

Women's Network Exchange

NPC Women's Working Party
Issue 50 May 2020

The escalating pandemic is affecting all our lives, our physical and mental health, and harming the global economy which will have devastating consequences for the future. Please spare a thought for the victims of this invisible enemy and for those who are risking their lives on our behalf.

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Rosie MacGregor
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Women's TUC Conference 2020



Proudly holding the banner of the Women's Working Party are vice-president Marion Wilson, Meg McDonald and Lorene Fabian.

Photograph by courtesy of Peoples Studio

Meg and Susan Howe looked after a well-stocked stall on Wednesday. Arlene Hansell and Janet Shapiro took over on Thursday.

Many thanks to Jonathan Saffir who transported the banner and all the documents.

Vice-president Marion Wilson attended throughout.

The Mixture As Before?

The Women's TUC Conference held in March was well attended as usual despite the coronavirus scare. But it was very noticeable that we were again talking about the same subjects as in previous years and little progress seems to have been made.

We dealt with the problems facing women at work, whether it was the gender pay gap, the barriers pregnant women face, to maternity leave returners whose jobs are threatened, to

work related stress and mental health.

We heard some heart rendering stories for example of a young woman who having lost her baby through miscarriage, was being forced to try again for another immediately by her partner. On medical advice she refused but then discovered the locks had been changed on her home and she was left homeless, having to live in her car and with no address, unable to get access to financial help.

Marion Wilson continued on page 2

Women's TUC Conference continued

Samira Ahmed, the BBC presenter who won her case against the BBC of unfair pay compared with Jeremy Vine, gave a moving speech encouraging others to fight for their rights.

I attended a fringe meeting on Equal pay and pointed out that, yes there was a gender pay gap but the gender pension gap was much

greater at 39.5%.

I explained the NPCs work on this and showed them our leaflet on "Understanding Women's Pension Equality".

The NPC stand was manned by members of the Women's Working Party who gave out leaflets and 'good advice' to those present

Marion Wilson

Coronavirus – a personal view

The Coronavirus is having an unprecedented impact on our lives. I thought I was a confident woman but now I feel vulnerable. At least I don't live alone; Mr MacGregor and I share our house with our 31 year old son. I wish he had a home of his own but I'm glad he's here. It's company and he can get the shopping and other essentials, but he also says he's worried.

Older women tell me their greatest fears, apart from whether or not they catch the virus, are loneliness and isolation, not being able to see their grandchildren, money worries, lack of savings, rising costs, health care and the supply of food and drugs.

I share some of these worries but at least we have our pensions even if barely enough to live on. I don't know how people of working age with their livelihoods taken away will cope if they can't pay the rent or mortgage.

There is so much conflicting advice from government and so much misinformation from various different sources, not least social

media. At least the free TV licence for the over 75s that would have been taken away has been extended until August, but that's not really good enough. I don't think the government realises how much older people, especially those who are housebound or live alone rely on the TV and radio for information and to combat loneliness.

My greatest fear is the unknown – not knowing who will succumb or how long the epidemic will last. If anything good comes out of this it will be a reduction in the mania for travel and harm to the environment and perhaps we might find ourselves living in a more caring society.

However, even our pensions are under threat in the current economic climate given the recent suggestion that we should lose the Triple Lock.

Keep vigilant and safe.

Rosie Macgregor

International Workers' Memorial Day

This year more attention was paid to the International Workers' Memorial Day.

Every year more people are killed at work than in wars. Most don't die of mystery ailments, or in tragic "accidents". They die because an employer decided their safety just wasn't that important a priority. International Workers' Memorial Day (IWMD) commemorates those workers.

In many hospitals and other places of work, a minute's silence was observed at 11am on

April 28th. We thought of the front-line nurses and doctors whose lives are at risk from Covid-19.

But front line workers include transport staff, delivery people, milkmen, shopworkers, security staff, postmen—all taking whatever precautions they can to avoid being infected. Their work helps those of us instructed to stay at home.

Key workers continued:

Key Workers– who are they?

Special thanks should go to postmen.

The Communications Worker's Union (CWU) had earlier voted for strike action over pay. But in March, the CWU voted in favour of carrying out essential deliveries during the Coronavirus crisis. This was a 94.5 ballot victory on a turnout of 63.4% showing that CWU members respect their role as an additional emergency service in the UK. They opt to carry out extra deliveries, such as medical, food parcels etc.

Many pensioners are not online so depend upon the post.

I certainly have benefitted with gratitude from the delivery of food parcels during my enforced self-isolation.

The CWU had decided to continue with essential deliveries being aware that good communications are essential during the pandemic.

However safe working conditions need to be observed. Change.org launched a petition on behalf of CWU workers, obliged to work in crowded sorting offices. The text was:

'In light of this worldwide pandemic whilst people

are being instructed to stay at home to prevent the spread of Coronavirus, Royal Mail staff are expected to continue to work closely together in small sorting offices and complete their deliveries without any PPE provided for them.

We are putting ourselves and our families at serious risk of contracting the virus. We are Key Workers but we do not have the equipment to keep us safe.'

This petition is now closed. Hopefully conditions in sorting offices have improved.

The Royal Mail has a **Universal Service Obligation**, being the designated provider of the Universal Postal Service – the six-day a week, one price goes anywhere postal service that **Royal Mail** delivers to 30 million UK addresses.

However the Royal Mail announces that it will temporarily no longer deliver letters on a Saturday from 2 May. Letters will be delivered as normal from Monday to Friday. The six-day-a-week delivery of letters and parcels will be resumed from June 13.

Janet Shapiro

Pensioners at risk of exclusion if not on line while the pandemic worsens.

Coronavirus has shone a spotlight on the growing difficulties of people who are not online in accessing information and services - including GP surgeries. This makes them more socially isolated, lonely and poorer.

The NPC is currently campaigning to help more older people get online, raise awareness of the problems of those who are not and improve their lives.

We need your stories to help us in the campaign – which is now more important and urgent than ever.

Please write to the Digital Working Party or email us at NPC, 62 Marchmont Street, London WC1N 1AB Email: info@npcuk.org

Jenny Sims

Chair of NPC's Digital Inclusion/Exclusion Working Party

Repayment of Legal Aid

Those people who have received legal aid in the past may, or may not, be liable for the sum to be repaid. The terms and conditions vary, according to circumstances at the time of the legal action. For example, if repayment is only required when a property is sold, or has a new owner, then a lien is placed on the property to be paid at that time. Nevertheless, even if repayment is not due, the Legal Aid Agency writes regularly to ask its debtors to contact the Agency, with information about their current financial circumstances, for the Agency "to ascertain if it is appropriate to

continue to postpone repayment of the charge." Although some are happy to repay early, others are not. It is therefore, important to check the original documents before complying with the Agency's request.

The writer has asked to remain anonymous and we respect her wishes

It may be that other readers have experienced debts of this sort, and the repeated reminders. Feel free to contact NPC if you have been affected.

Rosie Macgregor

Editor's note: Information on Legal Aid can be found at www.gov.uk/legal-aid

We need good data and trusted statisticians

In February I attended the annual conference of the Radical Statistics Group entitled 'Learning from the Past to Build a Better Future'. This group encourages good statistical practice, and exposes 'Fake news' based on dodgy statistics.

www.radstats.org.uk.

One of the talks was by Lynn McDonald, author of the book '**Florence Nightingale at First Hand**'.

Lynn explained that Nightingale's statistical knowledge had been learned from her mathematics tutor Sylvester. Also, she was good friends with Sidney Herbert, Secretary of War during the Crimean War and had the ear of government.

Like Joseph Lister, Florence did not understand the science of diseases such as cholera, but both knew the importance of cleanliness. In the Crimea she observed the appalling sanitary conditions where wounded soldiers were being treated and persuaded Herbert to order sanitary improvements. This resulted in substantial reductions in mortality.

French soldiers, had initially fared better; nurses were helping from the start, but the French government failed to order sanitary improvements

and mortality levels did not drop.

As well as tremendous fortitude, Florence benefitted from reliable data, her statistical skills and having the ear of government.

For Lyn McDonald's book see <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/florence-nightingale-at-first-hand-9781441132550/>

Another talk alerted us to '**Missing Numbers**.'

Anna Powell Smith from Sheffield Hallam spoke about the many gaps in data collection that frustrate researchers. <https://missingnumbers.org/about/>

In the article below, Dr Jay Ginn seeks to get a true picture of the pension gender gap. Her analysis draws upon a range of studies made by other researchers. The data used however was collected and published more than a decade earlier

[Jay was a Visiting Professor at Kings College London's Institute of Gerontology until 2015 and is an Associate of the Centre for Ageing and Gender at Surrey University. <https://www.surrey.ac.uk/centre-research-ageing-gender/people>]

Janet Shapiro

Spotlight on pensioner poverty for women over 75

The ages of women pensioners range from 65 up to 90 plus.

More than half (56%) of those women born before 1945 were in poverty compared with 45% of those born later, aged 65-74.

In addition, only 48% of these older women were-home owners, compared with 61% of the younger group⁽¹⁾. A high proportion of the oldest pensioners were lone women, due to women's greater longevity and widowhood.

Those women born before 1945 entered a rapidly changing society; NHS and Beveridge's National Insurance (NI) were created in the 1940s. However, NI assumed most women would be married, rarely employed full-time, and dependent on their husband's earnings and NI contributions. Only in the late 1970s was equal pay for equal work legislated and allowances made in NI for women's unpaid work.

More progress followed in pay and employment, while NI pensions now include Care Credits.

The oldest women missed out on these reforms, leading to smaller state pensions and small or non-

existent private pension compared with men of the same age.

Among all women aged over 65, the median personal income (including widow's pensions) was only 57% of men's; married women were the poorest⁽²⁾. Among couples aged 65+, women's personal income from state and private pensions was £75 per week compared with £295 for men. Thus women's income was about 25% of men's⁽³⁾.

Official poverty statistics assume equal sharing in couples, obscuring the personal poverty of married women and underestimating the overall gender gap among pensioners as a whole. The reasons for the gender gap in pensions still lie in women's lower pay and shorter employment due to caring responsibilities.

Notes

1. Hancock, R. (2005) 'Can housing wealth alleviate poverty among Britain's older population?' *Fiscal Studies* 19(3).
2. Arber, S. and Ginn, J. (2004) 'Ageing and gender. Diversity and change', lead article in *Social Trends 2004*, No. 34: 1-14.
3. Pensions Commissions (2004) Chapter 8 in *Pensions: Challenges and Choices*, London: TSO.

Jay Ginn

A Post-Brexit Future Looks Uncertain for Health and Social Care

The outcome of the General Election was a huge shock for many and there is great uncertainty about what the future holds. It is hard to predict what the Tory Government has in store based on a manifesto that told us very little about what we could expect after Brexit.

The NHS and Social Care, both so chronically underfunded, are of primary importance to pensioners. We must not forget that these services rely on migrant workers. The proposals to limit immigration will have a disastrous impact on service delivery. There are currently more than 40,000 nursing vacancies and if you include other NHS staff including doctors there are more than 100,000 vacancies. Nearly 10% of posts are unfilled and salaries in the UK trail behind many other countries.

Vacancies in adult social care are equally large and it is worrying that nearly 31% of social care workers leave the profession each year. The ability to recruit staff from overseas is key to addressing these vacancies. Yet proposed immigration policy and a minimum earnings threshold following Brexit will prevent the NHS and social care providers from filling these vacancies. Low paid posts within these services are well below the proposed earnings

threshold. Furthermore, coupled with a falling pound, many overseas workers would earn less here than in their home countries.

We know the American model of health care doesn't work especially for women, for older people and for the most vulnerable in society.

A no-deal Brexit, and any trade deals with other countries such as USA, will have an even greater impact, not just on staffing but on the cost of vital medicines and medical equipment and this could undermine the health of UK citizens for generations to come and end the NHS as we know it.

As if that wasn't enough to worry about, we have fresh fears and uncertainty about the epidemic of Coronavirus. Although the death rate overall appears low, older people with underlying health problems are most vulnerable and for whom it is most likely to be fatal.

Nye Bevan's words could not be more appropriate. "Illness is neither an indulgence for which people have to pay, nor an offence for which they should be penalised, but a misfortune the cost of which should be shared by the community."

Rosie MacGregor

Yet another women scientist kept waiting for proper recognition

Katherine Johnson, a 43 year old mathematician, worked for NASA during the space race.

John Glenn was about to take off on his epic journey to become the first American to orbit the earth. The computer had done its job but Glenn insisted that Katherine checked the figures before he would agree to go.

She spent a day and a half recalculating the data and provided figures which went two decimal places beyond what the computer had produced. Only then would Glenn agree to go. This was a mission in February 1962 which the Americans desperately wanted to complete in their race with the Russians.

Katherine then started work on the moon. She worked out the trajectory of the lunar module and made sure it synchronized with the command module for the return journey. She had to factor in the speed of the rocket, when it should fire, the

weight of the capsule and the rotation of the earth.

Her calculations were used to programme the computer for the Apollo 11 launch in 1969.

As she said in her autobiography

"The nation might still have thought of our people as inferior, but a black woman (she was Creole) had performed the computations that had taken white male astronauts into outer space, land them on the moon and bring them safely back home."

Her work was finally recognised many years later when she was presented with the Presidential Medal of Honour by Barack Obama.

Katherine was a truly remarkable woman who deserved to be better known for the work she did for NASA when she did it, not years later.

Marion Wilson

Women in Lower-Grade Jobs Hit By Pension Change 'At Greater Risk Of Depression'

Women in lower-grade occupations forced to work up to six years longer because of changes to the state pension age are a third more likely to suffer debilitating, potentially permanent, depression, research has found. The changes to the state pension age (SPA) have also resulted in a widening gap in health between women from different occupations, according to a paper by academics at King's College London. "Our research is important because we know that worsening mental health will lead to higher healthcare costs, higher use of disability benefits and greater use of health services.

Worsening mental health also leads to lower economic productivity and reduced ability to participate in life," said Dr Ludovico Carrino, who co-authored the research paper with Prof Karen Glaser and Prof Mauricio Aven-dano, also from King's College London. Published on Wednesday in the academic journal Health Economics, the research is the first in-depth analysis of the impact of the reform on women born after March 1950 in the UK. Carrino and Glaser used data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study to look at 3,531 women affected by the changes in specific employment sectors, comparing them with women unaffected by the changes who were born slightly earlier or slightly later and worked in the same professions. The jobs with the worst mental health outcomes include housekeeping, restaurant services, personal care, sales, cleaning and jobs requiring the operation of machinery.

Read more, Amelia Hill, Guardian, <https://is.gd/BrFyDj>
NUJ 60+ Council member

Don't Switch Us Off!

The message remains the same.

The NPC Annual Convention Campaign Special, February 2020 announces that every MP has been sent a personal plea to save the free TV licence for those over 75. **Currently the concession has been extended to 31st July 2020.**

Also in the Daily Express on February 17th Jan Shortt, commented that veterans had tiny pensions, but they would lose the free licence having incomes just above the Pension Credit threshold.

It was wrong that the government forced the BBC to take on the cost of the concession, in effect making a substantial cut to its funding.

As a top brand in the world the BBC needs both secure funding and independence.

If guaranteed funding, such as the universal licence fee was removed, standards would fall. Yet the government may seek changes and the BBC is under attack from all sides.

BECTU (the Broadcasting Entertainment & Theatre Union) representing workers in the media, have started an on-line petition 'Love it or lose it: Save the BBC' <https://campaign.goingtowork.org.uk/petitions/love-it-or-lose-it-save-the-bbc>.

Many regard the BBC as a public communications service; the Group 'We Own It' <https://weownit.org.uk/> is committed to saving the BBC.

Janet Shapiro

Beware scams: whether by phone text or email

ALERT! There has recently been an increase in ever more sophisticated phone, text and email scams. Always report scams to Action Fraud either online at www.actionfraud.police.uk or by phone on 0300 123 2040. You can also contact police directly on 101. Text scams can be forwarded to Ofcom on 7726 (free of charge)

Verena Beane

The series on BBC2 'Britain's Greatest Generation' in 4 parts is worth watching. Part 1 featured Hetty Bower who at over 100 was still an active peace campaigner. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b05tr94p/britains-greatest-generation-1-coming-of-age>

The NPC are backing the petition below which calls on the Chancellor to ensure there is not a pay freeze for frontline workers - but a payrise. https://speakout.38degrees.org.uk/campaigns/7392?bucket=email-blast-14-5-2020-nhspayreactivepayfreeze-mopup&submit=true&utm_campaign=14-5-2020-nhspayreactivepayfreeze-mopup&utm_medium=blast&utm_source=email Please sign.

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info@npcuk.org

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