



National Organiser Andy Reed, Head Office staff member Gary Fabian and the ASLEF Retired Members Section National Committee, Don Bates, Dave Weddle, Ray Jackson, Alan Taylor, Jack Housley and Brian Tagg outside Central Hall Westminster.

## ASLEF fight for decent pensions

The 24th of October 2007 was an RMS National Committee meeting and as it coincided with the National Pensioners Convention lobby of Parliament, it was agreed that we would convene early and deal with our business so that we could go to the House of Commons and represent ASLEF.

The rally was so successful that some of those that turned up to hear the speakers in Central Hall had to wait until others in the hall left to go and lobby their Members of

Parliament before they could get in.

The RMS Committee recognises that the NPC fight is our fight and our children's fight to ensure a decent standard of living and care. We would recommend that everyone reads the NPC's Pensioner's Charter (copies are available from Sharon Allen, the Equalities Adviser at ASLEF Head Office).

I would urge everyone to get active in their local NPC group.

Peter Smith RMS National Committee Member

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### SUPPORT YOUR RMS – BUY A PRIZE DRAW TICKET!

In November 2007 the RMS National Committee will be launching their first (of many we hope!) Annual Prize Draw at the Annual General Meeting.

With a top cash prize of £1,000 the Committee are hoping that at just 20p per ticket there will be many takers and the Prize Draw will generate income that can be used to fund the ongoing work of the section and allow RMS members to become more active in other pensioner organisations.

Tickets will be available to purchase at the AGM when the Prize Draw will be launched by Victoria Phillips from Thompsons Solicitors who have very kindly agreed to donate a cash prize of £200.

Extra books of tickets are available to buy from Alan Taylor, RMS National Committee member, he can be contacted c/o ASLEF Head Office.

The draw will be made at the 2008 AGM – so someone could enjoy an unexpected Christmas present next year.





## PENSIONS – FACTS AND FIGURES FOR 2007

### STATE PENSION

- From April 2007, the full basic State Pension rose by £3.05 to £87.30 a week for a single pensioner in line with the Retail Price Index of 3.6%. A couple got £4.85 more taking their Pension to £139.60 a week
- A woman who receives a State Pension based on her husband's contributions received an extra £1.80 taking her Pension up to £52.30 a week
- 87% of women pensioners do not receive the full State Pension (over 5million women)
- As a percentage of average earnings, the UK State Pension for a single pensioner currently represents just 15.7% - this is the lowest in Europe. By 2012 this figure is expected to fall to an all time low of 14.2%
- The Government's recognised poverty level is set at 60% of the median population income. This is currently £128 a week before housing costs for a single pensioner

### MEANS TESTED PENSION CREDITS

- From April 2007, the means-tested Pension Credit Guarantee rose by £5 to £119.05 a week for a single pensioner, in line with increases in earnings of 4.4%. For a couple it rose by £7.65 to £181.70 a week
- Around 4.1million pensioners are entitled to Pension Credit – but 1.6million of those do not claim it

### PENSIONS AND THE LINK TO EARNINGS

- Had the link between the State Pension and average earnings not been broken in 1980, the full State Pension for a single pensioner would now be £58.50 a week higher at £142.75 – equal to 25.6% of average earnings
- If the current Government restored the link to earnings in 1997, the full State Pension for a single pensioner would now be £24.05 a week higher at £108.30
- It would cost up to £600million this year to restore the link to the State Pension at its current level and around £11billion to pay every pensioner a State Pension of £119.05 a week
- If the link to earnings is restored in 2012, it will give just £1.40 a week more that year to the full State Pension than would have been received under the present system

### NATIONAL INSURANCE FUND

- The surplus in the National Insurance Fund is currently £38.4billion and is forecast to rise to £74.1billion by 2012. By that time the surplus will represent 91% of the fund's annual expenditure
- Dawn Primarolo, the Paymaster General has admitted that the Government is investing the fund's surplus balance in Government Gilts and using the money to fund public expenditure unrelated to the purposes of the National Insurance Fund

When the RMS committee learned of the decision of the 2006 AAD to admit a delegate to attend on behalf of its members, it realised that the delegates discussed and debated this significant decision at length. Some, therefore, felt a measure of apprehension and concern.

At the last of conference I took the opportunity to thank delegates for the reception and comradeship I had been shown. However, I also stated that the experience of us being there had finally allayed any doubts some may have had in this regard. These comments were greeted with applause, so it was mission accomplished!

We have over 70 delegates in attendance at the AAD. The Arrangements Committee had determined "the order of business" which was adopted. The election for Chair was won by Peter Dodgson (Stratford) and Pauline Cawood of Leeds was elected Vice-Chair.

The guest speaker who opened conference was the Secretary of the RMS Tony West. As usual, his remarks covered the whole gamut of the RMS's work and the continuing difficulties facing our trade union internally and within the industry.

The Conference Agenda focused delegate's hearts and minds on our current difficulties financially and many items on the agenda addressed matters in relation to cost savings.

A minutes silence was observed to recognise the passing of many members and stalwarts this past year. Our 'Raffle Man', Tommy Taylor of the RMS who raised money at the weekend forums at Wortley Hall, was given a special mention.

John Reid MP was the first politician to address us. In a prepared speech he outlined the need for everyone to get behind the Government to confront the issues facing the country at the time.

Conference then heard a report from the Auditors and Trustees, which made it clear that the events of the past four years have dealt a great deal of damage to our finances. To remedy the situation, it was pointed out that membership rates should rise, as for the past five years they have not been

# The AAD Scarborough 2007

raised.

In summary, it was indicated by our Auditors that the situation is looking critical for the next 36 months and we must act now on these matters. Delegates were left in no doubt as to their responsibilities regarding these matters.

The conference then went on to discuss the matter of membership contributions in more detail. After a lengthy debate, which included notions that we may lose members if we become more expensive, or that we need to raise contributions to survive and pay our way, it was agreed to only raise the contributions of Scale 1 members.

Later at conference, the attempt by the EC to de-democratise our AAD by moving to biannual AADs was rightly defeated, with RMS support. I felt that this cost cutting was detrimental to the membership on at least two accounts – accountability and policymaking. ASLEF is not a “top down” trade union. The EC need to look closer next time at the question of size – it should be examined relevant to costs. This was the case when the item to have one less EC member present at future AAD’s was subsequently adopted.

A detailed analysis of the political scene at Westminster was given by the next guest, MP John McDonnell, who spoke at length on the “soul of the Labour Party” and his aspirations in the election for the leadership. He went on to list the achievements of the Government, but indicated that certain events had grossly overshadowed its work and how there is, in his view, a need and desire amongst the members and rank and file trade unionists for dialogue and debate.

What set this man apart from other speakers is that he not only speaks with commitment and passion but, significantly, without notes – I note with regret that his Labour Party leadership bid failed.

Later during the conference Peter Hain MP made a contribution. There were also speakers from the Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC), the Railway Benefits Fund (RBF) and of course Dave Tyson, who has attended

our AGM several times, gave a well presented summary of the state of the pensions within our industry.

CSC, the RBF and the Morning Star all received generous sums of money by way of conference collections.

Discussions on the many reports within the EC’s Annual Report precluded my direct involvement, the RMS Committee having considered and adopted a set of guidelines for RMS delegates and their conduct at this and future AAD’s.

However, I did make a contribution on broader issues e.g. political, international and education, where we have a proud tradition of upholding ASLEF’s work.

Even in these difficult times, one can only observe the quality of some of the speeches, made particularly by certain first time delegates.

I would also like to make a special mention of those colleagues I shared a table with at AAD. I refer of course to the equality representatives - all of whom were pictured in the July edition of our journal. These young people are a credit to ASLEF and our total membership should be indebted to them for the work they undertake in the name of the union.

In conclusion, I can report that all the resolutions adopted at the 2006 RMS AGM received the full support of conference. When thanking the



delegates I also passed on your thanks and indicated that the ASLEF membership were in my view amongst the best briefed trade unionists on issues of equalities, which is due in large part to the sterling efforts of the “sections” with the assistance and guidance of the Equalities Adviser, Sharon Allen, and the assistance of Jenny Baldwin in the Administration Department.

To all the staff at AAD, many thanks for your assistance and kindness. The ASLEF conference is still a “debating chamber” and so can on occasions be quite lively, and that in many ways makes it a precious thing to defend.

Ray Jackson, RMS AAD Delegate,  
Scarborough 2007



ASLEF Equalities Reps and the Equalities Adviser at the 2007 AAD

# ASLEF joins debate at the Pensioner's Parliament

DAVE PRESS and I attended the 15th Pensioners Parliament from the 8th to 10th May as delegates from ASLEF at wet and windy Blackpool .

The first day started with a march from the North Pier to the Winter Gardens where the Parliament was officially opened by the Lord Mayor of Blackpool.

There were over two thousand delegates in the hall and a report was given on the progress on last year's Parliamentary Bills by Joe Harris General Secretary of the NPC.

This was followed in the afternoon by a parliamentary debate at which MPs from the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat' were to speak. Unfortunately, Hazel Blears MP did not turn up and sent a message to say she had to attend the funeral of a close friend, this did not go down at all well with the delegates as no replacement was sent.

Nigel Waterson Conservative Shadow Minister for Work and Pensions put the Tory view and David Laws for the Lib Dems. Of course they seized on the failure of the Government to send anyone.

Contributions from delegates followed and a statement from the NPC outlining their increasing anger and frustration at the Government's disgraceful neglect of older people.

In spite of Britain's wealth, millions of men and women are struggling to make ends meet on pensions well below the poverty line, and face council tax and rising utility bills which bear no relation to their income. Thousands die every winter due to poor housing and cold, and an increasing number are means-tested or forced to sell their homes in order to pay for care they were promised would be free 'from the cradle to the grave'.

Often living alone, many are excluded from their community, friends and relatives due to the lack of local facilities, adequate public transport and high fares.

Pensioners will only support political

parties who pledge to change this state of affairs and ensure that younger generations do not join existing pensioners as the poorest and most neglected in the European Union.

Referring to the NPC Referendum Joe Harris stated that 75,435 persons had responded

There is about £38 billion surplus in the National Insurance Fund and by 2012 this could be £60 billion. So now is the time to raise the level of pension for every man and women in the country to £190 per week.

This act that would only cost about £12 billion, but instead this money is being used for other things such as investments by the Government in Gilts etc. The Secretary of State had tried to claim that this fund did not exist but we know it does as this had been born out by the National Audit Office.

The National Pensioners Parliament called on the Government to immediately raise the basic State Pension for all men and women to £119 per week - increasing it annually in line with the rise in average earnings - and to provide free nationwide public transport and free health and long - term care of the highest standards.

At the end of the session a resolution was passed unanimously stating that 'This Fifteenth National Pensioners' Parliament is surprised and angry that, despite urgent communications with the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Pensions, the Government was unable to find a senior representative to attend this important event as a replacement for Hazel Blears MP'.

2000 delegates to the UK's largest representative gathering of pensioners expect those in power to listen and respect the views of older people and address their concerns. Delegates will be raising this issue through their organisations with the Prime Minister and Labour MPs.

Wednesday morning saw debates on healthy living, the National Insurance Fund Bill, and the Public Services Bill



Delegation to the Pensioner's Parliament

with the afternoon session covering the Housing Bill, Lifelong Learning and principles of the NHS Bill.

A social evening with very good entertainment took place from 7pm onwards and this was very enjoyable.

The final day had campaign sessions covering Dignity in Care, Fighting Poverty, Pensioners and the Media and The Right to Free Travel with an excellent speaker on this subject in the shape of Peter Rayner whose background is well known to ASLEF.

The benefits of free travel are that they would enable old people to live in their own homes knowing they could get out and about to their local shopping areas thus benefiting the local economy, and less journeys by car thus saving on pollution etc.

The final part was the keynote speaker Prof. Alan Walker from Sheffield University who is the Patron of the NPC. He was absolutely brilliant going over Labour's 10 years in office; on what they had promised pensioners initially and their subsequent failure to deliver on a whole range of issues.

In Sweden, Germany and Holland for example, their governments pay decent levels of pensions to older people why not this Government? There are 1million pensioners living in poor housing. Politicians have become complacent believing that they can ignore the older people of this country, pensioners deserve respect and dignity.

**Alan Taylor** RMS National Committee