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THE MAGAZINE OF THE RETIRED MEMBERS’ ADVISORY COMMITTEE

BLACKPOOL ACTIVISTS
Page 8/9 Pensioners convene to bring back trade union values
When I stood in the election to be general secretary earlier this year, I said that I wanted our retired members to play a full role in the union and particularly to be fully engaged in our campaign work. I reiterate this today.

I know many of you are among our most passionate and knowledgeable members about the challenges we face and you will appreciate that there has not been a more important time for the union to stand up for the people we represent in recent years.

We face five more years of austerity, growing inequality, a housing crisis and increasing levels of pensioner poverty as living costs continue to rise. Alongside this we now have the prospect of an all-out attack on the labour movement with the Trade Union Bill which is just as significant as the Thatcher-era restrictions imposed upon us.

We need to re-assert trade union values in the UK and to fundamentally shift the balance of forces in the world of work and wider society.

Over the coming months I will be engaging with the RMAC about the campaign and as trade unionists I would like to ask you to all play a role in this.

The election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader has delivered a change many of us thought we would never see and has offered the labour movement hope of achieving change.

If we are to stand any chance of success we will need all our members to join together and I hope you will all help us make the positive case for unions in society today.

When will this government leave pensioners alone?

The so called austerity cuts are making it very hard for many pensioners to exist, let alone live. A report from AgeUK has found 1.6 million pensioners living in poverty – these are the ones you don’t hear about, the majority, not the Alan Sugars.

We have been warned what to expect, means-testing for the free TV licence if over 75, reduction of bus travel concessions and cutting of the Christmas bonus etc. etc.

If you’re not already a member of the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) why not join and take part in your local regional NPC. It is important to be ready for the fight.
ELDERLY GIVE MORE THAN THEY TAKE

TONY KEARNS: SENIOR DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY

The news that billions in benefits due to pensioners are going unclaimed certainly puts a different spin on the welfare agenda.

A report from AgeUK, drawing on government figures, has found that £3.7 billion of benefits went unclaimed for 2013/14. The same report found that 1.6 million pensioners now live in poverty, with 900,000 in severe poverty. These figures need to be borne in mind when the right wing - media are spinning the intergenerational conflict line that the elderly are getting everything at the cost of the young. The elderly are clearly not, many are really struggling to get by. To put the scenario of failing to pick up benefits in context, imagine for a moment a banker failing to pick up his or her bonus – unthinkable? Yes.

Net benefit
It has been good over recent months to see organisations like the NPC stressing the value of elderly people to the economy. They have highlighted the contribution made with voluntary care provided for children, grandchildren and adults, together with taxes paid on earnings and savings. The NPC estimate that the elderly contribute £40bn more than they take out in pensions, benefits and care costs. It is important to keep pushing home this message, particularly now with this rampant Conservative government that knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. The next five years are going to be tough for working people across the board. Chancellor George Osborne has already shown where his priorities lie, with the first budget, slashing even more money from those on the lower rungs of the income scale, whilst rewarding the bosses at the top. The government has also signalled that it is going to attempt to destroy anything that gets in the way of the pursuit of its fundamentalist creed.

So trade unions loom large in its sights, with legislation proposed to force minimum 50 per cent turnouts on strike ballots, with 40 per cent having to vote in favour. Agency workers are also to be used to break strikes. This from a government elected by just 24 per cent of the population – hardly a popular mandate.

Battle lines drawn
The unions will be crucial for all generations seeking to defend their most basic rights. Times are going to be tough but the labour movement can once again overcome. There has been a new injection of energy to the struggle since the election result, with growing numbers appalled at the prospects of bigger bankers’ bonuses, whilst the queues at the foodbanks grow ever longer. There is a key role to play in the fightback and retired members, with their experience of past battles have a key role to play.
Police launch campaign to halt rise in identity crime

Crime Prevention

Police forces have launched a campaign to raise awareness of identity crimes in the UK.

The Not With my Name campaign, produced in partnership with the City of London Police (the national policing lead for fraud), highlights the risk of identity crime in the UK.

It is believed that one in four adults have fallen victim to identity crime, with each losing on average £1,200 each. The total loss to the UK adult population is estimated to be £3.3 billion.

Identity fraud is on the rise with a 27 per cent increase in the first quarter of 2015. Findings also show that men are 1.7 times more likely than women to have their identity stolen.

Not With my Name will highlight how people can protect their personal information by creating safe passwords, protecting internet devices, dealing with unsolicited phone calls and emails, and safely storing and disposing of mail.

The messages will be shared across the country by 35 local police forces and other organisations, including Get Safe Online, Cifas, FFA UK, Age UK and Experian.

City of London Police Commander Steve Head, who is the Police National Coordinator for Economic Crime, said: “What many of us do not appreciate is the sheer scale of the problem. To really get to grips with identity crime requires us to come together and share advice on how to protect our personal information at home, in the workplace and while out in public places.

“Following the top tips provided by the Not With my Name campaign will help people better understand the nature and scale of the threat they face which in turn will hopefully make them much less likely to fall victim to this type of offence.”

Charity claims pensioners failing to claim billions in benefits

ENTITLEMENTS

A report from AgeUK has found that pensioners are failing to claim billions of pounds of benefits due to them. The report of AgeUK’s chief economist, based on government figures, found that £3.7 billion of benefits designed to help low-income pensioners go unclaimed each year.

The report found that pensioner poverty has been creeping upward over the past decade. So, the number of people living below the poverty threshold increased from 13 per cent in 2012/13 to 14 per cent in 2013/14. And, there are now 1.6 million pensioners estimated to be living in poverty, with 900,000 living in severe poverty, according to the charity.

Figures show that 1.3m entitled to pension credit in 2013/14 did not take up the benefit. This was worth £2.86bn in total, £2,132 per person per year.

Some 260,000 pensioners missed out on housing benefit in the same period, a loss of £820m or £3,224 per person.

Caroline Abrahams, charity director for Age UK, said: “This report shows that the older population is increasingly diverse and characterised by stubbornly persistent levels of poverty.

“Worryingly, the poorest pensioners are losing ground fastest, leading to a widening gap between the haves and have-nots among those in retirement.

“We urgently need a concerted effort to help the most vulnerable. Better access to good quality information and advice, and increased take-up of pensioner benefits would be a good start.

“A national strategy with firm targets and workable solutions is also long overdue. Ultimately we want to see pensioner poverty halved by 2020 but in the meantime, ensuring that the poorest pensioners receive all the help to which they are entitled would make a huge difference to many lives.”
George Durack wins freedom of Islington

HONOURS
George Durack, 90, has received one of the highest local honours, the freedom of the Borough of Islington.

George received his award at a ceremony held at the town hall. He won the recognition due to decades of work in the borough, including being chairman of the Islington Pensioners’ Forum.

The son of a merchant seaman, he was born in White Lion Street at Angel, attended York Way primary school and then the former Gifford Street School, which he left at the age of 14. He was a messenger boy for the now defunct Daily Sketch and then a plumber before becoming a postman. He also saw action as a member of the Seventh Army Rifle Brigade in the Second World War.

As a postman George covered the Hampstead area from 1956-1989, delivering to Hugh Gaitskell and Michael Foot. “Gaitskell was a decent man but tended to look down his nose a bit, but Foot was a jolly man and a gentleman,” said George.

George became full-time branch secretary for the North West London Branch of the CWU for 14 years. He became an Islington councillor for Junction Ward in 1990 and served four years under the then leader Margaret Hodge.

George cared for his wife Vera, who was ill with a heart condition before her death in 1991. He has seen the horrors of war and watched his wife’s life ebb away. His principles keep him strong and he has always been a member of the Labour Party and takes great pride in his MP Jeremy Corbyn.

Cost of medicines to be printed on packet

MEDICATION
The government is hoping to reduce the cost of wasted medication by informing patients of the cost to NHS of the drugs they are prescribed.

As of next year, the packaging of all medicines costing more than £20 will come with the cost of the drug to the NHS printed on the label.

Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt said that people who use NHS services need to know that in the end they are paying the price of waste.

The Government will start the work to develop the new packaging this year, with the aim to implement the changes by next year.

“People who use our services need to know that in the end they pay the price for this waste. So today I can announce that we intend to publish the indicative medicine costs to the NHS on the packs of all medicines costing more than £20, which will also be marked; ‘Funded by the UK taxpayer’,,” said Hunt. “This will not just reduce waste by reminding people of the cost of medicine, but also improve patient care by boosting adherence to drug regimes. I will start the processes to make this happen this year, with an aim to implement it next year.”
The workplace at present is full of uncertainties and insecurity. But one thing is certain. The workforce is getting older and workers, by choice or necessity, are working longer. So what are employers and trade unions doing about this major demographic shift?

Employers frequently bemoan the shortage of relevant skills yet allow experience and skills to leave through early retirement or redundancy. Trade unions focus on pension rights for older workers whilst sometimes failing to ask older workers what they want from their employers.

A recent report from the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) stated that there are currently over 1.5 million workers over the age of 50 in health and social work and more than 1.2 million in both education and retail. It is doubtful that the replacements for these workers will be fully covered by school leavers. Many industries have poor retention records regarding older workers, seeing a large drop-off between the ages of 45–49 and 60–64.

Skilled staff
The CIPD report points in particular to finance, public administration and Information Communication Technologies, all of which saw a drop of greater than 60 per cent between the number of workers employed in their late forties compared to late sixties. Such falls would suggest that these sectors are not doing enough to support...
longer working lives and will be hampered by the loss of skilled and experienced staff.

The TUC is currently engaged in a European funded research project Workage. The three-year project is being led by Nottingham Trent University in partnership with Workplace Innovation Limited. It aims to inform policy guidelines about the engagement and retention of older workers through the application of workplace interventions.

The TUC-commissioned research looked at the challenges and opportunities for trade unions in representing an ageing workforce. It produced seven key recommendations and, in particular, recognised the diversity within the older workforce. The different groups included those that delay retirement because they want to, those that are compelled to work longer for economic reasons and others who want to work but are prevented from doing so for health reasons. Trade unions need to provide support in many different ways to meet these diverse needs and workplace interventions offer a solution to some of them.

Workage is concerned with four areas – work organisation, structures and work systems, learning and reflection, and worker engagement.

Collaboration

Workage is identifying and piloting non-age related workplace interventions that enhance the engagement of workers aged over 50 and delay the intention to retire. Specifically, the interventions will focus on workplace innovation practices that enable people at all levels of an organisation to use and develop their skills to the fullest possible extent during their working lives.

Collaboration

Workage is concerned with four areas – work organisation, structures and work systems, learning and reflection, and worker engagement.

Throughout the project participation of the workforce and their trade unions has been entirely voluntary and the output of the interventions will be monitored and evaluated during and at the end of the project.

Although only currently half-way through the project, benefits are already being identified in workplaces where the project is taking place. In Stoke, the mobile cleaning team have seen their ideas taken up and front-line workers now participate in monthly meetings with management.

In the maternity unit in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, the project has resulted in multi-disciplinary team meetings now taking place monthly, improving participation and removing duplication. In both cases the introduction of greater participation of workers at all levels is resulting in improved morale and a sense of well being.

The project team will be measuring the impact of the interventions and will return to undertake another survey of all staff after 12 months to evaluate the work and examine what, if any, impact the interventions might have on older workers and retirement decisions.

The three-year project is designed to develop workplace policy/practice solutions that can inform government policy on older workers and the workplace.

The project will conclude in 2016 with major presentations being held across Europe.

● More detailed information about the project and the outcomes of the pilot schemes can be obtained from the project web site at www.workage.eu or by contacting Roger Jeary on rogerjeary@btinternet.com
PENSIONERS FIGHT FIVE FURTHER YEARS OF TORY-LED AUSTERITY

John Thorne of London Region reports on a Pensioners Parliament that met during the aftershock of the Tory election victory to face the prospect of five more years of austerity.

Newly elected CWU general secretary Dave Ward called for the mounting of a defence of the welfare state amid growing threats from the Tory government.

Addressing the National Pensioners Convention’s Parliament in Blackpool, Dave declared that it was an urgent task for the trade union and labour movement to “reassert trade union values in society.”

The UK needs a “new agenda for workers,” which recognises that companies must share their success with their workforce, he continued, adding that the current neo-liberal economic model must be challenged and renationalisation must be on the agenda.

Dave attacked the newly-elected Conservative government’s plan to cut some £12 billion from the social security budget, insisting that “the welfare state must be defended.”

And, looking ahead to the forthcoming debate over the UK’s continuing membership of the European Union, he argued that the labour and trade union movement must not offer Prime Minister David Cameron unconditional support in his negotiations with the EU leadership.

If Mr Cameron returns from these negotiations with a new deal that is damaging for workers’ rights, then the labour movement must unite against it, he declared.

The Pensioners Parliament began with the traditional march along Blackpool front to the Winter Gardens. There, Mayor, Cllr Peter Callow welcomed delegates, informing them of the government’s £40 million contribution toward the purchase of the Winter Gardens, Tower and Golden Mile which are being improved and updated. He hoped we would return in future years.

“We are living in the shadow of Thatcher and her failed ideology, we want a new philosophy,” said Natalie.

The leader of the Green Party urged people to attend anti-austerity marches and support London’s bike couriers who are fighting for better pay. She condemned companies and the rich for not paying proper wages and taxes. Everyone should have a decent quality of life, she said.

Paul Nowak, TUC assistant general secretary, declared the Tory election win as a shattering result for workers and pensioners. It meant the need to organise against the ideological cuts that will affect the poor and vulnerable was all the more urgent. “We must work and campaign against privatisation, the dismantling of the welfare state, low pay and employer exploitation,” said Paul.

NPC general secretary, Dot Gibson highlighted the growing campaign for a decent care system. She reiterated that pensioners today are fighting for the pensioners of tomorrow, not ourselves. “We support the
TUC and union campaigns for a decent state pension and the young generation need to be catered for in any policies,” said Dot, who highlighted how local authority cuts have seen a reduction in pensioner and care groups and lack of support facilities.

Dr Brenda Boardman, of the Environmental Change Institute, discussed how fuel poverty and high energy costs are being ignored by the government. Some 80,000 homes are rated very inefficient and it would cost £3,000 each for the installation of better equipment and insulation.

A campaign is needed for fuel-efficient homes, and protection against loss of the winter fuel allowance, which the Government is likely to reduce or take away.

Carla Cantone, general secretary of the Italian Pensioners Association, spoke about the many state benefits available in Europe, but these were not enough to help the young and the old.

A code was required supporting dignity and eliminating poverty to protect the old after a lifetime of work. Organisations and unions need to work towards a European Charter and support an inter-generational alliance. Italy is working in this direction.

On the second day, delegates attended specialist sessions including topics such as the NHS, privatisation, pensions, digital exclusion, social care and dementia, accessible transport and money matters.

Addressing the questions posed by the next five years of austerity, Professor Christina Beatty, of Sheffield Hallam University, predicted a changing welfare state, involving cuts aimed more at working age people but which will affect communities and workers retiring in the future.

The impact would not be spread equally across the country with the North East, North West and South Wales hit hardest. The prosperous South, except coastal towns, would fare better.

Despite government policy to get people into work, low incomes and cuts in welfare will still hit the poorest hardest. More information can be found on the Sheffield Hallam University reports website. www.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr.

Dot Gibson confirmed that the NPC and Generations United were working for common aims to ensure young people can prosper during their working life and enjoy retirement in old age.

She called for unions and the NPC to organise and strengthen with a programme of opposition to austerity. She also called on academics to delve into the figures and provide arguments in support of opposition. Dot warned delegates the next five years will be a struggle for pensioners.
ELDERLY ARE AN ASSET NOT A COST

Brian Lee highlights the positive contribution the elderly make to society and calls on members to get involved in the National Pensioners Convention

Every week, a politician, think-tank or media commentator suggests that the country can no longer afford its older generation. They claim that pensioners have escaped the austerity and cuts and should now lose their universal benefits – free bus travel, winter fuel allowance, TV licences for the over 75s and free prescriptions. But this attack must be resisted.

Look at the positive contribution pensioners make to society?

- Every year, pensioners add £40 billion more to the economy than they receive in pensions, care and benefits.
- Pensioners pay tax, either on their income or indirectly.
- Many charities would not exist without older volunteers.
- Millions of young families rely on grandparents to provide unpaid childcare, and many older people also look after their spouses without any additional financial support.

Why are universal benefits so important?

- They save money through the prevention of problems eg. free bus travel cuts down on loneliness.
- They enable older people to play an active role in society.
- The UK’s state pension system is so poor that universal benefits are needed.
- Everyone who needs help gets it. A means-test would stop some from claiming.
- The tax system can always be used to claw back money from very wealthy pensioners, rather than a costly means-test.

So it is important to support the NPC’s Hands Off our Universal Benefits campaign The National Pensioners Convention is Britain’s biggest campaigning organisation for older people, with 1.5m members across the UK.

People can get involved where they live by contacting one of the regional groups (see panel right). Or if you’d prefer you can contact the NPC by phone on 0207-388-0388 or write to NPC, Walkden House, 10 Melton Street, London NW1 2EJ. www.npc.org or www.handsoff.org.uk

Contact Your Regional Group

Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk
frankluc@hotmail.co.uk or derry343@btinternet.com

Devon
sheila@hcurzon.plus.com

Cornwall
bernardt.oneil@mypostoffice.co.uk

Derbyshire, Leics, Lincs, Notts and Northants
bherbertson43@btinternet.com

Greater London (33 London Boroughs)
alanhoratio@aol.com

Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire
sibleysorchard@gmail.com

Durham, Teesside, Tyneside and Northumberland
jan.shortt@googlemail.com

Gtr Manchester, Lancs, Cheshire and Merseyside
jack.crossfield@btinternet.com

Northern Ireland
johnw.martin@btinternet.com

Scotland
ken.harold@blueyonder.co.uk

Kent, East and West Sussex
valdexia@btinternet.com

Berks, Oxon, Surrey and parts of Wilts
info@npcuk.org

Wales
shirley1934@hotmail.co.uk

Dorset, Hampshire and parts of Wilts
donharper@talktalk.net

Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset
bobjones@waitrose.com

Staffs, Worcs and the West Midlands
peterlast9@tiscali.co.uk

Yorkshire and Humberside
prussell2@btinternet.com
The assisted dying debate surfaced once again recently with the well publicised case of Jeffrey Spector, a man terminally ill with cancer, who went to the Dignitas in Switzerland to end his own life.

The Spector case raised many of the classic issues - a man with a terminal condition, who expected to see his life deteriorate and to suffer over a number of months if not years before the final release of death. He took the decision not to run that gauntlet of suffering, going to Dignitas and end it all.

The debate here has been about why people like Spector should be forced to leave the country to end their own lives.

There has also been the scene over recent years of terminally ill people being put through more suffering by the prospect that due to the legal situation in this country their nearest and dearest end up being dragged through the courts after they have gone.

I have to admit from a personal angle my own position on assisted dying has changed over recent years. I witnessed my mother go through years of physical suffering, declaring almost every day she wished she was dead. I remember regularly arguing that there were people worse off than her. My mum’s mind was excellent right up to the end when it came a couple of years ago. However, since her death I have had time to reflect.

Mum underwent a steady physical deterioration over a number of years. She did not have a terminal condition but had had enough. She’d lost most of her sight, hearing and movement.

The lesson of my experience really was to be a little more understanding of those suffering, looking down the barrel of things simply getting worse until that final moment of death comes. It’s not a great quality of life.

It was good to see the assisted dying bill put forward by Labour MP Rob Marris recently debated. There has been the claim made that assisted suicide should not just be for the rich.

The bill’s proposals stipulated proposals stipulate that the person must be terminally ill, with six months of life left. They must be of sound mind. Two doctors would be needed to certify the case and there has to be judicial oversight. The proposal sounds humane and limited, but the bill was overwhelmingly defeated by 330 to 118 votes. The assisted dying terrain is of course dominated by potential pitfalls. There is the slippery slope argument that once assisted dying is conceded the conditionality will be loosened. So six months will become a longer period, the doctor stipulation reduced.
and judicial oversight removed.

Doctors will object. Many rightly claim they came into medicine to save, not take, lives.

Then there is the economic argument that once assisted dying is on the statute book, pressure on NHS resources and staff will contribute to making euthanasia the default position for the sick and dying.

What of the elderly person alone in the hospital bed, without family or friends to fight their corner. Or alternatively, the elderly person in the hospital bed surrounded by greedy relatives just wanting the person to die so that they can get their hands on his or her wealth.

There is also the background concern of a country that increasingly seems to know the price of everything and the value of nothing. This approach can be extended to matters of life and death. People who do not serve the great capitalist machine in some visible way tend to be regarded as easily disposable. It could be argued that there is a creeping sense of eugenics about much of what informs public policy in areas like health and social care at the moment.

These are all valid concerns when it comes to making changes on the matters of assisted dying. What is clear though is that the present situation serves no-one very well. And nor is the debate being taken forward in a particularly sensible or sensitive manner.

On the one side, there are those who seek legalisation of euthanasia, using one emotive case after another as it hits the headlines to argue their case. On the other side are those who oppose any change in the law no matter what.

What is needed is for some rationality to be brought to the assisted dying debate. Perhaps a Royal Commission or similar body to take evidence over a set period of time, then come up with suggestions as to how things can move forward.

The situation as it stands at the moment does not serve anyone particularly well. It seems like we are creeping toward legalising assisted dying but not in a particularly rational or humane way. If there should be change it has to be undertaken after a logical look at the facts and implications. Then maybe the situation can change for the benefit of all.
The idea of “whole-person” or integrated care has been rising up the political and health agenda.

Labour’s health spokesperson, Andy Burnham has focussed heavily on the integration of services, but all main parties now agree on the need for a seamless service. The Government, for its part, has announced plans to devolve health and care budgets in Greater Manchester.

Whole-person health care should mean that a person can receive all the care and support they need in a personal, seamless and timely way, regardless of which part of the health system delivers the service. It offers a holistic approach to a person’s health and wellbeing in order that all needs are dealt with appropriately.

The person should expect their wishes and decisions to be respected and carried out wherever possible. If these decisions affect family, carers or other important people in their lives, they should also play a significant part in the decision-making process.

Above: Caring for the whole person has shown to result in better health and wellbeing

LOOKING AT ‘WHOLE-PERSON’ HEALTH CARE

The NPC looks at the options on offer regarding ‘Whole Person’ healthcare...
What would Whole-Person Health Care look like?
At the heart of whole-person health care, is the bringing together of health and social care services, but this can only effectively be done at a national level under a new National Health and Care Budget (as in Scotland). The services need to be properly funded.

Talk of making the home, not the hospital, the default setting for care, and prioritising prevention as well as treatment sounds positive, but it raises big questions as to whether or not any additional funds will be made available.

It could mean just moving around existing budgets. There is also the question as to whether the services will be universal and free. It seems difficult to reconcile two systems, when one is means-tested (social care) and the other is free at the point of delivery (health care).

The surprise announcement about Greater Manchester will see 10 local authorities take over the combined health and social care budget of £6 billion, but how long before cash-strapped councils are using NHS funds to shore up local government services?

This represents a massive devolution of funding and control and could effectively signal the end of the NHS. Not only that, but local authorities have no “duty to provide a comprehensive health service” nor do they have any experience of running such services.

Therefore, given the track record of many local councils, it is highly likely these services will be contracted-out, further accelerating the privatisation of the NHS.

Whilst the idea of devolving health budgets may appear on the surface to be giving local people control over spending on health, there are concerns that if money is not ring-fenced, it can be allocated by the local authority to other business-friendly projects on the grounds that the imperative is building and maintaining the local economy. Should this happen, shortfalls in funding for local health services will need to be made up by local people, either by an increase in Council Tax, raising money through a local ‘health tax’ or implementing some kind of ‘access payment’ for services. For these reasons, it would be a backward step for local authorities to be solely responsible for delivering whole person care.

Whole-Person Health Care needs public funding
It is clear from this analysis that the idea of whole-person health care (including health, social care and mental health services) is only going to work if it is publicly owned, funded and free to all.

If only the health side of the equation is publicly owned and funded, any inadequate provision by the private sector of care and nursing home places means that ‘bed-blocking’ occurs. Older people can wait in hospital for anywhere up to a year for a place in a care or nursing home, however, it leads to the public perception that older people are to blame for a lack of hospital beds, or hospitals, or the NHS in general, are to blame for not ensuring adequate provision.

Local authority commissioning of domiciliary care has led to a ‘lottery’ in many parts of the country. Low, intermediary and substantive needs for care are understood by our members in a way which does not seem to fit with many local authority definitions of those categories. In many areas services are being rationed, and in practice older people are being categorised for care according to the funding available and not actual need.

While on the whole, NHS staff are struggling to remain person-centred, older people’s services is just one of the local authority’s remits and most have now become business and finance orientated out of necessity and as a main organisational ethos and driver.

Conclusion
Whole-person health care is a nuanced and complex issue. ‘Modernisation’ should not be a word for a retrograde step to what has already been proved to be a flawed system. Nor should older people be shoehorned unwillingly into a system which is a great fit for a younger and less dependent and less frail age group, which may be time and money saving, more efficient, and may even have overall better outcomes for that group, but which leaves the older person bewildered, frightened, and without the human touch they so often need.

Whole-person health care should be compassionate, caring and effective, delivered with respect in a partnership which optimises health and wellbeing, and minimises suffering and harm. The goal should be to achieve a good working partnership grounded in mutual trust and respect.
**Regional Roundup**

**South East**

Rod Downing reports...

Two of the main topics of discussion at our July meeting were supporting the NPC at both regional and national level, and care of the elderly.

- The NPC will be holding a rally and lobby of Parliament on November 4. Please encourage your regions and branches to attend this important event. Lobby your MP and express your concerns about the way in which pensioners are being labelled as a burden on society because we are living longer and need more care. Even our pensions—which we all paid into all our working lives—are labelled as benefits by politicians. Our pensions are not benefits, they are our entitlement.

John Martin reports...

On July 6, myself and three other retired people set out on the long journey by car to Ennis, a distance of around 180 miles. The theme of the conference was Living Wage – strong economy. It was great, though, to see five motions dealing with older people’s issues.

There were motions from unions like Unite, Technical Engineering Electrical Union, Executive Council (ICTU) and Fermanagh Trades Council. They mostly dealt with pensions issues with the exception of two motions; Retired Workers and Older People’s Contribution to the Community. The latter motion said that one of the great success stories of modern times is that we are all living longer and as such the whole community will benefit enormously from the many contributions that older people make to society. It is vital to stress this because of the prejudice and especially ageism that older people regularly have to face.

The retired workers motion was comprehensive and I can best sum it up by quoting the last paragraph of the motion: “Conference asserts that it is the right of every worker to expect to spend their retirement years in financial security and with all their health and care needs provided for, and calls on governments to act now to ensure this”.

Brian Lee reports...

On June 20, London Region members joined other CWU Regions at the Bank of England for the People’s Assembly march against austerity.

We listened to many speakers, including Dave Ward and Matt Rack, the general secretary of the FBU, before setting off on the march to Trafalgar Square.

Consultation on discrimination of older people report...

There is currently a 12 week public consultation on Age Discrimination Legislation in Goods, Facilities and Services. I have to report that to get to this stage of the consultation has been fraught with many setbacks in the main from our local politicians in Stormont who couldn’t agree on the colour of fertiliser, however we are busy studying the various proposals etc before the deadline of submitting our take on the issues as we older people see them.

If it goes through, this piece of legislation will go further than legislation in Great Britain and Ireland in that it also protects 16-18 year olds from age discrimination and also offers the possibility of extending the legislation to under-16s in the future.