

# SCOTTISH SENIORS

Campaigning for a better deal for older people since 1992



Newsletter of the Scottish Pensioners' Forum Issue 49 October 2018

## Hands Off Our Bus Pass - Campaigning at its Best



"The bus pass is a benefit that many people enjoy and use as part of their daily lives and I'm delighted that this government will expand the scheme to include companions of eligible disabled children aged under five.

"The concessionary travel scheme enables independence, accessibility and social inclusivity. We have listened closely to the many respondents who feel that the free bus pass should remain available to all from the age of 60 and concluded that we should not change the age of eligibility. We will also continue to explore options to provide free bus travel for Modern Apprentices, while keeping the scheme under review and maintaining a balanced budget.

"At a time when we are investing and encouraging more people to use Scotland's many excellent bus services, this government will do all it can to ensure as many people as possible consider the many benefits of bus travel. The £250m we spend every year on the bus pass and support for services is a substantial part of this effort.

"It is right that we explore and ensure the sustainability of National Concessionary Travel Scheme and I am grateful to all those who took part in the consultation process and helped inform the future scope of Scotland's bus pass."

**Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity Michael Matheson MSP 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2018**

The SPF wishes to thank all members and friends who responded to the Concessionary Travel Scheme consultation or otherwise supported the campaign

## SPF celebrate United Nations Day of Older Persons at Holyrood

The Scottish Pensioners Forum held its yearly demonstration outside the Scottish Parliament to mark United Nations Day of Older Persons. Over 70 affiliates and friends brought their banners along to show their support on the day. This year's theme was "Celebrating Older People's Champions" and celebrating 70 years of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



Pensioners' Forum); Neil Findlay MSP; John Mason MSP and Alex Rowley MSP.

A message of solidarity from the STUC Youth committee was delivered by Sarah Wiktorwski who called on young and old to campaign together to bring about common change.

Sandra White MSP, Convenor of the Cross Party Group on Older People, Age and Ageing also lodged a motion in support of the event.

Speakers included Maureen Gardner (SPF Chair); Rose Jackson (SPF Vice Chair); John McAllion (Dundee

Maureen Gardner spoke to demonstrators and (Cont'd)

**Motion Number: S5M-14106 Lodged by Sandra White MSP for Glasgow Kelvin**

*That the Parliament recognises 1 October 2018 as UN International Day of Older Persons; understands that this resolution 45/106, was passed by the UN General Assembly on 17 December 1990, which declared 1 October the International Day of Older Persons; notes the contribution and dedication that older people have made and continue to make to help safeguard welfare rights during the last 70 years in policymaking; campaigning and in wider society, and supports the theme for this year's celebration, Celebrating Older People's Champions*

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(Cont'd) and thanked them for their support. Drawing on the theme for the event, *Celebrating Older People's Champions*, Maureen went on to declare that she felt all older people were indeed champions. Touching on the success of the SPF **Hands Off Our Bus Pass** campaign and the contribution which both Unite the Union and UNISON Retired Members branches brought to its success, Maureen stressed that this was only the beginning as the bus pass did not serve everyone, particularly those in rural areas, therefore the campaign must continue to include rail and ferry services too. Maureen went on to say that the SPF

believes that the ability to get out and about helps combat the loneliness and isolation that many older people experience and that perhaps the time was right to call for the re-regulation of buses and bringing rail services back into public ownership.

Maureen told demonstrators that one of the SPF's biggest concerns was the level of state pension and that it was an outrage that the UK state pension was the lowest in the EU. Nationally 1.9 million pensioners live in poverty and according to the Scottish Government's own statistics, poverty affects 17% of pensioners in Scotland. The SPF understands the fact that poverty does not only affect older people and fully supports those campaigning for a Living wage for workers as well as a living pension.

Maureen went on to say that there were many other issues on which the SPF campaigned and asked demonstrators to continue to work with the organisation to ensure a better deal for older people.

Maureen finished by venting her annoyance at many sections of the press who were trying to drive a wedge between young and old.

## WHO IS SERCO?

Serco began life in 1929 as RCA Services Ltd, a subsidiary of the Radio Corporation of America. With humble beginnings in cinema, it wasn't until the 1960's that the company found work for the UK government, taking on maintenance for the early-warning missile defence system for the RAF in Fylingdales. As years passed and government outsourcing expanded, RCA Services diversified, in 1987 it was bought out and became Serco, obtaining a public listing in 1988. Since 1994, the company has grown 1,200 per cent. As the public sector suffers ever more cutbacks, Serco plc continues to grow.

Today, government contracts constitute 90 per cent of the organisation's business, and the scale of operations is enormous. To quote Serco's own website:-

We... Have a forward order book that stands at a record £16.7 bn, operate traffic management systems covering more than 17,500kms of roads worldwide... provide a secure computer and software support service to all 66 UK law enforcement agencies ...manage 192,000 square miles of airspace in 5 countries ...employ 5000 scientists... manage education authorities on behalf

**The SPF fully supports young workers: Why shouldn't they have a decent job; why shouldn't they have stated hours of work; why shouldn't they have contracts of employment? We totally oppose the condition of Zero Hours Contracts and will campaign vigorously on this.**  
*Maureen Gardner, SPF Chair*

of local governments, provide defence support services worldwide...transport more than 275,000 passengers every day on our driverless trains on London's Docklands Light Railway.

Serco's holdings in Scotland are considerable. Discounting national holdings – the law enforcement contracts mentioned above and their support for civil nuclear power – it provided electronic tagging for offenders on behalf of the Scottish Government on a 5year, £30 million contract and transport and accommodation for UKBA asylum seeker services in Scotland, as well as running the Dungavel immigration centre – in a tenure mired in controversy – between 2001 and 2003.

An investigation from Bella Caledonia identified Serco contracts as including:-

...operating Scatsta Airport on Shetland, the ACCESS joint venture with Glasgow City Council providing IT and property services, the management of a fleet of support vessels for the



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Royal Navy at Faslane, CCTV and roadside emergency phones for Transport Scotland, the operation of HMP Kilmarnock... and facilities management for NHS Scotland at the controversial PFI Forth Valley Royal Hospital in Stirlingshire and Wishaw General Hospital.

## **Political Lobbying**

While Serco's growth owes much to their extensive contract portfolio and public sector expertise the role of political lobbying cannot be ignored. Obtaining around 80 per cent of its employees from the public sector - which also allows them to perform strike-breaking duties where they deem appropriate....it is an extremely well-connected company, Examples of the revolving door between Serco's management and the top tier of public bodies has been established, particularly with regard to the PFI. Accusations of undue government support for prison privatisation efforts in Scotland have also been logged. And without a doubt continued cutbacks and pay freezes in the public sector will drive more employees in its direction, guaranteeing taxpayers continue to pay

## **In conclusion**

Serco is a product of neoliberal times, taking over state responsibilities and in the process transferring yet more public money into private hands. On the basis that the public sector can be run more efficiently along for-profit lines, it guarantees that at least a portion of our taxation pays for a healthy profit margin for invisible investors. Through its political lobbying it ensures that privatisation remains high on the agenda, and is ready to step in to take over whenever the opportunity subsequently presents itself.

What's more, this is a one way street. The retraining and investment necessary to nationalise already privatised services in a period of austerity keeps its earnings secure, all the more positioned to charge high prices and assert its own terms in future. Meanwhile,, its ongoing growth ensures that the 'diversity' and 'choice' promised by the market should be regarded as little more than a hopeful prayer.

for the same services but with profits accruing to Serco's shareholders rather than the taxpayer.

Unsurprisingly, Serco is looking to make deep inroads into the newly 'liberated' NHS, including an £140 million contract to run services in Surrey. In America Serco has been giving generously to both parties, no doubt to shore up their considerable holdings in the defence sector.

## **Notable controversies**

Serco has attracted considerable controversy for mishandling responsibilities in many of its 'key' sectors, in health, one of Serco's 'major growth areas', it has come under fire for unsafe working practices in its out-of-hours services in Cornwall. Its joint venture with NHS GTST Pathology, also drew fire for the costs it incurred.

In security services, Serco has been criticised for brutality in both the criminal and immigration sector, their tenure at Dungavel being an example. Serco has also approached their schooling contracts with a militaristic zeal, and has been criticised for its aggressive attitude to suppliers.

## **In the News**

**SERCO "the international service company" has been in the news again recently. It has footholds in health, social care, law enforcement, transport, housing, education and defence. SPF members are asking for information on this company – Who is Serco? We can do no better than to report this article written by Joe Ritchie of Scottish Left Review (SLR) We thank Bob Thomson (SLR) for permission to use it here**

**The UK Home Office awarded Serco the contract for housing Glasgow's asylum seekers, this became clear in recent weeks by Serco's plans to evict large numbers of them. A temporary reprieve has been established following protests at Serco's offices in Glasgow together with a legal challenge driven by Govan Law Centre against Serco over the legality of its proposed evictions.**

**Surely, an adequate housing policy must address refugees human rights to decent shelter, as well as that of the settled population**

**SERCO UK Chief Executive Officer is Rupert Soames, a grandson of Sir Winston Churchill, brother of Conservative MP Sir Nicholas Soames, a nephew of the former Defence Secretary Duncan Sandys.**

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## Homelessness and Affordable Housing

Homelessness in the UK has doubled since 2010 and home ownership is at a record 30-year low. However the main problem associated with the housing market in Scotland, indeed in the UK, is not reduced levels of home ownership but the current scale of homelessness and affordable housing.

In 2016-17, a total of 137,000 homeless applications were made in Scotland.

6,041 dependent children are today living in temporary accommodation across Scotland (National Records of Scotland) There are 137,100 households on local authority housing waiting lists and a further 25,000 on transfer lists. This figure of 137,100 is likely to be an underestimate of the true level of need and does not include housing associations – which, for example, are all the social housing in Glasgow.

Young workers attending the recent STUC Youth Conference 2018 heard a Unite delegate give a moving contribution in support of a motion on rents that begins – ***‘that this conference notes the shocking YouGov poll of female tenants, commissioned by the housing charity Shelter, which shows that a quarter of a million women across the UK have had a landlord ask for sexual favours in exchange for free or discounted accommodation in the past five years. Including 140,000 women in the past year’***

Reports published by Age UK (relating to England and Wales) exposed the degree to which some rogue landlords rent out damp, mouldy, properties with no cooking facilities and insufficient heating leaving tenants to cope with large energy bills and fuel poverty. There were also reports of huge rent rises being imposed if necessary improvements were carried out.

Dot Gibson, National Pensioners Convention (NPC) – is on record as saying that the intolerable housing conditions suffered by many older people is a disgrace.

*We need more social housing and secure properly equipped homes at affordable rents and security of tenure’  
Dot Gibson, NPC*

The current Scottish Government has begun to fund the building of social housing and this is to be welcomed, but, the numbers being built are significantly below the estimate of what is needed (Shelter Scotland)

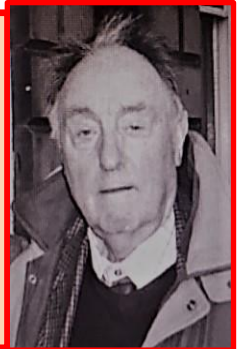
Homelessness and inadequate housing should be seen as an extreme form of poverty which is the living experience of people of all age groups and communities throughout the UK. Interestingly, the amount going to private landlords in housing benefit has almost doubled over the last decade to £9.1 billion in 2015-16.

There is an urgent need to end the climate of indifference surrounding homelessness and poor housing conditions Housing must be seen as a social issue and not as a personal problem.



The Scottish Pensioners Forum would wish to congratulate the Fire Brigades Union Scotland on their centenary year and for marking it as a tribute to all those who lost their life whilst in service. We would also like to thank the FBU for all their support for our organisation over the years.

One of the SPF's founding members, Enoch Humphries, was a former President of the FBU and was a champion for older people's rights throughout his life and we think it only fitting that we remember him even more fondly at this time.



**Join the Scottish Pensioners' Forum  
Campaigning for a better deal for older people since 1992**

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