



Charity No: 1043081

ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM

The voice of Islington's older community

April 2016 Newsletter

Dear Members,

Please do your best to come to the

London Mayoral and GLA Election Hustings

Monday 11th April 2016 2-4 pm

Islington Town Hall Council Chamber

Chair: Kristina Glenn

Director of Cripplegate Foundation

**HOW DO THE PARTIES IN THE LONDON ELECTIONS
STAND ON ISSUES OF CONCERN TO YOU?**

- *Housing* ● *Transport* ● *Public Toilets* ● *Safety*
- *Age-friendly venues* ● *& other issues* ●

We are hosting this important meeting for North London Pensioners. It is planned that following the meeting, we will continue working with our North London colleagues on issues of common concern.

Best wishes,

George Durack (Chair) Dot Gibson (Secretary)



**National Pensioners Convention
Annual Pensioners' Parliament
Winter Gardens, Blackpool - 14-16 June 2016**

For a party of fifteen (15) IPF members the subsidised cost is £50 for the return journey to Blackpool, leaving Euston on Monday 13 June, returning on Thursday 16 June plus B&B for three nights----- Contact Ann on: 07943733456

The main speaker at the opening rally is

JOHN McDONNELL the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer

there will be experts on pensions, health and social care, housing, transport and digital exclusion with plenty of discussion; plus an exhibition area and a social evening in the ballroom with pensioners from all over the country

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

We are definitely not in a time for doing a Ken Dodd "Happiness"! No wonder people turn away from politics!

Chancellor George Osborne believed he could cut disabled benefit PIP and at the same time give a large handout to the wealthy and nobody would ask a question! Surely when making life-changing decisions you ask around your associates? I cannot believe that this advice was mutual; so the questions came "who are those who gave the okay"? Then the blame-game. . . and some of the blame went to Ian Duncan Smith which he denied.

But don't let's forget that IDS was the Minister who, more than anyone, imposed harsh welfare cuts on the poorest in our country. He claims to have been pushed in that direction, so why did he hang on so long! "What a mess" a top Minister without a voice. If people believe this they will believe anything!

Apart from the ulterior motive of calling for a Euro "out" vote, his known disagreement with Osborne, and the question of who will be the next Conservative Party leader, did IDS at last tell the truth when he said disability cuts were a cut too far? Has Duncan-Smith really learned a lesson about and regret the damage his policies have caused?

What is a "compassionate Conservative" anyway? In the Euro referendum campaign there is much talk about "our British way of life" . . . what is this way of life, when we can see such attacks on poor and disabled people but tax cuts for the rich?

And, talking about the "British way of life" . . . the government's Trade Union Bill is an attack on the working conditions and the democratic rights of

millions of people. We should always remember that apart from representing their members at work, the trade unions were in the forefront of the campaign to establish the Old Age Pension, the National Health Service and many other important gains.

Now, with millions of young people without a proper job, without apprenticeships, on zero-hour and short-term contracts, trade unions are more important than ever. Dave Ward, the General Secretary of the Communications Workers Union is right: "there is not a company in the UK which is not looking for the harshest way to attack workers, who have already had their rights taken away over recent years; the minimum wage is becoming the maximum wage!"

But the unions are winning support. Members have been outside the Houses of Parliament each time the Bill is presented for discussion, and when it was in the House of Lords recently, peers from across the political spectrum voted for amendments to ask the government to think again on balloting, on resources for public sector representation, and on union political funds. So we are waiting to see whether the government will get the message and withdraw these undemocratic proposals.

But even with these changes the Bill is still a significant attack upon the trade unions. There will be more votes in the Lords and the campaign has to win again in the Commons, but the message is being sent – they have got it wrong with the Trade Union Bill! *For more information about the campaign:*

<http://action.unionstogether.org.uk/democracy-share>

"Kill the Housing Bill"

By Annette Thomas

Two meetings in the Town Hall and a big demonstration in central London show the strength of feeling against the government's Housing Bill.

We reported the first meeting in the March newsletter; two weeks later over 500 people attended the second one called by Council leader, Richard Watts and then Islington was well represented with thousands of others on the protest march to Parliament Square.

It is important for everyone to know about this Bill. It is designed to either persuade tenants to buy their property, which even with a generous discount is out of most working peoples' range, or else to pay the 'market' rent based on 80% of private rents.

When council properties become empty, instead of

/continued on page 3



We join "Kill the Housing Bill" demo 13/March

LOCAL NEWS MATTERS!

Veteran journalist Eric Gordon spoke at our March Forum meeting.

From a journalist with a young family working for a Peking publisher, living and then in jail in China, to owner of North London newspapers, it was a fascinating and interesting story. Many claimed he was naive to stick to his principles. We don't agree!

The Camden New Journal, Islington Tribune and West End Extra did not come about without a struggle. The owner of the Camden Journal decided to close it down in 1980 to get the troublesome and outspoken journalists off his back; Eric and other journalists, supported by Frank Dobson MP formed a co-op and relaunched the paper as Camden New Journal in 1982 with its sister paper in Islington and more recently in Westminster.

"It's not just celebrities who are important," said Eric. "Everybody has a story to tell, everybody's life is interesting and should be recorded." And he urges young journalists to remember this when writing their stories.

After speaking Eric, answering questions about circulation and distribution, gave more information about the character of the papers and their role in the community. He said that an ex-postal worker was in charge of distribution.

In its latest newsletter the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) says that "Local newspapers and their websites are the most trusted

form of the media, read by more than 30 million people each week. People expect their local newspaper to be their watchdog, keeping tabs on the decisions made by local politicians, defending local services, supporting the local football team and giving a voice to the community".

However, unfortunately the media giants and modern technology have taken their toll on local papers. So the "Eric Gordon Story" is as important as ever.

The Forum decided to write a letter of support to the NUJ which has launched the Local News Matters campaign to reclaim a vital vigorous press at the heart of the community it services and is owned and operated in the public interest.

The union is calling for:

- A short, sharp national inquiry into the state of local news;
- Local papers to become community assets to prevent newspaper titles closing overnight and to give potential new owners, including local co-operatives, the time to put together a bid for a paper;
- Action to stem the job cuts and attack on quality journalism;
- Research into new models for local journalism, tax breaks and other measures to fund community media.

KILL THE BILL *continued from page two/* providing homes for people on a waiting list, Councils will be forced to sell them to provide a discount to Housing Association tenants who may want to buy their home.

This policy is designed to end social housing, especially in London. Those who cannot afford to pay the increased rent will be offered accommodation elsewhere in the country, since there will be nothing affordable in London.

This Bill is not just devastating for Council (and eventually Housing Association) tenants.

The housing problem began with the Thatcher government's policy encouraging tenants to buy their council homes at huge discounts.

Good for those who bought, but bad for those

on the waiting list who were never going to be housed. This, plus the continuing failure to build Council or so-called "social" housing has created a huge housing shortage.

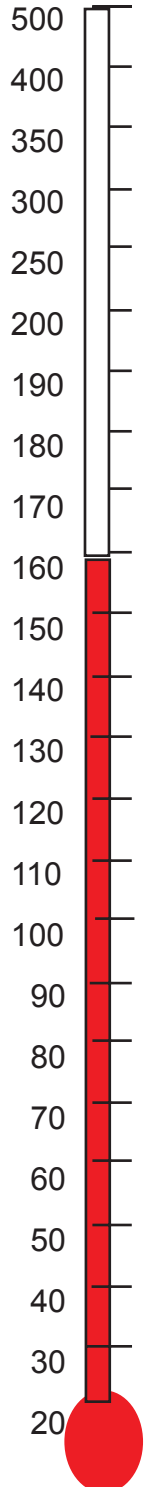
Now this is linked to the soaring rents charged by private landlords and the huge cost of homes to buy.

Much needed public sector workers are being driven out of London.

More and more young people are still living with their parents -- if they rent their own place, they cannot save up for a deposit to buy -- and those on low pay, short term or zero-hour contracts have no hope.

So -- unite the generations to "Kill the Housing Bill" if we are not to be driven out of London leaving it to be the 'financial city' of the world.

THANKS to all those members who have paid their 2016 subs. The £5 a year helps IPF to keep going! So keep the subs coming in!



David Lloyd George

Chancellor of the Exchequer, introduced the Old Age Pension Act in the House of Commons in 1908

*In the March Newsletter we published an article by Alan McDonald pointing out the welfare legislation of the Liberal government supported by Labour and the Irish Nationalists in the early 1900s - a time of growing trade unionism and workers' unrest. This reminded me of the publications and events organized by the National Pensioners Convention and its then General Secretary Joe Harris in particular, in 2008 - to mark the centenary of the 1908 Old Age Pensions Act, and I thought you would be interested to read this edited version of Lloyd George's speech. **Dot Gibson***

This House rejected the Royal Commission proposal for the introduction of an Old Age Pension, but must now recognize the growing support for this throughout the country. On behalf of the government therefore I introduce the Old Age Pension Bill purely as a first step. . .

. I may even say it is necessarily an experiment.

Our proposal is that it should be a non-contributory scheme. After all you tax tea and coffee, sugar, beer and tobacco, and so you get a contribution from practically every family in the land. Also a workman who has contributed health and strength, vigour and skill, to the creation of the nation's wealth has already earned a pension for the time when he is no longer fit to

create that wealth. I do not think the state has the right to invite the workman earning from 15s. to 20s. or 25s. a week to make the sacrifice which is necessary - the sacrifice, really, of some absolute necessities of life as far as he and his children are concerned, in order to make provision for old age, but that the State itself ought to make it.

We propose a 5s a week pension for those of 70 and over. But there is a problem. There are 1,262,632 of such people and the state has many other commitments, not least the Boer War. Therefore we propose to introduce deductions which will make a considerable inroad upon the number of persons who can claim the Old Age Pension. Only those with a 10s limit of income will get the pension, and there will be the crime and alien test and the thrift and industry test. The number of people who can pass these tests

and claim the pension is 572,000, meaning a cost of £7,500,000 with an administration cost of £250,000.

I have no doubt that in the course of two or three years these pensions will become very popular. They will be regarded as an honourable recognition of

services rendered to the State, and in the course of time, perhaps a very short time, practically all persons who can claim pensions will put in their claims and press them.

The moment the pension is established, there will be those who will want to remove old people from Poor Law Relief and add them to the Old Age Pension. You have the guardians, the aged persons themselves, their relatives, and all those who are engaged in charitable work, clergymen and others, in a conspiracy

to reduce the number of possible paupers and to increase the number of possible state pensioners.

After the Bill comes into operation there are many old persons who are now earning 11s. by hard work who will throw up their jobs and draw their pension. They may prefer to receive an Old Age Pension of 5s a week to earning 12s of 14s by hard work in a mine or quarry. At the age of 70 such people may think the time has come when they have earned a rest from their labour.

It is true that in New Zealand and Australia there are more liberal schemes, but the Colonies are not in the same position as an old-established country like ours. They do not have the great naval and military expenditure that we have, for it is this old country that defends their shore. */continued on page five*



Collecting the first Old Age Pension in the Post Office

LLOYD GEORGE *continued from page four/*

same position as an old-established country like ours. They do not have the great naval and military expenditure that we have, for it is this old country that defends their shores!

And so what about these disqualifications? I think it is highly important that the receiver of the pension should be regarded as quite honourable, that the pension should be regarded as the recognition of faithful service to the State. Therefore we should ruthlessly exclude the loafer and the wastrel from among the recipients of the bounty of the state.

We have to look at the finance at our disposal. Remember what a wealthy man does when he considers the charity which he is going to dispense. He does not look merely at the needs of the locality; he looks at his own means, and having made up his mind what his means are, he decides to dispense

charity within those means, picking out those objects which are most deserving of the funds at his disposal. That is exactly what we have done.

You have never had a scheme of this kind tried in a great country like ours with its thronging millions, with its rooted complexities; and everyone who has been engaged in any kind of reform knows how difficult it is to make way through the inextricable tangle of an old society like ours. This is, therefore, a great experiment. We put it forward as an incomplete one; we say it is a beginning and only a beginning but a real beginning.

I am asking this House to agree our proposals for an Old Age Pension at the expense of the State with the necessary disqualifications even though they may appear harsh and unjust, and to agree the necessary finance because we are anxious to utilise the resources of the State to make provision for undeserved poverty and destitution in all its branches.

SOCIAL CARE: WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

A report by the *Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC)* exposes the depth of the crisis looming over UK adult social care.

We all know that government cuts to local authorities are taking their toll on services: around 1.86 million people over the age of 50 are not getting the care they need; approximately 1.5 million people perform over 50 hours of unpaid care per week; the proportion of GDP the UK spends on social care is among the lowest in the OECD, with budgets having undergone an overall reduction of over 30 per cent since 2010.

Private companies in the care sector are also blaming inadequate government funding, saying that this is and can lead to closures of nursing homes. But is that the whole story?

The CRESC report: *Where Does the Money Go? Financialised Chains and the Crisis in Residential Care* reveals the dubious financial engineering, tax avoidance and complex business models shifting risks and costs from care home owners to care workers, local authorities and self-funders.

To show the severity of the crisis, the report gives the example in detail of the dubious activities in and around care providers *Four Seasons*.

Before being purchased by *Terra Firma Capital* in 2012, *Four Seasons* passed from one private equity firm to another, as each debt-leveraged buyout was followed by a larger one, with the seller making a profit from the willingness of the buyer to pay more and cover the cost of the debt.

By 2008 *Three Delta*, *Four Seasons* was servicing £1.5 billion debt, with the interest alone claiming £100 per week on each of its 20,000 beds. Eventually this situation ended with debt write-offs and restructuring when *Terra Firma* invested £300

million of its own capital, repaid £780 million of the old debt and issued a more sustainable figure of £525 million of new debt through bonds.

The report says that much of the media simply absorbed the announcement that *Terra Firma* had “bought stability to the company”. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

Four Seasons now consists of over 185 companies in 15 tiers registered in numerous jurisdictions including multiple tax havens with the primary purpose being tax avoidance. The company’s obscure financial operations have turned what was in 2013-14 a cash generative business into a loss making one and this is blamed on the lack of state funding.

But, as the report explains, discretionary accounting and financial decisions in the form of “charges” between the 185 companies means that *Four Seasons* has over £300 million of *internal* debt which shows that the loss isn’t what it first appears to be, and the owner will not be out of pocket in the event of liquidation or sale!

The report explains that “the declared profit of operating subsidiaries in financialised chains is the result of manoeuvring over several years to reduce tax, extract cash and rearrange obligations with an eye to exit”; and: “the problem is that in each chain nobody except the upper tier owners knows where the holes in the bucket are, so that public money can disappear without political debate or social accountability.”

Can there be any doubt that private ownership of social care with the irresponsible practices of companies like *Terra Firma* are at the heart of the crisis? It certainly is not the fault of frail elderly and disabled people and their families, nor of the care workers on low wages and poor working conditions.

INFORMATION

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| Every Monday BINGO | 1pm at IPF Hall, 1a Providence Court, Providence Place, N1 0RN |
| Monday 11th April 2 - 4 pm Islington Town Hall, Council Chamber | MAYORAL HUSTINGS : Hear about, ask question and discuss the parties' policies in the London Mayor elections: Chair, Kristina Glenn, Director of Cripplegate Foundation |
| Thursday 21st April 10.30 a.m. Islington Town Hall Cttee Rm 1 | FORUM meeting. Speaker Judy Downey, Chair Relatives and Residents Association : The crisis in social care |

We want to hear from you.

- Write to Islington Pensioners Forum, 1a Providence Court, Providence Place, N1 0RN
- Call us on: 020 7226 7687 Email us at: ipf@talk-talkbusiness.net
- Office open from 10.30 a.m. -- 2.30 p.m., Tuesday to Thursday, but please call first.
- Sign up for our online newsletter on our website: www.islingtonpensionersforum.co.uk

Presidents:

Jeremy Corbyn MP & Lord Smith of Finsbury

Chair: George Durack **Secretary:** Dot Gibson

Assistant Secretary: Annette Thomas

Treasurer: Eric Hill

Charity No: 1043081

Supported by Cripplegate Foundation & Islington Council

Shine

seasonal health interventions network

Shine is a one-stop shop established by Islington Council to tackle fuel poverty and reduce seasonal deaths and hospital admissions. Working across the borough Shine is delivering a package of interventions designed to improve seasonal health and wellbeing.

Bearing in mind that there were 43,900 extra winter deaths of cold-related illnesses last year, this is a welcome initiative.

For more information:

phone: 020 7527 8203

shine@islington.gov.uk

shine.team@NHS.net

www.islington.gov.uk/seasonalhealth

Annual subscription to Islington Pensioners Forum £5

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