

Women's Network Exchange

NPC Women's Working Party
Issue 32: October 2014

The National Pensioner Convention's Women's Working Party meets regularly in London, but we want to have women in all regions actively taking part. In November 2014 we shall be in the South West, Bristol. Can your organisation host a women's meeting next year?

Janet Shapiro.

apurshouse@npcuk.org

Walkden House, 10 Melton Street, London NW1 2EJ

Women's Working Party goes West

If you can get to the south-west please do come to the 'Event for Women' on Saturday November 1st in Bristol. This will be an opportunity for women pensioners and working women to get together and network. The topics to be discussed will include how pension changes affect women, the care crisis and how to defend the NHS, fuel poverty and loneliness. This issue includes an article by Sharon Graham who is one of the speakers.

Hopefully November 1st will be as successful as the Women's Conference held in Birmingham on 24th March 2012.

That meeting attracted a good attendance from the west midlands; two travelled from Dundee and another from Northern Ireland.

There will be ample time for questions and discussion; we want to hear your views and tap into your expertise.

There is a charge of £5 towards the cost of refreshments, and it is necessary to book.

Please send your payment including your name and contact details to:

Alison Purshouse, National Pensioners Convention, Walkden House, 10 Melton Street, London NW1 2EJ apurshouse@npcuk.org

[Your cheque or postal order should be made payable to National Pensioners Convention. Please include a SAE if you require confirmation of receipt]

The November 1st seminar will be held at Tony Benn House, Victoria Street, Bristol BS1 6AY between 10.00 and 3.00.

Ask if you want a map.

NPC Pensioners Parliament Blackpool 2014



The Women's Working Party banner was carried on the opening march by Rosie Macgregor and Janet Shapiro.

The lunch hour fringe 'Standing up for Women' was held on June 18th. We had an enthusiastic attendance in spite of our meeting in a lower ground room with lift problems.

We formed a circle and people introduced themselves. Everyone was able to contribute during the discussions.

Continued on page 2

Pensioners Parliament Fringe Meeting June 18th 'Standing up for Women!'

There was maximum group participation throughout.

Janet Shapiro introduced 'Pensions'

The Basic State Pension (BSP) should provide secure retirement income but it is too low. At £113.10 p/w it is practically the lowest in Europe.

5% men and 25% of women do not get the full BSP. A woman is less likely to get an occupational pension, even a small one. The gender pay gap extends into retirement.

Inequality exists amongst the retired: a few are very rich, many are struggling and too many well below the official poverty level (60% of median income). Older women predominate in the latter group. Guaranteed Pension Credit stands at £148.35 p/w, below the official poverty level. It is means tested so that while 4 million are entitled to receive it 1.8 million do not claim. Those present confirmed that the form was complicated and eligibility constraints very tight.

The UK has the economic resources to award decent pensions, but governments have focussed on occupational pensions. There is a powerful pension business lobby.

Increasing longevity is used as an excuse to raise the State Pension Age (SPA). The SPA will rise rapidly for women to 65 by 2018. The accelerated equalisation of SPA between men and women is causing severe anomalies. Women born a few days apart will experience markedly different financial losses. Many present were finding that women in their 50's, expecting to get their BSP and bus pass at 60, now find that they must wait several years.

Austerity measures are affecting women. The shift away from direct taxation favours the rich while indirect taxation such as VAT increases the cost of living for all. Reduced grants to local authorities and benefit changes all cause problems.

Rosie Macgregor introduced 'Getting About'

The concessionary bus pass is essential for those travelling in any large city but the impact of losing it would be much greater for those living in rural areas. Some services have become economically viable by the regular use by pensioners with passes; thus concessionary travel is protecting services that are essential for shopping, going to the library, having access to the bank and post office, seeing the doctor, dentist or pharmacist, meeting friends and socialising.

Women pensioners make up the bulk of passengers including those suffering long term ill-health and disability; they would be hardest hit if concessionary

travel was lost. Lack of transport leads to greater loneliness, isolation and deteriorating mental and physical health.

NPC recognises the importance for older people of accessibility to transport. Being able to get about makes older people more independent and more mobile, reducing demand on health and care services. In addition we have a positive impact on the environment. The NPC campaigns for free UK wide travel on buses, trams and local rail.

The bus pass can be used throughout each of the regions of the UK, but not across borders. In some areas concessions are not granted on Park and Ride bus services; in others local tram and train services are included, but these may now be threatened by cost cutting measures. In London the Freedom Pass, is available for use on almost all public transport but once you leave the city it is a different story.

The Dial-a-Ride scheme relies on local authority funding; it is a door-to-door transport scheme for people with mobility problems and all vehicles are wheelchair accessible. However, to use Dial-a-Ride you must become a registered user and this service is patchy or unavailable in rural areas.

We would like to have an accessible, integrated and affordable rail system that puts staffing and user needs before profits. In the current set up accessibility for the elderly and disabled varies between different rail companies.

A recent survey by Action for Rail and sponsored by the rail unions, NPC and TUC found that of 1,031 disabled passenger surveyed - 71% said they "always or sometimes required assistance from staff" and that 63% of wheelchair users said that "the loss of staff at stations would deter them from making some journeys or make train travel impossible".

Many present spoke of being dubbed 'twirleys', when trying to use the bus pass before 9.30am!

Mavis Hoyle introduced 'Caring'

Mavis emphasised that carers save the country £120 billion, more than £100 billion that is the total cost of the NHS.

She explained that a carer is defined as someone of any age who provides unpaid support for family or friends who could not manage without this help. However a carer usually, if not always, has an emotional relationship with the person they care for. In this session we focussed on 'informal' carers.

Continued on page 3

Pensioners Parliament Fringe Meeting June 18th 'Standing up for Women!'

Continued from page 2

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Carers often don't recognise themselves as carers. They are just a husband/wife, son/daughter, mother/father, neighbour, friend who does what is natural – but their health is important – we need to look after our carers!

The carers allowance is £61.35 a week, attendance

allowance £54.45 or £81.30 a week. There could also be Personal Budgets or Grants. There are prospects of a Carer and Support Bill and a Children & Families Bill, the latter would for the first time ensure that young carers are sufficiently protected by the law.

There are local and national services that include carers' centres, where they may expect to receive emotional support, helpful therapies, courses of various sorts and practical advice about benefits.

Mavis is currently campaigning for a law to protect the elderly having won Grassroots Action Support from the Sheila McKechnie Foundation.

Discussion during the fringe meeting focussed on informal carers. But all were aware of the need for paid carers to have good working conditions; they should have decent pay and be well-trained.

Gender Imbalance is not just in the NPC It's all around us!

Mark Carney, the recently appointed Governor of the Bank of England, was surprised at how few women occupied senior positions in the Bank when he took over. He thinks that hiring more women in these positions is not only "the right thing to do" but it also makes them "more effective".

Good news indeed. Perhaps it took an 'outsider' to see clearly the imbalance. Now he is actively recruiting women to the top jobs. The number of senior women managers has risen from a fifth to a third in the last 15 months. The Monetary Policy committee of 9 was all male. Now it has gained two women members. Better but still not good enough.

And what about Art? Eileen Cooper a member of the Royal Academy argues that there should be positive discrimination for women artists. In 2011 - 2012, 62% of arts and design students were women but in the same year only 31% of galleries showed work by women artists.

Of works by living artists acquired by the Tate that year, just 21% were by women. And a similar figure describes the proportion of women who are Royal Academicians (Just about a fifth of the 125).

Is that because women are worse artists? It seems unlikely. But this also follows through if we look at the public works of art on display in London. Less than 1 in 10 is by a woman. Art history is equally guilty. We think of Renaissance 'Man' and a visit to any public art gallery will reflect the imbalance.

So come on NPC. Let's lead by example. We have a good start with a woman as General Secretary but we are woefully short of women on the National

Executive and as officers in the Regions.

Ladies It's in your hands To coin a phrase "Your NPC needs you!" So get involved even if you start in a small way.

Marion Wilson

Zero Hours contracts -- A strangely British concept

With a zero hours contract you are tied to a firm but with no guarantee of work, and if offered it is often at very short notice.

This does not seem to exist on the continent but is now affecting over 600,000 workers in this country of whom 321,000 are women, mostly those under 25 or over 55.

Those most likely to be on these contracts are cleaners, care and social workers those in Call Centres or the retail trade. But it can also apply to teachers and nurses. These are typically 'women's' jobs.

Employers claim it gives their workers more flexibility but the reality is that these workers have often no idea when they will be working until the last minute (12 hours or less is not uncommon) and so may not be able to accept what is offered.

Research shows that 23% of women have been penalised for not being available to work when requested. It also means that their income will vary from week to week making budgeting for day to day living expenses almost impossible

Marion Wilson

Safe staffing – the importance of getting it right

Ensuring that health services have enough staff to meet patients' needs is the cornerstone in delivering high quality, safe care. Evidence shows just how important it is to have the right numbers of nursing staff, with the right skills, in the right place. In hospitals, studies have found that an increase in each nurse's workload is associated with a seven per cent increase in patient mortality odds (Aiken et al., 2014); and beyond a ratio of eight patients per registered nurses, the risks of unsafe care increase dramatically (Rafferty et al., 2007). Getting staffing right is not only good for patients, but also for staff, as nurses are more likely to be able to deliver all planned care, resulting in lower stress levels, lower illness and absence rates, and improved morale. This in turn leads to greater workforce stability, with positive financial benefits as providers are less reliant on temporary and agency staff.

With all these benefits to getting staffing right, and the risks in getting it wrong, it is perhaps surprising that understaffing remains a perennial issue for the health service. However, research has suggested that as many as 43 per cent of hospital wards are regularly operating on more than eight patients per nurse. Experience also shows us the impact of understaffing. Back in early 2013, Sir Robert Francis's Public Inquiry into high mortality rates at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust reported that significant understaffing and poor workforce planning had contributed to the appalling examples of substandard care discovered there. Similar findings on understaffing were later made by Professor Sir Bruce Keogh, NHS England medical director, who investigated another fourteen NHS trusts with relatively high mortality rates.

The Government has recognised the extent of the problem, and as part of its response, it has commissioned guidelines on safe staffing levels from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) which NHS trusts must follow. It has also asked the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the healthcare regulator in England, to strengthen its inspections and ensure that safe staffing standards are being met. Furthermore, more transparency over staffing is now required, with trusts displaying staffing levels at ward levels and submitting staffing data to the patient safety section of the NHS Choices website.

As part of this drive for safe staffing, there has been a renewed nursing recruitment drive in England. Since August 2013, over 7,000 additional full time registered nurses have been recruited. This is welcome news and long overdue, as NHS efficiency savings between May 2010 and August 2013 had

resulted in around 6,500 full time nurses lost from the NHS. There are, however, likely to be challenges ahead, as demand for nursing care continues to rise due to a growing and aging population, and increasing levels of long term conditions such as diabetes. Over the coming decade there is likely to be a significant shortage of nurses, as we are failing to train enough nurses to meet ever-growing levels of demand. We are already seeing the early signs of this, as many trusts are having to recruit nurses abroad, for example in Ireland, Spain and Portugal, simply to get their staffing levels up to a minimum safe level. However, with nurse shortages predicted across Europe, this cannot be a reliable long-term solution.

Urgent action is needed now to make sure we have the right numbers of nurses with the right skills to provide safe care. This means commissioning enough student nurses, and just as importantly, retaining them and investing in them throughout their NHS careers. We cannot risk an exodus of nurses who, prompted by increasingly stressful workplaces where they cannot work to the high standards they strive for, degradation of their terms and conditions, and low morale levels, choose to take early retirement, leave for overseas, or change careers. This was why the u-turn earlier this year on a promised one per cent annual pay increase for all nurses was so disappointing. Although judged affordable by the Treasury, the Government has now said it cannot afford both this small increase in nursing pay, and investment in staff to get staffing up to safe levels. We believe this is not only unfair, but misjudged. It will be critical that we keep the staff we already have, and attract the best new people we can to a nursing career. Continued attacks on the nursing profession will only make this harder in the long term.

Jackie Burns

London Women Worse off than the rest of the Country?

Women are worse off since Boris Johnson became Mayor of London a recent article claimed. They are more likely to be out of a job, earning less, and paying more for childcare. The gender pay gap in London is now 13% compared with 10% in the country overall. Average earnings for women has dropped from £625 to £575 a month (a 7% drop, almost double that for the rest of the UK) In addition the proportion of women earning less than the Living Wage has gone up by 6% to 20% in the last 6 years.

The unemployment rate for women also rose from 7.2% in 2008 to 8.7% this year. And if that were not enough, the cost of childcare has increased by 40 to 50% for under twos and by more than 60 % for children over 2. So how can we expect young women living in London today to develop their full potential and still play an active part in family life?

Marion Wilson

Women - defend your NHS!

Unite Executive Officer Sharon Graham explains how the Government is destroying our NHS, why it is so important to women and what we can do to defend our NHS.

It is a fact that women and girls – particularly those that are working class and older, are more likely to suffer from serious health problems than their male counterparts. That is why the Governments sinister moves to destroy our NHS should anger all women – we will bear the brunt of the disastrous Cameron and Clegg reforms. We now need to stand up and fight for our NHS before it is too late.

Since 2010, a potentially devastating two-fold attack has been launched against our NHS. First, £20 billion of cuts have led to over 7,000 front line NHS staff being made redundant, chronic understaffing of maternity wards and threats to close local services, including hospitals and GP surgeries. But it is the NHS sell-off, delivered by the *Health and Social Care Act 2012* that is threatening the very existence of our universal public health service. All NHS services are now potentially open to competitive tendering and a crack-down on cost is driving privatisation.

Following the introduction of the Act, over 70% of contracts for NHS services have been won by private companies and the first NHS hospital has been privatised at Hinchingsbrooke. With a further £20 billion contract bonanza predicted it is not a surprise that private interests are busy ‘lobbying’ for political influence. Updated research shows that, six Cabinet Ministers, seventeen other Government Ministers, the current Health Secretary and two former Health Secretaries – as well as literally dozens of MP’s and Lords – all have financial links to private healthcare.

The influence of private companies does not stop there. Their supporters and former employees sit at the most senior levels of the NHS, including the new Head of NHS England, Simon Stevens, a former Executive Vice President of giant American healthcare corporation United Health. Private interests are also using their power to influence international trade agreements. American health care corporations, including United Health, want the

NHS included in the EU-US trade deal TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) to make it almost impossible for any future Government to roll back privatisation.

If we fail to expose and mobilise, our NHS will be reduced to an American style insurance system within a generation. The sad irony is that the American healthcare system is far worse than the NHS. A recent survey by the Commonwealth Fund ranked American healthcare bottom out of ten western countries whilst the NHS was placed top. Not only was American healthcare judged to be the worst but also the most expensive.

We know that women are far more likely to live in poverty or be economically disadvantaged than men <http://fawcettsociety.org.uk/gap-in-pay-between-women-and-men-widens-after-years-of-slow-steady-progress/#sthash.WdlbjIRE.dpbs>.

American style healthcare would lead to a widening gender as well as class divide on health. Working class women are on the frontline of this emerging crisis but it will affect us all. The *Women’s Health and Equality Consortium* highlighted the facts

<http://www.whec.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/11/WhyWomensHealth11.pdf>:

- Women spend more years in poor health and with disability than men
- Recorded rates of depression and anxiety are more than twice as high for women than men
- Women are much more likely than men to suffer arthritis, rheumatism and strokes

This is why our campaign for the *Peoples NHS* is so important for women. Working alongside health professionals and community groups we are standing up for our NHS. From the privatisation of cancer care in Staffordshire to the outsourcing of pathology in Dorset, the *Peoples NHS* is exposing the truth behind the Tory agenda. But we can’t win unless women everywhere join with us in defence of our NHS.

Contact the *Peoples NHS* via www.peoplesnhs.org and you can follow @peoplesnhs on Twitter.

Sharon Graham

Please tell your friends and neighbours about this newsletter. If you would like to receive the Exchange regularly by email, please contact Alison Purshouse giving her your email address. apurshouse@npcuk.org

Walkden House, 10 Melton Street, London NW1 2EJ

Women in the Frame at the National Portrait Gallery

'Women in the Frame' was a conducted tour in the National Portrait Gallery organised on September 4th by SERTUC Women's Rights Committee and the expert guide was Rachel Kolsky. The tour was fun and made me want to know more. The group was whisked round a few selected portraits; it was not the portrait's artistic merit but the character of the sitter that mattered. Rachel set the scene for each woman's life experience and what she had achieved. For some this meant surviving multiple child births. She began with successful artists: Mary Beale, Mary Moser and Maria Anna Angelica Kauffman. Then Elizabeth Montagu, a rich socialite, who had hosted cultural gatherings, later called the 'Bluestocking Circle'. The writer and translator Elizabeth Carter attended these.

Mrs Thrale, originally Hester Lynch Piozzi, was a friend of Samuel Johnson, and wrote up a diary of his conversations.

Maria Anne Fitzherbert, one of the great beauties of her day, was persuaded to marry the Prince of Wales but discretely kept her secret after his official marriage to Caroline Brunswick in 1795.

Octavia Hill was the only woman featured amongst statesmen. A follower of Christian Socialism and encouraged by John Ruskin she engaged in schemes for improving the housing of the poor. She was founder of the National Trust.

Lady Colin Campbell, a journalist, was portrayed by Boldini in glamorous pose. Radcliffe Hall was a male dresser; as a lesbian, her book was initially banned but has never been out of print.

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson is more familiar to us because of the exhibition devoted to her life's work at the Unison headquarters on Euston Road.

Portraits of Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole

were hung together in order to contrast and compare their contributions for nursing during the Crimea War and since.

In the room for political thinkers we found Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women'. Thomas Paine's hung adjacent and her daughter Mary Shelley could be seen on the opposite wall.

We stopped at the portraits of suffragettes Mrs Emeline Pankhurst and her eldest daughter Christobel Pankhurst but found none for Sylvia Pankhurst, who campaigned for working women.

In the room for most recent notables we found the bust of a rather severe senior pathologist Dorothy Stuart Russell. A portrait of Dorothy Hodgkin hung alongside. Rachel's finale was the Andy Warhol portrait of Joan Collins where a photograph was taken of our group.

Do visit the National Portrait Gallery. I went again to check the names of those seen, and also found George Elliot, the Brontés, and Dorothy L Sayers.

In June I had visited the Brecons, Wales, and saw the mansion that Adelina Patti a successful young soprano had rebuilt and the extensive park she had planted. I found her too!

Janet Shapiro



Mary Wollstonecraft, & Lady Ottoline Morrell
We saw no portrait of Sylvia Pankhurst

Women take the lead: yesterday and to-day

The SERTUC Women's Rights Committee held a seminar on Tuesday September 16th 2014 with the title 'Women's emancipation before, during and after World War I. The guest speakers were Professor Mary Davis, and Christine Coates (former Librarian of the TUC Library at London Metropolitan University)

Professor Davis traced the historical events of this 'appalling' not 'great' war. Before WWI there was no emancipation – not all men had the vote. Acts of Parliament had granted voting rights very gradually, starting with those with property. The National Union Suffrage Society was founded in 1903 for universal suffrage and there was considerable industrial unrest during the early part of the 19th century.

The struggle for women's suffrage is commonly attributed to Emily and her eldest daughter Christobel but at the onset of WWI both stopped campaigning and supported enlistment and conscription, with women handing out 'white feathers'. It was the other daughter, Sylvia Pankhurst who remained loyal to suffrage; she identified with working women and organised the East London Federation of Suffragettes and the shop stewards movement. Sylvia encouraged the working class women to combine and win concessions.

After the war men over 21 were franchised in 1918, but only women over 30 with property were included. It was 1928 before all women over 21 had the vote on equal terms with men.

Continued on page 7

Women take the lead: continued

Christine Coates brought us pictures from the comprehensive collection held in the Trade Union Congress at London Metropolitan University, Learning Centre, London Metropolitan University, 236 Holloway Road, London N7 6PP.

For the history websites see www.unionhistory.info
Her pictures told the story of the activities of early campaigners for women's rights - led by working women themselves. Internationalism was supported as workers were being made to fight each other for a cause not their own. Her presentation included the National Federation of Women Workers 1906, that fostered struggles including the Chainmakers Strike

1910, 'Pinks' Jam Factory in Bermondsey and the Kilburnie Netmakers Strike 1913.

Campaigns continued for decent homes, the family allowance, transport and laundry workers, proper treatment for troops and their widows. The unemployed demonstrated as women lost their jobs to returning menfolk.

Margaret Bondfield was a prominent figure, being the first woman to chair the General Council of the TUC, and the first female cabinet minister.

The seminar continued with many questions to both speakers.

Janet Shapiro

For more information on Sylvia Pankhurst see 'Sylvia Pankhurst: Suffragette, Socialist and Scourge of Empire' by Katherine Connelly, PlutoPress.

The Darlington Mums, The Care UK Strikers, Focus 15 and more

The **Darlington Mums** walked the 300 miles from Jarrow to London, setting off on August 16th and arriving at Trafalgar Square on Saturday 6th September .

The picture shows one of them addressing the crowd that greeted them at Red Lion Square in London.



Supporters of '999callforNHS' received a message on 27th September from Joanna Adams on behalf of the Darlington Mums. Joanna said that they had been completely overwhelmed by the success of the march, but she hoped that we were still in for the journey as there was such a lot to do.

She said *'The NHS is not safe. NHS staff are still being treated poorly. Our hospitals are still being thrown into deeper and deeper debt. The election looms and we need to let the politicians know that we don't care what party you are from, we don't care how much you say you support us. We only care about protecting our NHS.'*

We must make sure that they are not let down.

Care UK is a private company that won a bid to provide assisted living for people with learning disabilities in their homes in Doncaster.

Care UK worker have been on strike to protect their pay and conditions and thus protect the service received by patients. Unison has been trying to negotiate with the firm without success.

On their 89th day of Industrial Action, the Care UK Strikers, joined forces with comrades from other Trade Unions and supporters plus members of the public in London yesterday, to take part in the TUC national demonstration on Saturday October 18th

BRITAIN NEEDS A .PAY RISE!

They shared the stage with Unison's General Secretary Dave Prentis as he gave his speech to the thousands of struggling workers present. A great day out with like minded people who have the same thoughts and the same goal.

Focus 15 is a group, largely single mothers, who since September 21st have been occupying the Carpenter's housing estate in Stratford that Newham Council plans to demolish. Bow County Court had ordered them to leave the flats by 7th October, but their determination has highlighted inadequate housing policies.

Quoting Sarah Kwei - the Guardian October 5th
With a lot of nerve, the support of thousands of people and media attention across the world, a group of mainly young, working-class women has put the political elite in its place. The age-old tactic of sticking together has come good and has given me all the hope in the world that we can win back Carpenters estate for the residents and put social housing back on the agenda.

Janet Shapiro