
NEWSLETTER

Unison North West Region Retired Members Committee

TORIES THREATEN THE TRIPLE LOCK!

The *Triple Lock* is a mechanism used by the Government to determine the annual rise in the State Retirement Pension, (commonly known as the '*Old Age Pension*') Under the triple lock the rate of inflation, the annual rise in earnings across the economy and 2.5% are compared, and the greater of these three figures determines the rise applied to pensions, meaning that the rise is never less than 2.5%.

The Tory Government have been unhappy with this formula for a while, as it regularly produces rises in excess of price inflation and annual earnings rises, and government spokespersons have raised the idea of scrapping the Triple Lock formula on a number of occasions. What has to be understood is that the State Retirement Pension in the UK is low, and is only 24.2% of National Average Earnings, normally it would take until 2038 to even reach 26% of national average earnings! (26% is the peak level, which was achieved as long ago as 1979).

But the situation is also complicated by the fact that people who retired before April 2016 receive a substantially lower pension than those retiring after that date.

Our pension is also low by comparison with other similar countries, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, being around 29% of our working income, compared with the OECD average of 63%, whilst in Italy and the Netherlands the figure is more than 80%!

But the Coronavirus crisis has created an unusual situation, because workers who were *furloughed* on 80% of their usual earnings, and who will return to their usual earnings when they return to work will statistically create a rise in earnings across the economy of around 18%, and this is panicking the Government because of the impact on the Triple Lock.

The National Pensioners Convention have called for urgent talks with the Government in an attempt to retain the Triple Lock, which we hope are successful, but the fundamental issue of bringing the UK pension up to a comparable level with similar countries is crucial, and if that takes a one off rise of 18% then so be it!

Roger Bannister
Chair

The Future Of Transport

Covid19 has transformed our transport system and the impact is likely to stay. It has created a risk to the viability of public transport following the very limited use during lock down. This has been compounded by the early government message to drive to work. We need to make the government aware that there will be long term economic and social costs if the public transport is diminished. Moreover the government now has the opportunity to transform transport.

One of the positive benefits of the lockdown has been the impact on the environment. The government was already setting out an agenda for transport that included greater sustainability through the promotion of active travel and public transport and moving to zero emission vehicles. Transport plays a fundamental role in our society as it underpins our economy but also keeps communities connected.

The challenges are connectivity and accessibility, making systems work, affordability and flexibility and the environmental impact. The social impact of transport is that allows access to public services, social and leisure activities. It allows equal access to travel by different groups, tackles social exclusion and isolation. We already know that some regions are better subsidised e.g. London. The government settlement for Transport for London means that free travel for children has been stopped.

Free travel passes for pensioners is important. A free travel pass is no use without a fully comprehensive transport system. Unison retired members need to join any local campaigns ie Better Buses for Bury. Subscribe (and donate if you can afford it) to the Campaign for Better Transport. Join in any local consultations on transport ie in Greater Manchester there are important proposals affecting travel.

Lastly don't forget to add in any campaign that if walking is to be encouraged we need decent footpaths. So government needs to properly fund local councils.

Mary Whitby
AQA Branch
NW Retired Members Committee

NATIONAL RETIRED MEMBERS' CONFERENCE

As you will all be aware all National Conferences have been cancelled for the time being. Your National Committee have decided to try to hold an internet seminar on 14 October, the day when we would have been starting our conference in Bournemouth.

If this can be arranged it will last for an hour and a half or two hours at the most and when we know more we will arrange for your branch to be informed.

Maureen Vass
NW Retired Member' Secretary.



TV Licences

In 2000 free TV licences were given to the over 75 yr. old and since that time have allowed them to enjoy the company -for many their only one – and a view of the outside world. Since that then all political parties prove this benefit however as part of the 2015 BBC charter deal the costs and administration of the scheme passed to the BBC. The BBC board announced that they would scrap the scheme from 1st June 2020 following political and public uproar they delayed the implementation until 1st August 2020. The result of this measure is that an estimated 3.7 million over 75yr olds will have to pay a licence fee of £157.50 PA, this includes some 1.2 million who are eligible for, but do not claim benefit support.

Campaigns by Organisations including Age UK and the Pensioners' Convention have not been listened to this will result in many having to give up their TV or refuse to pay and face possible court action, for others it will mean that to continue watching they will have to cut back on other essentials. This is particularly cruel at a time when COVID-19 is imposing great restrictions on the over 75s ability to have any kind of a normal life, (During the current crisis over 94% have used the BBC for information and entertainment)

Both the Government and the BBC seem to believe that this is an issue that the other will be blamed for and that it will just go away. There are other considerations to take into account in 2018/19 there were 25,927,000 licences issued this is a decline of 37,000 on the previous year (The first decline in 10 years) The decline of the 16yr -34yr olds was from 60% to 56%. The BBC has to make savings of 800ml in the year 2020/21. The loss of finances for this year are 125ml. The whole future of the BBC and the Licence has to be in debate. The Government has to find ways to bring back the economy and there have been some hints that the current benefits may not be maintained.

As the age group most likely to vote as well as the age group who use the BBC most we must ensure that we are heard, and that our benefits are not a matter for debate! The Government needs to honour their commitment to maintain our benefits and reinstate funding to the BBC for the licences.

Please ensure that if you are entitled to Pensioner Benefits you claim them,
Support the various Organisations fighting to save our licences,
Write to your local MP

Tony Smith

www.silvervoices.co.uk/campaigns

www.ageuk.org.uk/campaigns

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Maureen Vass

**Regional Retired Members
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Acknowledgements

Conference photo sourced from
Unison's website.