



# Southern Region Retired Members Association

Annual Conference Thursday 20 June 2024, 11am, Chessington

## Conference minutes

### President's report

Megan Dobney, President, welcomed delegates and reported on the year's work. She said we've worked hard, with the support of the office staff, particularly Debbie and Alice, to get you here!

Before I tell you what the Committee has been doing over the last year I want to reflect back on our conference last June. I said then:

“With a new and extreme right wing Prime Minister taking up her role, there's never been a time when collaboration and solidarity within and between unions is more necessary. The financial attack on the working class has rarely been more severe and we can expect some structured attacks on trade unions and our right to exist, never mind take action.”

Well that didn't last long did it. If you recall, it ended after 45 days after a competition with a lettuce.

This year we are also looking forward to a new Prime Minister – and we hope he lasts longer than 45 days and that there will be no issues with salad vegetables.

Instead of structured attacks on our trade unions from the new government we are looking forward to the speedy implementation of the *New Deal for Working People* in the first 100 days of the new Labour government.

I'm not going to say more about the forthcoming general election as I'm sure our guest speakers will be mentioning it!

So what have we been doing over the last year?

Your Committee has met, alternating between online and in-person meetings, seven times since our last conference, and we've emailed you, our members, as necessary, with news of campaigns and activities – including, importantly, how to register to vote and how to get a postal vote. If you haven't done it it's too late now for this election...

You will see from the agenda that the current Committee's mandate of four years expires next June. So this year there are no elections, but there will be at next year's Conference.

A key part of each Committee meeting is reports from delegates to various events and bodies. It's important to emphasise that members delegated to attend events or committees are not there for a day out, but to represent the Regional RMA and to report back to us on what's going on! And we carried a motion mandating reps to provide written reports.

We have also reported on our activities to the Regional Council.

Derrick Baker and I continue to sit on the GMB's national RMA Committee. We will be standing down after the national Conference in October, and our Regional Committee will elect two members for the next four years. It has been a rather unsettled year with two different National Officers having had responsibility for the Committee, and a third one will be there at the next meeting.

We are aware that there is discussion within the GMB on the future structure of the RMA, and sought, unsuccessfully I must say, further information on this.

There were two motions at GMB's Annual Congress last week relevant to retired members. One was not taken as already Congress policy, the other was lost. So nothing new there.

We have maintained our active involvement with the National Pensioners Convention and a number of members represent us on various of its sub-groups. We have had regular reports from Derrick on the Transport Working Party, Christine Sanders on the Health & Social Care Working Party, and Leila Kassam on the Ethnic Minority Working Party.

We nominated Leila Kassam to the NPC's London Regional Committee, but unfortunately the annual general meeting was disrupted and eventually abandoned. We sincerely hope this will be sorted and have sent solidarity to the Committee Secretary on this disgraceful state of affairs.

Issues that have been addressed this year include the successful campaign against the Closure of Ticket Offices, the State Pension and Triple Lock, Checking for Prostate Cancer, Older People's Mental Health, Integrated Care Boards, Lifts at Railway Stations, WASPI women, the Bus Pass, and Electric Bus issues.

Derrick Baker and Gena Grant attended the NPC's Transport Conference, and Leila Kassam their Biennial Delegate Conference.

Gena Grant and Leila Kassam represented us at the GMB's 2023 National RMA Conference and Caroline Watson attended as an Observer. Derrick Baker continued as Conference President.

We submitted two motions to the national RMA conference and both were carried. One on UK State Pensions Received Overseas, and one, submitted again this year, that you have in front of you on Pension Credit.

I have tried over the last weeks to find out what has happened to them. And failed.

I can only assume this is because there is no permanent or established National Officer looking after the national RMA Committee. However, it is extremely unsatisfactory

All the motions from the conference go to the Central Executive Committee of the GMB for consideration and action if appropriate. Despite the best efforts of some of our admin colleagues in head office I haven't been able to find out their current status. But I will continue...

Not good!

Thankyou all.

## **Guest speaker Lord Iain McNicol**

Iain outlined his background in West Kilbride – his father was a member of the Left Book Club, and Iain grew up in the days of the Berlin Wall, Nelson Mandela and the Miners' Strike. He came into the GMB Southern Region to recruit, represent and organise and then moved to GMB head office in a political officer role. He spoke of the latest 14 years of Tory rule and reminded us that it had been preceded by 18 years of Thatcher and Major – so many losses for working people during this time.

He was appointed as general secretary of the Labour Party during Ed Miliband and Jeremy Corbyn's times as leaders and was then sent to the House of Lords where he is Shadow Spokesperson on Business & Trade. He said it was a bizarre place that needs reform and this is promised in the Labour Party's general election manifesto.

Members raised lots of issues such as:

- The focus on the Red Wall is a new version of the North/South divide. What about us down south?
- When general secretary of the Labour Party how were your relationships with the party leaders?
- Appalled that the 2 child benefit cap is not being removed
- The party's response to Israel/Palestine has upset many people – Palestinians are paying for crimes committed by Europeans
- In the context of "turkeys and xmas" what will be the challenges in reforming the House of Lords?

The President and members thanked Iain for his attendance and he left for more election campaigning.

## **Election of delegates to the SWTUC & TUC LESE pensioners committees**

These committees meet several times a year and are a great opportunity to meet retired activists from all the other unions.

We share nominations for these committees with Wales & South West Region (SWTUC) and the London Region (TUC LESE), but there are several places available. The region will pay your travel expenses if required.

Nominations agreed for SWTUC:

- Derrick Baker
- Mike Goff

- John Powell

Nominations agreed to TUC LESE:

- Gena Grant
- Steve Jackaman
- Hilary James
- Munir Malik
- Matthew O'Halloran

## **Guest speaker Justin Bowden GMB Southern Region Secretary**

Justin briefly outlined the region's priorities at present:

- Now business as usual since Covid
- Supporting disputes – strikes, grievances, anything members raise
- We are growing slowly – 3,000 more members in 2023
- The region is supporting candidates across our area to help win a Labour Party victory in the general election

Members raised questions as follows:

- A member had offered to assist her branch but received no response! *This is not good – retired members can be a great help to branches, supporting officers on routine tasks for instance*
- We have had no information about disputes in the region – members are often able to visit picket lines and demos. *He will ensure this happens and will provide the President with information about the current dispute at Job Centre Plus involving our members who are guards.* [Information on pickets on 21 and 22 June was circulated to all attendees before the meeting ended]
- Are we still supporting Tolpuddle with a GMB space? *Yes, an email has gone to members. We are extending our support in collaboration with the regional TUC to include a space for local bands. There are no regional coaches, but your branches may organise them.*
- The national RMA Committee sent a motion on restructuring the RMA to the general secretary who said it had been sent on to regional secretaries. Where is it? *Contact Alan Fraser on this. We want to consider how it can support working people. Welcome input from the regional RMA Committee to go to the Regional Committee. Next year's Congress is a Rule Change conference. Bear in mind that if all retired members claimed the funeral benefit it would amount to £30 million!*

The President and members thanked Justin for his contribution and the conference broke for lunch.

## **Guest speaker Jan Shortt, general secretary of the NPC**

Jan shared a document outlining the history, campaigning and policies of the National Pensioners Convention. It was established in 1979 and is with workers in struggle and for dignity in retirement –

for us and for the pensioners of the future. She praised the contribution of several of our region's activists and confirmed that the NPC Annual Convention will be in Blackpool 3-4 September.

As the NPC has a federal structure motions for the organisation's attention must go either through, in our case, the regional or national committee. Points discussed included:

- Energy claim back – don't let your money build up too much in the pockets of the energy companies. Check your balance and claim back appropriately.
- Better Buses – a campaign started in the Yorkshire & Humber region. We should get involved and she will send Megan contact details. For instance there are many variations in the conditions for use that have been negotiated around the countries – some include trams, and early (pre-9.30am) use for volunteers and hospital appointments. Free transport is vital to ensure exercise and good mental health for older people. We want a truly universal bus pass!

## **Report from the RMA National Committee**

Derrick Baker, chair of the committee, reported.

- Steve Kemp resigned as National Co-ordinator, succeeded by Charlotte Brumpton-Childs. National Officer Andy Prendergast will be at the 9 July meeting.
- Regarding any new structure of the RMA Gary Smith said it had gone to regional secretaries, we will chase it.
- We are waiting for a response to the motions from last year's conference.
- He has been chair of the NPC Transport Working Party for 8-10 years – key issues have been the risks of eScooters and electric buses and lifts at railway stations.

## **National RMA Conference**

Election of two delegates (and visitors) to the National RMA conference on Tuesday 15 October 2024, in London. Hotel accommodation will be provided for 14 October if required.

The duties of the delegates will be to:

- Attend the conference
- Speak to the motions submitted by the Region
- Produce a written report for circulation to the Committee in a timely manner

As the GMB's membership is more or less half and half men and women, our delegates should reflect this with one of each sex.

Four members were nominated as delegates – Mike Goff, Gena Grant, Leila Kassam, John Powell. Votes were taken and Mike Goff and Leila Kassam were elected.

There is no national funding for Observers so they must obtain it from their branches to attend: Paulette Steeves and Dave Turner were agreed as Observers.

## Motions to national conference

Consideration of motions submitted – we can send up to three motions to go on to the agenda of the national RMA conference.

As you can see, we have two motions proposed by members and an emergency motion from the President.

We will take Motion 1 but with your agreement I don't propose to take Motion 2 proposed by Parvin Sethi. As I've already explained it was carried last year and is now RMA policy and we will report back as soon as possible on what has been done about it since the 2023 Conference.

The conference agreed.

Christine Sanders, the proposer of Motion 1, is unable to be here with us so I will move it formally from the chair and will then invite someone to second it.

### **Motion 1: For a National Care Service free to Service Users alongside a fully funded and publicly owned NHS**

*Formally moved by Megan Dobney, seconded by Steve Whitehead*

Adult Social Care Services provide a range of services to support people with the tasks of daily living such as shopping, cleaning, and personal care in their own homes or in residential care when they are unable to do this themselves. The King's Fund states that in 2022/23 there were 152,000 staff vacancies in England, and there are similar vacancy rates across all Four Nations of the UK.

These services are organised and funded by local authorities and provided mainly by private companies and voluntary organisations. Pay is generally low with many on the legal minimum wage often with no pay for travel time between jobs, or on zero hours contracts. Many staff are unqualified for work which should be regarded as skilled, with some of it the same as work carried out by nurses.

Social Care Services are in crisis and unable to meet the levels of demand which are increasing. Age UK's website stated in February 2023 2.6 million people aged 50 and over were not receiving the care they desperately needed. The site also states that in 2022/23 28,655 elderly people died waiting for Social Care. 612,000 adults of working age also applied for Social Care in 2022/23, and they too experienced long waits for care. This situation often leaves other family members providing care unsupported. Many have to give up work to do this, or are left juggling work and caring responsibilities. For many the caring task alone is extremely demanding. The delays with Social Care often leave people staying on in hospital when they no longer need medical care, so putting added pressure onto the already over-stretched NHS.

There is a means tested charging system for Social Care which is widely seen as unfair. People with assets of £23,250 and over have to fund these services themselves. Only those with assets below £14,250 receive free care. Service Users' homes are sold to fund Care Home places if there are no relatives living there.

The NHS is also severely over-stretched often with long waits for ambulances, in A&E, and for treatment. There are on-going strikes over levels of pay and high numbers of staff vacancies.

This situation severely impacts people of all ages including many people in employment who are working in these services, and/or providing unpaid care to relatives or who need or use Social Care services and/or the NHS.

GMB Southern Region's Retired Members' Association moves that the GMB Union call for a National Care Service funded from taxation which is free to Service Users, alongside a fully funded and publicly owned NHS.

*The motion was carried and will be submitted to the National Conference.*

### **Motion 2: Pension Credit unfair on those with small private pensions**

Conference notes that many pensioners are much poorer than those receiving Pension Credit.

Pension Credit entitles you to many other benefits such as no Council Tax, no charge for dental appointments or spectacles, travel costs to hospital, Warm Home discount and so on.

The addition of a private pension of as little as £39 a week can remove entitlement to Pension Credit and all the other State benefits that come with it.

Conference calls for this matter to be looked at with a view to achieving greater fairness.

*The motion was Noted.*

### **Emergency motion: Fighting for trade union recognition at Amazon**

*Moved by Megan Dobney and seconded by Gena Grant*

This conference of the GMB Southern Region Retired Members Association sends solidarity greetings to the 3,000 workers at multi-billion pound company Amazon's Coventry site.

Today they begin the ballot process under Central Arbitration Committee rules for their union to be recognised. If they win the company will have a legal obligation to negotiate on terms, pay and conditions.

GMB has been fighting for this for over 10 years and we look forward to success, in the face of one of the world's most hostile and anti-union employers, when the ballot result is announced on 15 July.

*The motion will be forwarded to our members at Amazon.*

### **Any other business**

One item has been submitted by Carol Atkins (along with her apologies). She wants, from her own current experience, to raise awareness of Sepsis and said "People must be made aware that Sepsis is your own body's auto immune system fighting a first caught infection. Your body reacting with Sepsis is going absolutely ballistic trying to fight infection. This can affect all ages, from babies up to seniors."

## Close

The President thanked all present, our three speakers, and also all delegates – not only for being here but for their important contributions during the day.

The conference closed at 14.50

## Attendance and apologies

### RMA COMMITTEE ATTENDEES

Dobney	Megan	K19 South London General
Baker	Derrick	W27 Tolpuddle
Goff	Mike	B40 Bournemouth
Grant	Gena	L26 Richmond & Wandsworth
Kassam	Leila	X96 South London Universities
Powell	John	W27 Tolpuddle
Whitehead	Steve	K19 South London General

### SPEAKERS

Bowden	Justin	Regional secretary
McNicol	Iain	Lord
Shortt	Jan	NPC General secretary

### ATTENDEES

Barker	Chris	C23 Carshalton
Ferguson	Lorraine	W09 Warehouse (Asda) Dartford
Jackaman	Stephen	L29 London & SE of England Gas
James	Hilary	L09 LB Lambeth
Laws	Mick	Z39 North Kent Engineering
Malik	Munir	L28 LB Bexley
Ngui	Margaret	C23 Carshalton
Ponomarenko	Alla	K19 South London General
Shepherd	Jeffrey	B50 Sussex
Steeves	Paulette	L25 LB Southwark
Turner	Dave	M27 LB Merton
Walker	Peter	K19 South London General

### APOLOGIES

?????	Bill	???
Ashley	Hambridge	X96 South London Universities
Atara	Varshaa	A10 Asda Retail Area 1
Atkins	Carole	M27 LB Merton
Barr	Douglas	S15 Securicor Apex 5
Berry	Sheila	C28 Political Educ'n TU's PETS
Caunt	Robn	C60 Croydon



Cole	Roy	S15 Securicor Apex 5
Cole	Roy	S15 Securicor Apex 5
Dellimore	Lenford	P29 South Coast Gas & Utility
Denyer-Hampton	Paul	H43 Hampshire County Council
Diplock	Malcolm	B50 Sussex
Domke	Penny	X17 Medway General
Endacott	Marion	K19 South London General
Finlayson	Graham	K19 South London General
Fitt	Peter	Z42 Southampton 1. 641
Giles	Gary	E41 East Susse General
Hardy	Maria	E18 East Berkshire Healthcare
Hawks	Lynn	K14 Kent County
Hibberd	Ian	Z42 Southampton 1. 641
Hinton	Patricia	L28 LB Bexley
Hitchings	Peter	R26 Reading & Berkshire
Holmes	Julia	B50 Sussex
Howell	Robert	W15 Three Shires
Isaac	Gwyn	M27 LB Merton
Jones	Patricia	X17 Medway General
Kincaid	Brian	G36 Security
Lee	Christina	X98 LFB
Lewis	John	D11
McCormack	Mike	C60 Croydon
Nunn	Norma	X96 South London Universities
O'Connor	Lavinia	B50 Sussex
O'Donoghue	Francis	G36 Security
O'Halloran	Matthew	M27 LB Merton
Parker	Kevin	B50 Sussex
Petty	Carole	L16 London Borough of Greenwich
Ranasinghe	Sumitra	C23 Carshalton
Richards	Caroline	R26 Reading & Berkshire
Ryan	Jack	K19 South London General
Sanders	Christine	L17 LB Lewisham
Schuman	Anne	L17 LB Lewisham
Sethi	Parvin	B40 Bournemouth
Sidaway	John	L10 London Electricity South Thames
Simmons	Roy	L10 London Electricity South Thames
Smith	Jon	B50 Sussex
Smith	Novlette	K19 South London General
Sparks	Lynn	B50 Sussex
Still	Sheila	S37 Southampton
Tagg	Alan	T15 Thames Water South London
Walsh	Eamonn	W15 Three Shires
Wheeler	Anita	R26 Reading & Berkshire
Winborn	Jeff	G36 Security
Wray	Simon	P29 South Coast Gas & Utility