



Charity No: 1043081

ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM

The voice of Islington's older community

April 2018 Newsletter

It's the local elections on 3rd May 2018



There will be a HUSTINGS at ISLINGTON TOWN HALL

when Councillors from all the parties standing in the election can be questioned, so:

PUT THEM UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

Tuesday 17 April

6.30 — 8.30 p.m.

Islington Pensioners Forum has joined with the following groups to hold this important meeting:

Islington Homes for all - Axe the Housing Act, Defend Whittington Hospital, Islington Fair Funding, Islington Hands Off Our Public Services, Islington Keep Our NHS Public, Islington Stand Up To Racism, Islington Trades Union Council, North London Sisters Uncut, Reclaim Holloway, Women in Prison

We thank Islington Homes for All — Axe the Housing Act for the work they have done to organise the above hustings. We are proud to join them and the other campaigns on this important occasion. Together all of us keep the flag flying in defence of basic democratic rights and the social rights of communities in our borough.

Another dispute about PENSIONS!

This time it is workers in the university sector whose occupational pensions are under attack. Therefore we are pleased to publish (PAGE 5) a report from **MEL COOKE** who is a senior teaching fellow at King's College, London, a member of the UCU executive committee and the strike organiser for the campus at Waterloo.



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Thank-you to all who have so kindly visited me, sent get-well cards and asked after me during this time in the Whittington.

Many of you will have seen the *Islington Tribune* article about my long time in A&E waiting for a bed. I was concerned that some people might get the wrong end of the stick and so a letter from my daughter Elaine was published in the following issue.

This explained that "No blame whatsoever should be laid at the door of the Whittington Hospital". I was treated very well from the moment I arrived despite "the horrendous cuts the Tories have made to the NHS; despite terrible staff shortages and staff being practically dead on their feet." The service I have had, and continue to have is second to none.

Anyway I have been reading the papers, and various things have caught my attention.

What a charade that Chris Grayling, Transport Secretary told Stagecoach/Virgin who have the franchise for the East Coast railway to continue even though they want to give up for lack of profit.

In effect the government's idolisation of privatisation means they are bailing out these companies using hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money.

The railways should be put back in public hands. A nationalised system can run them cheaper and better. It's ideology gone mad!

Once again Jeremy Corbyn is under attack. It is unbelievable that anybody could accuse him of anti-semitism or racism!

Long before he became Labour leader, he was (and continues to be) President of Islington Pensioners Forum. Our experience is that he speaks and acts in a principled way based on his strongly-held beliefs for democratic and human rights for all.

He recently gave total support to an amendment from Lord Dubs, a Jewish refugee from Nazism, to allow 3,000 child refugees into Britain. How could anyone who has seen the TV pictures of bombed and starving children fail to support this? But the Conservative Party did vote against — the amendment was lost. Where were the headlines then?

Yet Jeremy is under media fire with headlines like "siding with anti-Semites" and "figurehead for anti-semitism". Of course the papers say this is merely quoting others; that was the media excuse during the two Labour leadership elections and the General Election when Jeremy was constantly and consistently under fire.

At that time we demonstrated our support. Islington Pensioners Forum is non-party political, but we stand up for fair play, and we know that Jeremy is being targeted by those who want to undermine the support he has built throughout the country.

Hoping to see you soon! George

Britain at Work London Project

This year the Britain at Work London Project plans to interview people who live or have worked in Islington. This is their first borough-based project, and they quite rightly say that Islington has a really rich working history that needs to be recorded. Clearly our Forum has many people who have lived in or retired from work in the borough and such interviews could be an important part of our "generations united" campaign, for so much has changed in the borough and in the world of work over the years; it is important to talk about this to young people in school, college or work today.

So if you worked in a factory, the print, a shop, the post office, on the railways, on the buses, in the NHS or for the local authority, Britain at Work would like to hear from you.

Please contact Rima: britainatworklondon.com or telephone 0207 272 7649.

Or you can let us know in the IPF office (details on back page) and we will put you in touch.

World Social Work Day 17 March 2018

Viv, Joyce and David set up an IPF stall at Islington's World Social Work Day, and were able to distribute our newsletter to the participants, and other Islington voluntary organisations also had stalls. The event began over lunch and was accompanied by singing from Islington Council Choir. Speakers followed including Jo Cleary, Chair of the College of Social Work. Jo had pre-

viously been a social worker in Islington and gave a personal insight into the way in which social care can have a positive impact on individual's lives. She stressed that to invest in social work is to invest in communities and ultimately the investment brings savings. The event was sponsored by Liquidlogic, a social services computer software company.

BE VERY WARY!

It was interesting and important that you published Terry Wood's letter last month on rogue builders. To continue the theme — I received a note from my friend about similar upsetting experiences. She said: a friend of hers had had a call from someone saying her washing machine insurance payment was overdue and asking her to pay using her credit card. She thought they would turn up on her doorstep that night so got our friend Mike to be with her. No one turned up. I also had a "phone call saying my washing machine warranty had run out. I told them that was all sorted, because I'm getting a lot of scams popping up at the moment. This could be one for Islington Pensioners Forum? Can you alert people to the need to be very wary.

Annette Thomas

IS THIS FARE FAIR?

"I recently visited Broadstairs and used my computer to check train times from St Pancras. At the same time I noticed that if I bought two single tickets instead of a return it was £10 cheaper. Since I was going to be in the area I decided to buy my ticket at the station. However when I asked for my two single tickets I was told this was only available if I bought the ticket online. There was no indication on the computer that was the case, so my return ticket cost me £28.50. I think this is gross discrimination against people who don't have access or do not use a computer, and I have noticed people frequently have a problem downloading their ticket at the station. This sort of policy is very prevalent in an attempt to reduce staff as well as turning us into a cash free society. The railways are already overpriced and seem to operate with too many alternative pricing systems. Maybe time to take the railways back into public ownership with uncomplicated ticket pricing that don't change from week to week!" *Annette Thomas*

A DEVASTATING IMPACT

Raising the state pension age will have a devastating impact on the poorest in society, when life expectancy is falling.

According to new academic study, life expectancy between England's richest and poorest neighbourhoods has widened since 2001. On average a boy born in one of the most affluent areas will outlive one born in one of the poorest by 8.4 years.

The study also found that girls born in the top fifth of areas on average will live 5.8 years longer than those born in the bottom 20%. Most worrying was the finding that the poorest are now 89% more likely to die before their richer counterparts compared to a probability of between 41% and 52% in 2001.

NPC Campaign! (monthly E-bulletin)

PAXMAN HITS OUT!

Former BBC Newsnight presenter, Jeremy Paxman has hit out at the older generation by blaming them for Britain's housing crisis and describing them as "spoilt children".

The 67 year old claims that buying a house and seeing its value appreciate over the years is the fault of the "baby boomers" generation born after WWII.

He believes that because political parties have been scared of the "grey vote" and have pandered to their demands, the answer is to stop people voting at 65. Mr. Paxman also stated that he didn't take his winter fuel allowance or state pension.

Jan Shortt, National Pensioners Convention general secretary said: "Mr Paxman is completely wrong to suggest that today's housing crisis has been caused by older people, or that the answer is to stop pensioners from voting.

"Not only has he benefitted from years of having an inflated salary at the BBC, over the last few years he has also seen a reduction in the amount he pays in income tax — but he doesn't seem to be complaining about that!"

NPC Campaign! (monthly E-bulletin)

PwC BANKS £20m AFTER CARILLION COLLAPSE

Auditor, PwC has made more than £20 million so far from its role in winding down collapsed construction giant Carillion.

The bill covers its first eight weeks of work after it was drafted in at short notice in January.

Partner David Kelly, whose personal hourly rate is £865, told MPs that the weekly charge for the global giant's services was running at about £1.4 million.

The average hourly charge per staff member is £360 and 112 remain on the case.

"It is too early to say what the ultimate costs will be," Mr. Kelly told the Commons business and pensions committees. He admitted PwC was near the top of the payment queue for creditors.

When he could not answer questions on a Carillion contract in Qatar, Labour MP Peter Kyle said: "What does £20 million get you these days?"

Mr. Kelly said suppliers of Carillion, which is still working on about 70 contracts, were being paid within 30 days. Of the 18,100 workers it employed before the collapse, only 7,100 remain.

About 9,500 have found different work or had their jobs transferred to other companies, but 1,500 are redundant.

The METRO March 22 2018

If you have any news, information, personal experiences that you think will be of interest to the rest of us, please let us have them for the Newsletter.

The University College Union (UCU) represents university and college lecturers, administration workers, librarians, technicians and other university staff. At the time of writing, the union's members have just completed a 14-day strike over proposed changes to USS (their occupational pension scheme). Therefore we are pleased to publish here a report from **MEL COOKE** a senior teaching fellow at King's College, a member of the UCU executive committee and a strike organiser.

Universities UK (UUK) – the governing body for the university sector proposes to change our pension scheme, USS, from a 'defined benefit scheme' (a guaranteed income in retirement) to a 'defined contributions scheme' (defines what we and our employers pay but what pension we receive is subject to the whims and vagaries of the stock exchange).

In other words, our pensions would no longer be deferred wages which are guaranteed as a right; instead they would be reduced to precarious financial products. An average university lecturer could lose 10–40 per cent of their retirement income, around £10,000 a year.

The main objection to the proposal is that it is based on an alleged deficit of £7.5 billion which is actually a **projected** deficit. The scheme as it stands today is perfectly healthy – and this projection is based on various unlikely predictions, such as:

- a fall in investments;
- an increase in pay growth (a joke considering we have not had a real term pay rise since 2009);
- an increase in life expectancy to 93;
- a presumption that the entire university sector will go bankrupt at the same time.

At no point has UUK and USS shown how they made these calculations – so we have called for greater transparency and an independent panel to review the valuation which includes academic experts from our side as well as theirs.

The union balloted all of the universities who are in the USS scheme; all but six reached the 50 per cent threshold decreed by the 2016 Trade Union Act, and so 14 days of strike action were declared.

Many of us were quite shocked. In the past we had only ever organised one and two day strikes and at first we feared there would be little appetite for industrial action on this scale. But we were wrong – all over the country people came out in their hundreds in some of the worst weather any of us could remember, they stood on picket lines, made placards, sang songs, organised brilliant teach-outs and teach-ins, learned how to use social media to stunning effect and had the time to develop an incredible sense of strength, solidarity, hope and the certainty that we could win.

One of the wonderful surprises was that loads of students supported us, contrary to all the warnings from non-striking colleagues and managers – at the time of writing there have been 22 student occupations in support of the trike and in support of other struggles such as the campaign for cleaning staff to be brought in-

house rather than out-sourced to private companies.

At King's there is currently a stand-off between management and students who have occupied the corridor where our Principal has his office.

In the second week of the dispute both sides went into arbitration with ACAS and after a few days a deal was announced. This was little better than the proposal we had gone on strike about and so was resoundingly rejected by members. In an extraordinary 12 hours thousands of people signed a letter rejecting the deal and several hundreds of us demonstrated outside the union's headquarters in Camden.

One of the unforeseen results of calling 14 days of strike action was that a workforce not generally known for revolutionary zeal has now become radicalised and are not going to settle for anything less than the preservation of our existing pension scheme.

This dispute is nominally about pensions, but much larger issues are dominating – and some would say destroying – the higher education sector: the destructive role of senior management in embracing marketization and obstructing basic democracy and justice in our institutions.

The introduction of student tuition fees means that universities are financially very healthy, but this is not reflected in staff wages, it has meant massively inflated vice chancellor salaries, who are paid six times the average salaries of their staff. Also there has been a huge rise in casualisation – over 50 per cent of lectures across the country – amounting to 75,000 staff – are delivered by hourly paid staff and graduate teaching assistants, some earning under the minimum wage when planning and preparation are taken into account. All of this affects women and minority ethnic workers the worst – King's, for example, has a gender pay gap of 16.8%, the second worst in the country. Meanwhile, most universities are in the middle of eye wateringly expensive capital investments, buying and leasing shiny new or listed buildings which they say they need to attract students.

It is clear to most of us that the proposed reforms to our pensions are in fact proposals for a pay grab in a sector where staff are suffering increased job insecurity. Also, it is not just about us; there is a desire by government to put an end to all defined benefit schemes for public sector workers in the same way as has happened in the USA and other countries.

Thanks for giving me space in your newsletter. Please tell everyone about this dispute.

Annual General Meeting of the NPC London Region

The Secretary and Chairman's annual report showed that the Region has been active in many campaigns during the year and have given particular attention to reaching out to younger generations. The Region has supported those campaigning to safeguard and improve wages and working conditions and campaigning to recruit into unions those who work in the "gig" economy (i.e. self-employed, part time, zero hours contract workers).

Therefore it was no surprise that the guest speakers were Martin Walsh of the Communications Workers Union (CWU) and Sean Wallis of the Union of College and University Lecturers (UCU). Both explained their unions' pension struggles

For us in the pensioners' movement it becomes even clearer that attacks on occupational pension schemes mean that standing up for a living state pension today is vital for future pensioners; for many of today's young workers are likely to end up with only the state pension when they reach retirement age.

The report explained the problem of losing local pen-

sioner groups when local leaders cannot continue and replacements cannot be found. Local groups were urged to share their problems so that help could be offered.

The Region had submitted consultation papers on the London Mayor's programme, and had proposed that there should be a Deputy Mayor for older people. A meeting to discuss this was awaited.

A motion on the constitution was carried. The aim of this was to make it easier to bring new members into the leadership team.

Two motions on social care from Hornsey Pensioners Action Group and our own Forum were carried. Both called for the social care campaign to be developed.

There was a successful motion calling for free ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) courses to be available.

Two new members were elected to the 25-strong executive committee

Dot Gibson

Stephen Hawking and the NHS

Professor Stephen Hawking, world famous physicist, died at his home on March 14th aged 76.

In spite of having motor neurone disease he worked on the Big Bang, black holes, gravitational waves, Hawking radiation. He wrote "A Brief History of Time" which sold 10 million copies, and explained the origin of the universe and the theory of everything.

But he understood the importance of our National Health Service, without which he would not have survived. I was privileged to hear his talk to the Royal Society's medicine in August last year. He talked about his own personal experiences in Switzerland in 1985 where the doctors wanted to switch off his life support during an illness. His wife refused and he was flown to Cambridge. That was 33 years ago.

His experience of health insurance in the US was that going through an intermediary meant that the health insurance company will try its best not to pay. A lot of experience of the NHS and the care he received has enabled him to live his life as he wanted and to contribute to major advances in our understanding of the universe.

He said there are two ways to think about a national health care system.

One is that the most humane and civilised society is one in which all people are provided for equally, based only on their needs, no matter who they are, rich or poor, young or old.

The other way is to think of efficiency so there is as little as possible waste of labour and resources.

International comparisons show that the most efficient way for services to be run is for them to be publicly funded and run. (I would add publicly accountable. to us) The more profit is extracted from the system the more expensive health care becomes. So the NHS must be protected from commercial interests.

On one hand there is the force of multinational corporations driven by their profit motive.

On the other hand the public already supports the core principles but our greatest scientist said we need to know that the most humane system is also the most efficient and cost effective system .

Stephen Hawking and others have taken Health Minister Jeremy Hunt to court to stop him and NHS England bringing in ACOs without public consultation and scrutiny and debate.

In case you have forgotten! ACOs sound OK since they aim to combine health and social care but are an attack on the fundamental principles of the NHS and for allowing private companies to receive public money to administer them. (There are so many acronyms in the attempt to hide what is happening to our NHS that they may be called something different now!)

Pam Zinkin

INFORMATION

BINGO every Monday	1 pm at 1a Providence Court, Providence Place, N1 0RN
Lunch and a chat on Wednesdays	1 pm in the IPF Hall, address above
IT and Smart Phones on Wednesdays	3.30 p.m in the IPF Hall, address above
Tuesday 17th April 6.30 - 8.30 p.m.	Hustings for Council elections at the Town Hall (see front page)
Thursday 19th April 10.30 a.m.	A speaker from the Fair Futures Commission invited.

ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM

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Charity Number: 1043081

Supported by Cripplegate Foundation, the Big Lottery and Islington Council

Office opens from 10.30 a.m.- 2.30 p.m. Monday and Wednesday, but please call first. Sign up for our online Newsletter on our website: www.islingtonpensionersforum.org

Presidents: Jeremy Corbyn MP & Lord Smith of Finsbury

Joint Chairs: George Durack, Bob Collins

Secretary: Dot Gibson **Assistant Secretary:** Annette Thomas **Treasurer:** Eric Hill

Committee members: Frances Bradley, Joyce Herron, Supa Kusumratana, David Milner, Blanche Woodbridge, Pam Zinkin, Eddie Zissler

Thanks to those who have let us know their views on the proposed Lee Valley outing. We will contact the boat company about whether there is a reduction for group bookings and get some dates in time for the next Forum meeting.

DATA PROTECTION

(this statement is required by law)

Under the Data Protection Act 1998 and the EU General Data Regulation 2018, organisations must collect, handle and store personal information. These rules apply regardless of whether data is stored electronically, on paper or on other materials. To comply with the law, personal information must be collected and used fairly.

Islington Pensioners Forum stores members and volunteers' postal addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses and we ensure that these are used fairly, stored safely and not disclosed unlawfully. We will never share an individual's data with third parties without the individual's consent unless required to do so by law.