

Campaign!

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

Darling's state pension pledge is 'worthless'

The NPC has criticised the Chancellor's Budget promise to raise the basic state pension next year by at least 2.5% as "virtually worthless".

The Convention has calculated that Mr Darling's proposal would give someone with a full state pension an extra £2.40 a week from April 2010, whilst those, mainly women, on reduced pensions would get just £1.45.

The Chancellor's decision to freeze the winter fuel allowance at £250 for households under 80 and £400 for the over 80s is also unlikely to tackle the rising levels of

fuel poverty amongst pensioners.

One in three older people already spend more than 10% of their income on energy bills and the annual winter death

"A rise of £2.40 sounds more like and insult" - NPC

rate amongst pensioners continues to be well above 20,000.

In widespread media coverage of the Budget, Dot Gibson, NPC general secretary said: "Rising costs of food and fuel, and low interest rates mean that pensioners are suffering a disproportionate increase in the cost of living."

"In light of this, the promise to raise the pension by just £2.40 sounds more like an insult."

Pensioners say goodbye to Jack

Tributes from across the trade union and pensioner movements have poured in, since the death of Jack Jones on April 21, at the age of 96.

Born in Liverpool in 1913, Jack soon became involved in the political struggles of the time and at 23 became the youngest Labour councillor to serve on the city's council.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, he joined the International Brigade to fight for the republicans against Franco's forces and was injured in the Battle of Ebro.

In 1939 he joined the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) as a full-time regional official and over the next 30 years worked his way through the union



Jack Jones — the pensioners' much-loved champion
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until 1969, when he became its general secretary.

Over the next nine years, Jack led the TGWU to become the biggest and strongest in the country, with a membership of over 2m.

When he retired in 1978, he founded the National Pensioners Convention (NPC), to act as the voice of older people in Britain.

In 2001 he stepped down as NPC president and was succeeded by former UNISON leader, Rodney Bickerstaffe.

Paying tribute, Mr Bickerstaffe said: "Jack's signature tune was "Keep right on to the end of the road" - and that's exactly what he did throughout his long life."

National Pensioners Convention

19-23

Ironmonger Row,
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Campaign Dates

2-4 June

17th Pensioners' Parliament, Winter Gardens, Black-pool.

Day One:

1pm March from the North Promenade to the Winter Gardens.

2pm Question Time with Rosie Winterton (Pensions Minister), Nigel Waterson (Shadow Spokesperson for Older People), Paul Rowen (Lib Dem) and John Mason (SNP).

Day Two: Sessions on the general election, dignity in care, age equality, defending local services, LINKs and the economic crisis.

Day Three:

Guest speakers Rodney Bickerstaffe and Sir Michael Parkinson.

Credentials priced £3 available from the NPC office.

No progress on tackling poverty

The latest figures from the Department for Work and Pensions reveal that there has been no change in the number of pensioners living below the official poverty line in the last 12 months.

The Households Below Average Income report shows that 2.5m older people are living below the recognised poverty line of £158 a week before housing costs - the same number as

in 2006/7.

The worst areas affected were the East Midlands and Northern Ireland - each with 27% of pensioners living in poverty.

The national average was 22%. Other figures showed that older women were twice as likely to have low incomes as men.

Minority elders, owner occupiers and single pensioners living alone were also at greater risk.

Frank Cooper,

NPC president said: "Every day older people face rising costs of living, falling interest rates and low pensions."

"The over-reliance on means-tested benefits - which at least 1.8m pensioners don't claim - has failed and it's time ministers realized that raising the state pension above the poverty level for all is the only way to end the scandal of poverty in retirement."

Care needs to be both free and fair

The government's long-awaited green paper on social care is finally expected to be published in June, but campaigners are concerned it will fall short of older people's expectations.

Last October, the NPC's report into social care, entitled *No more suffering in silence*, highlighted the way in which the current system was failing to

meet the needs of hundreds of thousands of older people.

Nearly all local authorities have now rationed home care services to just those individuals with substantial or critical needs, the cost of an hour's worth of care remains different in different parts of England and staff are often badly trained and poorly paid.

The use of means-testing and

the introduction of personal budgets are putting an even bigger strain of some of our most vulnerable pensioners.

Pat Healy, NPC vice president said: "Our *Care Free* campaign calls not only for more fairness in the system, but for all care to be free at the point of delivery, and paid for through general taxation."

The *Care Free* campaign will be launched in June.

National voice for NPC

Pensions minister Rosie Winterton has confirmed that the NPC will have a place on the government's soon to be created UK Advisory Forum on Ageing.

As part of the government's revised ageing strategy, this new national body, chaired by Ms Winterton and care minister Phil Hope, will meet to discuss policies relating to older people.

Nine English regions, plus Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales will also have their own

regional advisory forums which will send representatives along to the national body as well.

Joe Harris, NPC vice president said: "It is vital that the real voices of older people are included in any new bodies that are discussing their well being."

The new forums are expected to begin meeting in June.

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