



GREY MATTERS
THE NEWSLETTER FOR NORTH
WEST REGION RETIRED MEMBERS
 April 2011

The North West Region is organised into 18 branches covering some 32,000 members across Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and the Isle of Man.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

May 23rd -27th 2011
 CWU Annual Conference at the BIC Bournemouth
 The Retired Members Fringe Meeting at Annual Conference will take place on Monday May 23rd in the Conference Centre
 Speakers will include Dot Gibson (NPC)

June 14th - 16th 2011
 NPC Pensioners' Parliament at the Winter Gardens Blackpool
 The Pensions Minister Steve Webb will face questions from delegates on the final day of this year's NPC Parliament in a special one-to-one session.
 Last year Mr. Webb was criticised for not coming to the event which some saw as a snub to the pensioner movement.

NPC BRAND CHANCELLOR 'COWARDLY'

George Osborne by choosing not to be up front announcing his cut to the winter fuel allowance (WFA) in the budget on March 23rd has angered millions of older people.

It only emerged in further statements that WFA is to reduce by £100 (over 80's) and £50 (under 80's) and will be frozen until the next election.

Dot Gibson general secretary NPC said "it's absolutely outrageous that George Osborne didn't have the guts or common decency to publically announce this.

Over 3m pensioner households spend more than 10% of their income on fuel bills. They need more money- not less."
(Campaign Bulletin Number 50)

COALITION NHS REFORMS FACE MOUNTING CRITICISM

On March 15th in an extraordinary emergency session the British Medical Association called on the coalition Minister for Health Andrew Lansley to withdraw proposed reforms to the NHS (see Page 3). This follows Lib- Dem Spring Conference criticism of the reforms the previous weekend, most notably the opening up of NHS contracts to private tendering (*back door privatisation*). Nick Clegg said "NHS reform Yes, privatisation No". Even his own party don't believe him.

Those who work in the NHS, medical

professionals and staff, know that the planned reforms are just a means by which private health care speculators can get their hands on the profitable parts of the NHS while the rest of the service, the less profitable and most expensive treatments e.g. elderly care, A&E, will be left in the public domain result - a reduced and diminished service.

On April 4th in a statement to the House of Commons Mr Lansley stated that there would be a 'pause' in the passage of the NHS Bill for reflection and further consultations

It is hard not view this apparent re-think as nothing more than a cynical and typical coalition ploy to get the local elections out of the way to minimise the electoral damage. It will then be a case of returning to the essentially unaltered agenda that will destroy the NHS as we know it. *JG*

Retired Members Advisory Council Motions to Annual Conference on RPI/CPI and The Death Grant

Held on February 3rd 2011 the CWU Retired Members Conference voted to forward two motions to CWU Annual Conference in May.
Comp. Motion 2
 That this conference instructs the RMAC to pursue the

following policy to maintain pension increases using RPI. To use all avenues and campaigns to secure RPI for continued calculation of pension orders.

Motion 11
 That this Conference instructs the RMAC to

pursue the following policy to retain the CWU members Death Grant Benefit with the current terms & conditions as defined in National Rule 4.1.11
 Cathy Leech and Ernie Coggins will represent the RMAC.

NORTH WEST REGION

POST OFFICE HIT BY GIRO BLOW

Retired Secretary's Report

NPC Biennial Conference at Southport March 22-23. **Frank Cooper**, president opened the conference and talked about the consequences for us all of the banking bail out; how reducing the deficit in four years can only be done by savage cuts that will impact on the vulnerable and the weakest in society. Also the Pensions Report to introduce a Basic State Pension of £140 (for new pensioners from 2015) would create a two-tier State pension. **Dot Gibson**, general secretary highlighted the challenges of the ideological cuts to pensions, the NHS, social care provision and local services; the building of relationships with the TUC, the UK advisory Forum, Action on Elder Abuse and the Equality and Human Rights Commission to oppose the cuts. In closing Dot acknowledged the services provided by Royal Mail and the Post Office that are relied on by so many pensioners. **Neil Duncan-Jordan**, press officer commented on the Institute for Economic Affairs report that pensioners are not taking their fair share of cuts (see page 3). Changing pension rises to CPI while 1 in 5 pensioners live below the poverty line; proposing a £140 pension in 2015 while the poverty line is £178 now; the cuts to domiciliary and day care centres, libraries, swimming pools, bus routes and transport services. It is clearly a nonsense to claim pensioners are shielded from the austerity measures. **Motions** carried at the conference included on the Basic State Pension that it increased in stages using the National Insurance Fund until it achieved 60% of median earnings. While welcoming the principle of a Citizen's Pension from 2015 much of the detail is unacceptable e.g. changes in Council Tax relief and Housing Benefit. To oppose the change from RPI to CPI. To campaign for a National Care Service. End age discrimination. The introduction of legislation to protect the elderly from abuse similar to the Children's Act. Finally to resist the

Reforms to the NHS (see page 3) **Death Grant** There are no NEC motions to Annual Conference. However 1 Branch is proposing changes (freezing until 2015 with pay outs from Branch funds). Tell your Branches this must be opposed.

Political Issues TUC March for the Alternative on March 26th (see Regional Secretary's Report below) *EW*

Regional Secretary's Report

200 North West CWU members travelled to London to join 500,000 protestors against the coalition cuts and Royal Mail privatisation.



This was a huge turnout from many trade unions and community organisations which meant the march took over 5 hours to get from the embankment to Hyde Park. To hear speeches by the Labour leader Ed Milliband and Brendan Barber TUC Gen. Sec. among others.



CWU Gen. Sec. Billy Hayes said "We are marching for a positive future. 500,000 on the streets is evidence these cuts will not work, there are alternatives. The Govt. needs to listen to the people and we must continue the fight until this happens.

The local elections in May are a great opportunity to signal the Government that no party was elected with a mandate to either make these cuts or privatise the NHS. *Carl Webb*

Following the lead of the last government, who handed over TV license collection to Paypoint, the coalition has given another slice of Post Office work to the private sector operator (owned by Citibank). The £20million contract is to cash benefit cheques for the 350,000 (mostly elderly) who prefer to cash cheques at the Post Office to smartcards.

From 2012 anyone wishing to cash such a cheque will have to go to a Paypoint outlet e.g. off-license or filling station, 'excellent' locations for vulnerable people. This follows a similar loss of Water utility bills to Payzone

If Royal Mail is sold off Post Office Limited may also lose their business. As the closure of Post Offices is increasing and business is being lost or given away it is no wonder that the Postal Bill is proposing to keep POL public.

There will soon be precious little left to sell off and the post office on our high streets will become a distant memory. *JS*

COMMISSION RULES OUT TAX-FUNDED CARE

Care commissioner Lord Warner has said it would be unfair for the working population to pay towards the cost of looking after the ageing population – effectively ending the idea of society sharing the risk of ill health and leaving it to individuals.

As a member of the Dilnot Commission which is currently looking into future funding of long term care Lord Warner is trotting out the familiar, unacceptable and failed mantras of the past e.g. insurance policies and selling of homes. He also goes on to say “Any fantasy about 100% universal state provision – forget it!”

In yet another about turn, despite assurances at the last election to end the need for pensioners to sell their homes to pay for care (by all three major parties) coalition ministers now say all options are being considered.

Dot Gibson the NPC General Secretary said “It is quite clear that the commission believe that individuals and their families should pay for care rather than the cost being shared by society as a whole. But the real weakness facing the commission is that it is trying to decide how care is funded without looking at the quality of care, staff training and inspection”.
(The average cost of a nursing home place is £36,000 a year)
(Campaign Bulletin Number 49)



BILL THREATENS FUTURE OF NHS

The government's 367 page Health and Social Care Bill brings with it the threat of wholesale privatisation of the NHS critics have warned.

The legislation will pass £80 billion worth of NHS budgets over to local consortia and open both the provision and commissioning of services to the private sector.

Those bidding to take over NHS services will be able to cherry-pick the profitable parts whilst services for older people, which are often costly and long term, are likely to suffer.

Campaigners also claim that such a radical change has no mandate or support from the general public or health professionals.

Despite government predictions in reality GP's are unlikely to do any of the commissioning themselves and instead will hand over responsibility to ex-managers of primary care trusts or private management consultants.

Price competition (*disguised as value for money. Ed*) will also be at the heart of the changes even the 'regulator' is obliged to encourage all services to be put out to tender. This could see standards fall in the same way as that competitive tendering of hospital cleaning services in the 1980's led to a drop in hygiene (*e.g. MRSA Ed*).

Dot Gibson NPC general secretary said “This probably the most serious threat the NHS has ever faced as it will change the very nature of health care from being based on the needs of patients to instead being governed by the demands of private profiteers”.

(At a time when public finances are under the hammer it defies logic to embark on costly, approximately £4billion, and unnecessary changes to an NHS system that works. Ed)

(Campaign Bulletin Number 48)

THINK TANK CALLS FOR PENSIONER CUTS

Right wing think tank the Institute of Economic Affairs has claimed that older people have been protected from the government's austerity measures and should start to pay by losing their free TV licenses, bus passes & winter fuel allowance.

The IEA also wants to abolish the state pension and other universal benefits and instead roll all payments into one benefit that would be means tested. The NPC has described such proposals as both vindictive and inaccurate.

Evidence shows that every pensioner is now at least £700 a year worse off: the VAT increase; the cuts in social care by many councils; reduction in bus frequency and routes; housing benefit cuts; plans to reduce the winter fuel allowance and the way pensions are increased are all taking their toll on a reducing pension.

Pat Healey NPC vice president said “cutting free bus travel and winter fuel payments may save money in the short term in the long run will lead to costly social care and support”. (Bulletin 49)

ONE YEAR ON AND THE COALITION SHOWS IT'S CONTEMPT FOR PENSIONERS

Taking stock of the first year of coalition government it is an understatement that they have been found wanting in the way they have dealt with pensioner related issues.

It began promisingly enough with the much trumpeted 'triple lock guarantee' that pensions were to rise by the highest of earnings (virtually static), prices or 2.5%. However, the lower Consumer Price Index instead of the historically higher and more realistic Retail Price Index was to be used.

Then came the emergency Budget which put up VAT and raised concerns about future levels of government support for local authorities. The important and urgent issue of Social Care was 'kicked into the long grass' of another talking shop despite being thoroughly examined by the previous government (*but came to the wrong conclusions Ed*). The Care Minister Paul Burstow has been "too busy" to even discuss concerns with the NPC.

The Comprehensive Spending Review (*more details of what was to be cut*) was preceded by a deliberately leaked announcement that there were plans to raise pensions to £140 per week. However this transpired to be just a headline grabbing deflection from all the bad news of the cuts as nothing was proposed to change before 2015. In the meantime the state pension age was to rise to 66 by 2020, local government funding was reduced by 27% and local bus subsidy cut by 20%.

The direction of coalition policy was clear when the PM announced his 'Big Society' idea. Put simply you do it all for nothing and the state does as little as possible despite taking your contributions on the promise of providing for you in old age.

But as all the things that pensioners depend like daycare and community centres were being axed or reduced living costs were

rising. The 'regulated' energy company cartels were increasing their prices way above any inflation measure and fuel prices continued to rocket, which knocked on to everything. So the value of an already inadequate pension is reduced further.

The people who got us into this mess, whose bail-out has created the debt, the bankers, have continued to enjoy their undeserved and obscenely large bonuses' for failure. So much for the bluster of Clegg, Cameron, Osborne and Cable that everyone will pay their share. Any hope that Lib-Dem involvement in the coalition would curb the closet thatcherite ideals of the Tories has disappeared. Very often it is a Lib-Dem apologist who fronts key and unpopular policy announcements.

What of the future? It is quite clear that there are no sacred cows and everything is fair game. Winter fuel allowance has already been reduced in the budget (in typical coalition fashion slipped in under the wire). What next? Free TV licenses and bus passes and free prescriptions and eye tests for the over 60's?

Even our post office pension is not safe. Very soon we will learn if the trustees of the PO scheme are to follow BT in linking rises to CPI. So we are conned out of more money.

But what can we do? We can write to our local and national papers with our objections to and experiences of the cuts; let the PO trustees know we oppose CPI; use our vote in forthcoming local elections to boot out the parties associated with these unnecessarily harsh policies and object whenever and wherever we can to register our complete opposition to these mean-minded measures.

Otherwise it's work longer, pay more and get less and less, with this Government. *JS*

The views in this newsletter are personal opinions & not necessarily those of the CWU

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