



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

25th May 1983

Dear Mr. [unclear]

Thank you for your letter enclosing a copy of your Charter.

As a result of the four pension increases made under this Government, pensions went up by 68½%, as compared with a general rise in prices of 61%. The general rise in prices is measured by the Retail Prices Index, which has been the yardstick used for the purpose by successive Governments - both Conservative and Labour - since the war. There will be a further pensions increase in November, and the next Conservative Government is pledged to continue to protect pensioners against rising prices.

Of course, we would like to do more for pensioners. But we cannot escape the fact that pensions are paid for out of the contributions and taxes paid by the working population and there is a limit to what can reasonably be afforded. We have no intention of deceiving pensioners by making promises which cannot be fulfilled.

We have raised the amount which can be earned without any deduction of pension to £57 a week. Our Manifesto makes it clear that a Conservative Government would continue to raise this limit. It reaffirms our aim to abolish the earnings rule as soon as we can.

The Government has published a Consultation Document on the Death Grant. We are anxious to study possible ways of concentrating more help where it is most needed.

It is our policy that in public sector housing, a major priority should be the provision of homes suitable for elderly people, together with more sheltered accommodation.

I would certainly like to see a big expansion of voluntary effort to help with the very real problem of loneliness.

You can be assured that the aim of the next Conservative Government is to improve the Health Service, which we recognise is of particular benefit to old people.

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A major hospital building programme is now in progress, and there are about 45,000 more nurses and midwives and 5,000 more doctors than in 1979. Spending on the Health Service, far from being cut, has increased substantially since 1979, even after allowing for prices rises.

I know that there have been suggestions that pensioners should receive concessions as regards such items as television licenses and cigarettes. But this would not help those pensioners who do not smoke or have a television set. I think, therefore, that it is best to concentrate resources on, for example, increasing pensions and improving the health and welfare services which will help all pensioners.

*Yours sincerely
George Dunn*

George Dunn Esq MISW

Pensioners' Voice

(National Federation of Old Age Pensions Associations)

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NON-SECTARIAN



NON PARTY

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GD/JC/5.

10th May, 1983.

The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret H. Thatcher, M.P.,
Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London, SW1.

RH/S

Dear Mrs. Thatcher,

The present pensioner population of these islands is 9.6 million, a not inconsiderable proportion of the electorate. Of this massive total, almost a half are living on or below the poverty line. What life is like on a minimum income was graphically outlined at our Conference in Llandudno last week.

As delegate followed delegate to the rostrum, a picture of frustration, desperation and sheer hopelessness emerged. The inadequacy of the basic retirement pension, the anomalies of schemes of Heating and Dietary Allowances which give help to some on low incomes and not to others. The ever increasing burden of Standing Charges on Fuel, Telephones and Water. The apparent breakdown in National Health Service provision and the unequal regulations which provide free optical and dental treatment for supplementary pensioners whilst excluding those who receive Rents and Rates rebates.

There were calls too for a concessionary scheme of TV licensing. How ludicrous a law which permits a City Council to circumvent it and how wrong that a caring authority has to search for legal loopholes in order to assist its pensioners.

From Llandudno the message was clear. The pensioner population does not accept the oft repeated phrase that the "living standards of pensioners are being protected".

I would remind you of the Charter of this Federation and I invite your comments on this and the points made above.

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Charter.

- (a) To obtain a pension which shall be one third of the national average gross male earnings in industry for single pensioners one half for married couples where the wife receives a pension by right of her husband's contributions, to be reviewed half-yearly.
- (b) To abolish the earnings Rule.
- (c) To press for the provision of suitable accommodation at reasonable rent, integrated within the community, with adequate and alternative sources of heating, which pensioners can afford to use.
- (d) To press for the provision of more sheltered housing units for old people requiring care and attention and the establishment of geriatric units in all general hospitals.
- (e) To press for the establishment of colleges of geriatric medicine to further research in the field of ageing; to seek also the establishment of a professional body to give added status and recognition to those engaged in the nursing and care of the elderly infirm.
- (f) To press for a national travel scheme giving a maximum of half fare travel on buses.
- (g) To press for the uprating of the death grant.
- (h) To press for increased facilities in education and leisure; to provide and encourage the provision of services to alleviate loneliness among old people enabling them to have a useful place in the community.

In the few weeks before the General Election I am anxious that our members should be fully aware of the attitude of all parties to its elderly and an early reply would be appreciated.

Yours sincerely,


General Secretary.