

# Campaign!

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

## 'Give back your bus pass' says IDS

**W**ork and Pensions' secretary, Iain Duncan-Smith (IDS) is the latest to add his voice to the debate over universal pensioner benefits.

In an interview with the Sunday Telegraph, Mr Duncan-Smith said that wealthy pensioners should consider handing back their winter fuel allowance and other benefits if they felt they didn't need them.

Deputy Prime Minister joined the debate to argue that pensioner benefits should be means-tested, whilst Business secretary Vince Cable suggested that they should become taxable income.

Amid the confusion over how easy it would be for someone to pay back money to Revenue and Customs, it was clear that once again the government

was preparing to change the entitlement to pensioner benefits.

Dot Gibson, NPC general secretary appearing on Channel 4 News said: "Elements in the coalition government are clearly desperate to take away the bus pass and winter fuel allowance from millions of older people, but are worried about the political backlash that would follow if they did so."

"The idea of people paying back their benefits is the latest in a long line of suggestions that are aimed at softening up the electorate for a change."

"Using additional taxes on millionaire pensioners would be a much more effective way of recouping the money back," she added.

The NPC's report *Sir Alan Sugar and the Missing Bus Pass* outlines the



Campaigners gather outside the Houses of Parliament as part of the NPC protest in defence of universal benefits  
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case for universal benefits and argues that many of the benefits not only enable older people to stay independent and active, but also give them the chance to help out in their communities through volunteering and unpaid caring.

During the 2015 general election campaign the Convention will be seeking pledges from candidates to maintain universal benefits if they are elected.

### Ageing in the middle?

The Fabian Society has produced a document entitled *Ageing in the Middle* which argues that the majority of pensioners are now on middle incomes and should pay more tax, as well as having their universal pensioner benefits means-tested.

Given that the majority of older people - 6.5m - have an income below £10,500 and don't pay any tax, the Fabians clearly class the middle somewhere which is actually closer to the bottom.

Labour leader Ed Miliband has also said he will review these benefits if the party wins the next election.



## National Pensioners Convention

Walkden House,  
10 Melton Street,  
London NW1 2EJ  
T: 020-7383-0388  
E: admin@npcuk.org  
W: npcuk.org

## Campaign Dates

**NPC Pensioners' Parliament 2013**  
18-20 June, Winter Gardens, Blackpool. New TUC leader Frances O'Grady will address the opening rally, alongside John McDonnell MP, author Owen Jones and Prof John Ashton. In addition, sessions are being planned on pensions and universal benefits, transport, how to influence the new NHS structures, dignity in social care and life for pensioners in devolved administrations. There will also be a special session on the issues facing local groups and what can be done to assist them. The entertainment at the social evening will be provided by The Merseybeats. Tickets priced £6 (including entry into prize draw). Booking forms and initial programme are available now from the NPC office.

# NHS under threat from free trade

**O**n 24 April, the House of Lords attempted to revoke Section 75 of the Health and Social Care Bill, which would open up the NHS to full privatisation.

This attempt failed, but it was later found that many of those voting in favour of keeping the rules had vested interests in a number of private healthcare companies.

The legislation also now paves

the way for a free trade agreement between America and Europe which would open up the health service to a global market.

Critics fear that as the power of transnational companies increase, the rights of governments to control big business are diminished.

Charities including Marie Curie Cancer Care, Sue Ryder and Help the Hospices have also voice their concern at the plans.

During the debate, Lord Owen said: "If this goes through the NHS as we have seen it, as we have believed in it, will be massively changed."

"It will take years, but unless we pull back from this whole attitude there will be no NHS that any of us can recognise."

NPC supporters are encouraged to write to their MPs and call for the NHS to be made exempt from the new agreement.

# Campaign against single-tier pension

**T**he government is expected to introduce a new Pension Bill in June aimed at creating a single-tier state pension of £144 a week for those retiring after April 2016.

The NPC has been leading discussions on this issue with a number of trade unions, pension experts and pensioner organisations.

It is clear from what is already known that existing pensioners -

especially those that currently get less than £144 a week - will not be included in the plans.

Future generations of pensioners will also end up with a state pension that is less generous than the current system, but one of the real anomalies in the proposal are the transitional arrangements that will give public sector pensioners with better occupational pensions, more mon-

ey than their counterparts in lower paid jobs who never contracted-out of the state second pension.

Ron Douglas, NPC president said: "Any new scheme has got to be fair to all generations and take both today's and tomorrow's pensioners out of poverty."

"Unless these issues can be addressed, there will need to be a very strong campaign against the single-tier pension."

# 67 care homes go bust

**L**ast year, the number of private care homes declared as being bankrupt rose by 12% to 67.

Critics argue this is part of a wider collapse in the social care system, with some suggesting that £2bn has already been taken out of adult social care budgets.

Many care homes used the boom years to borrow heavily to fund growth, but while the boom is over and occupancy levels are down in some homes, the debts remain.

The latest figures show that last year Britain's biggest private-care homeowners had combined debts of nearly £5bn.

Jan Shortt, NPC vice president said: "The needs of business and the needs of older people in care are just not the same."

"A national care service paid for through general taxation would be the best solution."

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