

Senior Reporter

News from the 60+ Council

NUJ
NATIONAL UNION
OF
JOURNALISTS

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Hard times ahead as inflation soars

Today's cost of living crisis is predicted to be the worst of its kind for decades.

Inflation is already above 4 per cent and rising fast. It could well be at 8 per cent or more by the summer – and a further increase in fuel bills in October is a terrifying prospect for many.

Those relying on the state pension have lost the financial protection promised by the government, which has decided to suspend the guaranteed rise that comes with the so-called “triple lock” – a formula which increases pensions in line with the rate of inflation, the average increase in earnings or 2.5 per cent, depending on which is the highest (see our February issue).

Last September, when this year's state pension increase was calculated, the rise in average earnings was a fraction over 8 per cent. The Treasury felt this was too high to apply to pensions (the UK's are among the lowest in Europe), despite a manifesto pledge to implement the triple lock every year. Instead, they opted to raise state pensions by just 3.1 per cent, the rate of inflation.

As a result, anyone on the maximum state pension is being denied almost £500 this year – which won't be part of any pension future years. That's why Senior Reporter is urging members to write to their member of parliament to urge Chancellor Rishi Sunak to change his mind and reinstate the triple lock, backdated to this April.

Another NUJ digital inclusion win

Three years ago the NUJ won its motion calling for the launch of a digital inclusion campaign – despite considerable opposition at the National Pensioners Convention's Biennial Delegate Conference, Stone, Staffordshire. But at the latest BDC, attended by three 60+ Council delegates, there was no opposition to the NUJ's proposal to continue the *Connections for All* campaign.

“There is still a great deal to do to help more older members get online,” Jenny Sims, 60+ Council co-chair, told the conference.

Making ageism old news

Aimed at stakeholders including politicians and the media and endorsed by the NUJ, Age Scotland's publication *Making ageism old*

Dear MP

In the 2019 general election the Conservative party made a manifesto pledge to honour the triple lock on state pensions. You will no doubt be aware that the Chancellor decided to break that promise, claiming a rise in pensions that matched an increase in salaries would be “skewed and distorted”. As a result, while backbench MPs are enjoying a pay rise of £2,212 per annum from this month, the increase to the maximum state pension is approximately £500 less than it would have been had the government kept its word.

To someone on a basic annual salary of £84,144 this may not sound a lot. But to a pensioner facing rampant inflation it is a significant amount of money.

The Chancellor has told the Treasury Select Committee that all three elements of the triple lock will be reinstated next year. But why not this year, when pensioners need the money more than ever? The cost of living crisis will not solve itself. With food prices climbing relentlessly and heating bills rocketing by more than 50 per cent, pensioners need help now.

Voters are entitled to have the promises made to them by political parties kept. As my MP, I urge you to lobby the Treasury to reinstate the triple lock immediately and backdate it to April 2022 – in line with the Conservative manifesto commitment.

Yours sincerely

Above is a suggested letter, although you may prefer to write your own. You can find your MP's contact details at <https://members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP>
Brian Williams, Brighton Branch

news: Reporting on older people guide is at: www.age.scot/mediaguideRoom for more!

Why not join us?

The 60+ Council still has vacancies, which need to be filled. Check them out. Our next meeting is at the end of June/early July.

FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

We're keen to feature a wide range of articles of interest to the NUJ's older membership, particularly any which would support our campaigns on pensions, ageism and digital inclusion.

We also hope to establish a “letters to the editorial team” section.

Contributions (articles and letters no longer than 250 and 150 words respectively, please) should be sent to derekcforrest@gmail.com

Waxing lyrical

The virtual three-nation Age at Work conference held on March 9 aimed to put age inclusion firmly on the agenda of business and government. Businesses need to see the opportunities that supporting people over 50 to remain in work can bring. This will require planning – the over-50s are estimated to constitute half the UK adult population by 2030.



“Businesses need to recognise the contribution that older workers can make.”

Centre for Ageing Better (<https://ageingbetter.resourcespace.com>)

In a keynote speech, Ruby Wax OBE described how ageism had at one point had a significant impact on her career. She moved on – and now campaigns on mental health and well-being issues and has published several books.

A panel discussion rounded off the morning conference. Panellists included Kim Chaplain, Associate Director for Work at the Centre for Ageing Better and Mary Bright, Head of Social Affairs and Age Special Adviser, Phoenix Group.

Some takeaways from the panel discussion:

- Age is where gender was in the 1970s
- People imbibe ageist assumptions
- End-of-life care should be as important as start-of-life care
- The same flexibility should be shown to workers who care for older people as workers caring for younger people (periods of leave, flexible working hours, etc.)
- The over-50s account for 50 per cent of consumer spending.

Nicoletta Flessati, Brussels Branch

About the NUJ 60+ Council: <https://bit.ly/3021u5o>

Plenty to offer after retirement

I GAINED MY SKILLS IN JOURNALISM and PR from being a campaigning trade unionist, focused mainly on occupational and environmental health and safety.

I retired three years ago – at least from having to earn a wage – but have continued to use my skills in support of those who perhaps don't have them, or could learn more. And I want to encourage other retired NUJ members to do the same. Issuing a press release on an issue or event, or talking to a journalist and encouraging them to take up an issue, or discussing talking to the press to someone who has a story to tell but has never done it – these are all second nature to me. To others we support it's a complete mystery.

I am a delegate from London Freelance Branch to Waltham Forest Trades Council and use my journalistic skills to help promote local issues and events. For example, every year we hold and publicise an event on Workers Memorial Day, 28 April, and we have helped the families of people killed working in Waltham Forest with the press, the law, coroners etc.

I have also used my skills on campaigns on housing, evictions, climate change, defending the NHS and elsewhere. Most recently I helped the National Pensioners Convention promote their protest in Westminster on "heat or eat" to fellow trade unionists and the media.

If you don't do so already, think about using your skills to help those who struggle for a better world. Get involved in your local trades council and campaigns. It can be very rewarding.

Mick Holder, London Freelance Branch

Mick Holder is London Freelance Branch delegate to Waltham Forest Trades Council and for many years been responsible for its relationship with the local media.

A quiet legend

WE MAY GO ON A BIT ABOUT INTERGENERATIONAL LINKS IN 60+ CIRCLES – BUT WHY NOT? Most societies in history have succeeded using the best of all generations.

Long-term NUJ activist Chris Reekie is 90, and Zooms in to his Edinburgh branch meetings while Covid rules life. This is an easier task than the 22 years he spent as branch secretary (and membership secretary) collecting monthly subs before the union organised this from HQ.

Devoted and meticulous as he was, Chris says he was pleased when a younger group of members joined him in running Edinburgh branch, which still has a lively programme and works closely with the city's freelance branch.

Chris is well known north of the border as a NUJ archivist, keeping years of records in a spare room. He joined the union in 1953, working as a general reporter in the Scottish Borders, Tynesides and then the Glasgow Herald office in Edinburgh for 32 years.

He and his wife, Ena, were married "at a mature age", Chris says. Many colleagues were surprised to see him taking up ballroom dancing with her. Chris is also a keen film buff, loving old Hollywood westerns and dramas, and smashing competition modestly if there is a movie quiz at Christmas parties.



Chris Reekie (left), Edinburgh branch secretary, in 1976, when Lorna Rhind was presented with a Life Membership certificate by branch chair Ernie McIntyre.

Photo: © James Thomson

The dancing days are over, since Ena died in 2015. Chris spent last Christmas in hospital, following a fall, but was "quite happy with the laptop, keeping in touch".

Chris Reekie is a NUJ member of honour and a quiet legend among the Scottish membership, always ready to share his knowledge of NUJ history while being part of it himself.

Ann Coltart, Glasgow Branch

Pension jargon busted

PENSIONS ARE COMPLICATED – so, to help its members get their heads around the subject, the retail workers union, USDAW, has produced an A to Z of pensions, which is useful for anyone faced with the barrage of new terms that come with this territory. Go to: [https://www.usdaw.org.uk/Help-Advice/Pensions/Pensions-Jargon-Buster-\(A-Z\)](https://www.usdaw.org.uk/Help-Advice/Pensions/Pensions-Jargon-Buster-(A-Z))



"...think about using your skills to help those who struggle for a better world": Mick Holder's photograph shows trade unionists in Waltham Forest laying wreaths to honour those who have died in the course of their work: April 28th, Workers' Memorial Day 2022.

© Mick Holder.

An invitation ...

KAREN ROSS, PROFESSOR OF GENDER AND MEDIA, NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY WRITES:

"I am currently writing a book that includes a chapter on gendered ageism in the news industry – because, astonishingly, there's almost no available research to draw upon.

"So it would be brilliant to hear the views and experiences of NUJ (working or retired) members about the issue, either on email (through responding to three broad questions) or via a short Zoom interview.

"While the views will obviously be your own, the experiences could either be yours or those of women colleagues and of course, all testimonies will remain confidential and be anonymised in the book.

"If you have a bit of time to participate, please email me to get the ball rolling."

She adds: "For a bit more info about me, here is my work profile: <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/sacs/staff/profile/ka-renross.html>"

Karen Ross can be contacted at: Karen.ross@newcastle.ac.uk

NUJ Equality Summit agreed

The cost-of-living crisis will be a main theme of an NUJ Equality Summit in November, the NUJ Equality Strands' has agreed.

A working party has been set up of members from the four equality councils (equality, disabled members, BMC and 60+) to organise the event: 60+ has proposed a session on ageism.

Natasha Hirst, NUJ vice-president, and equality council chair, said: "The Equality Summit will be an opportunity for reps to gain knowledge and confidence to build equalities work into their core work and put equality and diversity higher on the agenda in workplaces."

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