

Women's Network Exchange

NPC Women's Working Party
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With further attacks promised on women, both working and retired, 2012 will be a challenging year. We must prepare to fight back.

Pat Barrett.

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Walkden House, 10 Melton Street, London NW1 2EJ

The Women's Working Party are holding a conference to bring together today's and tomorrow's women pensioners to discuss a number of burning issues: Pensions, Ageing Policy, Social Care and Campaigning. Limited space—so book early!

“Women In Retirement”

Saturday 24 March 10.30am* to 3.30pm
at Unison Centre, 24 Livery Street,
Birmingham, B3 2PA

To book contact Alison Purshouse— Walkden House, address above.

*Registration from 10am. Cost: £5 including refreshments & buffet

30th November A Damp Squib?

The photograph shows the head of the London march on the Thames Embankment. Loud speakers and screens relayed speeches to the marchers.



We Don't Think So !

Inside find reports from London (Janet Shapiro), Bristol (Pat Barrett), Chelmsford (Marion Wilson), South-East (June Clarkson)

November 30th protests

'A Damp Squib':

This is what David Cameron said about the biggest strike of workers in decades. If this was a damp squib we dread to think what a full blown rocket would be like.

The photograph shows NPC Vice-President, Marion Wilson, on the Chelmsford march.

Here are just some reports of what was happening around the country on November 30th.



London

The starting point for the November 30th march in London was Lincolns Inn Fields near Holborn. The destination was the Embankment where a platform and screens were set up to relay the speeches. Public sector trade unionists with a huge variety of banners packed the road encircling Lincolns Inn Fields. Many had brought their children, the schools being closed. It was a miracle that those of us from London Region NPC managed to meet up with our banner. Some marchers arrived from early morning work-place pickets.

The numbers supporting the strike and rally were so many that we waited a very long time standing rather than marching. Our contingent did not get to the end of the march until most of the speakers had finished, and we missed the speech given by the chair of London Region NPC Barry Todman. Apparently the time allotted for the installation of the stage was limited and many wanted to speak. This meant that all speeches had to be very short. The photo shows a small section of those listening to speeches.

There were also many similar local activities around London that included MP Jeremy Corbyn speaking in Islington, Tony Benn in Kensington, MP Teresa Pearce joining the picket line at Woolwich Crown Court

and Brendan Barber TUC General Secretary joining the St. Pancras Hospital picket line on the Euston Road.

All of these activities augmented the media estimates of 25-30,000 taking part.

Janet Shapiro

Bristol

The day was very cold and windy; I arrived on the picket line at 6.45 in the morning armed with placards, leaflets and membership forms. Nearly all the people who were on the picket line were first timers so it was a learning curve for many of them.

As the time drew near to the arrival of workers, people were briefed on the rules of picketing.

Most of the people who crossed the picket line accepted the leaflets and agreed with the principles of the action; several did take membership forms.

As the morning went on about six mothers and their children joined the picket line. It was refreshing to see the younger generation having their first experience of strike action. As we were near a main road many motorists tooted their horns in support and we made sure the children had whistles and rattles so that they could make a noise. We left the picket line at

lunchtime to take part in the march and rally that would go round the centre of Bristol and through the main shopping area.

In all the years I have been in the Trade Union movement I have never seen so many take part in Bristol, it was estimated there were 15 to 17 thousand people on the march.

The rally on Castle Green was packed and there were several speakers from all areas of the Public Services and messages of support from all over the country. I must say it was a very uplifting day and this was repeated throughout the country. It sent out a very strong message back to the Government that people have had enough.

Pat Barrett

Chelmsford

Vice President, Marion Wilson, joined the thousands who gathered in the centre of Chelmsford, as shown in the photograph. A peaceful, though noisy, march around the town was followed by speeches from members of various public sector unions. We also heard greetings and support from our local MEP, Richard Howitt and from one of the French trade unions.

Marion Wilson

November 30th protests continued

South-East

Tens of thousands of Public Sector workers and supporters, thronged the streets on November 30th to show their disapproval and anger at Government plans to cut Pension entitlement for Public Sector workers from 2012.

In the South East, from Oxford to Portsmouth and from Dover to London, teachers, Local Government employees, Social Workers and many others joined rallies, marches and picket lines.

They were protesting against swingeing plans to increase their pension contributions from 2012 and to use the Consumer Price Index for up-rating their pensions annually. From 2026, these workers also anticipate their working lives being extended to age 67.

Many areas organised picket lines outside Hospitals, prisons, job centres, museums and City Halls; feeder marches from these converged to swell the

demonstrations. In many areas there was an almost total closure of all schools, due to combined action by all the Teaching Unions, and many libraries operated with only a skeleton staff.

Public Sector Union members representing UNISON, the Teaching Unions, the POA, Prospect, GMB, UCU, PCS, UNITE and the RMT were all very much in evidence at the Rallies; impassioned speeches were heard from the platform.

In Brighton, the Green Party MP, Caroline Lucas, endorsed the message that "workers will do all that it takes, to defend their pensions, including more strike action if necessary". A message of support from MEP Richard Howitt, was read out in Hastings.

There was a wonderful turn out of 3,000 in Portsmouth. From the platform, I said that from my experience as a retired teacher living on a meagre pension, I foresaw poverty beckoning many more teachers in the future. Many will not be able to teach until age 67 and will spend their last years either on Sick Pay or Job Seekers Allowance".

June Clarkson

Week of Action

October 26th & 29th 2011

Unions launched a legal challenge because the use of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) instead of the Retail Price Index (RPI) means loss of income to many in receipt of benefits and pensions. Support for this was part of NPC's week of action 'Rights in Retirement'; NPC members joined the Unions outside the High Court in the Strand.

Rally 26th October:

The Rally started at College Green, opposite the House of Lords at 12 noon for photographs. The heavy rain hurried the packing up of banners and lobbyists hurried to join the House of Commons queue; Kelvin Hopkins had booked Committee Room 14 for our rally. The meeting, chaired by Frank Cooper NPC President had a magnificent line up of speakers including Steve Webb the Work and Pensions Minister.

Pat Barrett reports: I made my way from Bristol to attend the rally in the House of Commons. Many speakers pledged support for a better pension and care in old age. Kelvin Hopkins was as usual very supportive of the causes of the NPC. The shadow minister Greg McClymont made his first appearance and support was given from trade-unions UNISON, UNITE and NUT.

Decent Care for All

Paul Burstow is Minister of State for Care Services; his constituency is Sutton and Cheam. For this reason the NPC organised a March and Rally in Sutton on Saturday October 29th. At this rally Paul Burstow praised NPC's **Dignity Code**.

Launch of 'Dignity Code'

The purpose of the NPC's DIGNITY CODE is *"to uphold the rights and maintain the personal dignity of older people within the context of ensuring the health, safety and well being of those who are increasingly less able to care for themselves or to properly conduct their affairs"*.

It is being launched in the House of Commons on 22nd February and the main speaker is **Paul Burstow** MP, Minister of State for Care Services. Other well-known supporters include **Dave Prentis**, General Secretary of Unison, **Baroness Sally Greengross**, Equality and Human Rights Commissioner, **Lord Stewart Sutherland**, chair of the 1998 Royal Commission on Long Term Care, **Rodney Bickerstaffe**, chair of the National Pensioners' Education and Welfare Centre charity and **Professor Alan Walker**, Director of the New Dynamics on Ageing.

The Dignity Code is relevant to all health and care service providers in the public, private and third sectors. Copies for display can be obtained from the NPC office so that you can ensure that it is there for all to see in Council offices, GPs' surgeries, hospitals, care homes, clinics and sheltered housing schemes etc.

Dot Gibson

Hot Press: An appeal against the High Court's decision to reject the case for a judicial review on the use of CPI instead of RPI is to be launched on February 20th. To raise awareness of the appeal a demonstration will take place outside the High Court, The Strand WC1 at **8.30am – 10am on Monday, 20th February**. Please turn up with banners and show your support.

Home Care

The government has decided to alter the criteria on who qualifies for Home Care. From now on, the only clients to get this service will be people that are so in need of care that it is debateable whether they should be in their own home in the first case. Please do not get me wrong. I have worked for 23 years as a Sheltered Housing Warden, and our main aim has always been to keep people in their own homes. But now, the way the Home Care services is being axed, leads to an appalling quality of life and even puts people's lives at risk.

Shopping is not classed as a priority. I witnessed only 2 weeks ago an elderly person being sent out of hospital to her flat after a stay of several months. All she had in her flat was a couple of stale biscuits. The meals on wheels

that were supposed to deliver never turned up and the private home care service rang up to say that they were running two hours late. This is not a one off occurrence; this happens time and time again.

This vital service needs investment, not to be cut back. People are far happier in their own homes and happiness equals better physical and mental wellbeing.

We should ask whether the powers that be are so stupid that they cannot recognise that it is cheaper to invest in keeping people in good health in their own homes, to avoid their becoming more dependent and needing hospital or nursing home care.

Pat Barrett

Hot press: 'The politics of care: the debate surrounding the future of older people's care'. Obtain from the NPC office £2.

Reporting back from Brussels

Pat Barrett and Marion Wilson attended the Extraordinary Meeting of the Women's Committee of the European Federation of Retired and Older Persons (FERPA). FERPA is part of the ETUC, i.e. TUC in Europe. Representatives from all over Europe attend these meetings.

The reason for this extraordinary meeting held in Brussels on 19th September 2011 was the unfairness of women's pensions not only in Europe but worldwide. There was a special resolution on "Woman's paid and un-paid work". This theme for discussion covered the fact that women do a lot of work that is taken for granted in the home and not recognised as employment—thus not receiving payment, employment benefits or rights. This sort of work, like child-minding, cleaning, nursing children or other relatives is not taken into account. Such work undertaken outside the home comes with a cost. Ask any mother the cost of engaging a child minder or meeting nursery fees. The cost of a cleaner is above the minimum wage and the cost of caring for someone who is ill is not cheap. Why then is a woman expected to do

all of these tasks without pay or recognition?

The woman is at a disadvantage by being at home because she loses out on pension contributions. As a result, women's pensions are a lot lower on average than men's. Life expectancy may be higher for women, but a high proportion of women live longer in poverty.

Before we broke for lunch the chair asked delegates what sort of things were happening in their country as far as women and pensions were concerned. In Italy the government were trying to raise the retirement age to 62; and they were shocked at what was happening in the UK.

It was decided that amendments to the resolution should be put forward in the afternoon session, but during lunch there was a power-cut throughout Brussels. This effectively closed the conference, as interpreters depend upon the equipment. It was decided that amendments should be put forward through e-mail.

Despite this hiccup, I found the experience very interesting and informative.

Pat Barrett

Reporting back from CHARTER FOR WOMEN CONFERENCE "Women-an unequal journey through life"



Marion with chair Mary Davis



Pat with Mary Davis

The chair of the Women's Working Party. Pat Barrett and the Vice Chair of the NPC, Marion Wilson, both spoke at the Charter for Women Conference held in October 2011. This looked at the unequal life of women from the cradle to the (almost) grave. Pat spoke about care of the elderly and Marion about women's pensions.

Marion Wilson