

Campaign!

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

Blackpool sets out campaign agenda

Over 2000 delegates from across the UK gathered in Blackpool at the start of June for the 16th national Pensioners' Parliament.

A packed Winter Gardens' ballroom rallied to the state pension centenary campaign demand for the pension to be raised above the official poverty level for all older people, and re-linked to earnings now.

Encouraging people to get involved, Kate Hoey MP said: "The simple rule of politics is that battles are won by those that turn out in the greatest numbers

and make their voices heard." Over the three day event, delegates also considered health and social care, age discrimination, concessionary travel,

"We are not asking for the earth" - Prof Alan Walker

council tax, and post office closures. NPC patron, Prof Alan Walker closed the event by reminding delegates of the moral strength of their campaign. "Remember that you are not asking the earth, only dignity, respect and a decent standard of living for all pensioners," he said.

Notes of speeches and sessions are available to download at www.npcuk.org.

STOP PRESS: Our campaign to secure a slot on BBC Question Time looks like it's winning. More details to follow.

Poverty reaches 2.5m pensioners

Shocking new official figures reveal that pensioner poverty in the last year has risen by 300,000 to 2.5m.

It provides real evidence that the government's existing pensions' policy - relying on means-testing and private saving - is beginning to unravel.

The NPC believes this increase is largely due to rising food, fuel and other household bills in relation to the continued decline in the purchasing power of the basic state pension.

It stands at just £90.70 a week, compared to the official poverty figure for a single pensioner of £151 a week before housing costs.

Other information released this month showed



An extra 300,000 pensioners fell below the official poverty line in the last year © DWP

that the inflation rate experienced by pensioners was at least double that of the official figure, and a record number of 1.3m older people were now going back to work to make ends meet.

Joe Harris, NPC general secretary said: "It is a real indictment of government policy that the number of older people living in poverty is the

same now as when New Labour came to power in 1997."

"If a society is judged by how it treats its older citizens, then we are seriously failing."

"Pensioners don't want charity - they have earned the right to a decent state pension that is set above the poverty level and rises each year in line with earnings."

National Pensioners Convention

19-23

Ironmonger Row,
London EC1V 3QN
T: 020-7553-6510
www.npcuk.org



Campaign Dates

1 August

Pensions Centenary Rally, Manchester. For details contact Dave Brown Tel: 01257-474-001.

16 August

Pensions Centenary Rally, Bristol. For details contact Paul Smith Tel: 01242-701-678.

27 September

One-day conference on women's pensions, 10.30am-4pm, TUC, London. Speakers include Dr Debora Price (King's College) and Jasna Petrovic (FERPA). Tickets £5 including lunch. To book a place contact the NPC office.

22 October

National joint lobby of Parliament on the issue of the state pension, in conjunction with the trade union movement. 12 noon rally, Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, followed at 2pm by a lobby of MPs.

Inspectors reveal poor state of care

Radio 4's Today programme recently uncovered some serious weaknesses in the system used to inspect Britain's many care homes.

One inspector was quoted as saying: "I wouldn't leave my dog in 90% of care homes."

"We know some homes are bad, but if we can't prove it, we are powerless to do anything."

At the heart of the problem lies

the new rules governing the frequency of care home inspections.

Those homes deemed to be excellent can now escape any inspection for up to three years, despite the fact that standards may have deteriorated over that time.

Pressure is also being placed on inspectors to mark certain homes as adequate, because then less work will need to be done getting them up to a satis-

factory standard.

Pat Healy, NPC vice president said: "Thousands of vulnerable older people living in care homes are clearly not being properly protected by the inspection system, and are maybe open to neglect and abuse."

"All inspections should be unannounced both day and night, and carried out at least once every six months to ensure standards are maintained."

NPC launch giro cheque protest

UP to 200,000 pensioners are being told to open bank accounts if they want to keep getting their pensions, the NPC can reveal.

In a move that has worried many older people, letters are being sent to those currently getting their state pension via a giro cheque, informing them that the government intends to scrap this facility in 2010.

But nowhere does the information say that a suitable alternative arrangement will be found before anyone has to give up their cheque.

Dot Gibson, NPC vice president said: "Clearly pensioners are being bullied into opening up bank accounts they either don't want, need or can't manage."

In response, the Convention has launched a campaign to protect

the giro cheques - which has resulted in national publicity and an urgent meeting with the minister, James Plaskitt MP.

"The minister has now confirmed to us that no-one need give up their cheque and that nothing will be done before a suitable alternative way of paying pensions is found," said Ms Gibson.

The NPC is advising people to ignore any letters.

Fuel bills could rise 40%

Over 1.5m pensioners could face fuel poverty if energy bills rise by 40%, the NPC has warned.

Figures show that around 2.4m pensioner households are already spending more than 10% of their income on energy bills, and for every 1% increase in fuel costs, a further 40,000 pensioner households are forced into fuel poverty.

Syd Ashby, NPC vice president said: "Raising fuel bills will mean that increasing numbers of pensioners have to make the unenviable choice between heating or eating."

The Convention is calling for a windfall tax on energy company profits, social tariffs to be standardised across the industry, an end to prepayment meters costing vulnerable customers more money and for the winter fuel allowance to be raised to £500 for all pensioners.

If you know of anyone who would like to receive this bulletin please send their email address to the NPC