



WINTER NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2022

UNISON RETIRED MEMBERS VIRTUAL CONFERENCE 13TH OCTOBER 2021

280 delegates attended online representing 160,000 members, over 11% of UNISON's total 1.4 million members. Vice Presidents Andrea Eagan and Cath Owen chaired the event from an eerily empty hall at the Brighton Conference Centre prior to the live Police and Justice Conference. They were accompanied by Rosie Macgregor, Chairperson of the Retired Members National Committee; Colin Derrig, National Officer; John Richards, Assistant General Secretary and UNISON Staff. Speakers on motions had to register in advance.

CARE SERVICES

John Duncan, Devon County Branch, highlighted provider exploitation of carers with no payment for travel between 15-minute visits, phone calls, or petrol. Training can be a one-hour video paid for by carers. A new independent body representing the workforce, elderly and providers is required instead of the current light touch regulation.

DIGITAL EXCLUSION

Eileen Thompson, Northumbria University, described how many pensioners are unwilling or unable to manage online tasks. Libraries are closing and affordable or free IT training is rare. Kevin Perkins, Islington, proposed a survey of digitally excluded pensioners

households, estimated at 6.5 million. East Midlands, Valerie Graham, quoted figures of 1 in 5 pensioners living in poverty, 1 in 3 of whom are black and Asian. Unclaimed tax credit claims are difficult to explain.

PENSIONER POVERTY

Levelling up disregards the need for the pension to cover the cost of basic needs. Pensioner commissioners in the four nations were suggested by Flintshire speaker, Moira Owen, to amplify the voices of the elderly. She added that the UK state pension is the lowest in Europe.

THE 1st STATE PENSION SCHEME

Vice President, Andrea Egan, informed the conference that the first state pension scheme was established in Germany by Chancellor Otto Von Bismark in 1889. Chancellor David Lloyd George began the United Kingdom system with the 1908 Old Age Pension Act.

PANDEMIC COSTS FOR ELDERLY

Rosie Macgregor pointed out that so many pensioners have died. Lockdown has meant increased isolation. The elderly have had to pay for the Chancellor's free dinners. Pensioners' living standards shouldn't be attacked to pay for the crisis. The Triple Lock, Fuel allowance, and Freedom Passes are under threat. There

are no effective restrictions on rent. The Government and certain newspapers try to set young people against the elderly. Another conference motion by Unison Young Members has expressed solidarity with the older generation. Moira Owen recommended that the campaign needs to support the Tax Justice windfall tax on companies benefitting from the pandemic with an increase in corporation and capital gains tax. NW speaker, Maggie Morrissey, argued that the proposal to align free prescriptions to the retirement age must be opposed. The rich should cover the cost.

GENDER PENSION GAP

She added that it is over 45 years since paying women less for doing the same job as men was made illegal yet for some women the state pension gap can be £7,500. Women live longer and face increasing poverty. A fight is required to get the Government to recognise the gap and to correct it. An additional issue is the calculation of a lower pension amount for widows. Kevin Perkins, London Region, said there is no such thing as partial equality and exemplified the Teachers' Union as having resolved this issue.

DWP PENSION UNDERPAYMENTS

These were detailed in a motion from the National R.M. Committee. 134,000 pensioners have been underpaid an average of £8,900, in some cases £13,000. Those affected are obliged to make a claim, and there will be no backdated interest. In certain cases, only 12 months can be claimed for. An estimated 40,000 pensioners cheated of their entitlement have died. A computer fault and human error are given by the Department as an explanation. No repayment timescale is stated.

ACCESS TO GP SERVICES

Birmingham delegate, Maureen Wade, described how her husband suffered a stroke, but the ambulance workers wouldn't take him to hospital. Only after GP intervention was he admitted. It takes weeks to get a telephone appointment with no home visits and no referrals for tests.

AGEISM DURING COVID

Moira Owen observed that Age Discrimination has been illegal since 2010 but the elderly have been treated as an afterthought during the pandemic, discharged from hospital untreated into care homes, a sacrifice worth making according to reported comments of the Prime Minister. The issue is the decimation of public services. Many pensioners must continue working past retirement age to make ends meet. The term 'geriatric' is still in use by NHS services. The elderly have contributed to public services during their working lives and deserve an equal society where they are treated with dignity.

TAKE ACTION AGAINST AGEISM

Our union needs to give them a strong voice and to act against ageism. Maggie Morrissey argued for active campaigning. Ageism is given little attention, and Covid deaths have been incorrectly described as normal for the aged. The abandonment of restrictions means increased vulnerability for the elderly. Enfield Local Government, Gary Williams, re-iterated the callous accusations against a callous Prime Minister and underlined the UK deaths total as the highest in Europe under his watch. He advised increased publicity for this issue via the N.E.C. and Communications section.

DO NOT RESUSCITATE DECISION

East Midlands, the late Sue Salzedo, referred to the damning October 12th Health Committee report on the Government's response to Covid. The long delay before lockdown, borders not closed. More than 39,000 pensioners died between April 2020 and March 2021. The release of elderly patients from hospitals to care homes with no PPE. The tragic scale of loss, totalling so far over 157,000. The Care Quality Commission has investigated the blanket application of Do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation notices issued in care homes with no consultation with the residents or relatives.

END OF TRIPLE LOCK?

Assistant General Secretary, John Richards, said that the Government should promote intergenerational fairness. A civilised society looks after people in need. The UK's financial provision is inadequate. Only Scotland has announced plans for a social care system. He suggested that the Government's stated intention to restore the Triple Lock isn't credible. UNISON is preparing to give evidence to the COVID Inquiry.

E-SCOOTERS AND OLDER PEOPLE

Greater London, Kevin Perkins, described E-Scooter activity in his area. No helmets are worn, some scooters are ridden dangerously on the pavement. An E-Scooter related death has been recorded. No consultation has taken place with the public to allow these trials, which are only supposed to be in a few selected boroughs. Clear limits and licensing are needed. In response Southwark's Roger

Stocker said that E-Scooters are popular and eco-friendly world-wide. Renters are required to have a car license and to attend a course. Use outside the agreed areas is illegal.

DISAPPOINTED IF YOU FAIL, DOOMED IF YOU DON'T TRY

This was the Hampshire Branch motion criticising the National Committee. The delegate outlined the difficulties of the past year. Covid, pensioner deaths, continuing austerity, food, and petrol price increases. Triple Lock suspension, inflation. He argued that no leadership to oppose the endless attack on our rights was forthcoming from the Regional and National Committees, while the N.P.C. and T.U.C. arranged protests to Parliament and engaged with the media. The motion called for a N.E.C review of the National Committee's lack of leadership.

R. MacGREGOR FIGHTS BACK

In response, the National Committee Chairperson stated that the Committee has been actively campaigning on issues. The TUC initiates actions but much of the information circulated by the TUC is contributed by UNISON and acknowledged by Frances O' Grady. She suggested that we should be proud of our union, its response, its criticism of Government, and of the campaigns for a public enquiry into care home deaths and the absence of P.P.E. She presented an amendment to the motion to include the information about the T.U.C. and to delete the references to lack of leadership. The amendment was carried and so was the amended motion.

ENTHUSIASTIC EALING RETIRED MEMBERS

We are still living through a world health pandemic facing an unpredictable future. With lockdowns and various viruses and vaccines galore on top of our usual health problems we need to focus on survival, not on the negatives but on the positives. As word gets around about our Group's activities, we have recruited six new members who are eager to get involved in just the last two months. We had three zoom meetings, one hybrid meeting and two face to face meetings. The Ealing Borough Mayor held a reception for us in his Chamber, thanking members for their service. He gave us an amazing history lesson and a wonderful lunch. Our festive meeting included a session on how to make floral table decorations. Members brought a dish to share and enjoyed a glass or two of bubbly. The following week we enjoyed a magical Christmas experience with a festive meal. We have also mapped out 2022 and so looking forward to seeing the new year in.

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

It is an honour and an inspiration to have two 100th birthday celebrations in our Group this year. Stella who celebrated her centenary and attends every meeting. In August Vera was so excited when she received a birthday card from The Queen.



Birthday Girl
Vera Norman

We arranged a big picnic at Horsenden Farm Courtyard, with live music and a visit from the Mayor of Ealing.



Centenary Picnic Horsenden Farm

Amarjit Jammu Chair UNISON Ealing Retired Members Group

THERE FOR YOU

This UNISON charity can support members in financial difficulty, offer advice on budget planning, debt counselling, benefits entitlement and confidential concerns. The credit Union provides savings accounts and low interest loans. If you are suffering financial hardship due to the current crisis you can apply to the COVID-19 response fund. The Branch Secretary or Welfare Officer can assist you. Information is on the UNISON website and the telephone number is 0207 121 5620

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