NW Regional Retired Members’ Council Report

**February 2016**

**Retired Members Council**

The Council continues to be well attended and met 4 times during 2015. We go into the New Year with two new officers. Des Carney of NW No1 Branch takes over from Doreen Watson who resigned as Chair in December after many years service to the Council. I would like to place on record the thanks, not only of myself personally but of the whole of the Council for the contributions Doreen has made. Allan Trotter has also stood aside as Assistant Secretary. His duties will be taken over by Phil Duffy from Greater Mersey & SW Lancs Branch. Again my thanks and those of the Council are well deserved by Allan who has served this union in various capacities for many decades and who never failed to produce succinct and accurate minutes of our meetings. Allan will continue to serve as a member of the RMAC.

The revised Branch Model Constitution caused much disquiet when LTB 664/16 was published in November. It wasn’t so much the inclusion of Rule 6.4.8 into a new paragraph 4.4.6 that caused the problem as the additional note which the NEC deemed necessary. The note prevents Retired Members from both standing and voting for the Branch Committee. Motions have been submitted to the Retired Members Conference and others will be submitted to General Conference. Subsequently LTB 723/16 was published early in December and went some way to defuse the issue. Here is an extract. *“In due course it will now be the intention of the NEC to give the whole subject of retired members voting rights and their role within the union further consideration. The intention will be to bring forward an appropriate set of rule changes before annual conference to ensure a consistent position is adopted across the union.”*

Unionline now offers help in setting up Lasting Powers of Attorney for members and their families. There are two types of LPA - Property and financial affairs; Health and Welfare. If you wish to do either of these individually our charges are £175 + VAT. If you require both of them the total is £300 + VAT.  Please note that these prices only cover Unionline’s professional fees and do not cover court fees, which are currently £110 per LPA.

The most significant event of the year on the pension front was the introduction of the New State Pension. Hailed as simple and single tier it is anything but. It will divide pensioners into two groups with increases unfairly varying between the new pension and the old. Nevertheless those on the New Pension will be worse of over time than they would have been on the old one.

The loss of the Referendum, from a retainer’s point of view, throws up many uncertainties for pensioners. How Brexit affects the prosperity of the UK will have implications for pensioner issues such as NHS spending, VAT on fuel, triple lock for pensions, Human Rights Act protection, UK pensioners living in the EU could face loss of income and loss of access to social services.

**General Conference**

Conference either carried or the NEC accepted several motions of interest to Retired Members on wide ranging subjects such as the Pensions Triple Lock; recruitment of retired members; support for remaining in the EU; the Human Rights Act; cuts to Local Authority spending; support for Jeremy Corbyn; prostate cancer and social care.

Once again there was a very lively Retired Members' Fringe meeting chaired by Allan Trotter. Tony Kearns spoke about various aspects of fairness in society and the responsibility of the state to care for the weak and vulnerable. The Torys are failing in this preferring to look after millionaires and global companies whilst moving benefits from disabled people all in the dogmatic drive for austerity. NPC National Officer, Neil Duncan Jordan, was guest speaker and addressed many issues that affect both young and old particularly the wedge that continues to be driven between the generations Neil said it is being driven by powerful right wing think tanks, Tory dogma and the right wing media.

**RMAC**

There was concern that the RMAC did not meet after the Retired Members’ Conference in January until the end of November. The SDGS, Tony Kearns has been made aware that this is unacceptable. At that meeting delegates pursued the progress of General Conference motions, the timing and distribution of The Link, the forthcoming NPC Biennial Conference, the RM Conference 2017 and the revised Branch Model Constitution.

By the time you read this the RM Conference will have taken place here in Manchester. Social Care, housing, NHS A & E services, the triple lock on state pensions, support for a protest march in London on NHS funding, retired members benefits and the new branch model constitution are all subject for discussion.

**National Pensioners’ Convention**

The NPC again organise a successful Pensioners Parliament in Blackpool which was magnificently supported by NW Branches. An array of guest speakers and multiple sessions took place over the three days which I have reported fully earlier. Space does not permit me to repeat myself.

In October Dot Gibson and Neil Duncan-Jordan met with the Pensions Minister, Richard Harrington MP. Pension indexation, Brexit and frozen pensions, universal benefits, state pension age and intergenerational fairness all came under discussion. It was more productive than meetings with the previous minister, Baroness Res Altmann and it was agreed to meet again.

The Annual Lobby of Parliament took place early in November when about 200 pensioners were addressed by John McDonnell MP, Shadow Chancellor; Ian Blackford MP, SNP Pensions Spokesman; Kelvin Hopkin MP, NPC Parliamentary Group Convener and Dot Gibson, NPC General Secretary.

The NPC’s analysis of the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement makes grim reading. He forewarned of the triple lock coming under scrutiny prior to 2020, said nothing about Pension Credit, transferred the cost of Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowance to Local Authorities after 2019, benefit spending will be capped at £126bn by 2020/21. The biggest omission from the statement was on Social Care so there will be no increased funding from central government.

The NPC continues to campaign strongly on pensioner issues and is fully supported by the CWU

**Dates**

Annual Conferences 23rd to 27th April Bournemouth

Pensioners Parliament 6th to 8th June Blackpool

**Graham Wilson**

**NW Retired Members’ Secretary**