

Old Grey Matter article for publication Saturday 3rd February 2018

Dignity and Security in Old Age

The National Pensioners Convention (NPC) revealed in its January Campaign bulletin that Britain's state pension is now the worst in the developed world, according to the OECD's (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) latest findings. It means a worker entering the British workforce today can expect to receive less than a third (29%) of their final working salary as a basic pension after tax – and is 40% lower than those who entered the labour market in 2002, who would have received around half of their salary in state pension. Since the OECD study began, the UK has consistently ranked near the bottom of the table, but this is the first time it has been last. The OECD believes the fall is because the government replaced the earnings-related State Second Pension (S2P) with the new flat-rate pension which came into force in April 2016. Elsewhere in the developed world the average worker can expect 63% of their salary as a state-funded pension. For example, the pension systems in Japan, Germany, France, Italy, the United States, Canada, the Netherlands and Ireland all pay out a higher proportion of working income. I ask myself, "Why haven't we learnt from our European neighbours whilst in the EU?" The report also acknowledges that current poverty levels among those aged 75 and over are 18.5%, compared to 11% among the whole population and just over 10% for the age group 66-75. Women are also most affected by old-age poverty. A recent National Audit Office report found that 76% of people reaching retirement in 2060 will be worse off under the new state pension than if they had been on the old system. Ron Douglas, NPC president said: "We need a living state pension for all, set above the poverty level at around 70% of the living wage and equivalent to £200 a week.

Dignity Action Day is set for the beginning of February. Over the last few years, the NPC has been organising around National Dignity Action Day to highlight our Dignity Code and the need for improvements in social care. Over the last 20 years, there have been numerous commissions, research projects and inquiries into the social care system. Whilst all have concluded that it is not fit for purpose, little has been done and thousands more frail old and disabled people and their families have suffered. This week Anglia NPC will be leafleting the public in Norwich to call for a National Social Care Service funded through general taxation and free at the point of delivery like the NHS. People should recognise that in order to get quality care, staff must be properly trained and paid, services should be brought into the public sector and something similar to the NPC's Dignity Code should be adopted by all local authorities, hospitals and care providers to help ensure proper standards of care.

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