

REPORT OF PSPC PRE-ELECTION CONFERENCE 4TH MARCH 2015

Opening remarks

More than 60 delegates from the PSPC Constituent Organisations attended the conference and heard speakers from the three main parties. The Chair welcomed the delegates and gave a brief overview of the current Coalition Government's pension policy since 2010. The General Secretary gave a commentary on the PSPC 2015 General Election manifesto and highlighted the specific areas that the delegates may wish to focus their questions for the speakers. A comment was made from the audience noting the small number of women delegates and speakers attending the conference. It was agreed that delegates should raise the point with their respective Organisations and that it would form the basis of a question to each of the three party spokespeople on involvement of women in politics.

Labour – Gregg McClymont MP, Shadow Minister of State: Work and Pensions

Gregg McClymont stated that Labour did not believe in a 'race to the bottom' of reducing public service pensions to fall into line with private sector provision but that private sector provision should be improved. He would build on the private sector pension cap (on private sector pension charges) already introduced, by introducing a rigorous monitoring system. He stated that it was unlikely that Labour would meet all the PSPC manifesto demands. He had sympathy with the PSPC arguments for universal pensioner benefits to remain universal but stated that Labour were likely to affluence test some benefits. Mr McClymont did not promise to reintroduce RPI as the indexation method for public service pensions and stated that he would not be pressed to make any future promises he may not be able to keep.

Conservative – Guto Bebb MP, Member of Public Accounts Committee

Guto Bebb's view was that means testing of benefits was complex and unfair. He felt that the neediest pensioners would find it more difficult to cope with making important financial decisions and navigating complicated benefit regulations. He used the Pension Credit system as an example of a difficult system for people to understand. He was positive about Coalition pension policy to date and stated that the Conservatives would retain the 'triple-lock' guarantee for state pension increases and that universal pensioner benefits would not be means tested under a Conservative Government. He was supportive of public service workers and the contribution they make to society.

Liberal Democrat – Steve Webb MP, Minister of State: Pensions

Steve Webb stated that he would enshrine the triple-lock guarantee in statute. He promoted the single-tier pension policy of the Coalition Government and stated that those workers who had been contracted out of State Second Pension would gain under the new scheme. He said the new Class 3A National Insurance contribution would help pensioners and people nearing pension age to boost their state pension – this would be especially beneficial for women. He confirmed that under the Liberal Democrats RPI would not be reinstated; however he would protect the pensioner bus pass. Free television licences for over 75s and the Winter Fuel Payment would not be available to higher rate tax payers - though Mr Webb appreciated the PSPC position on means testing. Mr Webb was dubious of the PSPC arguments against the Coalition decision to phase out age-related personal tax allowances. He reiterated his position of wanting to move to a simpler and fairer pensions system with increased attention on workplace pensions. He agreed with the PSPC demand for a higher state pension rate. Lastly, he stated that he favoured a single rate of tax relief at 33 per cent and advocated the abolition of the lifetime allowance on pensions saving.

Closing remarks

The PSPC Vice Chair closed the conference by summing up the various party positions on pensions and pensioner policy and urged the delegates to continue to campaign for the PSPC's main policy concerns as set out in the PSPC manifesto.