UNISON Tower Hamlets Retired Members

Meeting Thursday 13 June 2024
12.30pm

In person

TH404, New Town Hall,
160 Whitechapel Road, E1 1BJ

You will need to contact the Branch Office so we can arrange access to the building, and so that we can assess provision of refreshments/food.

RSVP to:
jamie.donohue-strawbridge@towerhamlets.gov.uk or bernadette.hall@towerhamlets.gov.uk
or call
020 7364 6968/ 020 7364 5302

Online

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Agenda:

1) **Setting Up the Retired Members Group**
2) **Motions (text below)**
   i) **Palestine and BDS in Tower Hamlets**
   ii) **Motion for UNISON retired members Conference**
3) **UNISON retired members conference, Llandudno Tuesday 8th October – Wednesday 9th October.** The closing date for registrations is 11 July 2024. We are asking at this stage for indications of who would be interested in being a delegate so the Branch Committee can consider how many delegates can currently be funded and, if necessary, arrange an election.
4) **Any other Business (to be notified in advance).**

Motions:

1) **Palestine – Tower Hamlets Pension Fund and DBS**

Thie retired members group shares the horror of the majority of people in Britain about the ongoing brutal assault by the Israeli state on the people of Palestine, both in Gaza and the illegally occupied West Bank settlements.

We condemn the failure of the British government and the Labour leadership to demand a cessation of this assault and their continued provision of arms and other means to the state of Israel to continue it.

UNISON has consistently campaigned for justice and rights for the Palestinian people, and for a solution that recognises the rights of all the people of the region.

The union vehemently opposes all forms of discrimination including antisemitism, racism and Islamophobia, and totally condemns any attempt to use the conflict to promote them.

Tower Hamlets UNISON has a long tradition of actively supporting the campaign for justice for Palestine and of working closely with bodies like the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign (PSC), to which we are affiliated.

It is of particular concern to retired and active members of the Local Government Pension Scheme that our pension funds may be used to invest in companies that:

1. support the occupation, in particular companies involved in the illegal settlements;
2. are associated with public service contracts being awarded to companies which are involved in the illegal settlements or the violation of Palestinian rights and international law;
3. participate in any aspect of the arms trade with Israel.

We fully support the demands of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) campaigns for disinvestment in such companies.

We welcome the fact that the Tory attempt to introduce legislation to prevent local authorities being able to make such divestment was widely opposed and fell on the announcement of the General Election.

We believe that Tower Hamlets UNISON should now be calling for full transparency and disclosure of all investments of the Tower Hamlets Pension fund with a view to:

a) assessing whether any of those investments are with companies that breach the three criteria set out above;
b) actively engaging with any of those companies to demand that they cease such activities;
c) divesting in any such companies if they refuse to cease such activities.

We call on the Branch Committee to establish a working group including retired and active members of the LGPS to take this forward, and to work on achieving the aims of this motion with appropriate national and local campaigning bodies, relevant UNISON branches and other bodies, and other appropriate Trade Unions.

Proposed by John McLoughlin

2) **Motion for UNISON Retired Members Conference**

Pension Fund Divestment

This Retired Members Conference notes that the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) with some 6.4 million members is the largest direct benefit scheme in England and Wales, holding some £370 billion in total assets valued in 2022 (latest valuation), which are concentrated (two-thirds) in pooled investment vehicles.

Conference notes that research conducted for the Palestine Solidarity Campaign indicates that LGPS investments include more than £4.5 billion in companies such as BAe Systems, Boeing and RTX-Raytheon, which are engaged in supplying armaments and/or surveillance technology to the Israeli military, and others such as Caterpillar and Hyundai that are complicit in the construction of Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian land in violation of international law.

Conference further notes and welcomes that UNISON has been to the fore among trade unions in Britain in building support for a campaign "Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions" among its own members and the wider trade union movement in solidarity with the Palestinian people. The union has published a very useful guide on divestment for use at branch level (https://lgpsdivest.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Unison-Pensions-Pack.pdf).

Conference believes that those companies currently supplying weaponry and logistical support to the Israeli military risk not only reputational damage but also significant financial and legal risks.

Conference further believes that many LGPS members, whether they currently pay into the scheme or are beneficiaries will be concerned by such investments being made on their behalf without their knowledge or informed consent.

This Conference therefore calls on UNISON's national retired members' committee to support the union's efforts to secure divestment of local authority pension funds that form the LPGS, particularly from those companies that supply weaponry to the Israeli military and repressive regimes such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

As part of such a campaign there should be information specifically addressed to retired members, many of whom are now beneficiaries of the LGPS, enabling them to learn more about their pension scheme's holdings and voice their concerns about LGPS investments to councillors responsible for oversight of the individual local authority schemes.

Proposed by John McLoughlin