

Campaign!

The NPC's monthly bulletin for activists in the pensioners' movement

Budget offers £3.40 'rise' in state pension

Alistair Darling's first budget as Chancellor of the Exchequer did very little to fuel the anger felt by millions of pensioners at the continuing fall in their living standards.

Whilst he repeated the plans to introduce a free national bus travel scheme next April and to published a green paper on social care, he delayed outlining any increase in the state pension.

Later it emerged that next year's increase would be based on a 3.9% rise in the rate of inflation.

This would give an extra £3.40 a week on a single pension and £5.45 a week for

a couple.

However, figures also uncovered by the NPC revealed that around 1m women pensioners

Around 5m women don't even get £87.30 a week

were not entitled to any state pension at all - despite some of them having paid national insurance contributions for over 9 years.

Frank Cooper, NPC president said: "This Budget will do absolutely nothing to end the scandal of pensioner poverty, particularly amongst women, and provide no help with rising council tax or fuel bills."

"We want a decent state pension - starting at £119 and rising to £134 a week - which is linked to earnings now."

'Invisible' lobby demands rights

Over 1000 campaigners from across the UK descended on Westminster on October 24 to take part in the NPC's national lobby of parliament.

The theme of the protest focussed on the need for pensioners to have a charter of basic rights to prevent them from having their needs overlooked and ignored.

To make the point, over 30 protesters dressed like H G Wells's 'invisible' man demonstrated outside the House of Commons in front of the cameras.

During a packed lunchtime rally in the Methodist Central Hall, the MPs Kelvin Hopkins and Kate Hoey both emphasised that it was not a lack of money that prevented the gov-



ernment from raising the basic state pension, but a lack of political will.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka also said the campaign for a decent state pension was one that was in everyone's interests - regardless of their age.

But pensions were not the only issues to be raised.

Transport, post office closures and dignity in care were also highlighted.

Sue Bott of the Campaign for Independent Living and the NPC's own Prof Peter Millard

explained the need to end the means-testing of care and to provide all nursing and personal care free of charge.

Following the rally, hundreds of campaigners filled the Westminster Hall in parliament, where well over 100 MPs were lobbied to give their support for the campaign.

The event was featured on local and national radio, BBC TV, regional and national press.

The 'Invisible' generation protest outside the House of Commons
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62 MPs have now signed Early Day Motion 1987 in support of the Pensioners' Charter

National Pensioners Convention

19-23

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Campaign Dates

October 31 - Listening to the voices of our minority elders conference. Guest speakers and refreshments 12.30-3.30pm, Barton Hill Settlement, Bristol.

November 3 - NHS Together demonstration in defence of the health service, London. Assemble 11am at Victoria Embankment for rally in Trafalgar Square at 1.30pm. NPC will be speaking at the rally.

December 5 - Listening to the voices of our minority elders conference. Guest speakers and refreshments 12.30-3.30pm, Tottenham Green Leisure Centre, London.

3-5 June 2008 - Annual Pensioners' Parliament, Winter Gardens, Blackpool. The event will focus on the centenary of the first state pension and care of the elderly.

For further details contact the NPC.

Cold winter could kill ten every hour

As many as 10 pensioners could die from the cold every hour this winter, the NPC has warned.

The claim is based on research showing that 260,000 pensioners have died of cold related illnesses in the last decade.

In the winter of 2004-05 alone, 31,250 people aged 65 and over died and if that was repeated this year it could mean the equivalent of

10 pensioners dying per hour.

The NPC's warning comes as the Met Office predicted that Britain was due for a colder winter than last year.

The problem is also compounded by the fact that the government has not raised the winter fuel allowance - £200 for those aged 60-79 and £300 for the over 80s - for four years, despite rises in electricity of 32% and gas by 48% over the

same period.

Recently the Department of Health published tips for keeping pensioners to "put on a good coat, hat, scarf and gloves when you go outside."

Pat Healy, NPC vice president said: "This sort of advice is insulting and patronising to older people, and provides an excuse for allowing the government to continue freezing the winter fuel payment."

Clarity needed on bus travel scheme

The NPC has called on ministers to issue further information on the new free, off-peak national bus travel scheme, due to be introduced in April 2008.

The call came during a recent meeting between the Convention and transport minister, Rosie Winterton, at which the NPC raised a number of concerns about the new concession. These included

the possible exclusion of community transport schemes such as dial-a-ride and taxi tokens from the system, problems associated with cross-border travel within the UK including N Ireland and the position relating to routes where the stops are more than 15 miles apart.

The Convention also raised the need for the central government grant for the new scheme to be ring-

fenced.

In response the minister agreed to give detailed information within a few weeks and indicated that the government were already looking into the funding mechanism for next year.

Peter Rayner, NPC vice president said: "There is an urgent need to clarify the details of the new scheme and ensure that all pensioners get the same benefits."

Backing for NHS demo

The NPC is giving its full support to a national demonstration on November 3, called by the NHS Together campaign, in support of the health service.

Today's pensioner generation not only helped create the NHS after WWII, but they also paid for it during their working lives and now rely on it to care for them in retirement.

This inextricable link means that pensioners are now at the forefront of many campaigns across the country to defend the NHS from cuts and privatisation.

Dot Gibson, NPC vice president said: "The care of Britain's elderly is now a major political issue which includes mixed-sex wards and malnutrition through to age discrimination and

MRSA."

"Older people deserve to get the best possible care available, and defending the NHS is vital."

Extra copies of this Campaign! bulletin are available on request from the NPC office