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THE LINK

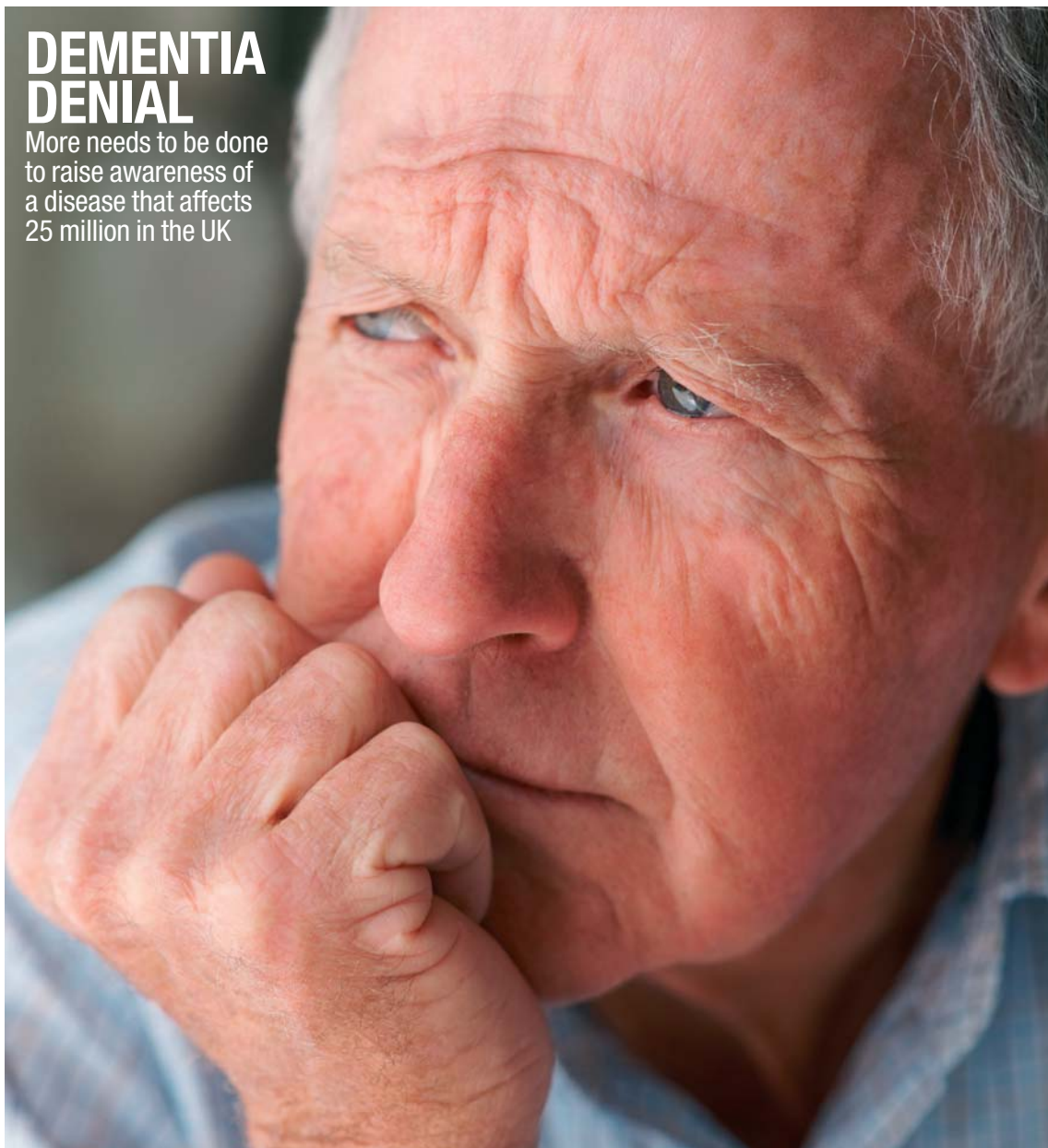


THE MAGAZINE OF THE RETIRED MEMBERS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE

WINTER 2010 WWW.CWU.ORG

DEMENTIA DENIAL

More needs to be done to raise awareness of a disease that affects 25 million in the UK



ContactUs

CWU
The communications union
 150 The Broadway, Wimbledon,
 London SW19 1RX
T: 020 8971 7200
E: info@cwu.org
W: www.cwu.org

General Secretary
 BILLY HAYES
E: bhayes@cwu.org
W: www.billyhayes.co.uk

Head of Communications
 KEVIN SLOCOMBE
E: kslocombe@cwu.org

Editorial Consultant
 PAUL DONOVAN

BT Pensioner Helpline
T: 0800 731 1919

Accenture BT Pension Central

T: 0800 731 1919

BT Benevolent Fund

T: 0845 602 9714

Royal Mail Pensioner Helpline

T: 0845 603 0043

Royal Mail Pensions Centre

T: 0800 731 1919

Royal Mail Pensioner's Welfare

T: 0800 731 1919

Support your magazine and send items for the Spring issue by 07/02/2011 to:

The Editor, SDGS Department,
 150 The Broadway, Wimbledon,
 London SW19 1RX

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T: 01727 893 894
F: 01727 893 895
E: enquiries@centurypublishing.ltd.uk
W: www.centurypublishing.ltd.uk

Art Editor
 HEENA GUDKA

Design & Production
 SARAH THORLEY
 TANYA KANT

Cover image
 SHUTTERSTOCK

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POSITIVE PROTESTS

BILLY HAYES
GENERAL SECRETARY



Slowly but surely the different groups being picked on by the ConDem government are coming out onto the streets to say they will not put up with paying the bankers' debts. The students have recently been making the headlines with their protests through the streets of London. As reports in this edition of *The Link* show, the elderly have also been out on the streets protesting about how the cuts

agenda could effect them. Public sector workers are also rallying to defend their jobs and pensions. It would seem the anger is building as the true scope of the cuts agenda, aimed primarily at the weakest and most vulnerable, becomes apparent. As a trade union it is important that we are active in opposition to any unjust measure that the government may seek to impose.

Billy Hayes

Right deal

KEVIN SLOCOMBE
HEAD OF COMMS

There is a growing tendency in the media to redefine pensions as being some sort of privilege, rather than a right.

Pensions in the public sector have been set against those in the private sector but as with most things the tendency has been not to seek a better deal for all but to level down. So public sector workers must accept a worse pension deal.

As trade unionists we must resist this race to the bottom. It is important to put the whole picture on pensions out in the media, not accept

the neo-liberal consensus that says these benefits can no longer be afforded.



K Paul

Thorn in our side

NOBBY CLARK
EDITOR & RMAC MEMBER

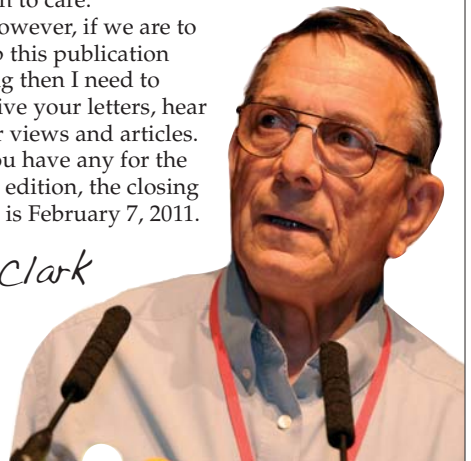
I have attempted to deal with the thorny subjects raised by the current government in their spending reviews in this issue.

There are details of the announcements in the spending review, which affects us as retired members and state pension holders.

Paul Donovan has written an article on dementia and in doing so has highlighted the need for a greater priority to be given to care.

However, if we are to keep this publication going then I need to receive your letters, hear your views and articles. If you have any for the next edition, the closing date is February 7, 2011.

N. Clark



AGE ATTACK

The Comprehensive Spending Review attacks the elderly, young and disabled

TONY KEARNS: SENIOR DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY

The coalition government's underlying agenda suggests pensions received by the elderly are a privilege and not a right, says Tony Kearns. The *Back to the Future* approach proves we haven't moved far forward since the 1980s



The coalition government set out just how hard it intends to hit the elderly and most vulnerable in its Comprehensive Spending Review.

The elderly, disabled, public sector workers and the young were all singled out as those being made to pay the price for the bankers' greed.

The attack on the elderly seems to be being pursued in an incremental way with cuts that often don't kick in straight away but some way down the line. For example, the Winter Fuel Allowance will be cut from £250 to £200 for those under 80

from next year. The cut for those over 80 will be from £400 to £300. The disability allowance will end for those in care from 2012/2013.

Right not a privilege

The underlying agenda though seems to be that pensions and other benefits received by the elderly are to be seen more as a privilege than an inalienable right.

It is noticeable how, whenever there are debates on the affordability of pensions, the subject of the billions of pounds stored away in the National Insurance

Fund rarely gets a mention. This is no doubt because mentioning the huge surplus does not fit well with the overall narrative that the country

cannot support pensions, especially those of people working in the public sector.

Coming together

Pensioners need to keep making the case for decent pensions, not allowing the government, and its numerous friends in the media, to continue with this gradual erosion of basic rights.

There will no doubt be plenty of debate about how to counter the coalition government onslaught come the retired members' conference at headquarters on February 3.

The key to success in opposing the cuts agenda must be in bringing together inter-generational forces. So students need to equate their struggle against fees with the right of public sector workers and existing pensioners to a reasonable standard of living in retirement. For those who think

this government is on the right lines, a look across the Irish Sea could prove informative.

A couple of years ago, Ireland enacted austerity measures of the kind recently introduced by the coalition here. The result in Ireland was that the country went into a second recession and ended up effectively giving up its own sovereignty to Europe. It is a clear warning of what could happen here.

No change

The *Back to the Future* nature of the present government's approach was underlined recently in a comedy sketch about a Falklands War veteran estranged somewhere in the North Atlantic. He was unaware the war was over or what had gone on over the past three decades. Talking about life in the early 1980s, he referred to a deficit, austerity cuts, public sector turmoil and Bruce Forsyth still on the TV – so what has really changed?



Guessing game: financial attacks on the elderly seem to be pursued in an incremental way



Women lose out in state retirement age change

PENSION AGE

The state pension retirement age will be equalised for men and women by November 2018 – two years earlier than planned.

On top of this,

the pension age for both sexes will increase to 66 by April 2020.

This change to the state pension retirement age will affect around 5.1 million people, with the vast

majority of losers being women.

For example, a woman born on April 5, 1953 could

5.1m ... people affected by the increase

claim her state pension a month before her 63rd birthday, whereas a woman born a year later would be forced to wait until she is 66.

The Treasury claims that from

2015 to 2025 this change will save around £30 billion in reduced payments and raise some £13bn through increased tax and National Insurance contributions.

Lasting memorial to North West member Stan Skinkis

TRIBUTE

The North West branch recently named its main meeting room The Stan Skinkis Room after the well-loved member who died

last year.

The short ceremony was attended by members of the North West retired members' council, lay members, the retired members' section, the officers and delegates of the branch central committee as well as Stan's wife Pat Skinkis and members of her family.

The branch president John Simpson said a few words on the work Stan had carried out since becoming an activist in 1973. His involvement with working people was not confined to the union but as a politician in Oldham and Greater Manchester and an active member of the community in

Failsworth.

Carl Webb, the North West regional secretary, spoke of his involvement with Stan over the years, particularly while he was secretary of the North West retired members' committee and member of the National RMAC.

"I was privileged to sum up the event and ask Stan's wife to uncover the

plaque and place the photograph of Stan in the boardroom. Having worked with Stan since 1984, I'd got to know him extremely well. He wasn't just a work colleague but a friend and mentor, and he was a remarkable man with a fantastic sense of humour and eye for detail. He was an inspiration to many, young and old, men and women."



Pensioners lobby Parliament about cuts agenda

CAMPAIGNING

Pensioners were in defiant mood as they made it clear to MPs that they were not about to lie down and accept the brunt of the cuts agenda.

Pensioners from across the country joined the NPC rally and lobby of Parliament, demanding higher pensions, better care and safeguarding of universal benefits.

“The national debt has never returned to zero since 1692”

The demonstration began with hundreds of pensioners gathering in Methodist Central Hall in Westminster to listen to MPs, trade union leaders and campaigners highlighting the problems that the planned cuts will have on older and more vulnerable people.

Speakers underscored the ideological nature of the Comprehensive Spending Review, with its neo-liberal underpinnings.

They also highlighted how the coalition government is attempting to convince the public that the current budgetary deficit is totally unprecedented in modern times, which is totally untrue. For most of the UK's economic history, the national debt has been two to three times the current level. It has only been below 40 per cent of Gross Domestic Product a few times since 1914 – most of which were recorded under the Labour Government between 1999 and 2008.

It was also stressed that the national debt has



Masking their anger: pensioners at Parliament

never returned to zero since its inception in 1692.

One contributor pointed out that previous deficit reductions were achieved through a more judicious mix of economic growth, investment and increasing employment, alongside some marginal and incremental public service reductions. This contrasts with the coalition government's approach, which will slow growth and escalate unemployment to 1980s-type levels.

Both Dot Gibson, from the NPC, and Mike Duggan, from Civil Service

Pensioners' Alliance, emphasised the need for a living state pension for all, to be set minimally at £171 per week.

Both felt there should also be free long-term and social care, retention of winter fuel allowances and the continuation of free travel.

The TUC representative pointed out that although the government had recently announced its intention to scrap the means-tested pension credit and raise the state pension to £141 per week, this proposal only applied to those reaching pensionable age after 2015.

InBrief

Council tax benefit slashed

Council tax benefit spending will be reduced by 10 per cent from 2013-14, and devolved to local authorities. Currently, some 3.5m pensioners receive some level of council tax benefit.

Allowances cut in care homes

Disability Living Allowance will end for claimants in residential care homes from 2012-13. The change will not affect those who fully self-fund their care, but will effect an estimated 58,000 people, who receive on average around £33-40 per week.

Drop in winter fuel payments

The Winter Fuel Allowance will be reduced next year from £250 to £200 for households with occupants under 80, and from £400 to £300 for those over 80. The government intends to initiate an independent review of the fuel poverty target before the New Year.

Cold weather payments

Cold weather payments, which kick in when the average temperature falls below freezing for seven consecutive days, will be set at £25 for those on pension credit, and benefit some 4.2m households.



Changes to Warm Front programme

FUNDING CUTS

Funding for the £280m Warm Front programme will be cut over the next two years from £110m in 2011-12 to

£100m in 2012-13.

From next April, energy suppliers will provide additional help with energy bills to fuel poor households through social price

support. This form of support will rise from £250m in 2011-12 to £310m in 2014-15.

[[WWW.CWU.ORG](http://www.cwu.org)]

LETTER OF THE MONTH



Elderly welfare mess

I read Nobby Clark's comments in the summer issue with great interest, and he made a strong point regarding 'care of senior citizens'.

When Lord Beveridge drew up the outlines of the health service in the early 1940s, he could never have envisaged the many discoveries in the world of medicine that would mean pensioners like me could live much longer, but, sadly, need expensive care in our closing years.

Successive governments, both Labour and Conservative, have addressed this growing problem without success. The present government is following the same course as its predecessors with another review and report that will inevitably come to the same conclusion. Many OAPs have sold their inheritance in exchange for their care.

A 'lump sum to ensure care' has been suggested, but how many have such a sum when they are, say, of middle age? If they had, much of it would go to clear mortgages, or be invested. And what of those who have never bothered to save?

And what of the huge deficit in the pension fund and the Post Office? Or, the return of the earnings link? I view the latter with great suspicion and feel we'll not be any better off as a result.

When Gordon Brown abolished the tax relief on dividends for the pension funds in 1997, this was the start of the deficit problems. Top financial experts estimated the annual loss was £6billion per year. Add the 13-year holiday from contributions that the Post Office enjoyed, while employees still had to contribute, and it doesn't take much to work out that had such events not happened, many funds would still be in profit today.

Ray Bullock, Eastern No 5 branch

SEND YOUR LETTERS TO: The Editor, THE LINK, 150 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19 1RX **OR FAX:** 020 8971 7437 **OR EMAIL:** voicelatters@cwu.org

We reserve the right to edit letters sent anonymously, but will withhold names and addresses if asked. Views expressed here are not necessarily those of the editor or the CWU

OBITUARY

GEORGE POOLE

It is with great sadness that I have to inform you of the death, at the age of 90, of our dear friend and comrade George Poole. George was branch officer and member of the Post Office Engineering Union (POEU) and the National Communications Union (NCU), and the CWU until his recent death.

George had served the union as chair of the branch and attended annual conference as a delegate on a number of occasions. He had been a member of the union for 55 years, culminating in a life honorary membership in 1985.

George retired from BT in 1985 but continued his membership and was elected chair of the North Midlands retired members' section.

He won the respect of all for the authority, dignity, fairness and impartiality he exercised throughout. He gave tremendous support to his fellow workers and his no-nonsense approach to GPO managers gained him affection and loyalty among all of those that knew him.

George was a very astute person and was always well up on current events and political matters and, on my visits to George, he would discuss these issues

with great knowledge and understanding.

He will be missed firstly by his family and many friends but also by the North Midlands branch and its members.



By Andrew Cawley,
North Midlands
branch secretary

[REPORT]

WHY ARE WE 2ND CLASS CITIZENS?

Marion Wilson, chair of the women's working party of the NPC, asks why the lot of women pensioners is particularly bad and suggests ways to improve the situation

Women pensioners are certainly treated as second class citizens. Very few retired women receive the full basic state pension and if they are lucky enough to have an occupational pension it is much lower than that of men in similar work.

So why is this? The main reason is that few retired women managed to complete the necessary 40 years of National Insurance contributions – mainly due to taking time off to bring up children – and when they did return, many chose to go part-time to cope with the demands of both family and work. A lot of women also opted to pay what was then called 'the married women's stamp'.

Research has shown that any interruption in the work pattern can have a very big

effect on advancement up the promotion ladder and, therefore, an increase in salary. You don't often find part-time managers, and because employers think that managers need to be there all the time, even job-shares may well be out of the question.

Dual demands

In addition, it has been shown that even qualified women such as nurses tend to take lesser-skilled jobs such as check-out clerks simply because it is less stressful and means they can deal more easily with the dual demands of work and family.

As a result, few receive the full state pension of £97-a-week, with more likely to be receiving about £58 – try living on that!

Things improved when the number of years of NI contributions was dropped to 30, but that didn't help

£58

... the average weekly pension most retired women receive

current pensioners as it was not made retrospective.

There was a time, not that long ago, when women had to leave work upon getting married, and the occupational pension was not open to them. Add to this the fact that most women earned less than men, and it's easy to see why many are currently suffering very low incomes.

“Very few retired women receive the full state pension”

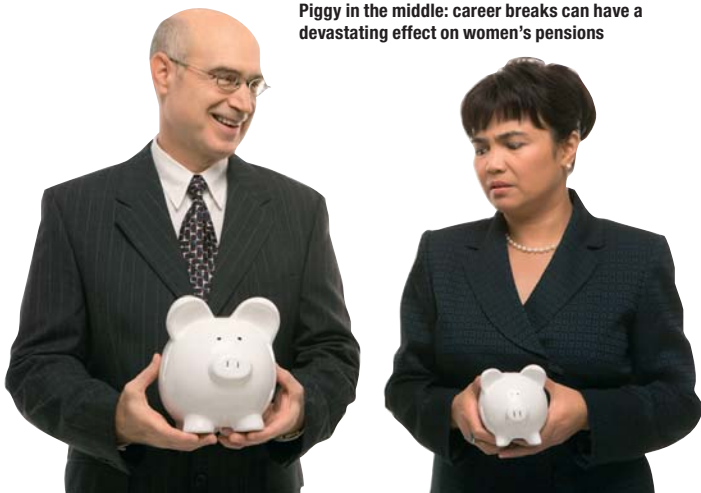
Novel idea

The UK is not alone in this. All over Europe, women suffer from the same cumulative effects of lower wages and interruptions to their careers, either because of young children or the needs of elderly parents. However, the problem in the UK is compounded by our complex pension system and low basic state pension – one of the lowest in Europe.

Given that the government's own poverty line has now been set at £170, one wonders how they can morally justify such a low basic state pension.

Here's a novel idea: get rid of all these extras and just pay us a decent living wage i.e. a pension, which, after all, is what we all paid in for. Why hasn't anyone thought of that?

Piggy in the middle: career breaks can have a devastating effect on women's pensions



DEMENTIA DENIAL

Paul Donovan outlines the situation for dementia sufferers in the UK and urges the disease be given greater priority



Dementia is hitting more and more people in the population, yet still remains a fairly low priority on medical research agendas.

The condition is growing – with 700,000 sufferers in the UK alone – and this figure is predicted to rise to 800,000 by 2018 and 1.7 million by 2050.

The most prominent form of dementia is Alzheimer's with 417,000 sufferers in the UK. Alzheimer's disease, first described by German neurologist Alois Alzheimer, is a physical disease effecting the brain.

During the course of the

Above: More needs to be done to highlight the painful effects of dementia

disease, 'plaques' and 'tangles' develop in the structure of the brain, leading to the death of brain cells. People with Alzheimer's also have a shortage of some important chemicals in their brains, involved with the transmission of messages.

Painful memories

Alzheimer's is a progressive disease, which means that gradually, over time, more parts of the brain are damaged, and as this happens the symptoms become more severe. There is no cure at present.

Other forms of dementia

include vascular disease, which occurs when oxygen supplies to the brain are restricted, dementia with Lewy bodies that gets its name from the spherical structures developing inside the nerve cells leading to the degeneration of brain tissue, and fronto-temporal dementia effecting the front of the brain. By 2018, dementia will cost the UK £27 billion per annum.

My dad suffered with dementia for some years, and this was painful for the whole family to endure; seeing a man who had always been full of the zest for life gradually deteriorate.



Dad first started to show serious signs of dementia around 2001 and it was a gradual decline from then on.

He started to become more withdrawn, and the situation became a great deal worse in May 2004, with 18 months of rapid drift downhill until he went into the first home. After that he went into two further homes before he died in August 2008.

Despite the profligacy of dementia, the level of understanding of the disease and care provision is at best rudimentary. There are many questions that arise. How does the sufferer cope when first diagnosed? What is the

best approach to adopt? Should the sufferer remain at home as long as possible? Should the sufferer and his or her family seek to bring care support into the home? When should the sufferer go into a home? Should they go into a home at all?

Bleak analysis

Most of these questions arose when dealing with my own father's dementia.

The first port of call is the GP. It should be the GP who diagnoses Alzheimer's, or another condition leading onto dementia. In my case, my father was diagnosed but then nothing happened. On one occasion I wrote to the GP asking whether we were simply waiting for a serious accident before anything happened. He pretty much confirmed that analysis.

A number of accidents occurred – my Dad got out on the street alone and fell over, severely bruising his face, another time he fell and broke a finger.

It is probably best for all concerned if the sufferer stays at home as long as possible. However, at an advanced stage, dementia can have unpleasant side effects. Many of what would previously be considered strengths – like drive and determination – can transform into negatives like aggression and violence. Sometimes a home can be the only answer. In the case of my father, my mother was the primary carer for a couple of years until it simply became too much for her.

25^m

... number of people affected by dementia in the UK

There are also problems with homes. A lack of regulation and private control means that for some owners these centres of care amount to mere profit centres. Staff tend to be low paid with care sometimes at a premium. More regulation is definitely needed.

One obvious lesson learned from my own family's experience was the importance to the dementia sufferer of having someone to act as advocate for their interests. Without such a person the dementia sufferer would have real difficulty, which of course beggars the question what happens to those who lack an advocate?

More attention

Dementia does not get the attention it warrants. Just £50 million a year is provided for dementia compared to £600m for cancer research. Tellingly, on one documentary about the subject a doctor pointed out that cancer patients are not told to go away and come back later when the condition gets worse as has been the case with some dementia sufferers.

Around 25m people, or 42 per cent of the population, are affected by dementia through knowing a close friend or family member with the condition. Fortunately, the profile of dementia has increased and progress has been made as more becomes known about the condition and new drug treatments become available. But much still needs to be done.



ROYAL MAIL INJUSTICE

Deputy general secretary **Dave Ward** outlines the injustice of a move by the coalition government to tie Royal Mail pension increases to the cost price rather than retail price index

The coalition government's announcement in July regarding the introduction of changes to the method of indexation for the Royal Mail pension schemes from Retail Price Index (RPI) to Cost Price Index (CPI) represents one of the biggest and most unnecessary attacks on pensions of all time.

The change directly affects every pension scheme member and if left unchanged will represent an enormous reduction in benefits for thousands of members.

It is important to understand some of the background and thinking that lies behind this proposed change.

The indexation of pension scheme benefits was, and is, a hard-one benefit. Since the

introduction of the Royal Mail schemes in 1969, and the linked associated

70%
... of pensioners own a home with no outstanding mortgage


benefit structure, the indexation of those pensions in payment and deferment has been the foundation upon which the scheme was built.

No substance

To date increases in pensions have been aligned to RPI. The CWU argue that there is an expectation that this practice and method of up rating should continue irrespective of what the trustees say. We would also argue that there is a custom and practice to be considered as far as this issue is concerned.

So why would the government wish to introduce this change? Pensions Minister Steve Webb said: "We believe that CPI is a more appropriate measure of changes in the cost of living of pensioners than RPI. While RPI includes mortgage interest and other housing costs, more than 70 per cent of pensioners own their own home with no outstanding mortgage. CPI is also the Bank of England's preferred measure of inflation."

These two comments are the corner stone of the government's thinking and



A wrench on expenditure: pensioners are fighting for every penny

rationale as to why the changes are needed and justified. Both are worthy of challenge and in truth both hold no real substance. It is unacceptable to justify this change on the basis that pensioners do not have mortgages. Pensioners do have mortgages along with associated housing costs, including rent and other major areas of household expenditure.

Measuring standard

It is dishonest to say that CPI represents the Bank of England's preferred measure. CPI was introduced to allow better comparisons of inflation across EU member states and it was the last government that introduced it as a measure that the Bank of England should use.

The move to CPI will affect



Dave Ward says changes to the Royal Mail pension scheme are unnecessary



What's been done?

So what has CWU done to date? It wrote to Royal Mail in July after the Pension Minister's statement was made seeking the company's view on the issue. It wrote again in October and eventually met with Royal Mail in early November. Royal Mail's position was that it was unable to confirm its approach and policy on the proposed change.

The CWU has argued that the change is unnecessary and that RPI should continue to be used as the measure of indexation. Following the meeting the union wrote to the trustee board as well as to Moya Green, the chief executive of Royal Mail. CWU is currently working on a communication package for branches and other interested groups within the union.

In its letter to the trustees, CWU said it believes that this change is fundamentally wrong, most importantly it is wrong because it is not needed and it penalises members of the Royal Mail Pension Plan by reducing their benefits that have been earned and paid for in contributions to the plan over many years.

The need to mobilise and campaign against these proposals is a key objective for our union and every effort will be made to ensure that we take this argument and case for opposition on.

Left: The index shows that CPI will produce a lower pension increase

Left: The CWU argue that changing to CPI will see a pension shortfall

the income and standard of living of thousands of pensioners and pension scheme members.

An examination of the two indexes clearly shows that CPI will produce a lower pension increase. The July

budget report highlighted the difference in the two indexes going forward. The CWU argue that the two tables (below) provide clear evidence as to why the use of CPI is unacceptable.

Figure 1: RPI/CPI Annual Comparison

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
RPI%	3.3	1.7	1.7	2.8	3.1	2.7	3.6	3.9	5.0	-1.4
CPI%	1.0	1.3	1.0	1.4	1.1	2.5	2.4	1.8	5.2	1.1

Figure 2: Forecast Difference (%)

Year of Increase	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Overall
CPI	2.7	2.4	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.0	13.7
RPI	3.7	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	22.1
Shortfall	1.0	0.8	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.5	7.4

DAVE AND THE SILVER SURFERS

Solent branch lead learning rep **Dave Thompson** grabbed the chance to get more retired members involved in his branch by learning to teach them himself

Dave Thompson has made an opportunity out of several thorny problems.

As lead learning rep of the Solent branch, Dave found because most of the members of his branch work during the day, his two learning centres in Bournemouth and Southampton were not being fully utilised during working hours.

Dave was keen to involve the whole of the membership in learning and found retired members were one of the most difficult groups to reach.

Overcoming problems

"Retired members are often reluctant to come to evening courses, especially once the nights start to draw in," said Dave. "So I thought 'I have the learning centres which are quiet during the day and I have a pool of potential learners who would prefer to learn during the day', so I decided to combine the two.

"My final problem was finding a tutor. I approached all of the local education providers but all of them wanted to charge for courses. As the retired members are often on a tight budget, I really wanted to provide the course for them at no cost."

Though the branch was considering funding the course for the retired members it became clear it

Digital age: learning more about IT



was too expensive an option.

"At about the same time, I saw that one of the local colleges was offering a P.T.L.L.S. (Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector) course," says Dave. "I decided to enrol as not only would this be a good learning opportunity for me, it would also qualify me to present courses myself.

"The course was one evening a week for 11 weeks and a lot of fun to do. I did manage to pass the course and found my role as a union rep a big help when it came to the equality and diversity section of the course, and public speaking."

First course

Given that Dave's strength was in IT, he decided that the first course he would run would be a basic IT course at Bournemouth.

"Retired members have often been passed over when

it comes to computers and the internet, and this can leave them feeling isolated in an increasingly digital age. I did a mail shot to all of the retired members in the area and had a very good response," said Dave. "I must admit that I was a little nervous when I first stood up and introduced myself as the course tutor, but the nerves quickly passed and I now look forward to the weekly sessions. The retired members are very good learners, very interested and eager to learn."

Dave continues: "So far, I've had a zero drop-out rate and have even been asked to extend the course further so my students can learn more. I do hope to repeat the course for our Southampton retired members and I am also considering running a slightly more advanced course once that's complete."

11

... number of weeks Dave trained to qualify as course tutor

RAISING THE
PROFILE OF
ROWLAND HILL



Rowland Hill Fund continues to provide a vital service

Helping pensioners stay mobile and active is just one of the services the Fund provides

HELPING MEMBERS

Financial support for a young boy with a brain tumour, funds for household items, essential roof repairs and help with hospital expenses; these are just some of the many ways Rowland Hill Fund has helped people.

But although there has been an increase in requests for help, contributions to the Fund are gradually falling.

“The Fund supports pensioners facing strain due to circumstance beyond their control”

Helping hand

The Fund supports colleagues and pensioners facing unmanageable financial strain due to circumstances beyond their control, sudden illness or personal issues.

It helps current and former Royal Mail Group Limited colleagues by distributing in excess of £300,000 in grant aid every year, dealing with around 400 different cases.

For example, Terry Fleming approached the Fund via the Royal British Legion for help towards the cost of a new electric powered scooter. Terry has multiple sclerosis and his condition is slowly deteriorating. His old scooter was becoming unreliable, the batteries needed constant changing and the body work was deteriorating.

The Fund were very pleased to assist the Royal British Legion with £1,000 towards the scooter and Terry emailed the Fund

to say thank you and provided us with a picture.

He said: “I am writing to thank you for the donation. This scooter means a great deal to me as it helps me to stay active and mobile and not be reliant on others.”

Awareness raising

The Fund aims to continue to raise the awareness and profile

of the Fund and deliver support relevant to the changing times. It also hopes to encourage new contributors to join.

There is a free confidential helpline available 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week (0800 688 8777), and you can also find out more via the Fund's website.

[TO FIND OUT MORE GO TO
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REGIONAL ROUNDUPS

Midlands

Ernie Coggins, Midland region retired members' secretary, reports

The Midlands region rallied magnificently to contribute significantly to the numbers present at the Right to Work demonstration outside the Tory Party conference on October 3.

Despite the pouring rain, those participating in the march included South East, Harrow & District, Mount Pleasant, Eastern No 4, East London, Burslem, Oldham & Rochdale Amal North/Northwest London and Birmingham & District Amal – all holding banners aloft, and supported by a multitude of members from every section of the union who added greatly to the pleasure of participating in this event.

The day was rounded off by everyone returning to the Birmingham Amal offices where a delicious buffet was

laid on for participants.

I would like to say well done to everyone who attended and especially those retired members who braved the elements.

Keep The Post Public lobby of Parliament

In addition to the National Pensioners' Convention event on October 27 at Westminster, members of the CWU were also out in force at Parliament that day, in support of the campaign to Keep The Post Public. This lobby had been planned to coincide with the second reading of the Postal Services Bill, which was being debated that day.

However, the lobby was not conducted in the same way as normal. The union had, quite rightly, concluded that as we now have a coalition government it was most unlikely that those MPs would be prepared to meet

an assembled group of members in a Commons' committee room.

Instead, the union organised a briefing for all Labour MPs in a committee room – and it was packed to capacity, with Dennis Skinner making a brilliant contribution to the debate.

78% ... percentage of public that says Royal Mail sale is bad for taxpayers

With regards to CWU members whose constituency MPs are Lib Dem or Tory, the union advised that they use the 'green card' procedure to request a meeting with their MPs, which was – judging from the numbers of members talking to MPs in Westminster Hall – an opportunity that many colleagues took advantage of.

Retired members' sections

Since the last publication of

The Link we have been

very fortunate in the Midland region to have the opportunity to set up two new retired members' sections.

The Midlands No 7 branch held its inaugural meeting on October 28, electing officers and setting dates for further meetings. It also attended the



retired members' regional meeting on September 28.

On November 10, the Coventry branch held its retired members' inaugural meeting, which was very well attended with officers elected and dates set for future meetings.

I wish to place on record my appreciation to the officers of both these branches for their hard work in sending out invitations and organising the venues to enable these meetings to come to fruition.

Eastern region

Nobby Clark, Eastern regional secretary reports

Some members of Eastern region branches attended the NPC protest in October, held on College Green, near Parliament. Media attention around the green was vast as they waited for the announcements on the spending review that afternoon.

There was a good turn out of Eastern branches to the rally and lobby of Parliament for both the NPC Pensioners and Post Office privatisation events on October 27.

I got bogged down with waiting for my MP to turn up. He eventually arrived 45 minutes late and during the interview kept on looking at the clock saying "I must be away shortly".

Eastern region members also attended the Keep the Post Public event.

[SPOTLIGHT ON...] **NORTH WEST**

Graham Wilson, of the North West retired members' council, reports
Some 65 retired members gathered in November in the historic Mechanics Institute in Manchester for their annual open forum.

Labour MP Kate Green made a critical appraisal of the coalition government's policies to deal with the deficit. She spoke about the importance of universal benefits, criticised the change from Retail Price to Cost Price Index for pension increases and cast doubt on the permanency of the link to earnings for the state pension. Of greater concern, she thought, were the cuts to housing and care benefits and the savings credit. Local Authority cuts will also severely impact upon the elderly and the needy.

Kate offered cautious support for the proposed £140 per week pension because there is an intention to abolish NICs as a qualification for state pension. This will particularly benefit women. Kate was of the opinion that Ed Milliband needs some time and space to move the party towards the position he would like it to occupy. We would then see an effective and forceful opposition emerge. Meanwhile, while being vigilant, we should not simply oppose the government for the sake of it.

Stephen Lowe, policy advisor for social care at Age UK, declared funding for social care in crisis. He talked about the fact that more people living longer, needing more care at a time of economic slow down is a perfect storm. Domiciliary care is likely to see an extra



250,000 people unable to get the help they need. Personal budgets are not sufficient to buy the care needed. Of the extra £2 billion for local authorities for residential care £1bn will come from the NHS and none of it will be ring fenced. The Care Commission, expected to report in July next year, should recommend new legislation for funding and standards. In Stephen's opinion state funding is the only real effective option.

Dot Gibson, general secretary of the NPC, reminded us that at the end of the war, a mass movement for social justice led to the establishment of the NHS and the welfare state. Dot surmised, that the severe funding cuts and the privatisation of services that began with the Labour government, will increase under the new regime.

She called for a substantial increase in the basic state pension and highlighted how cuts to housing benefit, mobility allowance, the pension credit freeze and care policy will lead more elderly into poverty. The NPC is to build, with the TUC and others, an anti-cuts campaign.



STEPHEN LOWE, POLICY ADVISOR FOR SOCIAL CARE AT AGE UK, SAID MORE PEOPLE LIVING LONGER, NEEDING MORE CARE AT A TIME OF ECONOMIC SLOW DOWN IS A PERFECT STORM

Graham Wilson, North West retired members' council



[SPOTLIGHT ON...] LONDON

Brian Lee, secretary of the London retired members' regional committee, reports London pensioners came out in force to oppose an effort to take away their freedom passes.

In August, London Councils, which is a body representing the 32 London boroughs and the City of London, issued a consultation paper on the scope and management of the London Freedom Pass. This was ahead of a Parliamentary Private Bill entitled the London Local Authorities (Concessionary Fares) Bill.

Those councils behind the Bill made claims that it would have made minor changes to the Greater London Authority Act 1999 in relation to the concessionary fares scheme for older and disabled Londoners.

There was serious concern that the changes would have allowed the 32 London Boroughs and

the City of London flexibility to make unspecified changes to the concessions currently available.

The Parliamentary Private Bill contained two main proposals:

i) To hand over the 'reserve powers' currently held by the Mayor of London to settle any dispute about the scheme's future cost with Transport for London (TfL) to an "independent" arbiter.

ii) To remove the requirement for all TfL services, such as overground trains, to be included in the concession in the same way as other services such as buses and underground trains.

The executive committee of the Greater London region of the National Pensioners' Convention had dates and times when the councils were to hold meetings to discuss the Bill. These meetings were subsequently 'lobbied' by pensioner groups and other parties concerned, and councillors were also asked to vote against the proposals.

This worked because after a few council meetings, London Councils issued a letter to all borough officers stating that TfL had confirmed the withdrawal of its previous support for the Bill.

The battle was won this time, but we must be alert to this rearing its head in the future.



Raising the banner at Parliament

South east

Rod Downing, south east regional secretary, reporting

We attended the NPC demonstration at Parliament in October, meeting at midday in the Old Palace Yard and then moving onto the College Green.

Our banner attracted some attention from both television and radio media, and we did our best to get our message across that cuts in the public sector spending would result in some services for the elderly being reduced or, eventually, closed.

NPC general secretary Dot Gibson told a later rally at Parliament that the government keep telling us there is no money available to increase the basic state pension, yet we all know that there is £54 billion surplus in the National Pension Fund.

Ultimately, she said, it's the same old story, billions for bankers but peanuts for pensioners.

Mike Leahy of the TUC General Council also said the cuts were "a savage attack on the poor and the elderly", and urged pensioners to join the TUC mass demonstration on March 26 next year.

Green Party MP Caroline Lucas said: "You can make a difference; you must get out there at every opportunity and make your voices heard."

Region retired members' advisory committee 2010-2011

England

Nobby Clark
John Hodgson
Brian Lee
Ernie Purkis
Allan Trotter
Graham Wilson

Northern Ireland

Bryan Alexandra
John Martin

Scotland

Cathy Leech
James Stewart

Wales

Allan Lloyd
Joan Moxon

