

Campaign!

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

Pensioners' Parliament sets out new election manifesto

Two thousand delegates from across the UK gathered at the beginning of June for the start of the 17th National Pensioners' Parliament in Blackpool

For the first time ever the opening session took the form of a Question Time, chaired by the NPC's patron, Prof Alan Walker

A panel consisting of Rosie Winterton (the then Pensions Minister), Nigel Waterson (Shadow Minister for Older People) Paul Rowen (Lib Dem pensions team) and the NPC's Joe Harris faced questions on MPs' expenses, the level of the state pension, the National Insurance Fund surplus, the 25p age addition, fuel poverty, dignity in care, elder abuse, council tax, free travel and the link with earnings

Despite problems with

the sound in some parts of the hall, the session proved extremely successful and often exposed the weaknesses of some of the politicians' arguments

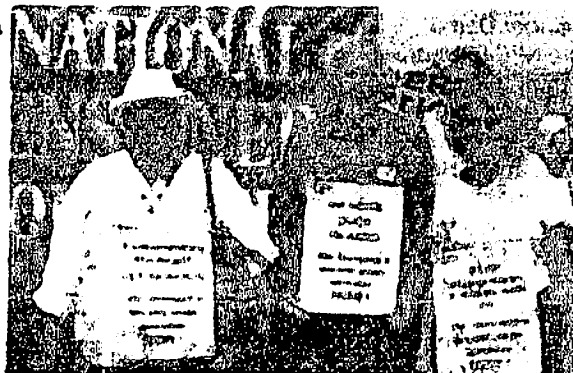
On the second day there were discus-

sions with expert guest speakers on the effects of the economic crisis, dignity in care, age equality, Local

Information Networks (LINKs) and public services

One of the most important sessions included the launch of a Pensioners' Manifesto at the next election (see right) and a discussion over the question of standing candidates.

On the final morning there were campaigning workshops, before the event was rounded off by Rodney Bickerstaffe who gave a moving tribute to the NPC's founder Jack Jones and Sir Michael Parkinson who spoke about his role as a Care Ambassador



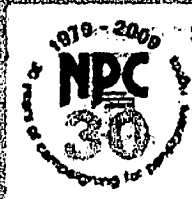
Delegates make their views known on the march at the beginning of the Pensioners' Parliament © George Henderson

A Pensioners' Manifesto

- A basic state pension set above the official poverty level (estimated at £185 a week in 2009), which is linked to the higher of earnings or prices, and paid alongside other existing concessions, to provide some financial security for all.
- Free long-term and social care funded from general taxation and provided to the highest standards in order to maintain dignity and without the need for means-testing, rationing or a postcode lottery.
- Good quality local services funded through national income tax rather than council tax.
- Free UK-wide travel on public transport to encourage independence and greater mobility, as well as helping the environment and reducing demand on care services.
- An end to discrimination where a disability affects the opportunities, goods and services available to older people.
- A winter fuel allowance of £500 per pensioner household to help maintain a warm and comfortable home.

National Pensioners Convention

19-23
Hornsey, Row
London EC1V 3QJ
020 7863 6510
www.npcuk.org



Campaign Dates

October Demo
The NPC Executive Committee (EC) believes that the new security regulations of the House of Commons have made the annual lobby of Parliament very difficult to organise.

As an alternative the EC will decide in July on whether to stage a march and rally on a Saturday in October on the theme of 'Defending the Welfare State for all generations'.

For this to be effective we would need to work closely with the trade union movement, students and other organisations that share our concern over issues such as pensions, care and public services.

In the meantime please let us know if your organisation would be prepared in principle to support such an event.

State pension is lowest in Europe

The latest figures from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have confirmed Britain's state pension as one of the worst in Europe.

The OECD showed that future UK pensioners can expect to get far less in their state pension than their counterparts in France, Germany and Spain. Research from the Office for National Statistics

also revealed that Britain had the lowest replacement rate pension amongst 17 OECD countries, with pensioners receiving a state pension of less than a third of the average wage, compared to the 90% offered in Greece, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The government's pension policy continued to unravel further when 96% of top companies announced that their final salary pen-

sion schemes were unsustainable. Dot Gibson, NPC general secretary said: 'Both today's and tomorrow's pensioners face a pension system that is now in crisis.' 'Rather than encouraging people to risk their savings on private pensions, the government should be strengthening the state pension to give everyone real financial security in retirement.'

Care Green Paper too little too late?

Care minister Phil Hope has announced that the long awaited Green Paper on care will finally be published in July.

Speaking in the Commons, Mr Hope said: 'The proposals will spell out what we will do to ensure that people get high-quality care, and that they have choice and control over that care.'

Insiders reveal that the Green Paper is expected

to set out options to change the means-tested system of care in both residential homes and an individual's own home. This could include the introduction of a tax, to be paid on retirement, or from death duties, in return for free care in later life. But campaigners are concerned the proposal will fail to tackle the real problems faced by older people in the

care system. Pat Healy, NPC vice president said: 'The proposals must end the postcode lottery in care charges across England, improve the quality of the care provided and stop local authorities rationing services because of underfunding.' After the paper has been published there will be a 16 week consultation period to the end of October.

MPs say tax fuel payment

MPs on the Environment and Rural Affairs select committee have called on the government to make the annual winter fuel allowance taxable and to withdraw it from those pensioners paying a higher rate of tax.

But the call comes at the same time as energy companies have pocketed a staggering £1.6bn profit by failing to pass on reductions in fuel prices to vulnerable customers.

Joe Harris, NPC vice president said: 'One in three older people are currently spending more than 10% of their income on fuel bills.'

'Rather than cutting back on the winter fuel allowance, the government should raise it to £500 for everyone and intervene to stop the energy companies from making huge profits at the expense of vulnerable older consumers.'

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