

Pensions Action Group Newsletter

Issue 23

19 September 2009

Fighting to get our pensions back

Labour Party Conference Demonstration

12:00 Tuesday 29 September, Brighton Seafront

Labour Party Conferences have been a rich source of protest and successful action: let's make sure that this one's no exception! Friends in Parliament tell us the campaign should continue and they need our support. Please note in your diaries and arrange to be there.

Transport: The Seafront is 10mins walk from train station (map at <http://tinyurl.com/kswqqb>). If coming from beyond London the earlier you book the cheaper your journey, especially if you need to start before 09:30. Anyone needing help or a lift, please ring 07899 904845.

What to wear: Depends on the weather. T shirts with slogans will be provided as an over-garment.

Final joining instructions: The precise meeting point (which will be between the two piers (1 a burnt ruin) on seafront) will be posted on the pensionstheft Yahoo! group as soon as the police notify us.

Banners & placards will be provided. The theme: Fairness for all - all we want is what we paid for. What's good enough for bankers is good enough for us.

Willie Riggans will be bringing UEF pensioners from Scotland & Birmingham by bus, & John Benson doing the same from ASW Cardiff. Come and join them and really let the Government know that we're not going away!



The UEF contingent at the 2008 LPC

Other party conferences

We are holding our demonstration at the Labour Party Conference because they are the party in power and have the ability to compensate us properly, if they so wish. We are not however neglecting the other two parties. A group of PAG members are provisionally booked to see Nigel Waterson, the Shadow Pensions spokesman, at the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester on 6 October; and another group will be seeing Steve Webb, the Liberal Democrat Shadow Work and Pensions Minister at their conference on 22 September. Both parties have been supportive of our case to date and we are seeking to ensure that their support continues after the forthcoming general election, when they may at last be in a position to take concrete actions.

Strategy and direction

A Notch meeting (PAG strategic meeting) was held at Groby, Leicestershire on 8 August 2009 with the following outcomes.

1. PAG STRUCTURE

Following arrangements agreed unanimously & in absence of any representations from those not able to attend:

Open Notch meetings will continue to be held at intervals: all on Yahoo group email site invited. Minutes will be sent to those attending & those who send apologies.

To speed up decisions Inner Notch continues & consists of:

Paul Gill	Peter Humphrey*
Peter Lapinskas*	Alan Marnes
Terry Monk*	Richard Nicholl*
Andrew Parr*	Pat Sargent
Adrian de Segundo	Peter Wheeler

Existing members re-elected with additions of PL/AdS proposed/seconded by RN/TM & TM/RN respectively.

Consultation team for political and DWP discussions indicated by * with PL as stand by.

2. STRATEGY

Following strategy statement unanimously adopted in light of discussion and of responses received from those not present:

"Whilst recognizing that we expected to receive 100% of the pensions we were promised, our primary focus is to ensure that the Government's own Dec 07 promise of 90% must mean 90%,

including full scheme indexation, of the full entitlement for all members."

This does not stop those campaigning for full compensation from continuing to do so - in fact it can strengthen the consultation team's hand when conducted sensibly.

3. PRE-ELECTION SUPPORT FROM LIBDEMS AND CONSERVATIVES

Contacts already made to be fostered and developed, pursuing the constructive comments recently made in committee at the Commons by Steve Webb & Nigel Waterson.

4. LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE BRIGHTON 27 SEPT - 01 OCT

Agenda to be checked for any pensions debate or fringe meeting. Infiltration and peaceful protest/picketing, the latter spearheaded by John Benson of ASW Cardiff, to be formulated. Most likely dates Tue/Wed 28/29 Sept. Details to follow. [*See lead story - Ed.*]

5. WORKING WITH VISTEON ACTION GROUP - VPAG

We were joined by 2 members of the action group - 450 strong - from Visteon, a major Ford sub-contractor whose UK mfg operations were summarily shut down on 31 March, with 3000 members of their pensions scheme immediately finding benefits reduced to PPF compensation levels.

Agreed that if we both stick to the same message extra numbers from either side will help raise awareness and be useful for both groups.

7. PRE 2010 GENERAL ELECTION STRATEGY

Fielding candidates to be kept under review. Noted that a Pensioner's Party already exists but has not been responsive so far.

Adrian de Segundo

FAS Regulations - Fifth Set

The plan for the Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS) revealed by the then Minister Peter Hain in December 2007 is being implemented through a series of six sets of regulations. The fifth set, known as the Summer Regulations, was passed into law by Parliament in Committee on 7 July 2009. The regulations deal with a number of very important issues for those whose schemes folded between 1997 and 2004, including indexation, ill-health and early retirement, the cap, pre-2004 retirement, the treatment of partners and the tax-

free lump sum. They were put out to consultation in the Spring (see <http://tinyurl.com/bktnlk>) and submissions were made by many PAG members, as well as a group submission on behalf of all our members. The Government responded to the comments on 9 June: <http://tinyurl.com/lm7pr9> and the final regulations are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/l92225>

Unfortunately many of the points which we made were rejected, but this was not unexpected – the fight goes on!

What was perhaps more encouraging was the line taken by the opposition parties during the debate in committee, which is available here: <http://tinyurl.com/nvbtfk>

Both parties criticised the remaining injustices and so there is the possibility that we could see some more progress after the election, if not before.

FAS Regulations - Sixth Set

The final set of regulations deriving from the December 2007 announcement deals with the transfer of assets from schemes which have not yet completed winding up to the Treasury. The consultation document for it has now been published and is available here: <http://tinyurl.com/lprsg>

PAG will be responding on behalf of members, but if your scheme still has assets, you should read the proposals and make sure that you send in details of the comments or changes which you would like to see. Remember, if you don't write, the DWP will take it that you are in full agreement with their plans.

The closing date for responses is 6 October 2009

Political meetings

Over the last few months, several meetings have been held with leading political figures to put forward our case, including Angela Eagle (Minister of State for Pensions and Ageing Society), Steve Webb (Liberal Democrat Shadow

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions) and Peter Hain (Secretary of State for Wales).

TUC defends public pensions

The TUC has produced an interesting report in which they mount a defence of the pensions for public sector employees, which are currently under attack. Their case is basically that private sector pensions are in danger of being destroyed but this will make the situation worse not better. So they argue that the effort should go into improving the lot of private sector employees, and they put forward some interesting suggestions as to how this might be done, including the removal or limitation of tax relief on pensions contributions for high earners. This is a very good argument for our case as well – if Government can't afford to compensate us properly, how can they justify giving pension tax-relief to people earning £100,000 a year or more?

The report is called "Decent pensions for all" and you can download it from: www.tuc.org.uk/extras/decentpensionsforall.pdf

House of Commons demo

On 3 June a group of disgruntled pensioners assembled on Parliament Square and proceeded to take their clothes off in front of the world's press, a number of police officers and throngs of bemused tourists. Yes, it was "stripped of our pensions" time again! We had a good turnout, the weather was kind to us and a good time was had by all. It was at the height of the MPs' expenses scandal and the contrast between our losses and the gains made by so many of the MPs who had voted to keep us in poverty was very obvious.

Previous issues

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