

Campaign!

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

NPC remembers Rodney Bickerstaffe

Former NPC president and lifelong trade unionist, Rodney Bickerstaffe died at the beginning of October, aged just 72.

Rodney replaced Jack Jones, as the NPC's president in 2001 and served for four years, during which time he regularly appeared in the media advocating for better state pensions and care.

One of his personal achievements was to challenge the government over the rules which reduced an individual's state pension if they were in hospital for more than six weeks.

The rules were later changed to 52 weeks.

Jan Shortt, NPC general secretary said: "Taking over from Jack Jones was no easy job, but Rodney always felt as home."

"He was a passionate advocate for Britain's older people, and often took on the Labour government over issues which he felt were wrong such as the refusal to restore the link between the state pension and earnings, and the way in which social care was means-tested."

"He was one of the labour movement's greats and the NPC is proud to have had the benefit of his skills, intellect and humour."



Rodney Bickerstaffe, NPC president from 2001-2005
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Cards or letters can be sent to Jasmin Johnson, UNISON Centre, 130 Euston Rd, Kings Cross, London NW1 2AY (j.johnson@unison.co.uk).

Minister defends 'spare room' discharge plan

Health minister, Philip Dunne has said the idea of discharging hospital patients into people's homes should 'not be ruled out'.

The original trial was abandoned by Southend University hospital before it started, but Mr Dunne claimed the NHS had to 'trial different things'.

Ministers know that the collapse of social care services in the community, means that patients cannot be discharged from hospital, causing delays.

Under the plan, private company CareRooms would place 30 hospital patients in local residents' spare rooms while waiting to be discharged.

CareRooms said it would recruit "hosts" whose properties had spare rooms or annexes with a private bathroom.

The hosts - who would earn up to a maximum of £1,000 per month - would not need any previous care experience, but would need to go through security checks and be able to heat up

three microwave meals a day for the patient.

Dot Gibson, NPC deputy general secretary said: "When research consistently shows that people recover better in their own homes, this is simply another way of avoiding the real crisis in our social care system and the fact we need to have a properly tax-funded, free at the point of delivery service."

"Gimmicks such as this are not the answer, and could potentially place patients at risk."



National Pensioners Convention

62 Marchmont St,
Bloomsbury,
London WC1N 1AB
T: 020-7837-6622
E: info@npcuk.org
W: npcuk.org
Facebook: NPCUK
Twitter: @NPCUK

Campaign Dates

22 November 2017
Autumn Budget and Publication of winter death figures
The NPC will be responding to events on the day - follow us online

1 February 2018
Dignity Action Day
Groups around the country will promote the NPC's message for a National Care Service as one of the best ways of improving the quality of care

April 2018
This will mark 10 years since the introduction of the concessionary bus pass. More details to follow regarding the plans for the celebration

12-14 June 2018
NPC Pensioners' Parliament
Tickets on sale now for the 3-day event, priced £10 or day ticket £5. Available from the NPC office or www.npcuk.org

UK pension among the worst

British workers can expect to receive one of the worst state pensions in the developed world, according to a new report from UBS.

Comparing the retirement income for a 50-year-old woman in major cities across the globe, it considered the amounts that employers must set aside, plus the payouts from state pensions.

The research found that a woman in London could expect just 41% of her current income in retirement, compared to 72% for her counterpart in Sydney, Australia.

Part of the reason for the difference was that in Australia employers are required to put aside 9.5% of a worker's salary into a pension.

In Britain, the auto-enrolment scheme currently only compels employers to

put in 1%, rising to 3% by 2019.

Other European countries also fared better than the UK, with the French receiving 69% of their salary in pensions, 67% in Italy and 50% in Germany.

Even America managed a 55% replacement rate.

Ron Douglas, NPC president said: "The UK state pension is simply too low - and future generations of pensioners are going to find this out the hard way unless the trade union and pensioners' movements take action now."

"Even the 3% increase in the pension next April will only bring it up to £126 a week for someone with a full contributions' record, whilst many older women will only get around 60% of that figure."

Energy cap offers too little

The NPC has described the government's plans for a cap on energy prices as "too little, too late".

The draft legislation will apply to about two-thirds of households, who are on standard variable tariffs.

For those consumers on these plans, the price per unit is dependent on the base interest rate of the Bank of England, meaning that consumers experience a large level of fluctuation in their energy bills.

However, the price cap will not include those households on the following tariffs: fixed energy, dual fuel tariff (where you get your gas and electricity from the same supplier), online energy, pre-payment and green energy tariffs.

In addition, the price cap

will not apply to households in Northern Ireland

Furthermore, the legislation will not be implemented until 2018/2019, at the earliest, and then expire in 2020.

On 22 November, the excess winter death figures are also likely to be published for last winter.

Every year, tens of thousands of older people die from cold related illnesses and there is clear evidence between the rising costs of fuel bills and winter deaths.

Norman Jemison, NPC vice president said: "This really is too little, too late and is unlikely to give any real help."

"The government is scared of tackling the big six energy companies, but in the meantime they are ripping customers off with eye-watering increases in their bills."

The end of the PO card?

Millions of older people currently have their state pension paid weekly in advance, or four-weekly in arrears, into a Post Office Card Account (POCA).

But the government has started writing to people to encourage them to switch to a bank, building society or credit union account - and have only

committed to retaining payments into a POCA up to 2021.

The government's existing POCA contract with the Post Office expires in November 2021, but there is an option to be extended for up to 3 years to 2024.

A decision on any extension has yet to be taken, but it is important that individuals start raising their concerns now.

This is therefore an issue that the NPC will be taking up - to ensure that the POCA continues for those who wish to carry on having their state pension paid in this way.

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