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# THE LINK



THE MAGAZINE OF THE RETIRED MEMBERS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE **SUMMER 2010** [WWW.CWU.ORG](http://WWW.CWU.ORG)

## PENSIONERS IN SEARCH OF JUSTICE

Members turn out in force to  
fight for their rights at the  
NPC Parliament in Blackpool



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# ATTACK ON ONE AND ALL

**BILLY HAYES**  
**GENERAL SECRETARY**



Pensions, it would seem, are one of the targets that the new coalition government has selected for its cuts agenda. The bankers may have created the economic crisis in the first place but it is the pensioners, public sector workers and others who are going to have to pay the price.

Under the guise of "needing to address the deficit", the new government is seeking to further the neo-liberal economic revolution started by Margaret Thatcher. In a straight return to the failed Thatcherite mantra of private good/public bad, secure unionized public sector jobs

with pensions are to be replaced by lower paid insecure non-unionised private sector jobs without pensions. Workers are also to work longer prior to qualifying for retirement. The deficit is being used as an excuse for more ideological tampering.

Young and old trade unionists must come together across the generations to oppose these injustices. It will only be such unity that can hold back this assault on the most vulnerable in our society – an attack against one is an attack against all.

*Billy Hayes*

## Anti-ageism

**KEVIN SLOCOMBE**  
**HEAD OF COMMS**

There seems to be a growing sense of ageism operating in the media, with an emerging narrative that older people are of less value. The debate is often framed as older people having somehow got all the benefits for nothing, while youngsters have to struggle by paying the price. The reality, namely that pensions and other benefits have been hard won rights, is deliberately missed in an effort to build up inter-generational hostility. This destructive divide and rule narrative needs to be

challenged. As trade unionists we must do everything possible to confront ageism in all its forms in the media.



*K Slocombe*

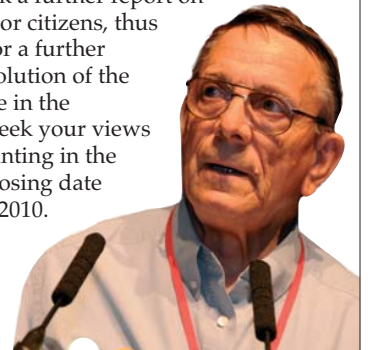
## Smoke screen

**NOBBY CLARK**  
**EDITOR & RMAC MEMBER**

As the editor of a publication like this, it can sometimes be difficult to be even minded when something you believe in is covered with a fog of uncertainty. That is what this coalition government's pronouncements of a better deal for pensioners has stirred in me.

Within the pages of this edition you will find the government's latest smoke and mirrors trick on pensions for the forthcoming year, but what really angers me is the way that, at a stroke, it has cancelled proposed funding for care that was marked up by the previous government.

As if that wasn't enough, it has announced the need to seek a further report on the care of senior citizens, thus putting back for a further period any resolution of the problem of care in the community. I seek your views for perhaps printing in the next edition, closing date November 17, 2010.



*N. Clark*

# TIME TO FIGHT

Its time to focus on the real welfare cheats in the City...

## TONY KEARNS: SENIOR DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY

Tony Kearns warns that the trade unions must be ready to fight a cuts programme that seeks to hit the most vulnerable in society while those in the banking community, most responsible for the crisis, continue with bonuses as usual



Hopefully you will all recall the "Defend the Welfare State" rally on the 10 April this year. Less than a month later the general election threw up a Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government. As predicted this Government has launched an attack on the welfare state, the elderly and public sector workers in order to pay for the deficit. In other words, anyone but those responsible for the deficit i.e. the bankers.

The cuts though are no more than an excuse for an ideological retrenchment that will see the public sector cut while the private sector is supported in its expansion to take up the slack. It marks a real return to

the discredited mantra of private good, public bad.

The role now for the trade unions is to stand and defend those who this government seeks to attack.

### Private jobs fantasy

Increasingly, voices have been raised as to the danger of cutting too severely, thereby choking off the green shoots of recovery. The Coalition Government's plans are prefaced on the private sector creating twice as many jobs now as it did at the height of the boom years of the past decade. Its fantasyland, supported by no historical equivalent growth.

The question though must be who should pay for a crisis

created largely by the reckless behaviour of an unregulated banking sector. There is real disquiet in the country that whilst we are all allegedly being asked to tighten our belts the bankers continue with business as usual. Bonuses continue to be paid, in some cases by banks that only exist today because the taxpayer bailed them out.

### Hit rich cheats

The public discourse over welfare tends to have a very limited application, restricted to the poorest members of our society. Less is said about the rich welfare beneficiaries, who live here, run their businesses on the infrastructure provided

and pay literally no tax. It has been estimated that anything up to £13.7 billion a year is lost in tax avoidance. According to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, 12 of the country's largest firms "extinguished all liabilities in 2005/6" through avoidance mechanisms.

In 1997 the 1,000 wealthiest inhabitants of these islands were worth £98 billion. A decade later they were worth £335.5 billion.

### War dividend?

Other areas that appear unjustifiably ring fenced from cutbacks are the billions wasted on the redundant Trident nuclear weapons system and the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The trade unions must oppose this unprecedented attack on working people, failure to do so will see pay, pensions, terms and conditions all cut in order that a few can make ever more wealth to the cost of the many. It's no more than a race to the bottom and it must be resisted.





## Pensioners feel effects of emergency budget

### TAXES

The coalition government's emergency Budget has resulted in no rise in the tax allowance for pensioners.

The 65-74 tax

allowance of £9,490 will remain frozen for 2010/11 and 2011/12. For those aged 75 and over the tax allowance of £9,640 will also remain frozen.

The future forecast rise of 2.5

per cent from April 2011 is for one year.

**2.5%** ...rise from April 2011

The increase under the triple lock

system is linked to the consumer prices index (CPI) measure of inflation rather than the retail price index (RPI). This will hit the payment because the RPI (currently 5.1 per

cent) is typically higher than CPI (currently 3.4 per cent). The frozen tax allowances and the use of the CPI figure will affect any benefit from a rise within the next two years.

## NPC **New Government: Same Old Problems**

NATIONAL PENSIONERS CONVENTION

DIGNITY  
- IN  
OLD AGE

### NPC Rally & Lobby of Parliament

**Wed 27 October 2010** 1pm Rally, Methodist Central Hall, followed by lobby of MPs

Call on your MP to support:

- A universal state pension set above the poverty level
- Free, non-means-tested social and long-term care

For more information contact:

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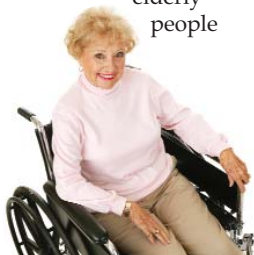
## Charity in action with the BT Benevolent Fund

### CHARITY

The BT Benevolent Fund (BTBF) exists to help current and former employees of BT, and their dependents, who are experiencing financial hardship.

The demands on the service are growing and last year the BTBF gave more than £600,000 grants to more than 650 individuals, couples and families. It also paid weekly grants to more than 200

elderly people



on very low incomes, as well as making grants to allow older people to stay independent – for example by paying for someone to do their garden, shop, clean or help with personal care.

Most of BTBF's assistance goes to ex-employees and pensioners, but it also helps around 100 current employees a year.

Recent cases included a lady of 92 who was supplied with her very first washing machine, and a former engineer with mental health problems who faced eviction. The BTBF paid his rent arrears and outstanding

electricity bill.

The BTBF also assisted an 85-year-old widow whose husband had worked for BT for 40 years, and who needed a walk-in shower. Because the

“Last year the BTBF gave more than £600,000 grants to 650 individuals, couples and families”

local authority could not fund it until 2011, the BTBF helped towards the cost of installation.

Many of the BTBF grants pay for house repairs, replacement kitchen appliances, stair lifts and mobility scooters. The Fund gets

generous support from BT, but most of its income comes from contributing members, the majority of whom are BT pensioners. What's really important is that you don't have to be a contributor to the BTBF to ask for the help it provides.

If you'd like to become a member, just call on 0845 602 9714. If you know anyone who might benefit from BTBF help, please urge them to get in touch.

● **Contact BTBF, Reading Central TE, 41 Minster Street, Reading RG1 2JB, [www.benevolent.bt.com](http://www.benevolent.bt.com), email: [benevolent@bt.com](mailto:benevolent@bt.com)**

**[ [WWW.BENEVOLENT.BT.COM](http://WWW.BENEVOLENT.BT.COM) ]**

### InBrief

#### Rich live longer

The NPC has criticised government plans to raise the retirement age as “an attack on the poor”. It points out that according to NHS figures, the life expectancy for men in Blackpool is 72.5 years, some 10.5 years fewer than their counterparts in Kensington and Chelsea. Similarly, life expectancy for women in Hartlepool is 78.1 years, some 9.6 years fewer than those in Kensington and Chelsea.

#### Dementia and depression link

A new report published in the American magazine *Neurology* suggests that dementia is twice as likely to develop in those who are depressed. The research suggests that brain chemistry and lifestyle factors, such as diet and social activity, may play a role. However, the researchers argued that the study only indicates there may be a link not a direct cause.

#### Rich are real welfare cheats

The focus of the cuts agenda has been on the poorest and most vulnerable but what of the rich benefit cheats? It has been estimated that up to £13.7 billion in tax avoidance is lost every year, while in 2005/6, 12 of the countries largest firms “extinguished all liabilities” through avoidance mechanisms, according to HM Revenue and Customs.

## Good turn out for retired members fringe meeting

### CONFERENCE

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns raised issues about the state pension and the larger reliance on private pensions at the recent retired members fringe.

The meeting, addressed by Debbie Terry, from the BT Benevolent Fund, and Ernie Dudley and Mary Jeffery, from the

Rowland Hill Fund, outlined that although it was hoped people would join the BTBF (for as little as a £1-a-week) no-one who needed help was ever turned away. The grants provided were aimed at allowing people to remain in their own homes following accident or illness, or personal difficulties. The debate that



Fringe meeting covers crucial issues

followed looked at issues such as death benefit, occupational pensions, state pensions, care in the community and the publication of *The Link*.

The chairman

asked that it also be recorded that best wishes were conveyed to Mick Ryan, RMAC member, who had suffered a stroke and was unable to attend.



# ANNUAL CONFERENCE REJECTS AGEISM

**Nobby Clark** reports on outcomes from annual conference, where members argued against age discrimination in the motion for the abolition of death benefit

Annual conference had an atmosphere dominated by the cuts agenda. This agenda concerned not only union services and budgets but also alterations to slim down the union to make savings.

Concerns were raised about union elections being held every two years, rather than annually, and there was a realisation among

**Above: Annual conference argued for equal rights for young and old**

delegates that Royal Mail's greater reliance on technology could result in a reduction in staffing levels. This in turn would mean a huge loss of membership, and could lead to a large deficit in union funding unless measures were taken.

## **Death benefit changes**

With this agenda in the background, the conference opened with the Standing Orders Committee moving

the carriage of the standing orders to conference.

Upon reference backs and appeals being heard against motions to the conference, support was won on the reference back of **Motion 44**. This motion by the NEC, ably spoken against by Ernie Coggins, sought the support of conference to gain agreement to bring rule changes to conference 2011 to abolish the death benefit for retired members.

165

... number of pounds the government recognises to be the poverty line



Ernie argued that the wording of the motion was ageist and discriminated against one section of the union membership and should not be allowed on the agenda.

The conference supported the argument and the motion was withdrawn.

I'm sure we have not seen the last of the NEC's efforts to dispense with death benefit. There will no doubt be further challenges in the

future, based purely on the union's projected financial position.

#### **Motions passed**

The following motions of concern to our constituency were also passed:

**Motion 4**, to obtain a constitution for the National TUC Pensions Committee, was accepted by the NEC without debate. Readers may wonder why this needs to go before conference for

explanation. The reasons are that, currently, a committee consisting of delegates from the unions meet at the TUC to discuss pensions and pensioners' problems four times a year. Just recently, it was discovered that a proposition being put forward from the committee to amend TUC General Council's pension policy for the benefit of today's pensioners could not be actioned as there was no constitution allowing the committee to do so. This caused great concern among the union delegates present and a decision was taken to place propositions by individual delegates to their unions in order to right this wrong.

**Motion 9**, seeking that the union adopt a policy of achieving a state pension above the official poverty level, also passed unanimously. The government recognises the figure on the poverty level as being £165 per week.

#### **Youth awareness**

Another motion was passed to increase the awareness of pension schemes for younger members, following a very valid point made in the debate that many younger members have no idea of the changing pensions options and their options for the future.

A further motion was also passed, instructing the NEC to campaign through its links with the trade union movement and others for greater funding for research into dementia.





# PENSIONERS IN SEARCH OF JUSTICE

**Graham Wilson**, NW retired members secretary & RMAC member, reports from Blackpool's National Pensioners Convention Parliament where members discussed crucial issues such as pensioner poverty, cuts to social services, and the rich and poor divide

**T**he National Pensioners Convention (NPC) began with a march in the pouring rain through the streets of Blackpool to the Winter Gardens.

The opening session was chaired by Rodney Bickerstaffe, with a panel made up of Dot Gibson, general secretary of the NPC; Angela Eagle MP, Shadow Minister for Pensions; Ruth Marks, Commissioner for Older People in Wales; and Tony Watts of *Mature Times*.

Rodney expressed his annoyance that the new coalition government had decided not to send a representative as both Conservative and Lib Dems had done in previous years, and said the NPC will work with any government that is fair and honest, whatever its colours. His opinion was echoed by others on the platform.

Questioned about cuts in public services, Dot Gibson said although pensioners

hadn't caused the economic mess it looked as though they were going to pay for it. She said the NPC will resist any cuts to frontline services that affect pensioners. Angela Eagle pointed out that a consultation process on cuts to social services and care had been announced. She was concerned that taking £6 billion out of the economy this year will cause a double dip recession and hopes that the opposition can work with the NPC to resist the proposed cuts. Ruth Marks said the prevention of society's ills would be better than a cure and therefore there should be investment in services.

## **Pensioner poverty**

In response to a question about pensioner poverty, Angela Eagle defended the Labour government's record and listed the improvements made during its 13 years in power. However, she acknowledged there were still too many pensioners living in poverty and still ►

► much to do. Dot Gibson felt the key to addressing poverty was to raise the basic state pension to the official poverty level of £165 per week, insisting that this would be affordable by using the surplus in the National Insurance Fund and the resulting savings in means-tested benefits.

**Point of need**

On the question of how to pay for social care, Dot said the NPC manifesto states that the aim for long-term and social care is for it to be free at the point of need and paid for through general taxation. Angela Eagle felt national insurance contributions should be used.

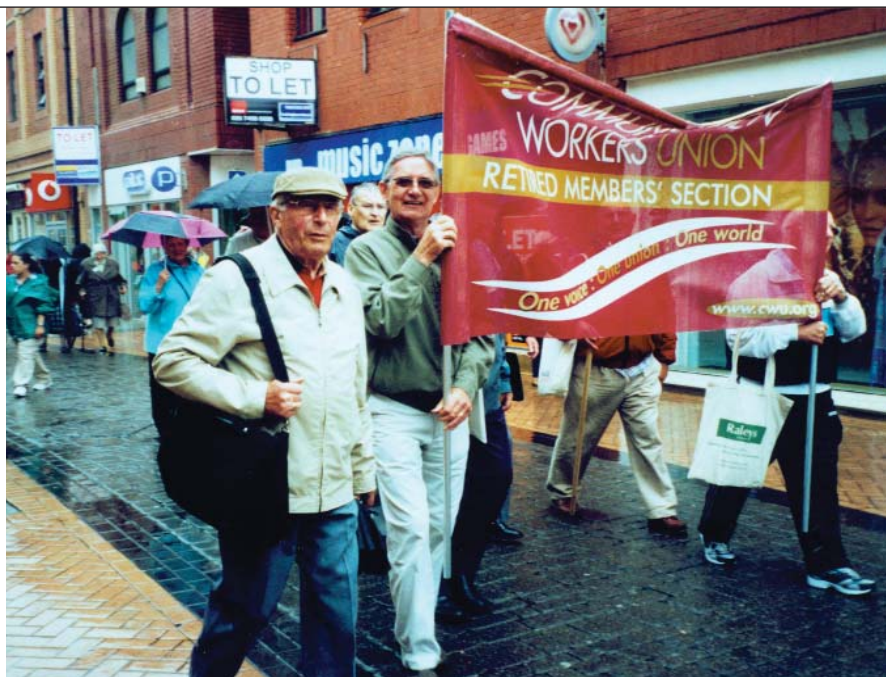
Other topics of discussion included winter deaths, travel concessions, Post Office closures and privatisation, carers' allowances, and elder abuse.

**Forum for discussion**

The following day was split into six forums, which covered subjects from social care and free travel to the future of pensions and devolved government.

It was particularly interesting to learn from Clive Evers, from the Alzheimer's Society, about the different types of Alzheimer's and dementia and how the needs of sufferers vary widely according to the type and the stage to which the condition has progressed. He pointed out that many workers in the caring industry are poorly paid, poorly trained and often lack understanding, which leads to inappropriate prescriptions of drugs and a general lack of quality care.

Gary Fitzgerald, from Action on Elder Abuse, echoed Clive's thoughts but said that most



**Above:** Marching to conference through the wet streets of Blackpool

**Below:** Members warned of more cuts in social care

abuse was committed by relatives and friends of the sufferer in their own homes.

Dame Jo Williams of the Care Quality Commission said the CQC is the newly formed independent regulator for all health and adult social care in England and has the responsibility to monitor and inspect all health and care establishments. She acknowledged that it was a mammoth task and that not all care homes would be registered until the autumn.

**Travel at home and abroad**

The 'Putting the Record Straight on Free Travel' session was designed to consider the benefits of free travel and address inaccurate information surrounding cost and administration of concessionary travel.

Explanation was given of the problems surrounding cost and administration of the scheme and the way it was intended to progress to create a

joint bus and rail card.

The 'Pensioners across Europe' session, meanwhile, looked at the challenges faced in all European countries, with speakers Françoise Vagner, former general secretary of the French union, UCS-CGT, and Liz Mestheneos, president of AGE Platform Europe.

**Rich and poor divide**

A later session focused on the future of pensions. Neil Duncan-Jordan, the NPC national officer, discussed how Britain had become one of the richest nations yet had 2.5 million pensioners living in comparative poverty. Acknowledging that the campaigning environment will become increasingly difficult over the next few years, he said the previous Labour government had done little to ease the situation and he had no faith it would be any better with the new coalition.

Successive governments have shown they want to reduce the role of the





**Above left & right:** Rain showers didn't dampen the spirits of the Retired Members' Section

basic state pension (BSP) in favour of private pensions and means-tested benefits. Quite apart from the fact that means-testing doesn't work (millions of people don't claim their entitlement), it is plainly unfair to those people whose income is a little above the threshold. Neil asserted that the prospects for future pensioners are worse than for the current generation.

#### **The rise and fall**

The promised restoration of linking BSP to earnings is not enough. A substantial rise is needed first in order to lift pensioners out of poverty. In addition, the shortly to be introduced National Employment Savings Trust (NEST), which will be funded by contributions from employers, employees and government for those employees who are not members of a company scheme, is not likely to yield more than about £3,000 per year. It is not enough to

eliminate means-testing without a decent rise in BSP. Neil suggested this was a golden opportunity for insurance companies to make "pots of money" because they will hardly need to pay out for any pensions for decades. Neil insisted there was no political will to improve the BSP, even if there were governments that could find the means to do it, not least by using the surplus in the National Insurance Fund.

Neil said he believed the state pension will be more, not less important in the future, and the only way to improve it will be to mobilise current pensioners, as well as workers.

#### **Devolution impact**

Another Blackpool convention forum concerned the challenges facing pensioners in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This session looked at how devolved government had affected older people and considered how many benefits had been secured for them as a

result. Speakers included Ruth Marks, Commissioner for Older People Wales, Bill Carson, Age Sector Northern Ireland, and John Story, Older People and Age Team Scottish Government.

#### **Ageism and exit fees**

The last day of the convention began with a forum addressing whether the media is ageist. This session considered how older people and their concerns were portrayed in the media and what could be done better. A session on age equality also considered how equality legislation tackled age discrimination and what needed to be done.

A really interesting session on pensioners and housing looked at the importance of sheltered housing and site warden. There was also a focus on issues facing those in leasehold retirement properties, looking at the need for legislation to regulate exorbitant exit fees and service charges.

# CHEQUE OUT TIME

With a 40 per cent reduction in the use of cheques in the last five years, the UKPC has confirmed its target to end their use by 2018. Here, we look at the impact of this decision on pensioners and small businesses, and some of the “acceptable alternatives” in the pipeline

The board of the UK Payment Council (UKPC) has set the date to phase out cheques in a bid to encourage the advance of other forms of payment.

Though the history of cheques dates back some 350 years, the UKPC, the body responsible for setting out the British national payment strategy, said there should be “no scenario” for using cheques by 2018. The decision will be greeted with disappointment by some small businesses and consumers.

Experts have been looking for alternatives to the cheque for some time, after the board described the payment method as “in terminal decline”. The target date for the closure of the system that processes cheques has been set for October 31, 2018.

However, there will be annual checks on the progress of other payments systems and a final review of the decision in 2016.

“The goal is to ensure that by 2018 there is no scenario where customers, individuals or businesses, still need to use a cheque,” said a UKPC statement. “The

12.4<sup>bn</sup>

... number of personal cheque payments made in 1990

board will be especially concerned that the needs of elderly and vulnerable people are met.”

Though the four independent members of the board – who are not from the banking industry – voted in favour of setting the target date, the decision was not unanimous.

The UKPC accepted that cheques were still used for payments to sole traders, small businesses, clubs, charities and schools.

Now it wants to find “easy-to-use efficient alternatives” to the cheque which are understood by everybody.

“Customers are not likely to see any immediate change as the target date is still a long way off,” said Paul Smee, chief executive of the UKPC.

“There are many more efficient ways of making payments than by paper in the 21st century and the time is ripe for the economy as a whole to reap the benefits of its replacement. But real challenges lie ahead if we are

going to be comfortable to wave goodbye to the cheque, which undeniably occupies a unique place in British culture.”



## Alternative methods

Banks and credit providers have been investing in chips, which allow a customer to pay when the chip is pushed against a sensor, known as contactless technology.

The use of mobile phones to allow people to make payments is also regularly promoted as the future of payments systems.

But charities representing older people have said that paper-based payment systems should be available for those who are not comfortable with



the new technology.

"We are concerned that this (decision) will give the green light to banks and retailers to start phasing them out even sooner (than 2018)," said Andrew Harrop of Age Concern and Help the Aged. "The Payments Council needs to urgently come up with some practical alternatives to replace cheques or it will be condemning thousands of older people to extra worry, cost and financial insecurity."

Dot Gibson of the NPC said: "This is such a selfish

decision, made by people who are clearly out of touch with the way millions of older pensioners manage their affairs."

### Analysis

Considering a life without cheques leaves many people unsure about how they might pay workmen, such as a plumber or a builder.

The answer could be in technology that allows people to transfer money by mobile phone, or cheap and efficient debit card readers that could

be used by small businesses.

If that happens, it could also lessen the demand for cash, and the mobile phone could become a virtual wallet.

Many stores, including all the major UK supermarket chains, have chosen to stop accepting cheques as shoppers have turned to debit cards or stick with cash. Cheques are also the most expensive form of transaction for shops.

The cheque's predecessor was the 'bill of exchange' – a way for traders to buy and sell goods without the need to carry cumbersome and valuable quantities of gold and silver.

The earliest cheque in the UK was thought to have been written 350 years ago, dated February 16 and made out for £400, and signed by Nicholas Vanacker. It was made payable to a Mr Delbo, and drawn on Messrs Morris and Clayton – scribes and bankers of the City of London.

In the early days, cheques were used relatively infrequently, and mainly by merchants and traders for high-value transactions. But they had to be confident that these handwritten pieces of paper could be guaranteed, so they were often issued by goldsmiths within a local network of traders who knew and trusted each other.

Later on, printing processes meant that cheques started to be used by customers of commercial banks, with personal cheque payment volumes reaching a peak of 12.4 billion in 1990. Since then, the numbers of cheques used has fallen steadily to a low of 663 million in 2008.

**Above:** The UKPC have signed the death warrant for the cheque

**Left:** Post 2018, electronic forms of payment could turn mobiles and computers into virtual wallets

# REGIONAL ROUNDUPS

## Midlands

Ernie Coggins, Midlands region retired members' secretary, reports...

As you will read elsewhere in this edition, the national rally and demonstration in London, on April 10, went off very well despite having to compete with the Grand National and the FA Cup semi final at Wembley but, as demonstrated by the general election results, it was not successful enough to sway the electorate's opinions into keeping a Labour government in office. The Midland Region's retired members once again gave excellent support to the rally with 26 attendees from Birmingham and at least 14 from other branches in our region.

which the NEC sought to abolish the death benefit for retired members. The basis of our argument was that this motion was discriminatory against one section of the union's membership and as such should not be allowed on the agenda (read the full story on page 6). Conference agreed and overwhelmingly supported our argument. However, this doesn't mean that the threat has gone away, it only means that the NEC will need to reconsider their approach to this issue.



working in order to support themselves. We think that, despite the fiscal deficit left to us by the former government, that is the fairest way to proceed."

John Robertson said he was somewhat disappointed with this response because Justine had not identified exactly how she would support elderly people at a time when cuts will be made all over the country and effect everyone, including pensioners.

He asked what priority she would give to pensioners and what kind of increased payments will be made to cover some of the cuts, which will hit pensioners harder than anyone else?

In reply, Greening said: "The honourable gentleman seems to have missed the fact that this government is having to tidy up a huge financial mess left to us by the previous one. We have made it clear that, despite that mess, we want, first, to protect key pensioner benefits – the benefits that Labour members claimed we would take away – such as free bus passes, free prescriptions, free eye tests and the winter fuel allowance. That is a range of benefits that the Labour Party said we would remove, but we are going to keep them.

## Bedtime reading for insomniacs

If you find you need something to help you get off to sleep at night, try reading the Hansard reports of the activities of our representatives in Westminster!

Occasionally, however, you do discover an entry that makes you sit-up-and-take-notice. One such entry appeared on June 8, 2010 (Column 161), where John Robertson, MP for Glasgow North West, asked if the government would assess the merits of increasing the level of financial assistance to pensioners through the tax system. Responding, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Justine Greening, declared: "This government is committed to supporting pensioners to ensure that they can live with the respect and dignity they deserve. We have already said that we will restore the earnings link, protect key pensioner benefits and ensure that the retirement age can rise if pensioners want to continue

**1.8m** ...number of pensioners in poverty in the UK 2008/9

"I can assure him on that, so he can go back to the pensioners in his constituency and explain why he was telling them mistruths during the last election."

Also on the same day, the Coventry MP, Jim Cunningham, asked the minister what his most recent estimate was of the number



## General Election, May 6

I'm very proud to say that most of our retired members' sections were able to provide volunteers to assist in their local constituencies during the election campaign, and, in a number of cases, proved to be the mainstay in delivering publicity material to the electorate. Why are the Labour Party hierarchy so vehemently opposed to using the tried and tested method of canvassing votes by knocking-on-doors?!

Fortunately, in all except two of the 16 constituencies where retired members worked, the seats were retained by Labour, albeit on reduced majorities.

The two that were lost – despite the sterling work performed by Joe O'Neill – were Northampton North and South.

## CWU General Conference, May 23 & 24

Conference supported our reference back of motion 44 in

of pensioners living in poverty in (a) the UK and (b) Coventry.

In response, Steve Webb said: "The most commonly used measure of poverty relates to those with incomes below 60 per cent of contemporary median income, after housing costs.

"The latest figures for the UK are published in the *Households Below Average Income* series, and show that in 2008/9 there were 1.8 million pensioners in poverty (16 per cent of all pensioners). Figures are quoted to the nearest 100,000 and percentages to the nearest whole percentage point.

"Estimates of poverty only allow a breakdown of the overall numbers in poverty at Government Office Region level. Therefore, information is available for the West Midlands Government Office Region, but not available for the city of Coventry. Three-year averages are used to report regional statistics as single-year estimates and are subject to volatility. The latest information relates to 2006/07 to 2008/09 in which there were around 200,000 pensioners in poverty (16 per cent) in the West Midlands Government Office Region."

He continued: "This Government will restore the earnings link for the basic pension from April 2011, with a 'triple guarantee' that pensions are raised by the highest of earnings, prices or 2.5 per cent. We will help prevent people from falling into poverty in later life by simplifying the rules relating to pensions to help reinvigorate occupational pensions. We will encourage companies to offer high-quality pensions to all and will work with businesses and the industry to support auto-enrolment."

So there you have it – the promises regarding both pensioner benefits and future pensions recorded in the Official Parliamentary records.

I wonder how many of those promises will be broken in the coming months?

## [SPOTLIGHT ON...] LONDON

Brian Lee, secretary of the London retired members' regional committee, reports...

The latest meeting of the London region was held on April 22 and our guest for the meeting was NEC member Lesley McLean, who also sits on the RMAC. Lesley did not address the meeting but stayed for the duration and took part in debate wherever she thought she could make a useful contribution.

I am pleased to report that more London branches, especially postal, have formed a retired members' section. Also, more branches are affiliating to the Greater London NPC.

We will continue to urge branches to form retired members' sections. After all, if they have retired members, then these members should have a voice.

The next London region meeting will be held on July 22 at 11am and will take place at 33/41, Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BB. All visitors are welcome.

### Sound beating

The British National Party (BNP) was beaten out of site at the local council and



Lesley McLean joined the debate in London

general elections in Barking and Dagenham. At the previous council elections the BNP became the second largest party, behind Labour.

At the May elections the Labour Party took all 51 council seats and Margaret Hodge retained her seat with a much larger majority. The BNP were pushed back into a poor third. The CWU headquarters and London region gave great support to the Unite Against Fascism campaign.



WE WILL CONTINUE TO URGE BRANCHES TO FORM RETIRED MEMBERS' SECTIONS. AFTER ALL, IF THEY HAVE RETIRED MEMBERS, THESE MEMBERS SHOULD HAVE A VOICE

Brian Lee, secretary of the London retired members' committee



## [SPOTLIGHT ON...] NORTH EAST

Danny Sloan, North East retired members' regional secretary, reports... Mike Findlay's MND Charity Day held on Saturday June 5 started with a musical morning in Marske by the Sea (which raised £844), and a large number of people took part in the afternoon charity walk from Marske to Redcar, for which donations are still coming in.

Mike also visited Buckingham Palace last month to receive his award from the Queen.

I would also like to place on record, as the North East regional secretary, the

thanks of the retired members of this region for the way that the proposition regarding the death benefit was thrown out at annual conference.

I was at the conference and wholeheartedly give my congratulations to Ernie Coggins and Ernie Purkis in the way they dealt with the motion.

It is the view of this retired section of the union that through the RMAC we make sure that the NEC does not try to do anything with the death benefit that would undermine the recruitment of potential retired members.

## [SPOTLIGHT ON...] EASTERN

Nobby Clark, Eastern regional secretary, reports...

As Saturday April 10 dawned bright and clear, I was travelling by coach from my home to Peterborough to join up with trade unionists and Peterborough Pensioners Group for an onward journey to London. The reason for our travel was to join a march and rally, organised by the NPC and

supported by the unions, to defend the welfare state and public services.

On arrival at the embankment near Westminster in London we were greeted by the sight of a very large crowd all waving banners of various shapes and sizes and all in very good spirits. CWU activists from branches all over the UK met up and marched behind an Eastern No 5 branch banner (as the national retired members banner was unavailable), and proceeded up the embankment, past the Houses of Parliament, up Whitehall and into Trafalgar Square where the rally was being held.

While we were marching, we didn't realise how many people were involved but afterwards it was estimated that more than 10,000 people attended the speeches. The volume of people on the march that showed concern over their public services must surely be taken into account by the government.

I found it very worthwhile and was pleased to see so many CWU people around.



### South West

Ken Ward, assistant secretary South West region, reports...

Some branches in the South West area don't send delegates to this forum, and we'd like to see more.

As a regional council, we debate on many issues effecting retired members and issues impacting pensioners in general, and pursue these via rallies and also at annual conference.

It would be nice to see other branches within our area, who have set up retired members' sections and receive rebates from union headquarters, at this forum because they can have their say on issues affecting members in their region. I wonder if this problem occurs in other regions and, if so, how we should encourage members to attend?

### 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