
Submission by Unite Retired Workers Branch Committee to the Department of Business, Employment & Retail on the Pension Entitlements of Retired Workers 2021 Bill

People on average are living longer and as a result can be reliant on their pensions for more than 20 years after retirement. It is therefore vital that they do not see the value of their pensions decreased or their benefits eroded as a result of decisions made by Pension Fund Trustees, Trustee/Employer Agreements, Union/Employer Agreements or Unilateral Employer actions. Pensioners are also experiencing severe problems in maintaining living standards due to the current wave of inflation in Ireland. Retired Members in Unite therefore welcome the Pension Entitlements of Retired Workers Bill which came before the Dail in 2021. The passing of the Bill was adjourned by 12 months to allow for consultation with interested bodies.

The main objective of our Retired Members as outlined in the Bill is to have proper representation and negotiating rights for pensioners both in respect of their own pensions and national pension's policy and legislation. We believe such representation and protection is not adequately provided by member Trustees in pension schemes who are constrained by the legal requirements of their office. Pensioners would also need to have equal representation on national bodies such as the Pension Commission to ensure their rights are protected.

Furthermore, there needs to be a body set up with the necessary legal powers to address and adjudicate on the legitimate grievances of pensioners. The Bill proposes the WRC as such a body to adjudicate on such issues. Alternatively, the powers of the Pensions Ombudsman could be expanded to broaden the nature of these grievances to include communications from Trustees or Employers as well as Trust Deed or Rules issues. Pensioner representatives need to be fully involved in the negotiation of these additional adjudicating structures whether they are within the remit of the WRC or the office of the Pension Ombudsman.

The need for pensioner representation is highlighted as mentioned above by the problems caused for pensioners by the current wave of inflation that is being experienced in Ireland and abroad. Pensioner representation is required to ensure that retired workers who are reliant on State and/or private benefits do not succumb to serious poverty. Unless State and private pensions are increased as a matter of urgency, pensioners will struggle to make ends meet and without negotiating rights they may be left behind.

The Retired Public Servants wish to retain the link between the pay of serving colleagues and the pension applicable to retired peers and to be present when discussions are held which directly affect their pension.

We also believe that safeguards and protection of existing Pension Scheme Entitlements should result in the introduction of a Ministerial Order or legislation preventing employers or trustees unilaterally changing pension schemes where such changes have a detrimental impact on the pre-existing pension entitlements of retired workers.

Representatives of our Retired Members Committee would be pleased to meet with you to discuss the above points.

Retired Members' Branch

Unite

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