

COMMUNICATION WORKERS UNION
NORTH STAFFS (POSTAL) BRANCH
RETIRED MEMBERS SECTION



Minutes of the Meeting of 17th November 2021

Chair Andrew Cawley
Secretary Jan Zablocki

The meeting opened at 10.40am at the North Stafford Hotel, Station Road, Stoke on Trent.

Apologies

Tim Waye, Judith Collinson, Eileen Jones, Gary Pointon, Bob Clutton and Frank James all sent their apologies for being unable to attend the meeting. Mick Jones would be late to the meeting due to a dental appointment.

Minutes

The minutes of the previous inaugural meeting of the Retired Members Section had not been typed and were not available.

Chairs Report

Tributes were paid and a minute's silent reflection observed for our respected member Bob Nearney.

The Chair then explained that no events had been arranged other than the Christmas Lunch which was to take place at the Borough Arms Hotel at Newcastle under Lyme on Wednesday 15th December with the option of two and three course menus on offer. It was agreed a £5.00 deposit would be taken for places to be reserved for the lunch and for members to be provide their menus choices, at the close of the meeting, to Andrew (Cawley) who was organising the event.

A visit to the Blist Hill Industrial Village and Ironbridge Museum would remain under consideration for the year 2022 given there had been insufficient time to arrange an event within reasonable daylight hours during the remaining weeks of 2021.

Finance Report

Andrew reported the Branch Secretary, Chair and Financial Secretary had all been very supportive in providing finance for the Christmas Lunch and that some £4,000 was in the fund available to the Retired Members Section which was an excellent platform on which to build the retired members activities and despite ongoing COVID virus concerns and restrictions he was looking forward to 2022 in organising events for the benefit of CWU members.

Any Other Business

There was discussion about the impact the COVID 19 virus was having on everyone's lives with two reports from members that people of retirement age over

65, with the virus, were not allowed to be admitted to the Royal Stoke Hospital. It was suggested this should be investigated and publicised.

There were concerns the issue of delays in the postal delivery service across North Staffordshire had been raised publicly with complaints made in letters to the Evening Sentinel newspaper. Andrew reminded everyone that the closure of the automated mail sorting centre at Station Road Stoke meant that mail posted in North Staffordshire and delivered there had to travel through the Wolverhampton based "Mail Centre" often with a round trip of some 70 miles to be sorted for delivery. He went on to explain how the decision to re configure the mail processing system in this way made no economic or business sense and was a "political decision" made during a Labour government and could only really make sense in terms of their desire to hold on to marginal electoral seats in the West Midlands at the expense of safe Labour electoral seats across Stoke on Trent and North Staffordshire.

(Adjacent "Mail Processing Centres" were established at Birmingham some 15 miles from Wolverhampton and Warrington some 70 miles from Wolverhampton with Stoke equidistant from both within a huge North Staffordshire conurbation and better located on both the road and rail network than Wolverhampton. The Stoke City Council also offered land free of cost to Royal Mail for the construction of a Mail Centre. When CWU and local political representatives went to meet government ministers Margaret Beckett and Chris Smith at the Labour Party Annual Conference to Lobby them for a centrally located Mail Centre at Stoke they asserted they "could only spare 5 minutes" to listen to the case ! A decision that led to the loss of more than 150 jobs and an annual income in excess of £2 million to the North Staffordshire economy) There was general agreement it was this sort of political neglect of "safe red wall parliamentary constituencies" that led to the collapse of public support for the Labour Party across North Staffordshire. Andrew stated he would respond to the complaints expressed in the Evening Sentinel newspaper accordingly. The Chair in expressing support for Andrew in this recalled how he was involved with Ted Smith, Leader of the Stoke City Council and Mark Fisher MP for Stoke Central, in organising the campaign to get the £80 million Mail Centre built at Stoke rather than Wolverhampton and still felt betrayed by the decision to close the sorting centre at Stoke.

Mick Jones then opened a discussion of the 2021 CWU "Virtual Retired Members Annual Conference" at which it was agreed to establish a cross constituency Executive Sub Committee to examine the reasons for the declining CWU retired membership and report their findings to the CWU 2022 Annual Conference. Mick referred to a "CWU Retired Members Retention Pack" which he had been instrumental in designing, as Secretary of the Midlands Regional Retired Members Committee some years previously, for distribution to Branches such that they could be given to members retiring from their work explaining the benefits of continued CWU membership but this had not been embraced by the CWU Executive and never put into effect. Some feeling was expressed that the CWU Executive were not that interested in "retired members" and the Senior Deputy General Secretary had been a huge disappointment in his role with responsibilities for retired membership and this was now coming back to bite the Union.

Footnote:- The CWU Annual Report and Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2020 shows there had been a loss of some 6,800 members during 2020 alone with a reduction of £837,154.00 to the CWU's annual income. Membership overall has declined from some 205,000 in 2010 to 189,000 in 2020 and is predicted to decline by a further 4,700 during the 2021 fiscal year. In response the Senior

Deputy General Secretary Tony Kearns states:- “These are, without wishing to state the obvious, fairly serious issues. Continued membership reduction of the numbers we have and are currently experiencing has to be tackled. Failure to do so will have a material impact on both CWU head office and branch funding.”

It was agreed the next meeting would be convened on Wednesday January 19th 2022 at the North Stafford Hotel. The meeting then closed at 11.40am.