

Newsletter No 2 – 2019

Hello and welcome to our Newsletter for Autumn 2019. Articles include the continuing attacks on pensions and benefits, the TV Licence debacle, Period Poverty and the decline of the Great British Toilet. No mention of Brexit.

HOUSE OF LORDS ATTACK ON PENSIONS AND BENEFITS

A House of Lords Committee launched a disgraceful attack on pensions and senior citizens' entitlements during May, in the name of intergenerational fairness. How dare the rich unelected peers, who can claim £300 per day just for turning up, recommend the Government to take actions which would increase pensioner poverty significantly? The Lords Committee on '**Intergenerational Fairness and Provision**' in declaring that 'many pensioner households are now on average better off than many working households', proposed that—

- The Triple Lock on uprating state pensions should be scrapped
- Free TV Licences based on age should be phased out
- Bus passes and Winter Fuel Allowance should only be available five years after a person becomes eligible for a state pension
- 'Better Off' senior citizens should pay national insurance while they continue to work.

There is no indication or sense that the money saved by attacking pensions and entitlements would directly benefit young people, indeed the perspective of the report appears to be that intergenerational balance will only be achieved by being **seen** to reduce the benefits of all pensioners (not just the better off) it is an agenda of **discrimination and punishment**, not reconciliation.

Although these are only recommendations, the Committee's findings represent part of a worrying trend; to blame senior citizens who have worked and contributed all their lives for the current difficulties facing young people today. We must keep putting the argument that today's workers are tomorrow's pensioners, when they do reach our age, they will need good pensions benefits and services just as we do now.

It is alarming that this committee is cross-party and includes Baroness Greengrass, previously the Director-General of Age Concern! and opposition parties should immediately disassociate themselves from the recommendations of this committee. These comfortable and complacent peers have no idea what it is like to struggle by on the weekly state pension as they can bring in double that amount for one day of dozing on the Lords' benches

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UNISON SUPPORTS THE CAMPAIGN TO END PERIOD POVERTY

Unison Retired Members help to hand over donations to Diane Whitehead of 'Women's Work and prospective Labour candidate, Cecile Wright on International Women's Day. **Unison's Becky Everett** of Derby City Branch has been coordinating donations of sanitary products to distribute to those in need of them. **Becky writes;** I decided 2 years ago I wanted to do a Period Poverty Project from our branch for local women in need. At UNISON'S Women's Conference I was so upset to hear that women in the UK were struggling to afford essential sanitary products. The stories I heard from real women of the things they used instead, broke me into tears, also teenage girls were missing up to 5 days education a month as a direct result of not being able to afford the basics and embarrassment with their peers. These young women are the future, Doctors, Solicitors, Teachers, etc. Women should not be held back because of poverty. After speaking to friends, family and other Unison members, I found this to be much more of a local issue than I first thought. I will collect donations again this year and they will be given to a charity to be handed out to local women

WHEELCHAIR USERS PUSHED OUT?

Sometime this year, thousands more people with hidden disabilities will become eligible for Blue Badges, meaning thousands more parking spaces will be needed. However while this is commendable, very few, if any of the newcomers will need a wide bay and wheelchair users may find themselves pushed to the outer limits of car parks.

The pressure added to an already struggling system will be immense unless many changes are made. Local Authorities need to take parking abuse seriously and issue appropriate fines. Regrettably, there could be confrontation between various disabled groups. I have been informed that there is a campaign to remove the wheelchair symbol from the badge altogether as only 7% are wheelchair users, however the symbol is internationally recognized and must be retained.

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Pensioners TV Scandal

TORY TV ELECTION PROMISE IS BROKEN—MINISTERS MADE ‘SECRET PACT’

The **BBC Director General, Lord Tony Hall** has claimed Tory cuts were behind the cynical decision to hand responsibility for funding free TV licences for the over 75s to the BBC. Lord Hall accused Ministers of making a secret pact on the issue in 2015 and said he was told nothing would stop it from happening. It further exposes the myth of the Tory 2017 election manifesto promise to keep the benefit for the duration of this Parliament till 2022. Lord Hall spoke out after the BBC announced it would mean-test the licence fee, meaning around 3.7 million pensioners will lose out.

Lord Hall said the ‘secret pact’ came during talks over the BBCs Charter renewal. BBC Chairman, **Sir David Clementi** said “the talks were done behind closed doors with very little input from the BBC and none from the public”. Shadow Culture Secretary **Tom Watson** said “this shows the Tories never intended to protect free licences for older people” Pensioners will now have to fork out £154.50 per year. Only those on pension credit will qualify for one.

Tory MP **John Whittingdale** the Culture Secretary responsible for the 2015 deal told how those involved knew the decision would end up with free TV licences being scrapped.

Silver Voices Director, Dennis Reed said “Many will have to choose between heating, eating and what is often their main source of company, TV” Mr Reed added: “If the government get away with removing this benefit, next in line is going to be the winter fuel allowance, bus pass then free prescriptions. He said means-testing will have ‘ A huge impact on the two million pensioners struggling just above the Pension Credit eligibility level. **Jeremy Hunt** admitted the Conservatives were breaking their 2017 election manifesto, becoming the first Cabinet Minister to own up to the betrayal.

Taking the P*: the decline of the great British toilet.**

The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) has recently published a report revealing the dire state of our public conveniences and its impact on the public’s health: *Taking the P****. The report reveals that the public say there are not enough in their area: a damning reflection of the nearly 7000 council-run toilets that are estimated to have closed down since 2010. The findings shed light on the health burden of declining toilet provision which falls on people with ill health or disability, the elderly, women, outdoor workers and the homeless. For many, fear of or knowledge of a lack of facilities nearby can tie people to within a small distance of their home, acting as a ‘Loo Leash’ for one in five of the British public, and two in five of those with medical conditions requiring more frequent toilet use (such as diabetes or bowel conditions). This directly hampers some of the UK’s wider public health efforts, such as curbing obesity and keeping the elderly population physically active and socially engaged with the community.

Shirley Cramer CBE, Chief Executive, RSPH said “Our report highlights the dwindling numbers of public toilets in recent years is a threat to public health, mobility and equality that we cannot afford to ignore. As is so often the case in this country, it is a health burden that falls disproportionately on already disadvantaged groups. Public toilets are no luxury; it’s time we begin to see them as basic and essential parts of the community—just like pavements and street lights that enable people to benefit from and engage with their surroundings. It is deeply concerning that amidst a national obesity crisis, at a time when public health policy is to encourage outdoor exercise, our declining public toilet provision is in fact encouraging people to stay indoors!

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Universal Credit—The Scandal that just keeps on growing

The Department of Work and Pensions, DWP has spent £250,000 of taxpayer's cash to wrap 4 pages of drivel about Universal Credit around daily issues of the Metro, Britain's most widely read daily newspaper. The content tells readers that universal credit is a wonderfully efficient reform of the benefits system (not true), how the UK's most vulnerable people are better off through its introduction (they're not), how happy and caring civil servants are administering the new system (another howler!) They're not happy at all, and at least one region, Merseyside have said they will strike rather than impose universal credit on already-suffering benefits recipients.

There's a sinister aspect of the so called 'Advertorials' as there is little indication that they are being written and paid for by the DWP using our money, and the Metro's publishers is the right wing Daily Mail Group. **The Disabled People Against Cuts group (DPAC)** have responded by raiding Bus and Rail stations and gather up these copies and recycle them before they are read by an all too often gullible readership. Thousands of copies have been snatched, and the number of 'snatch squads' has been growing every week. The reaction of the Metro bosses has been to try and identify the organisers of this direct action so they can find someone to prosecute, but that won't work because the action spreading. One Sheffield activist said 'we have had messages from all over the country supporting us and we would dearly love the trade union leaders and MPs give their support to this campaign.

Changes at UNISON Derby City Branch office. Following the earlier departures of Arlette Kelly and Julie Warner, Branch Secretary Nicole Berrisford and Assistant Branch Secretary Paul Berrisford, have now moved on to pastures new. All have been very supportive and kind to the Retired Members section and we wish them all the best in their new projects. At a recent Branch Committee meeting the following people have been elected as Branch Officers in an interim capacity until the next AGM. Chair, Jill Cartwright, Branch Secretary, Becky Everett, Assistant Branch Secretary, Dennis Jackson. All other officers continue as normal.

CAPITALISM - Top Bosses pay continues to soar as others decline.

Top bosses pay has shot up over the last two years while workers wages have been at a virtual standstill, new research reveals. The highest paid bosses will benefit even further if PM Johnson implements a £9.6 billion tax cut he is planning for them. The TUC reveals that Britain's highest earners—the top 1per cent enjoyed a 7.6% real pay rise. Workers on average pay saw a tiny increase of 0.1% over the same period. TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady said ' while millions struggle with Britain's cost of living crisis, pay for those at the top is back in the fast lane'

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