



'GREY MATTERS'
THE NEWSLETTER FOR NORTH WEST REGION RETIRED MEMBERS
 June 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.

Ret. Secretary: Graham Wilson – Ass. Sec: Alan Trotter - Editor: John Gaherty – Ret. Chair: Doreen Watson
Regional Office: 302A BARLOW MOOR ROAD, CHORLTON PARK, MANCHESTER M21 8AY Tel: 0161 881 9450
Mobile: 07850 019 602 REGIONAL SECRETARY: CARL WEBB E-MAIL: northwestregion@cwu.org

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

October 26th
 Westminster
 House of Commons
 London
 NPC Annual Lobby of Parliament
 Part of NPC Campaign Week
 (October 24-29 2011).
 A week long programme of protests around the country

November 11th 2011
 CWU North West Region Retired Members Forum at the Mechanics institute
 Major Street Manchester.
 (Speakers to be Announced)
 All North West Retired Members and Guests are welcome to attend

DWP STUDY REVEALS EXTENT OF PENSIONER POVERTY

CPI: LEGAL CHALLENGES

Two separate High Court applications for a Judicial Review of the govt. decision to up-rate future pension rises by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) instead of the historically higher and previously used Retail Price Index (RPI) have been made. A total of 11 public sector unions comprise the two applications. *[CPI is now at an all time high, 4.5% May 2011, RPI is 1% higher. Ed.]*

Gail Cartmail of Unite says the switch is "morally wrong". Chris Keates (NASUWT) describes it as "daylight robbery".

A successful judgement may open the door for others, such as PO pensioners, to mount their own legal challenges *JG*

A Dept. of Work and Pensions two year study of 8.4 million pensioners provided some shocking facts.

Around 1million are so hard-up that they could not pay an unexpected bill of £200. More than 160,000 have no warm or waterproof coat. 84,000 do not eat one filling meal a day. 330,000 elderly live in homes in a state of disrepair. 300,000 could not replace their cooker if it broke. 420,000 do not see friends or family at least once a month. 40% 3.3 million never take a holiday. Half a million live in damp premises, 330,000 are unable to keep their homes warm. 168,000 have no working

heating, electrics, plumbing or drains. £12.7billion (one quarter of the total benefits bill) goes unclaimed because many pensioners are either too proud or too confused by the unnecessarily long and complicated claim booklets to submit a claim. *(Can't help feeling this is deliberate Ed.)*

Pensions minister Steve Webb said "We as a government have to think much more widely about what we are doing for older people – who lack the everyday things we take for granted". *(Extracted from Sunday People - May 8th 2011)*

Fine words! The Coalition's actions however tell a different story (see below). *JG*

DGL The Department of Government Lies

"We will protect the key benefits for older people, such as the winter fuel allowance (WFA)"
 [The Coalition: Our Programme for Government May 2010]
"The WFA will be reduced by £100 for the over 80s & £50 for the under 80s"
 [Budget March 2011]
PENSIONERS

"The Govt. believes that people deserve dignity & respect in old age & that they should be provided with the support they need"
 [The Coalition: Our Programme for Government May 2010]
"The flat-rate £155 state pension will not apply to existing pensioners"
 [Budget March 2011]
CANNOT TRUST

"We have no plans to change the current index-linking of pensions in payment from the RPI"
 [Conservative Party pledge at the 2010 General Election]
"The government will index all pensions, benefits and tax credits by the CPI"
 [Emergency Budget June 2010]
THE GOVERNMENT

NORTH WEST REGION

NW Regional
Secretary's Report

Retired Secretary's Report Pensioners Parliament Blackpool June 14-16

About 400 pensioners marched, well sauntered, from the Tower to the Winter Gardens (in which incidentally our NW Retired Members banner was the only one from the CWU) at the start of the 3 day event.

The Opening Session: heard eight excellent speakers on subjects ranging from Govt. cuts to the effects of tax avoidance; from the NHS to Social Care; from international pensions to elder abuse. CWU General Secretary Billy Hayes spoke about the broken promises of the Coalition and how their dogmatic drive to reshape the economy is a fundamental attack on all sections of society. He said there needs to be an alliance between pensioners and young people, the NPC and the trade union movement – **the real big society**

Day Two: opened with Mike Duggan (Civil Service Pensioners Alliance) telling us about the campaign for a Judicial Review about the legality of the change from RPI to CPI as the index for increasing pension.

Dr. Jay Gunn was concerned that income inequality was increasing at a faster pace than ever and was now at a level it was in **1908!** It divides society and has a negative impact on crime rates, housing, welfare and care.

Neil Duncan-Jordan an NPC national officer in an impassioned contribution on the Basic State Pension (BSP) pointed out the proposed £140pw for new pensioner in 2015/16 would be divisive and bureaucratic. The only way to resolve pensioner poverty is for BSP to be lifted above the poverty threshold.

Steve Webb Pensions Minister

got a polite welcomed but was heckled loudly for failing to justify the change from RPI to CPI and his constant attempts to blame Labour. Bizarrely he claimed a pensioner with an occupational pension of under £1,000 would be better off *once earnings started rising 'normally'*. What extraordinary spin!!

Dr. John Lister strongly attacked the Health Bill even after the 'listening exercise'. He blamed the Lib-Dems for being party to the break up of the NHS and the intention to allow any willing provider to bid for NHS services. It was Tory dogma and would take us back to the days of long waiting lists and poor provision. If we don't "Kill the Bill it will kill the NHS".

Final Day: Hugh Lanning (PCS) highlighted the dogmatic drive to make the poor pay for the greed of the rich. He said the gap between tax due and tax paid was £120billion yet Revenue staff continue to be cut making avoidance and evasion more likely. The govt. is prepared to spend millions on getting a few people off benefit to save next to nothing yet cuts resources that could bring in billions. Commenting on the June 30th strike he said it was not just about pensions but the kind of society we want.

In closing Neil Duncan-Jordan praised the £40billion contribution that pensioners make to society, saying our voice would not be ignored. Said that Social Care needs to be professionalised with a regulator given the power and resources to protect residents, Finally the need for a National care service, paid for by taxation, and a decent BSP to prevent 25,000 dying with cold-related illnesses.

EW

4 More Years of C***

Although we knew that we would all take a hit it was not expected that pensioners would have it so hard. It is important that North West retired members make our feeling known at every opportunity.

The Lib-Dem's have ditched their manifesto promises for ministerial cars and become yellow Tories. They have allowed the targeting of the defenceless elderly who after paying their taxes for 40+ years are now seeing their services and allowances being butchered by the coalition.

Cuts to the Winter Fuel Allowance and Council services to the elderly (meals on wheels, day centres and costs of travel) have reduced while costs rise. Residential care continues to require the sale of homes to fund that care leaving pensioners with just £10. It is a scandal and an outrage that people save all their lives to leave their children a few bob then have to sell their homes to pay for their care.

We have to campaign to get this changed. It won't happen overnight or if we sit on our backsides and hope that others will do it for us. We have to start now.

I urge all CWU active retired members to write to their local papers, to national papers and to their MP's; attend their retired members meetings and North West forums and make plenty of noise about the effects of coalition policy. Otherwise it's another 4 years of cuts bringing more and more poverty to the elderly.

Carl Webb Reg. Sec.

LABOUR DECIDE TO CHASE 'GREY' VOTE

After 13 years in power and one year out of office the Labour party is to review its policies affecting older people.

The party has set up a panel chaired by the shadow health secretary John Healey to investigate issues such as healthcare, the ageing population and the contribution that pensioners can make to society.

The panel will include the former government's 'Voice of Older People' Dame Joan Bakewell (*a job she walked away from. Ed.*)

Peter Raynor NPC vice president said "It is quite astonishing that during its time in office the Labour party failed to listen to the genuine concerns of older people on crucial issues such as the level of the state pension, the link with earnings and the cost and quality of care. Now in opposition it is going to ask the likes of Joan Bakewell to tell them what we want".

Since the general election the NPC has met the pension's minister and transport minister and their opposition counterparts. A further round of meetings is planned for later in the year. Despite numerous requests the care minister Paul Burstow is still **'too busy'** to meet the NPC. (*more proof of the contempt in some parts of govt for pensioners. Ed*)



WHICH? STUDY FINDS CARE HOME ABUSE

Actors posing as residents in care homes uncovered some shocking findings according to the latest report from consumer group Which?

The researchers found that food in the homes was 'unappertising and inadequate' with one researcher losing 7lb in a week.

Some residents had to wait up to 17hrs between dinner and breakfast. One resident was left 25mins waiting to go to the toilet.

Other researchers witnessed staff dragging and pulling residents around. Most worrying is that the investigation only focused on 4 homes yet found a host of serious problems.

Dot Gibson NPC General Secretary said "Individuals are paying up to £800 a week for this treatment but there is no way you could call it care. It is a scandal that older people are exploited and abused. We have to speak on their behalf and ensure that care homes are safe places to live".

The NPC are calling on the regulator – the Care Quality Commission – to improve both the level and frequency of their inspections. (*Last year 40,000 people sold their homes to pay their care*)

(*Articles from Campaign Bulletins 51*)

CWU Annual Conference Retired Issues

General Conference Death Grant

There will be no changes for now. However due to falling membership and the strain on HQ finances means **this issue will not go away.**

Branches will need to be vigilant to any future changes,

RPI v CPI

An RMAC motion committing the union to 'use all avenues to secure RPI' was passed.

Moved by Cathy Leech (RMAC) she pointed out that CPI deliberately excludes many household costs.

Seconding Steve Clarke (Eastern No5) said " This affects every single person. The younger you are the more it affects you.

Geoff Hodge (South West & Thames Valley) commented "We have all be mugged by George Osborne".

Tony Kearns SDGS on behalf of the NEC agreed but while supporting the two High Court challenges (see page 1) doubted their chances of success. He remarked that it was a political battle and that the CWU would mount a political campaign.

Alan Trotter

NW Ret .Ass. Secretary

SOCIAL CARE 'AT BREAKING POINT'

Age UK ('Care in Crisis' report) said £250 million, less in **real** terms, would be spent on the 2million older people who currently have care-related needs by 2014 putting older people at risk and intolerable strains on families as eligibility criteria toughens. The charity is calling on the government to commit £2 - £3 billion to older people's care.

A Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection into elderly care in NHS hospitals found 3 hospitals, out of 12 inspected, gave "appalling levels of care" not meeting basic standards they are legally obliged to deliver.

A recent BBC Panorama highlighted the shortcomings of the CQC as they failed to investigate whistleblower complaints in a private vulnerable adults hospital where serious abuse and neglect was taking place.

Southern Cross the biggest provider of private care homes for the elderly is in financial trouble due to cuts in local government spending and their own financial chicanery. They announced that they are to reduce staff by 3,000. Up to 130 homes, out of 700, may be shed heaping more worry and strain on residents and their families.

The Dilnot report on Social Care, due to be announced in July, is expected to rule out any national level for provision of care (expecting financial contributions from families either up front or at a later stage) While it **may** in the light of above propose some reforms to the apparently 'toothless' regulator (CQC) it is unlikely to recommend anything different than failed 'sticking plaster' remedies to this growing crisis.

JS



Benefits You Could Claim Pension Credit:

If your income is less than £137.35p you could get the Guarantee Credit part of Pension Credit to meet the difference. For couples it's £209.70p. You may get Savings Credit with a higher weekly retirement income £189 (single) £278 (couple). The amounts are higher if you are severely disabled, a carer or have certain costs for housing. Savings need not disqualify you (benefit is reduced over £10,000).

You also may qualify for Council Tax Benefit and/or Housing Benefit if your saving don't exceed £16,000. If you are on Guarantee Credit your Council Tax and/or Rent may be fully covered regardless of savings.

Attendance Allowance:

Over 65's with physical or mental disability may get £49.30p a week if they need help day or night and £73.60p if they need help both day and night.

If you are under 65 you may claim Disability Living Allowance instead.

Top tips to Claim Benefits

Don't assume you're not entitled. Call Age UK on 0800 587 0668 to find a local benefits adviser or use the online benefits calculator

www.ageuk.org/calculators

Advisers can assist filling in forms, even at home or if there are any grounds for appeal if claims are turned down.

(Extracted from AgeUK information supplement)

NHS: THE 'REFORMS TO THE REFORMS'

Few voters ever understood the government's planned NHS Reforms (*or the need for them Ed*). Very few will understand the 'reforms to the reforms' said Nick Robinson, Political Editor for the BBC the day they were announced.

In accepting in full the NHS Future Forum report David Cameron said listening job "done". But how much change to the original thrust of the reforms has been made?

GP Consortia: new name and inclusion of a hospital nurse and consultant – smacks of 'tokenism'.

Commissioning: decided on quality not cost and safeguards against 'cherry-picking' – does anyone believe that?

New Watchdog - Monitor: to safeguard against a "market free for all" – likely to be as ineffective and useless as all the other so called regulators. That Health minister Andrew Lansley can remark "The fundamentals of our plans – are as strong today as they have ever been" says it all.

All the 'pause' has achieved is virtually the same proposals expressed in less provocative language. More spin than substance. Done! Mr. Cameron we certainly have been.

What does not appear to have been considered is the £4 billion cost of these 'reforms'. If there is so much money to spend (or rather waste) why is it not going into frontline services as promised by the Tories in 2010? Labour have belatedly taken up this issue that should have been central to any opposition. The cost is something you can't dress up in flowery language and statistics.

The Views Expressed In This Newsletter Are The Writer's Personal Opinions And Not Necessarily Those Of The CWU

HELP AND ADVICE



Walkden House
10 Melton Street
London
NW1 2EJ
Tel: 020-7383-0388
E-mail: info@npcuk.org
Website: www.npcuk.org



Legal Services
Helpline: 0800 8046674
CWU Headquarters
150 The Broadway
Wimbledon, London
SW19 1RX
Tel: 020-8971-7200
E-mail: info@cwu.org
Website: www.cwu.org
or contact your Branch Secretary



Advice Helpline:
0800 107 8977 (8am-7pm)
E-mail: contact@ageuk.org.uk
Website: www.ageuk.org

If you have any views, opinions or articles you would like included in the next issue please send to:
Editor 'Grey Matters'
302A Barlow Moor Road
Manchester M21 8AY
or e-mail:
northwestregion@cwu.org