

February 2022

**NUJ 60+ Council**

The NUJ’s 60+ Council is fighting for fair pensions and supports the WASPI campaign for the almost 4 million women born in the 1950s unjustifiably discriminated against in their pension. The Council also supports the retention of the triple lock and is most concerned for the very, many freelance journalists who do not have the benefit of employers’ contributions to their pension and could not always afford to contribute to a private pension.

**Case study**

This NUJ member, Sally, went freelance early in her career and has been moderately successful most of the time. She bought a small house and has remained solvent. More than 40 years of earning a living freelancing meant she could pay off a mortgage and gather some savings. What she was never able to do was join a private pension scheme of any significance, as freelancing is such an unpredictable and irregular business that she never felt able to commit to large enough regular payments (if any) into such a scheme.

Complete retirement in such a circumstance is really not an option, so the state pension plays a large part in keeping the freelance solvent as work opportunities dry up. Further, any extended period of sickness, or having to support children, or a partner, would have made inroads into Sally’s ability to save.

In fact, Sally was ill for an extended period and in that time used up most of her savings, leaving her facing a ‘retirement’ depending on the state pension and continuing to try to find work – ie. no retirement at all.

**The NUJ’s 60+ Council says**:

* Freelances, like other working people, have paid National Insurance throughout their working lives, and yet are rewarded with one of the lowest, if not the lowest state pensions in the industrialised world.
* The government would have us believe that it is worth around £9,350 a year – that is simply not true. For various reasons fewer than half of pensioners are entitled to this, the average coming in at around £8,000. (See the article: https://leftfootforward.org/2021/10/prof-prem-sikka-the-governments-claims-of-not-being-able-to-lift-retirees-out-of-poverty-are-not-credible)
* The state pension comes in at between £3000 and £4000 a year LESS than HMRC think you need before you can afford to pay tax. The state pension is, like every other pension and other sources of income, liable for tax. This fact underscores an important point both the government and may of our colleagues fail to make clear – it is NOT a ‘benefit’. It is deferred income that has been earned.
* The ‘triple lock’ was brought in an attempt to make sure that, over the years, the UK state pension might slowly rise to get close to that in other countries. Breaking it, even temporarily, will make this less achievable and, even if the lock is restored, any break will have a lowering effect on the base from which the pension is raised subsequent years, thus inflicting permanent delay to any hope that this aim can be realised. Keeping the state pension at a low level, puts younger and older workers in conflict with each other for employment.
* The much-touted benefit, pension credit is of little help. The tiniest private pension or a minimal amount of paid work renders the pensioner ineligible for pension credit. In any case, we should ask why someone who has worked all their life and paid into the state pension scheme over all that time, should be reduced to claiming a few pounds every week as a ‘benefit’ to compensate for the scandalously low UK pension.
* Myths that need to be addressed are both the scandalously low level of the state pension and the discussion about ‘affordability’ which tend to treat the pension as a ‘benefit’ rather than deferred, earned income.
* The funds are there. The idea of paying a pension to people who are no longer able to work should not be seen by the government as optional expenditure. Doing so is an insult to working people.