



LATE SUMMER 2023 EDITION

RETIRED LIFE

The Newsletter for UNISON South West's Retired Members

Welcome from the Chair of the Retired Members' Committee

By Liz Payne-Ahmadi

Hello to all our 11,619 Unison retired members in the South West! The editors hope you will enjoy this issue of Retired Life. It's full of serious things to think about, reports of activities and notice of events to come. Please start now to make plans to attend our Seminar and AGM on 9th November in Taunton. In the meantime, we hope that you manage to have a well-deserved break this summer and wish you well for all your ongoing campaigns on retired members' issues and your support of working members in your branches.

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E newsletter and what can you find on the website

By Rosie MacGregor

The first retired members newsletter since 2012 was published earlier this year and I hope everyone was able to access it. The intention is that it will provide relevant information about the key issues affecting UNISON retired members as well as details of our various campaigns.

It will be published twice yearly but only online as an electronic newsletter.

I know this will disappoint those members who do not have access to the internet but given that we have 170,000 retired members UNISON simply cannot afford the huge cost of sending by post.

The new Interactive e-newsletter for Retired Members has been well received with some very positive comments from several retired members.

I think many of our retired members will be reassured that we now have a publication dedicated to our retired membership.

If you did not receive the link via email please contact UNISON Direct on 0800 0857 857 who will be able to correct your communication preferences so that I will receive emails, letters and calls from Unison in future.

Also, you can find out plenty of information about various UNISON campaigns and other important matters on the website including regular blogs from our General Secretary. Please visit <https://www.unison.org.uk>

Report from Unison's National Delegate Conference

By Liz Payne-Ahmadi

This was held in Liverpool from Monday 12th to Friday 16th June, and I had the privilege of participating as the retired members' delegate from the South West. On the first afternoon I joined other retired member delegates from across the country at a meeting in which we worked through the whole agenda and decided on speakers on motions. I also went to a very welcoming and supportive meeting of the SW delegation of working members from our region. It was great to see so many familiar faces, as well as first time delegates from this part of the world.

The leader of the retired members delegation was our own Rosie MacGregor who chairs Unison's National Retired Members' Committee. She did a brilliant job of encouraging us to get to the rostrum and speak to the 2,500+ people in the hall. I spoke on motions on the struggle for women's rights internationally and on Palestine and most other retired member delegates spoke, some more than once. Our contributions were very well received, and we were able to make a big impression on Conference.

As well as the main conference sessions, many other activities were planned – fringes, socials, and meetings on a wide range of policy issues. Choosing which to go to was really difficult, but I want to mention in particular the International Rally which was really inspiring. We learned about some of the amazing solidarity work of Unison but most memorable were the contributions of invited guests from across the world on the trade union struggles in their countries.

The whole experience of being with comrades and friends, old and new, for five days and discussing the future direction of our union was something I wouldn't have wanted to miss. Thank you for sending me!

YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSIONS – YOURS OR THEIRS?

By Roberto Franceschini

Unlike State Pension and most other Public Sector Pensions with workers contributing and the Treasury paying pensions, the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) pays your pensions out of a Fund at County level. All employers and members pay into this, run locally by your Pensions Committee overseen by a Pensions Board.

There are 77 such Schemes in England worth up to £500 billion. Our South West 8 have assets over £35 billion which are invested through Brunel (a wholly owned company in Bristol). The Environment Agency, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire are also included. The LGPS is well run and fully funded with a range of diverse assets, strong enough to pay our pensions well into the future. To achieve this, consistent outcomes through a wise choice of fully advised sustainable investments, our contributions and any additional balancing employers are constantly added to the Fund. Unlike Private Sector funds - some say our pensions are “gold plated” – I believe in solid gold!

We discover that our penny pinched Central Government is now consulting on further centralizing these funds into fewer bigger Pools, giving them ownership, also directing that all LGPS funds pass their remaining assets to them by 2025.

The disastrous economic policies since Brexit are driving His Majesty’s Government to get LGPS to pay for their “Localism” investment plans and other speculative private investments, because the money markets are unlikely to back poor returns for their pet projects. I see our pension contributions being used as “milch cow” for Government ambitions they cannot afford, to the detriment of future returns into our LGPS Funds.

But worse I see local accountability being centralized and our say on how we invest our pension money taken away from Local Committees on which we are represented. We really must object to this unreasonable try-on and contact our MPs to ask them to stop it from happening.

68 is Too Late!

By Rosie MacGregor

The government may have delayed proposals to increase state pension age to 68 but we can't be complacent.

Further rises in the State Pension Age are a cynical proposal by the current government to save money. What's more the government idea of linking pension age to average life expectancy doesn't make sense because average life expectancy varies depending on where you live by up to 20 years. Many will die before being able to draw their pension because instead of life expectancy increasing it is now in decline. Perhaps that's the government plan!

To put it simply, workers today are being asked to work longer, pay more and get less pension. Is this fair? No but that's what we've come to expect from this government.

How realistic is it to expect everyone to continue to work when they are in their late 60s with the same ability or enthusiasm as their younger colleagues especially those who are in demanding physical jobs. The State Pension Age should be 65 for men and women. Most people by then will be beginning to suffer from the adverse physical effects of ageing.

We may be retired already but we should support our young members. After all the workers of today are the pensioners of tomorrow and we all deserve a long and happy retirement.

AGM and National Retired Members Conference

By Liz Payne-Ahmadi and Rosie MacGregor

The UNISON South West Regional Seminar and AGM will be taking place on 9 November 2023.

Our guest speakers are the new SW TUC Regional Secretary Ines Lage who will talk about her role and the contribution pensioners can make to the TUC. Kerry Baigent, UNISON Regional Manager will talk about current UNISON campaigns. The Albermarle Rooms have been booked for the event and calling notices will go out to branches early in September.

UNISON Retired Members' Conference 2023 will take place at Edinburgh International Conference Centre on Tuesday 3 October and Wednesday 4 October.

The final Agenda is due for publication on 6 September and we are pleased to say that it includes 3 SW Regional Motions - Maximising Support for Retired Members; Scrap Tax on Pension withdrawals; and Parking Problems for Pensioners. The deadline for submitting changes of delegates is 28 September.

We hope to see many delegates from the South West at both the National Retired members Conference and our own AGM and Seminar.

