

# Women's Network

# Exchange

NPC Women's Working Party  
Issue 52 February 2021

In this issue we focus on the consequences of the pandemic and the horrific statistic (as we go to press) of more than 100,000 deaths, women role models, the climate and the need for lifestyle changes.

## Women and Climate Change

Climate Change and how we combat it has been put on a 'back burner' since the Covid pandemic, yet it may be a greater threat.

A frightening picture is emerging and the speed faster than predicted. A threat to the planet, its ecosystems, wildlife and us from rising sea temperatures, rising sea levels, mass extinctions, extremes of weather and poor air quality affecting health.

Climate change is acknowledged by most scientists. Even the sceptics are beginning to understand the enormity of what is happening.

The poorest and most disadvantaged will suffer first. Women whose role in most societies is to nurture and provide food for their families are already disproportionately affected. Women in the developing world are responsible for growing, gathering and cooking food (on wood fires or kerosene stoves) and collecting water (often at great distances).

UN research suggests that 80% of people displaced by climate change are women. Action Aid states that "Climate change is a gender issue because women and girls living in poverty are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change due to their given roles, and their status in society.

Women and girls often bear the heaviest burden of climate change as the majority of the world's poor are women." Women make up more than half the world's population but wealth and power is unevenly spread.

Men still make the major decisions in patriarchal societies. No surprise that it is predominantly male

politicians who make judgements regarding climate change. We must share a commitment to change the way we live and the National Pensioners Convention can help in campaigning. We are well placed to contest the apathy of some and the commercial reluctance of others.

Increasing taxation, provided it isn't taxation on our pensions and benefits, may help especially on air travel and there are calls for the banning of those massive SUVs (sports utility vehicles) the 'Chelsea Tractors' favoured by the wealthy.

We can as individuals change the way we live. Small change may seem ineffective but collectively it can make a massive change. Whatever happened to the 'make do and mend' philosophy of our mothers and grandmothers? We must reduce energy waste by promoting energy efficiency, encouraging greater re-cycling, reducing reliance on plastics, encouraging sustainable transport initiatives and bringing pressure to bear on our government.

We need to support initiatives for solar and offshore wind power. Our health would also improve if we walked and cycled rather than using our cars or public transport. We need to think about the clothes we wear – where and from what materials are they made? We should cut down on the amount of red meat we eat and eat more locally produced food.

Whilst some may disagree with all the tactics of Extinction Rebellion, we should listen to and unite with environmental pressure groups to influence, raise awareness and challenge those who refuse to make change.

*By Rosie MacGregor*

## Congratulations to Christina McAnea newly elected General Secretary of UNISON



We are really pleased that Christina was elected at the beginning of the year as the new General Secretary of UNISON, the largest trade union in the UK following the retirement of Dave Prentis. This is a milestone for a union with a majority of women, in fact over one million women in membership

We live in challenging times, not least the pandemic, the economy and the impact of Brexit on the workforce. Christina as a proven negotiator has in the past taken a leading role on health, social care, pensions and equalities to more than demonstrate that she is well placed to meet these challenges.

Christina, a Glaswegian, has worked for UNISON since its formation in 1993 and prior to that joined NALGO as Women's Officer in the late 1980s.

She launched UNISON's Care After Covid Campaign, is a member of the ACAS Council, sits on the government's COVID-19 social care stakeholder group and was the driving force behind the creation last year of the cross-party alliance on the future of social care.

## TIME FOR CHANGE . . . . .

The removal of the bronze statue of Edward Colston, 17th century Bristol merchant and slave trader, was long overdue when it was unceremoniously toppled from its city centre plinth by a jubilant crowd and thrown into Bristol harbour on 7 June 2020. There had been calls over many years for its removal and a Black Lives Matter Protest accomplished this where the City Council had failed.

The photo of a young black woman activist Jen Reid standing on the plinth with her fist raised in triumph was beamed around the world in news coverage. London based artist Marc Quinn, in a fitting tribute to her act of defiance, produced a sculpture of her called A Surge of Power. This was secretly installed on the empty plinth at

dawn a few weeks later, though that too was removed the following day by the council. Like the statue of Colston which was later removed from the harbour it is now stored in a museum.

The name of Colston has since been taken down from a number of prominent city centre buildings including Bristol's Colston Hall concert venue now given a new identity as Bristol Beacon on 23 September this year. Schools have also been renamed and previously Colston's House at St Mary Redcliffe School was renamed after female NASA mathematician as Katherine Johnson House.

Now the government is intending to enact legislation to protect statues from being taken down "on a whim or at the behest of a baying mob" says Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick in January of this year. Bristol Mayor Marvin Rees described his comments a "poor analysis of what's really going on" and that it was irresponsible of a political leader to use language that creates an adversarial culture.



By Rosie MacGregor

## Judges rule in favour of the government in women's fight for state pension justice

On 15 September 2020 the Court of Appeal dismissed the case of two women in their 60's, Julie Delve and Karen Glynn backed by the *BackTo 60* campaign, who claimed discrimination when the state pension age was increased. **By Meg MacDonald** with the decisions taken through the parliamentary process".

Their case was that successive government increases in the state pension age left 3.8 million women born in the 1950's likely to suffer hardship and poverty as a result of a delay in receiving their pensions.

Their barristers argued that they had been unfairly discriminated against when the government introduced changes to the state pension age from 60 to 65 to have parity with men and subsequently to 66 and many were not informed by the DWP of the changes.

Despite evidence of hardship and lack of communication by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), the judges decided it was not a case of discrimination.

The judges further stated "We are satisfied that this is not a case where the court can interfere

They agreed with the High Court's assessment of 2019 that government evidence showed that the appeal was without reasonable foundation.

The two judges also dismissed the claim that the women were not given adequate notice of these changes.

It is alleged that reversing the process and making changes for those women born in the 1950s would cost the government £77 billion but it is also estimated that it would cost each woman an average of £45,000 and it has saved the government some £31 billion.

The government won't budge on this issue but neither will the campaigners.

Jonne Welch, founder of *BackTo 60* has said that they are considering taking the case to the Supreme Court and would draft legislation to bring in a "Women's Bill of Rights". Trades Unions, Women Against Pension Inequality(WASPI) and a cross party group of MPs are continuing to pursue the cases of women affected.

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## A victory for UNISON and underpaid, exploited care workers

It took over four years for branch officers in Haringey, ten home-care workers and UNISON's legal team to win a significant victory to improve the terms and conditions of these homecare workers but it was worth it and has implications for workers across the country.

The employment tribunal accepted that contractors commissioned by the council breached the National Minimum Wage Act by paying some care staff less than the minimum wage.

The claimants, mostly black women, will receive an average settlement of around £10,000 each in backdated earnings.

It was acknowledged by the

tribunal that travelling and waiting times of up to 60 minutes between appointments should be treated as working time and paid at the minimum wage.

The impact for these workers is massive because they are



Pic: victorious Haringey care workers with Dave Prentis (now retired General Secretary of UNISON and the union's legal team

**Haringey Council has signed up to UNISON's ETHICAL CARE CHARTER**

amongst the lowest paid, on zero hours contracts, and the most undervalued. Yet the work they carry out is essential in caring for those who are older or disabled.

They were working extremely long hours and not paid for the time spent driving between appointments. During the current pandemic they have been putting themselves at risk to care for some of the most vulnerable.

The Council has now signed up to UNISON's Ethical Care Charter and will ensure that those providing homecare will be paid the London Living Wage including payment for travel time.

## **“We can help care workers”**

Janet Shapiro reports. . . . . A member of my local National Pensioners Convention Action Group, encouraged the care workers who visited her husband to seek support from Unison about their working conditions. This was four years ago now, and her husband has since died. Here is her story in her own words:

*My husband, Bill, began to use carers hired by Haringey from many private firms. Quite soon I began (because of my employment law background) to wonder how their travel between jobs (by car, bus or on foot) was dealt with. It was clear that they were all on zero hours contracts: if they offended the company in any way they were not given any work and therefore had no income.*

*In 2014 a judgement on Appeal made it clear that time between jobs should be paid. Two of them – our main carers – trusted us enough to tell us they were not paid. My husband suggested to one, who had become a family friend, that they join a Union. She did, then seven more women and one man: there is a wonderful photograph of them on the steps of the Town Hall.*

*Their courage was immense. Unison had just filed at Tribunal when Servacare, dismissed by Haringey Council, went into bankruptcy. The firm was sold, with the workers, to another firm of carers. The matter dragged on from 2016 until last month. During the earlier stages I was able to show them how to draft their cases, do some typing, make sure they saved or photocopied all documents, and so on. I cannot speak too highly of Unison the skill of the in-house lawyer and of the courage of those carers. Four years is a long time to fight.*

*Because they are all still working as carers (one for Barnet Council) I think they would not want their names used. But their story is a wonderful one;- nine people who were brave enough to fight. As it is they have brought about the agreement with Haringey of £10.75 an hour, up from £4 or less.*

## **“Ella was not born with asthma”**

Rosamund, the mother of Ella Kissi-Debrah told the coronor: “Ella was not born with asthma”. and on 16th December the coronor concluded that exposure to excessive pollution should be added to Ella’s death certificate.

So it’s official. a happy nine-year-old living in a loving family died of asthma — this frightening disease — simply from walking to school and playing with her friends. We — all of us — owe brave Rosamund a huge debt of gratitude for her fight to establish the truth.of her daughter’s death.

Surely this beautiful, happy picture of Ella Kissi-Debrah should be a uniting symbol for all those standing up for clean air?



# **TOXIC AIR KILLS!**

## National Pensioners Convention adjusts to life in lockdown

The National Pensioners Convention, as a result of the pandemic has held two very successful Webinars and will be holding a further one on 1 February to coincide with Older People's Dignity Action Day 2021.

### The first webinar took place on 1 October, UN Day of Older People.

By then it had been just over three months since publication of the booklet: "Goodbye Cinderella — A New Settlement for Care Services — Moving Forward from the Pandemic", and this had already received significant support from medical professionals, academics and social care workers. The webinar therefore gave a chance to a large audience to hear from a number of these experts and put their questions to them.

There was unanimous support for the NPC's proposal for a National Care Service, structured along the lines of the NHS and to work alongside each other. Like the NHS the NCS would be free for everyone at the point of need, delivered according to need, not rationed, not means-tested, with training and career progression and the proper remuneration of care workers.

### The second webinar, held on 3 December was on Ageism, Human Rights and Hate Crime.

It was particularly relevant to women because we live longer and in worse health than our male counterparts. Holly Harrison Mullane from Amnesty UK reported that the situation in care homes has been so appalling that it has directly affected

and violated the human rights of residents.

Jackie Killeen from the Equality and Human Rights Commission stated that the rights of older people, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities have been ignored and they have been treated unfairly during the pandemic.

Louise Ansari from Centre for Ageing Better said the over-arching picture is of inequality suffered by people in later life. Life expectancy is slowing down and for poorer people, those with life-limiting diseases and the millions living in sub-standard homes the picture is worst.

Dr Hannah Bows, Durham University Professor of Criminal Law highlighted concerns that family abuse in domestic situations is on the increase particularly in lockdown. Huge problems are created by stereotyping older people as vulnerable — just because we are older. Ending on a positive note she said most older people have developed coping skills as a result of their age and the evidence is that the risk of victimisation does not increase with age.

### The third webinar on 1 February, Older People's Dignity Action Day.

This features a panel of leading experts looking at how 'digital poverty' is isolating and endangering older people. and discussing ways of giving older people the chance to go online and at the same time continue to ensure that those who can't or don't want to do so are not denied the right to access services etc. by 'phone and post.

For more information and access — [www.NPCUK.org](http://www.NPCUK.org)

## **PENSIONER BENEFITS AT RISK**

Someone has to pay for the costs incurred by the pandemic but it shouldn't be pensioners! A group that can ill afford it and one that is amongst those hardest hit by the virus. It isn't as if we haven't got enough to worry about for the future, not least our health.

First it was the handing over to the BBC of the universal benefit of a free TV licence for the over 75s. This is now means-tested so only those claiming Pension Credit are eligible for it. There are even fears that those claiming Pension Credit will still be worse off.

This government has a lot to answer for in so

many different ways but now we have further worries that we will be asked to pay towards its inept management of the Covid-19 crisis.

There are threats of higher taxation and we know that the state pension triple lock is already vulnerable. The Social Market Foundation has stated that the triple lock should be scrapped. I don't want to be a scare-monger but this could be a foretaste of policies to come.

We have increased worries about what the future holds for those remaining essential universal pensioner benefits — winter fuel payments, free

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prescriptions, bus passes and the London Freedom pass could all be at risk as could our 'Christmas bonus'.

The cumulative impact of the loss of these benefits would be serious for pensioner finances especially for those who are already on low incomes, mainly women. The intention of these benefits was to boost the state pension which is the worst of any developed country even though we are one of the richest.

The pandemic will have a massive impact on the economy and the costs have been estimated to

run to over £300,000 billion. We know that those who have been made redundant, as well as many young people and others who were on zero hours contracts, have been adversely affected. They shouldn't be expected to pay for government incompetence and nor should we.

What about those on the highest incomes, surely they are the ones who should pay with taxes imposed on their wealth?

Pensioners have already paid a high price as a result of Covid-19 we must fight to ensure that we don't pay a higher price still.

**Rosie MacGregor**

***“No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear”***

***C.S. Lewis on the death of his wife.***

I too lost my partner of over 40 years last year and what follows is what I too have learnt since and what I wish I had known before.

▷ We had taken time to sort out our affairs – we had written crossover wills in 1974 but had not transferred our home/bank accounts into joint names. We were going to live forever. None of the Council Tax, Electricity, Water Bills were in joint names and getting them changed to a single name can sometimes be difficult. Don't even mention BT. Probate has been granted after ten months but inheritance tax (because everything was in his name alone) is on-going and HMRC can ask the most invasive questions. The car was not in joint names and I was a named driver — the car becomes part of the “estate” and you are no longer insured. However, if you are married, the “estate” does automatically pass to the surviving spouse but the bills can still be a problem.

▷ Take your courage in your hand and discuss funeral arrangements and the service. It will ease your burden if you know what each wants. Do not be embarrassed by the undertaker — keep asking how much things cost.

▷ Your brain dies and you find yourself feeling as though its been replaced by a sponge. The feeling does gradually come back. Do not be shy of crying or of being moved by memories — give yourself whatever time you need even if it takes years.

▷ Cherish your family and friends — friends will always be there for you — it could have been them.

There is added urgency at the present time caused by unexpected virus deaths across all ages.

***Angela Harrington*** — UNISON retired member from Bath University

**National Pensioners Convention — Women's Working Party — Exchange newsletter**

We welcome articles and reports by women members, regions and affiliates about issues and events affecting women for inclusion in future *Exchange* newsletters.

Please submit these c/o NPC, requesting that they are forwarded to the Editor—

by email to [info@npcuk.org](mailto:info@npcuk.org) or by post

to NPC, Marchmont Community Centre, Marchmont Street, WC1N 1AB

understanding that we cannot guarantee inclusion, and they may need to be edited, but we will always reply to you.