

Old Grey Matter article for publication Saturday 14th October in the EADT

WASPIs

At our Anglia National Pensioners Convention (NPC) Conference last week, Lynn Nicholls outlined the plight of the WASPIs. She is a member of Women Against State Pension Inequality who campaign for fair transitional pension arrangements for women born in the 1950s. This is because they are unfairly affected by the government's policy of raising the State Pension Age (SPA) - see their website at www.waspi.co.uk. The injustice came about when the 2011 Pension Act accelerated the process by speeding up the timetable so that women's SPA will rise to 65 by November 2018, and then men's and women's rising together to 66 by April 2020. The injustice arose because women were relying on the application of the previous Act of 1995 that was equalising the SPA slowly from 60 to 65 between April 2010 and April 2020. This was adequately explained and reluctantly accepted by all as due notice was given. Suddenly, the pension age goalposts were changed in 2011 with too rapid effect. The equalisation date was brought forward two years to 2018 and a further year added to 66 by 2020 with no adequate notice or letter given to millions of women nearing retirement whose future plans were affected.

Some women are suffering huge financial difficulties as a result and over 3.5 million are effectively denied the pension and associated benefits such as bus pass and winter fuel payment they were expecting. While they had paid the National Insurance due previously, now they had to wait longer, having borne the brunt of austerity and suffering inequality in the workplace whilst those at work had to pay extra National Insurance without getting the fruits of their labour. Their case is a moral one with which we sympathise and support. Meanwhile, George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer, was congratulated on saving the nation billions of pounds by not paying pensions at the earlier agreed date, and increasing the revenue by continued National Insurance payments, all this at the expense of the WASPI women's 'shoddy' treatment and later, to a certain extent, that of everyone due to retire at 65 in 2018.

Nor is that the end of it. He did it again later in the year to bring the SPA of 67 forward by 6 years to 2028 saving another 60 bn pounds. Then this July, Government announced plans for around six million people born between April 6th 1970 and 5th April 1978 to see their SPA of 67 rise in stages to 68 instead! This means people now aged 39 or more live with the prospect of working much longer in their old age if they are still fit and able, before getting their state 'reward'. For those with poor health or without an occupational pension or little prospect of owning a house, it's a depressing scenario. The NPC says '68 is too late – keep SPA at 66' - because the latest evidence shows average life expectancies of 79 for men and 83 for women are no longer rising and this, with its many variations, needs taking into account.

Christopher J. Brooks, Chair,
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