

Campaign!

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

Lord calls for 'National Service' for the over 60s as knives come out again for universal benefits

Around 300 campaigners from across the UK gathered on October 31 for the NPC's annual lobby of Parliament.

This year's protest was organised in response to the growing number of attacks by politicians, think tanks and media commentators on the future of universal pensioner benefits, such as the bus pass and winter fuel allowance.

Campaigners are concerned that following the general election, whichever party wins, there will be a proposal to means-test the benefits for the majority of older people.

The latest attack came just days before protestors went to Westminster, when the crossbencher, Lord Bichard suggested that in future pensioners should have to do voluntary work after

they retired or face a reduction in their state pension.

At the time, the NPC described the Lord's plans as "National Service for the over 60s" which were out of touch and ill-informed.

Dot Gibson, NPC general secretary told the media:

"Those who have paid their national insurance contributions for 30 or more years are entitled to receive their state pension and there should be no attempt to put further barriers in their way."

During the lobby, a packed Committee Room in the House of Commons, heard from Kelvin Hopkins MP and David Crausby MP about the importance of the campaign.

However, both the pensions minister and Labour's Treasury team had also been invited to speak, but both declined.

Protestors were



Campaigners gather outside the Houses of Parliament as part of the NPC protest in defence of universal benefits © NPC

told that the suggestion that only million-
aire pensioners would lose their benefits was being used as a smokescreen, given that to do so would save very little money.

Frank Cooper, NPC president said: "There is absolutely no suggestion that the country cannot afford to provide these uni-

versal benefits for older people - especially when every year pensioners add an extra £40bn to the economy in taxes, voluntary work and unpaid caring."

Many at the lobby also pointed out that MPs themselves received a number of universal benefits - such as free travel, which didn't seem to be under threat.

Mr Cooper said: "Many of these pensioner benefits have been introduced over the years in order to supplement the state pension because it remains so inadequate and taking them away would actually end up costing more in the long run."

The NPC has pledged to make universal benefits a key issue at the general election in 2015, and would be seeking a pledge from all candidates to protect them.

Get your MP to sign Early Day Motion 373 put down by David Crausby MP in support of our campaign



National Pensioners Convention

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Campaign Dates

21 November 2012
CPI/RPI Conference
12 noon-4pm, NUT HQ, London. Organised by the CPI/RPI campaign committee. Speakers invited include Steve Webb MP and Rachel Reeves MP. Tickets available from NPC on request.

28 February 2013
Transport Conference
10.30am-3.30pm, St Pancras Church Hall, Euston. Guest speakers will cover the campaign for improved public transport and details of the new trial of the bus pass for discounts on First Great Western trains. Booking essential. Contact the NPC office for details.

NPC Pensioners' Parliament 2013
18-20 June, Winter Gardens, Blackpool. Bookings and initial programme will be available from January 2013.

Number of winter deaths could rise

The NPC is warning that the latest excess winter death figures could show an increase in the number of older people dying from cold related illnesses, when they are released later this month.

The official figures for the period December 2011 to March 2012 will be published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 29 November, and campaigners are con-

cerned that fatalities may be higher than the previous year's total of 25,700.

Already five of the big six energy companies have announced large increases in their charges, and many older people will be concerned about the cost of keeping warm this winter, especially since the government cut the winter fuel allowance last year.

In addition, ministers are also considering

changing the way in which fuel poverty is measured - moving away from the current definition of spending at least 10% of income on fuel and instead favouring a complex measurement that will be less sensitive to price fluctuations.

Norman Jemison, NPC vice president said: "Over 3m pensioner households suffer from fuel poverty and tinkering with the definition won't help them."

Last push needed on tax petition

The NPC is calling on supporters to take part in one last push to publicise the online petition opposing the government's plan to freeze the age-related personal tax allowances from next April.

The petition stands at just over

70,000 signatures - but MPs will only debate the subject in Parliament if over 100,000 people come forward.

Under the government's plans, around 4.5m older people who currently pay income tax will effectively end up paying more tax, whilst at

the same time, those earning over £150,000 a year will see their tax rate cut by 5%.

Marion Wilson, NPC vice president said: "The chancellor has broken his promise on tax allowances and should stop attacking pensioners whilst helping the rich."

More change to RPI

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has launched a consultation on the future calculation of the Retail Price Index (RPI), which could potentially have a negative impact on millions of occupational pensioners.

Three out of the four options being considered by the ONS are likely to lead to a lower RPI figure - which will impact on those whose occupational pension schemes still go up by the RPI every year.

This potential change follows the government's decision to scrap the RPI link with both the basic and

second state pensions, as well as all public sector pensions.

Frank Cooper, NPC president said: "The switch from RPI to CPI has already hurt millions of pensioners, now it seems the government wants to move the goal posts again."

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

Sign Arthur's Petition

The NPC has thrown its weight behind Arthur Streatfield's online petition calling for the freeze on age related tax allowances to be reversed.

Please add your support by signing the petition at: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/31778>.