

C Pensions

Motion 20 and amendments, motion 21, motion 22, motion 23, motion 24 and amendment, motion 25 and motion 26

Congress notes with alarm the continuing campaign against decent pension provision under the coalition Government.

Congress condemns the scale and pace of government cuts across the public services. The cuts combined with changes to taxes and benefits, represent a real transfer of wealth from poor to rich, impoverishing women in particular. Congress believes that such plans will further entrench poverty and inequality in our society leading to social divisiveness and must be strenuously opposed.

Congress deplores the short-sighted decisions taken by the coalition Government which adversely affect workers and pensioners while insulating employers. Delaying the earnings link restoration, watering down the 'triple-lock', cutting the indexation of past and future service and reducing pension protection on outsourcing, combined with a faster increase in the state pension age, all form a devastating programme for generations of pensioner poverty.

Congress reaffirms its support for the provision of quality occupational pensions in the public and private sectors. Congress opposes the sustained campaign seeking to undermine pensions and condemns corporate attacks on workers' pension provision in recent years, in particular the closure of final salary pension schemes. Congress condemns those private sector employers who have abandoned their responsibility for decent provision but believes the answer is to rebuild occupational pension schemes.

Congress notes the review of public sector pensions currently being undertaken by John Hutton, deplores the propaganda about "gold-plated" schemes, condemns the repeated offensive references to "pensions apartheid" and CBI scaremongering about public schemes creating a "black hole" in government finances, which the Government intends to use to cut the living standards of millions of public sector workers in retirement. Congress notes that statements from the coalition Government suggest that working people can expect significant attacks on pension rights over coming months. Congress commends the TUC for its work so far in robustly defending public sector pensions and in co-ordinating union responses to Hutton.

As one of the first national battles around public sector pensions in this parliamentary term, the success or failure of action to defend pension entitlements at the BBC will be crucial. Congress notes Robert Peston's comments that the plans could be a blueprint for the rest of the public sector.

Congress rejects accusations that current public sector pensions are neither affordable nor sustainable, and notes the NAO report of March 2010 that demonstrates that public sector pensions will be no larger a share of GDP in 2060 than currently. Congress deplores the continuing misrepresentation of public sector "pay-as-you go" pension scheme costs, which ignores current and past contributions and pretends that costs will all fall due at once. Congress reminds the Government that in previous years, when contributions exceeded pensions in payment, it simply kept that money. The Government has had a cheap loan from public sector workers' pension contributions but now balks at paying the pensions that are due.

Congress is appalled by the political manipulation and lies which portray public sector workers' pensions as 'gold-plated'. Congress deplores both the attacks on public sector pensions and the presumption of the coalition Government that public sector pension provision will have to be further diluted, involving an increase in retirement age, an increase in employee contributions, and a diminution in existing pension benefits.

Congress reaffirms that the changes already made (including higher retirement ages, higher contributions from employees and cost-capping for employers) are adequate to ensure their long-term sustainability. Congress notes that in 2005 public sector unions worked together to defend public sector pensions. No union's arguments in defence of its members' pension schemes should suggest any cuts in the schemes of any other worker.

Congress notes that in the public sector all staff are equally members of common pension schemes, in contrast to some private sector employers where defined benefit arrangements are more prevalent for directors and the most senior staff. Congress recognises that many public sector managers are paid significantly less than comparable private sector counterparts at a time when public accountability of managers has never been greater. It notes that senior civil servants and NHS managers already have an earnings cap applied to their pensions, and deplores the singling out of a tiny handful of cases in which this may not be the case. It recognises that attacks on the pension arrangements of senior public servants are part of a wider agenda to undermine all public sector pensions. Congress rejects any suggestion that pensions for senior public servants should be cut and believes that this would be divisive and unfair, and would serve to undermine the TUC's defence of pension provision as a whole.

Congress condemns the ongoing campaign being conducted by some politicians and sections of the media to seek to divide private and public sector workers on the basis of the right to a decent pension at retirement, which is merely an attempt to create a 'race to the bottom' in pension provision whereby each attack on pension rights is gradually extended to all groups of workers. Congress reaffirms its view that the real pensions' problem lies in the private sector, where employers' abandonment of occupational pension schemes means that workers face poverty in retirement and taxpayers face higher welfare costs. Rather than extending this to public sector pensioners, we need decent pensions for all.

Congress condemns the BBC's plans to attack future staff pension benefits and undermine the value of pensions already earned, effectively leading to the closure of the Corporation's defined benefit schemes. Congress welcomes the strong stance, including the threat of industrial action, taken by the unions in response to the BBC's pensions robbery.

Congress rejects the proposed government plans to switch the basis for pension increases from the retail price index (RPI) measure of inflation to the consumer price index (CPI), which will reduce public and private sector occupational pensions and state second pensions and could lead to existing and future pensioners losing thousands of pounds.

Congress is strongly opposed to the Government's policy to accelerate the increase in the age at which men and women are entitled to claim their state pension, which will disproportionately affect workers who cannot afford to retire early or those in physically demanding occupations. Congress rejects the Government's 'work until you drop' policy that is against the interests of workers' health, safety, dignity and quality of life and could increase long-term costs to our NHS.

Congress calls on the General Council to:

- i) defend the welfare state
- ii) defend public sector pensions and campaign for decent private sector pensions
- iii) promote measured, informed and rational debate over public sector pension reform
- iv) engage with the Hutton Commission on public pensions and co-ordinate union responses to the interim and final recommendations of the Hutton review of public service pensions. Work to ensure that proper equality impact assessments are carried out at the earliest possible stage, including the impact on part-time workers
- v) argue for the maintenance of the 2005 Public Sector Forum Agreement
- vi) develop research and publicity material to support the campaign to defend quality occupational pensions and demonstrate the value of these to working people as a whole and develop the case for extending the provision of occupational pensions to those not currently covered by such schemes
- vii) publish a report into the economic costs of inadequate pension provision in the private sector and commission research into the true cost of living increases applying to pensioners and create a pensioners' cost of living index.

viii) highlight the financial and social costs to the UK of the Government's pension reforms

ix) monitor and publicise government breaches of the coalition agreement.

Congress calls on the General Council to support and co-ordinate the closest possible collaboration between affiliates in defence of schemes under threat - public and private sector-, state pension rights and any future threat to the public sector pension scheme provisions, and to campaign for high quality pensions including affordable final salary schemes in both the public and private sectors. This should include:

- a) an urgent high-profile, public campaign including the regional rallies and the national demonstration
- b) support for the ETUC day of action in September
- c) a national press and publicity campaign to tell the truth on pensions and expose the true cost of tax relief on pensions for the top 1 per cent of earners
- d) co-ordination of union resistance to arbitrary attacks on good quality occupational pension schemes
- e) resisting moves by employers and industry regulators to level down pensions in the private sector
- f) lobbying against current or future moves to raise the state pension age
- g) co-ordination of industrial action where appropriate and to fully support any workers forced to take industrial action in defence of pension rights.

Congress calls on the Government to:

- 1) engage in meaningful negotiation with unions on any changes to public sector pension schemes
- 2) consider the case for reviewing each public sector pension on a scheme-specific basis
- 3) require the private sector to negotiate with unions over workforce and executive pension arrangements
- 4) be transparent about the true cost and impact of pension reforms on individuals and the public finances.

Congress resolves to defend public and private sector pensions against attacks from the coalition Government.

Mover: GMB

Seconder: UNISON

Supporters: National Union of Teachers, Fire Brigades' Union, Educational Institute of Scotland, FDA, National Union of Journalists, Public and Commercial Services Union, Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, Transport Salaried Staffs' Association, NASUWT

