

9th February 2017

Chi Onwurah Labour MP for Newcastle upon Tyne Central brings another #WASPI debate to Westminster Hall and votes against the Brexit Bill the night before and her own parties whip.

Westminster has rarely seen a campaign like it. The #WASPI campaign to help alleviate the impact of two Acts of parliament in 1995 and again in 2011 to raise and thereby equalise the state pension age for women has led to demonstrations, petitions, debates, select committee reports and numerous PMQs but #DWP ministers refuse to make any concessions to them. More marches are planned on international women's day this year on March 8th 2017. It is estimated that 2.5 million women are affected by the changes and some may have to wait up to 6 years or more to receive their state pensions. They have tweeted and made moving new media videos showing themselves living in sheds having to sell their homes or drawing on their savings or even living off the pensions of their elderly 80-year-old-parents to just about survive. When they register at job centres they are sent on work experience even though they are in their 60s and have paid their NI stamps for over 40 years. Yet despite achieving the support of a powerful all-party parliamentary group on the #WASPI the Prime Minister, Theresa May and her officials are not minded to help.

We spoke to Chi Onwurah just before her Westminster Hall debate where she wanted to raise the issue of social class and the #WASPI pension changes. We also asked her about her decision to vote against the Brexit Bill and defy her own party whip.

Chi on #WASPI: "I wanted to raise the issue of the impact it has on working class women. A dress maker in my constituency has worked since 15 and has over 40 years of qualifying years for her pension and she is going to have to work for another five years for her State Pension so she will be well over 60 as a dress maker on her knees before she qualifies and that is so unjust. That is what working class women often have experience of they have started work earlier often in manual jobs, they work longer, they will die earlier because of the disgusting health inequalities and the impact on them is particularly harsh and I wanted to raise the issue and see how the Tory government responds. Not all forms of work are equal and they do not have the same impact on the body and they don't have the same form of security in old age.

"This is hopefully the last generation of women to have suffered all the brutal inequalities of an economic system that didn't recognize them and didn't want them, in terms of pay and pension rights and in terms of qualify for pensions and in terms of child care and so many other barriers. It really is a matter of inter-generational justice that these women are better taken care of by these pension changes."

Chi on her vote against Brexit: "I voted for the Second reading of the Bill last week because I thought it was important to reflect the will of the people in the Referendum. Newcastle voted to remain very closely and it was a national referendum. But over the week it became clear the government was not going to accept a single amendment. They are abandoning the single market which is so important for jobs in the NE and half of our exports are to the EU and they are talking about changing our economic model so we are more in line with President Trump's American agenda and I find that unacceptable. This is not a Brexit about the will of the

people this is a Tory Brexit and I cannot vote for that. Not one amendment got through, and there are many Tories MP have their doubts. It is Mrs May's Brexit and she will us that to turn Britain into a kind of Tax Haven and I couldn't do that. It was hard to vote this way.