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Old Grey Matter article for Saturday 20th July's EADT

1 message

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The July Campaign issue of the National Pensioners' Convention (seen in full at www.npcuk.org) reports pensioners across the country have reacted angrily to the BBC's decision to means-test the over 75s' TV licence from June next year. The corporation announced on 10 June plans to take away the free licence from 3.7m people, and in future make it only available to those on Pension Credit. At the moment, that amounts to around 900,000 people, with a further 1.3m who are eligible to claim Pension Credit, but have not done so.

The NPC spontaneously organised a coach full of delegates from the annual Pensioners' Parliament in Blackpool to demonstrate outside the broadcaster's Media City in Salford where they were joined in the rain by actor, Ricky Tomlinson.

On the following Friday, NPC groups across the UK staged over 20 demos outside local BBC studios, involving around 1000 people. Anglia NPC led the lively Norwich one supported by around twenty folk for an hour. We were filmed and I was kindly interviewed in a live recording. However not a snippet of the interview was broadcast on Look East nor our noisy protest chants heard though visual scenes from the demo. were shown for a few seconds whilst the BBC presenter gave a covering commentary.

Eastern Region of NPC led the protests at Ipswich and Chelmsford. In London, campaigners stopped the traffic in Oxford Circus, and media reports of the campaign appeared in newspapers, on radio, TV and online.

Jan Shortt, NPC general secretary said: "We want the government to take back responsibility for funding the licence, but we also have to criticise the BBC for choosing probably the worst possible alternative. At a time when loneliness among pensioners is reaching worrying levels and pensioner poverty has started to rise again, the government needs to recognise that it's not the BBC's job to fund welfare policy."

Of the two Prime-Minister candidates, Jeremy Hunt is on record as saying his government would restore responsibility, and in a recent consultation with the NPC executive committee, John McDonnell, Shadow Chancellor, said Labour would too.

Chris. Brooks, Chair,
Suffolk, & Anglia Region
Pensioners Associations (NPC).