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ARMS  **NORTH
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ASSOCIATE & RETIRED MEMBERS

Associate and Retired Members North West Committee

NEWSLETTER

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Generations, Unite!

Merseyside Pensioners Association's 'Generations United Against Austerity' Conference, Saturday 12 November, Liverpool - Steve Ion reports.

The Conference was called to mobilise against the divide and rule tactics of the Tories between young and old. There is a clear need to unite across generations against common attacks from austerity measures. It was timely given the recent announcements over the proposals to reduce the Triple Lock. This is a system of ensuring the Basic State Pension will increase each April by the higher of the growth in average earnings, the Consumer Price Index (CPI), or 2.5%. The argument used is that "wealthy pensioners" should redistribute some of their pension income to the young.



ARMS members with John Dunn (centre), past Clay Cross Councillor and Orgreave campaigner

The Conference opened up with a message of support from Mark Serwotka PCS General Secretary. Mark said that pensioners and young people face the same problem; austerity and capitalism. The Trade Union movement needs to

link into this fight by campaigning for its members conditions not only now but for the future. This Conference was an excellent start.

Dot Gibson National Pensioners Convention Secretary ably dealt with the arguments over the myth of the "wealthy pensioner". Dot argued that the demand for a living wage state pension is for future generations as well. The NPC was not wedded to auto enrolment as it is basically an opportunity for private investors to make a profit. 6.5 million pensioners earn less than £11,000. 5.8 million struggle with food, gas and electricity. 1 million pensioners suffer from malnutrition.

The next generation of children, 'The Millennials', are more likely to live in poverty. Young people struggle with University Debts, Bedroom Tax, Food, Rent and Cost of Living rises. 300,000 children are being affected by the recent benefit cap. Unite have just recruited 6000 young people; a great start with integration into union activity.

Social Care is in crisis. The key battle with Care and the NHS is against privatisation. With many Private Care Companies with severe financial problems. Dot welcomed the Labour Party position of integration of Social Care with the NHS into one public sector model.

Paul Novak Deputy General Secretary of the TUC outlined the work in the TUC on prioritising a recruitment drive of young people.

John McDonnell, Labour Shadow Chancellor, said that "Our time has come". He analysed the victory of Trump in the USA as working class anger against austerity and the establishment

politicians. He considered that if Bernie Saunders had been the Democratic nomination then he may now be President. John condemned the divide and rule tactic of the Tories creating divisions between the young and old. He outlined some policies of a future Labour Government, bringing the NHS back into public ownership, scrapping the Anti-Trade Union legislation, a £10 minimum wage, bringing the railways back into public ownership, tackling tax abuse and a massive house building programme.

In questions from the floor, concern was raised with John over the position of Labour Councils implementing Tory Cuts: that this could impact on support for Labour in a future general election. Other speakers raised concern over the current referendum being conducted by Joe Anderson, Labour Mayor of Liverpool. Residents could be asked to vote on whether they should pay up to 10% more council tax to help their “desperate” local authority maintain public services in the face of government cuts.

Joe Anderson wants to hold a public referendum – the first of its kind in the UK – to ask residents whether they would support a significant rise above the 3.99% cap. The council is warning that if it does not increase tax then it faces cuts to all its services, with adult social care and children’s services the hardest hit.

The question to John was what he would recommend to people on how they should vote in this referendum. John’s strategy was to protect councillors against surcharge if they implemented an illegal budget as the legislation had changed. John however clarified the position that instead the District Auditors would be brought in to run the council. John said that Labour parties should be knocking on doors and campaigning to advise voters that the cuts are not the fault of the Labour Party but the Tories. This should also be done by linking up with the Local Government Trade Unions. John said he would take these concerns back. John predicted a general election would be called next year.

John’s response though lacked clarity. The argument is to set a means budget based on what is required for the year, plus the use of reserve funds. This would not be an illegal budget. Alongside this would be the need for a campaign linking up with other councils. Like the tremendous campaign of the Liverpool 47 who

fought on the slogan “Better to break the Law than break the poor”. The Liverpool 47 were sadly surcharged but again this would not happen now. How could party workers or local authority trade unionists be enthused to knock on doors to explain why your Labour council has just implemented cuts of 50% to adult social care, children’s services, libraries, sports centres, maintenance of parks, highway repairs, street cleaning and rubbish collections? There was a growl of protest from the meeting on this suggestion. What is needed is a fighting campaign linking all sections of working people.

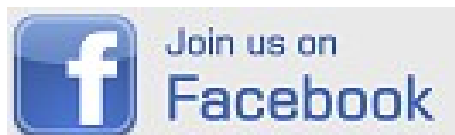
Reselection of MPs: there was no mention unfortunately of this but John talked about Labour Party Advocates. My only thought was what kind of advocate for instance is Frank Field Labour MP who is the Chair of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Intergenerational Fairness which recommends scrapping the Triple Lock on the unbelievable premise that pensioners have been protected from public spending cuts.

The demand for mandatory reselection of Labour MPs is long overdue. This democratic demand needs to be at the forefront of Labour Party Policy.

Finally there were some excellent Youth Speakers. They outlined the good work of campaigning amongst young people and urged support for the forthcoming demonstration United for Education in London on 19 November. Sheila Coleman from Unite spoke and encouraged those not in a union to join. There was also a contribution from a 14 year old school student.

The conference ended with a rousing speech from John Dunn, past Clay Cross Councillor and Orgreave campaigner. John outlined his involvement in Orgreave as a miner and the current campaign: he received a standing ovation.

The conference agreed to set up a permanent standing committee to take the work forward and also agreed a Young Workers Charter. An excellent start to a great initiative and well attended event. Definitely something to build on for the future.



NW ARMS opposes ACAS closures

PCS members from HSE, DWP, HMRC and ARMS, together with staff from the TUEd college, challenged Sir Brendan Barber and chief executive Anne Sharp about the closure of the ACAS office in Bootle on 2 November.



A few days later, PCS, including ARMS, held a small protest outside ACAS in Manchester where



ACAS chair Sir Brendan Barber and chief executive officer Ann Sharpe were meeting staff to talk about the office closures.

Successful heart transplant for Mark Serwotka

NW ARMS was delighted to learn that our general secretary Mark Serwotka has had a successful heart transplant.

The operation at the weekend went smoothly and the medical team at Papworth hospital are very happy with how the new heart is performing.

He is now recovering in hospital and will then recuperate at home.

After contracting a virus in 2010 Mark's heart failed and for the last two years he has been kept alive by a mechanical pump. He was readmitted to hospital on 30 August when the pump developed a clot and his doctors then placed him on the urgent transplant list.

Mark's wife Ruth said: "Mark recovering well from heart transplant op. Words inadequate but so much gratitude to skilled, dedicated NHS staff of Papworth Hospital. And nothing will ever adequately express my overwhelming thanks to the family of a stranger who in their loss have allowed us a future."

NW ARMS sends our own best wishes to Mark and our hopes for a speedy recovery.

Future ARMS meetings

All members can attend these meetings. Contact details are on our blog – see newsletter header for link.

The next NW regional meeting is on Wed 11 January 2017, 11:30 am to 2:30 pm in the Disability Equality North West office, 103-104 Church Street, Preston, PR1 3BS. *All members are welcome to attend, especially those from the Lancashire area, as we will be seeking to form a Lancashire ARMs Group in the near future.*

The NW AGM is in Liverpool on Wed 1 March 2017 at 11.30 am in the PCS office, 3rd floor, Jack Jones House, Islington, Liverpool.

Next Manchester meeting is Thu 12 Jan at 11.00am, Methodist Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester.

Next Merseyside meeting is Wed 21 December - 11.30 to 14.00. in the PCS office, 3rd floor, Jack Jones House, Islington, Liverpool.

**Happy Christmas to
all our readers**