

Uniting the Generations

The National Pensioners Convention (NPC) issues a monthly bulletin named 'Campaign' that can be seen on the website at www.npcuk.org and In the July issue, it reported on the implications of the recent EU Referendum vote. One is the effect on the unity of generations. Some younger people have expressed anger at older voters for backing the 'Leave' campaign.

A YouGov poll has been widely circulated on social media showing the age breakdown of Referendum voters. The results show that 75% of those under 25 voted to Remain, whilst the majority of those over 50 voted to leave. However, since then a poll by ComRes has found that more over 75s voted to Remain than those aged between 65 and 74. Some younger people have reacted by calling for changes to Universal Benefits and the Triple Lock on pensions, and again there has been widespread comment in the media that the generations that have benefitted from the welfare state are now the ones making things worse for their grandchildren. It is clear that age will yet again be used as a reason for making further cuts to public services.

It is worth noting that the under 65s account for 41m voters, compared to 11m pensioners, and other factors such as educational attainment, social class and geography were also very significant factors in the way in which people voted. Any argument that older people were therefore the only group to determine the outcome of the Referendum is factually incorrect. Nevertheless, the need to bridge that divide by uniting the generations to improve younger people's prospects is even more vital now than before.

Finding key issues on which we can campaign together under the 'Generations United' banner, such as suitable and affordable housing and good public transport is crucial. In the meantime, issues such as the strength of the U.K. economy and its ability to sustain pensions and benefits, the plight of UK citizens living in Europe and whether or not increases in the state pension will be frozen in the 27 remaining EU countries have to be resolved.

Amidst all this, we now face the prospect of new government ministers and their opposition shadow ministers heading up the key areas of Care, Transport and Pensions. The NPC is calling a national lobby of Parliament on Wednesday 2nd November to begin to raise these concerns with those new officials. It is crucial that we do so from a position of strength, by putting forward the concerns of both today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

My own Referendum comment, for what it is worth, is that millions more people in the UK did not vote to leave the EU than did, simply because one quarter of the electorate, 11 million of them, did not vote at all. I'm sure that those who definitely wanted change for a variety of reasons made the effort to vote and their determination carried the day, though the difference between the opinions of those who did vote was less than 4%. To my mind this does not warrant a complete root and branch change of government though that is what is now happening, whilst the main opposition party seems to be in meltdown and missing the opportunity to make a credible alternative to promote public services and reduce austerity measures. What would our forebears who fought to obtain the vote, have thought of the present state of democracy, and in particular of those eleven million of the nation who decided not to participate at all?

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