknowledge that this was introduced in 2010 in order to begin to restore state pensions following the previous 30 years since the Thatcher Government broke the link with earnings. Without that break, the pension in 2010 would have been £161.30 a week instead of the £97.65 actual figure (3). Nor does it refer to the OECD recognition that UK state pensions are some of the worst in the world – 29% of previous salary compared to an OECD average of 63% (see table). Even taking into account occupational pensions, the UK is well below the international average and this will worsen as occupational pensions diminish. The last government's response was to say it was committed to the triple lock for the lifetime of the administration, but, "A policy which allows each generation to spend an increasing percentage of life over State Pension age financed by an increased level of public pension expenditure will be unsustainable in the long run and unfair to subsequent generations."



The report also recommends ending the free TV licence for the over 75s. The government of course had predicted this and stated it is entirely a matter for the BBC who will take the blame for inevitably doing just this. The last government pulled back from the Committee's recommendation to make the free bus pass available only 5 years after the SPA. Instead, it will phase this in. It also avoided challenging winter fuel payments; after all, they have fallen in value from being worth one third of the average bill when it was first introduced 15 years ago to only an eighth today (3). Fuel poverty is now estimated to affect one in three pensioner households.

The nature of this debate masks the fact that inequality is deepening *within* the generations. It is a consequence of widening social inequality – a worsening of what used to be called the "social wage" (benefits accruing from collective provision of the welfare state) as well as payments from, and conditions at, work - combined with concentrating wealth. Older people experience this as much as younger people. Whilst some older people are the wealthiest in the world, those who have been in low paid jobs, often without occupational pensions, remain in poverty in old age. Gender is an added factor – 71% of men over 65 have an occupational pension, but only 43% of women. The UK pension gap for women (39.5% less than men) is twice the level of the 2017 gender pay gap (18.4%). (3)

The House of Lords has not yet debated the Committee report and this government has yet to deliberate on age-related benefits, let alone deliver a Green Paper on Social Care. Its prime minister has made many contradictory pronouncements such as not raising individual taxation, but putting more resources into housing and the NHS. "Intergenerational Fairness" could still become a dangerous weapon in his cabinet.

1. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldintfair/329/32902.htm>
2. (see it at <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/Intergenerational-Fairness-and-Provision/Intergenerational-Fairness-Government-response.pdf>)
3. NPC, "Exploding the Myths about Intergenerational Unfairness". 07.19

Angus McLardy

7. Barry Johnson

Sadly, we have to report the death of Barry Johnson after a long illness. Barry was a leading member of the Chesterfield College NATFHE branch and played a major role in attempting to defend hyios members in a series of attacks on their contractual rights. Barry was also involved in the Regional structures of the union and attended national Conference as a delegate from the East Midlands Region. He late became a member of our Retired Members Branch.

Barry played an outstanding role in the wider labour movement: in Nottingham Trades council and then as President of the Chesterfield Trades Council. It is largely due to his efforts that Chesterfield May Day was built until it became one of the largest in the country. He was a major figure in the Chesterfield Unemployed Workers Centre and was an initiator of the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Labour History Society.

He will be remembered as a kind, courteous and committed man.

Julian Atkinson

8. 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 and to other RMBs.

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

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East Midlands Branch officers and committee

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