

Spring 2023 Edition

Retired Life

The Newsletter for Retired Members



Welcome!

Greetings to each and every retired member in our region. I didn't want this spring edition of our magazine to go out without saying to you all what a great honour it is to have been elected again as chair of Unison's SW Retired Members' Committee after a gap of several years. During that gap I have continued as Branch Retired Members' Officer with what is now Somerset Local Government and Community Branch and have been working with my local trades council and as a delegate to the SW TUC Regional Council, as well as being on the Executive of the National Assembly of Women. I have returned to our regional Retired Members' Committee to find it all geared up for a range of activities and campaigning and I look forward to representing it at Unison's National Delegate Conference in Liverpool in June and at our National Retired Members' Conference at Edinburgh in the autumn. I wish you all good health and success in all your projects and undertakings. We all have a busy year ahead.

Liz Payne-Ahmadi

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Solidarity with Striking Workers

One key area of labour movement activity with which many Unison retired members in our region are involved – as delegates, supporters and friends – is that of local trade union councils. Through them we have played a particularly important role during the current wave of strikes, taking trade council banners and solidarity greetings from the collective of affiliated unions to the picket lines in our communities and helping to organise rallies and demonstrations.

Jamshid Ahmadi and Liz Payne-Ahmadi, both Unison retired members and delegates from Somerset Local Government and Community Branch to their local trades council, have been speaking to *Retired Life* about their experience of doing just this:

“Since the RMT rail workers held their first strike on 21st June 2022, we have had the privilege of standing with the trades council’s big red banner in support of striking workers at 60 picket lines in the Taunton area. These include those of RMT (rail), CWU (Royal Mail), UCU (Bridgwater and Taunton College), RMT (bus), Unison (SW Ambulance), PCS (Driving Examiners, DWP and Charity Commission), NEU (Teachers), RCN (Nurses), BMA (Junior Doctors) and Prospect (UK Hydrographic Office).

“All the workers we met, many on strike for the first time in their lives, were absolutely committed to the public services they run and were very angry and frustrated that they had been put in the position, by their employers and the government, of having no other option but to withdraw their labour to secure a wage on which they could live, safe working conditions and properly funded services for all of us.

“One of the biggest highlights for us was meeting and talking with Unison’s general secretary, Christina McAnea, when she visited the picket line of ambulance workers outside the ambulance station in Taunton with our regional secretary, Joanne Kaye. How pleased the striking workers were to see her!

“But the thing that stands out most for us over the months is the tremendous level of public support for those taking industrial action – the honking of horns, ringing of cycle bells, clapping and, of course, the ‘in person’ greetings from the many passers by and those who came especially with welcome cakes, pizzas, and chocolates to sustain the picket line. This support has been consistent throughout, despite the negative mass media barrage about the unaffordability of claims and every attempt to divide workers from workers by giving precedence to one group over another.

“This long period of action has helped unions and their members in our community to get to know each other, support each other’s pickets, meet together to voice common demands in local rallies and demonstrations and be seen by the public. Many of the linkages that will be the strength of the labour movement going forward have been built and facilitated by the trades councils. As Unison retired members and trades council delegates it has been good to have the opportunity to contribute in even a very small way to the seeking of justice by working people.”

Liz Payne-Ahmadi



Winter Deaths

Whilst I usually try to be as up-beat as possible we simply cannot underestimate the impact of winter deaths in the older population. The figures released of excess winter deaths was 13,400 from 1 December 2021 to 31 March 2022. These figures are always published belatedly and when they are next announced I doubt there will be any cause for celebration.

We are paying the price not just of the pandemic but gross underfunding of health and social care with an over-stretched, underpaid, and exploited workforce struggling to deliver.

The impact of poverty wages and squeezed pensions, rising inflation and unprecedented food and energy costs is profound and must not continue. Many of these deaths are linked to those who are unable to afford high energy costs and are living in cold, damp and poorly insulated homes.

Vulnerable people and their relatives are getting a raw deal and the emotional impact in one of the richest countries in the world is too great. Yet successive governments have simply ignored the problem. UNISON is making its voice heard and has send a message to the government about these excess winter deaths and the reasons behind them.

Rosie MacGregor

Memories of John Duncan

Devon County Retired Member John Duncan died suddenly on 5 January 2023. His partner Yvonne had flown out to Brisbane for a few weeks in November. He was a larger-than-life character with a great sense of humour. For Unison's purposes, he was a strong and effective retired member who had given years of service to our Branch and Unison SW. He had been an effective Consumer Protection Officer in Devon.

He had moved from Scotland where he'd been an active trade unionist in the Strathclyde region, the largest Nalگو Branch at National Conference. This is where we first encountered each other, as he regularly reminded me in his jovial way. In Scotland, he had been a Sheriff, or Judge of First Instance, and I enjoyed addressing him in the appropriate Scots Court way, 'M'Lord'.

As many of us know, after retiring from Devon County work he became Chairman of the Magistrates Bench in Torquay. We will greatly miss him.

The family funeral was on 1 February 2023 in Torquay.

Roberto Franceschini

SOUTH WEST REGIONAL COUNCIL 28/29 January 2023

I attended both SW Regional Committee and Regional Council. This was a great occasion when our National President Andrea Egan gave us a strong lead on the shocking economic impact on the poor by this doctrinaire unfeeling Government. She highlighted the reaction of the Unions and the substantial and widespread strike action across all working sectors. She dwelt on the solid member supporting engagements and on the TUC conducting a co-ordinating role. It thrilled me to get a reply to my question about the help Retired Members had offered; and she highlighted at length our essential and supportive role in helping our working colleagues across all public services and asked Branches to make more use of us and us to do more! It's so nice to be appreciated as a group and a real encouragement for us to get more involved!

We also heard from Ines Lage of the SW TUC on positive days of action and other activities to persuade Government to drop some of their more reactionary state shrinking and anti - TU legislative measures. Another excellent review of the extent that working together we could make public awareness work for us in Health, Social Support and other essential pulic services we as pensioners really will be needing now and in future.

Roberto Franceschini





Dates for Your Diary

The UNISON National Delegate Conference takes place in Liverpool 12 -16 June 2023 and Liz Payne-Ahmadi has been elected as our delegate by SW Retired Members Committee. Liz will also be our Regional Delegate at the National Retired Members Conference 3 - 4 October 2023 in Edinburgh.

Both Edinburgh as a destination and the date in October may seem a long way away but time has a way of catching up very quickly, especially as we get older!! Please speak to your Branch Secretary if you are interested in being nominated as a delegate. Delegations must meet the UNISON rules on proportionality. The branch will cover your travel costs, book and pay for your accommodation and pay your subsistence. Delegates may wish to fly to Scotland or catch the train rather than even considering driving such a long distance.

The deadlines for the Edinburgh Conference have not been published as yet.

Our SW Regional Seminar and AGM takes place on 9 November at The Albemarle Centre in Taunton. We have yet to agree the theme of the Seminar but will advise you in the next issue of Retired Life.

Rosie and Liz