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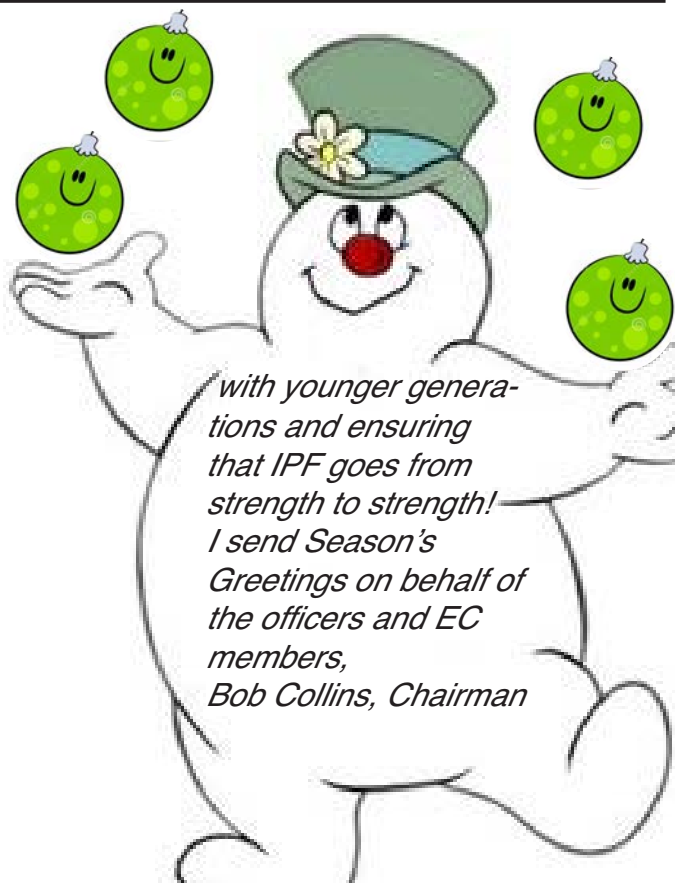
ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM

The voice of Islington's older community

December 2018 Newsletter



*Dear Members and Friends,
Many thanks for your support throughout 2018; now we are looking forward to 2019, standing up for basic rights and social justice, building solidarity*



*with younger generations and ensuring that IPF goes from strength to strength! I send Season's Greetings on behalf of the officers and EC members,
Bob Collins, Chairman*

* NATIONAL HOUSING SUMMIT *

Our picture shows members of the IPF delegation to the National Pensioners Convention lobby of Parliament on 24 October. We were anxious to show our solidarity with younger generations who are experiencing terrible housing problems. So we are glad to let you know about the

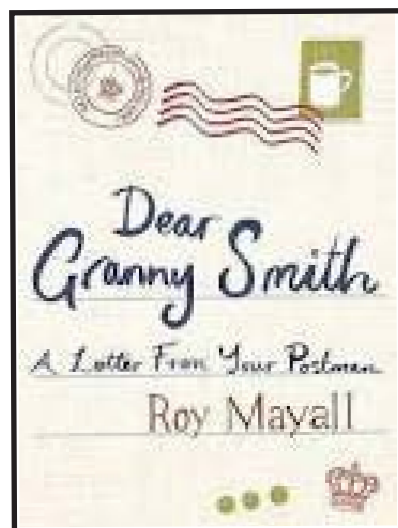


**National Housing Summit:
Safe, Secure Homes For All
Saturday 8th December
11 am, - 5 pm
Hamilton House,
Mabledon Place, WC1H 9BD
(off Euston Road, near Camden
Town Hall)**

To book a place: 07432 098440

The fight for homes affects everyone. Millions are stuck on waiting lists, in temporary accommodation, or on the streets, and millions more pay half their income to private landlords, with few rights and no security.

(See page 2 for housing article)



**Chapter Five: "In the Office" -
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"There's a lot of resentment and an increasing amount of bullying"

A VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Armistice Centenary

This was my first time as chair of IPF to lay a wreath at the war memorial Islington Green. Sandra and I joined children, veterans and a band at the town hall and marched down Upper Street. After a short inter-faith service and observance of the two-minute silence I laid the wreath on behalf of Islington Pensioners Forum.

The Shrouds of the Somme

We went to Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park to see a powerful art commemoration to mark the centenary of

the end of World War 1. There were 72,392 shrouds on display all are made to be in a different position.

TV Licences

The BBC are plotting to axe free TV licences for the over-75s which is currently funded by the Government to 2020 when the BBC is due to take on the full cost IPF will keep up with developments along with other pensioner groups.

All the best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Bob Collins



IPF wreath at Islington Green War Memorial



Artist Rob Heard, who made 72,396 shrouded figures

THE HOUSING CRISIS by Ruth Steigman and Annette Thomas

There is currently a housing crisis nationally, which affects London in particular, as people are drawn from the rest of the country for work here.

The crisis is caused by a combination of the massive loss of council housing to right-to-buy, changes in the way housing associations operate, and the increasing use of land and housing for investment purposes.

Successive governments since Thatcher have steadily privatized housing provision through right-to-buy (Scotland has now ended this policy), and by cutting government grants to local councils and housing associations. Since 2010 government austerity measures have meant a more than doubling of homelessness.

Starved of money to carry out repairs, councils have transferred their housing to housing associations through stock transfer schemes, and cuts in grants to housing associations have led them to operate more like commercial property developers.

Some councils have embarked on regeneration programmes to improve their housing stock, leading to the demolition of council estates, and their replacement by private housing developments — unaffordable for the original tenants.

These programmes tend to occur in inner-city areas,

leading to claims of 'social cleansing', as they become affordable only for wealthy people.

Lack of council and social housing has pushed more and more people into private renting, especially young people. As well as paying high market rents, private tenants now have very little security. With new fixed-term tenancies, usually of six to twelve months, landlords don't have to give any reason for not renewing the tenancy at the end of the fixed-term (though they do have to follow proper eviction procedures). The deposits that have to be found to move to another high rented private tenancy come to thousands of pounds.

Defend Council Housing is a national campaign against the privatization of council housing - its slogan is *Hands Off Our Homes*. In 2016 the Government passed the Housing and Planning Act, which would have forced councils to sell off properties, introduce means-testing for council tenants, encourage the demolition of council estates, and make it difficult for new council housing to be built. Islington was at the forefront of the campaign against this Act, which would have forced higher-earning tenants to pay increased rents. However, Islington led other London councils against this "Tenant Tax", resulting in this and other proposals in the Act not being

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Dear Granny Smith : Chapter 5 – The Office

Last month we published chapter four. Roy explained how ‘time’ was an important part of the job..time for the customers, a lifeline for the lonely and the bereaved.

I always say it's a job of two halves. The first half is in the office. It's loud and intense in here. There's real pressure to get everything done so you can get out. Everyone is shouting. There's a lot of noise. The radio is playing: usually some dumb local radio station reel-ing out mind-numbing hits from the sixties.

There's a lot of banter, a lot of swearing. Some of it is very quick, and very funny. It's hard to give you a flavour of this as it's all "in the moment". People are working fast and talking fast at the same time. But there's one sample from the morning before the strike:

Alan: "Are you going to be on the picket line in the morning?"

Bob: "No, I'm going to be tucked up in bed with my lovely wife."

Colin: "I am though."

Bob: "What? You're going to be tucked up in bed with my lovely wife?"

Bob is the loudest and quickest of them all. There's a constant stream of banter emanating from his frame. His reactions are instantaneous and often hilarious. He's like a one-man comedy routine, with a string of catchphrases which he repeats endlessly and always with exactly the same relish. He also has a tendency to burst into a raucous chorus of "If I Were A Rich Man". That, or any of a dozen other songs. He has the look of a naughty boy just about to play some prank on you. Often there's a perverse element to it. One of his tricks is to drop his trousers to his knees when he's in the urinal, like a little boy having a pee by the roadside. He does this to every unsuspecting new employee and it will usually cause screams of protest. This, of course, is exactly what he's looking for.

Let's set the scene. Tread carefully. We are now about to enter the men's toilets. Jim is there, just about to have a pee. It's the same day: the morning before the strike. I'm there. We're lined up like proper men in a toilet, looking blankly at the wall in front. There are one or two others, washing their hands, or just on their way out. It is the busy time, just before we're about to set out on our rounds. Bob enters. Only he's not just un-doing his zip: he's unbuckling his belt too, starting to pull down his trousers. There's a look in his eye, per-verse and playful at the same time. Jim screams in panic. "No, no, I don't want to see it!" he shouts, quickly pulling up his zip and rushing for one of the water closets to hide. Bob is too quick and has already dropped

his trousers and is now backing into the closet with him, mooning at him. "Is it clean?" he says, amid raucous laughter. "I want you to tell me if it's clean or not." It's not all as good humoured as this, however. Sometimes the pressure gets very intense and tempers get frayed. This is particularly true when management make one of their arbitrary decisions, favouring one of the compliant posties over the rest of us. This is a common oc-currence.

There is a deliberate provocation: one of the "favoured" postmen being allowed to leave before all the rest of , who are being held back in the office waiting for the miss-sort run. This is the van that goes over to the City to collect any late mail. Often we are standing around waiting for it to arrive. Sometimes, when it gets back, there are only one of two additional items of mail, sometimes none at all. Management know we're eager to get out but hold us back anyway. There's a duty to deliver all mail, they say. But then, if it suits them, they will hold back the mail. Or they will let someone on overtime go out and not wait for the miss-sorts. There's an element of favouritism and a feeling that the rules are being applied arbitrarily, to suit management, and not fairly, to suit everyone.

There's a lot of resentment and an increasing amount of bullying. There's a feeling that they are trying to wind everyone up, to get rid of as many full timers as possi-ble. It has become so persistent, so noticeable, we be-lieve it is a deliberate policy being driven from higher up. The old posties have to go, to be replaced by part-timers and casuals.

One of the current tricks is in the application of the so-called "Attendance Procedure". Believe it or not, some-times posties are made to come into work even if they are sick or injured, on threat of dismissal. The Atten-dance Procedure is the means by which this is done. They monitor your attendance. You are only allowed a certain amount of absences in any one year.

If you exceed the number of absences you are brought before management and a so-called Stage One warn-ing is issued. This is regardless of whether your illness is genuine or not. Every absence is considered to be genuine, but each one is also counted towards the At-tendance Procedure, regardless of how long you are

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Dear Granny Smith continued

away. A day or a week, it makes no difference. The limits are: no more than two illnesses in a year, and no more than three weeks' absence. If you exceed the limits a second time, a Stage Two warning is issued. A third time, it's Stage Three and possible dismissal. There is no right to appeal against either Stage One or Stage Two, and although they are meant to be discretionary, discretion is never used. This, of course, is the exact opposite of the meaning of the word "discretion". So by Stage Two, a person is already under threat of dismissal. One more warning and that's it: you're on your way out.

So no matter how ill you are, if you are on a Stage Two you daren't miss work. I've seen people hauled up before management because they were in hospital for a hernia operation and have exceeded the total number of days allowed off in any one year. And I've heard of people on the verge of a mental breakdown being bullied and harassed and humiliated in front of the entire office and sent home crying like babies. This is happening more and more at the Royal Mail.

Everything is arse-about-face. Words have come to mean their exact opposite. So "discretion" means "mandatory" and "flexibility" means "as directed". I have to be flexible at work, meaning I have to do what I'm told. Management can twist the rules at will. They can

apply a the rules in one case and ignore them in another And meanwhile we have young managers of no more than a few months' experience overriding old posties who have been in the job for 30 years.

Take this as an example: a few weeks ago, a new young manager came into the office and, as a way of flexing his muscles, told us that we could no longer leave our mail bags under our frames. It was a "health and safety issue" he said. Pardon? I've been leaving my bags under my frame since I got here and I haven't tripped over them once. How can I trip over them? They are under the frame, for God's sake.

But – so be it – we do as we are told. So you can picture us now: a whole office full of confused postal workers waving their mail bags around in the air wondering what to do with them. Where are we supposed to put them? On top of the frame? That's where the packets go. On the work surface? That's where the letters go. Beside the frame? That would precisely cause the health and safety issue that is the excuse for this little exercise in futility.

There's nowhere else to put them. So, eventually, after a week of stumbling over our exposed bags in the name of "health and safety", they go back to where they've always been: under the frame, out of the way. The way it's always been.

Winter deaths: 50,100 — that is 417 deaths a day or 17 deaths an hour

The National Pensioners Convention is calling on the Energy Minister, Claire Perry MP to resign as the official figures for excess deaths in England and Wales among the country's older population for the 2017-18 winter months (December to March) are announced (31 November)

Jan Shortt, general secretary of the NPC said: "Today's figures are proof that older people are at the mercy of poor housing, rising fuel costs, shrinking pen-

sions and colder weather.

"Using the government's official definition of fuel poverty, around 1.4 million older people in England are at risk.

"In addition, almost one in three older people live in homes with inadequate heating or insulation making their homes more difficult to heat or keep warm.

"In total, this accounts for around 3.5 million older people at risk or suffering from fuel poverty."

Highest for 40 yrs

NPC PENSIONERS' PARLIAMENT

10 - 14 June 2019, Winter Gardens, Blackpool

Cost £250 — Pay a £10 depost and spread the cost over the months

● Monday 10th June: a comfortable coach (with reclining seats and an on-board toilet) from Islington Town Hall, returning on 14th June.

● Bed, breakfast and evening meal at the friendly Gresham Hotel, which has a lift, a comfortable lounge and is very near the Winter Gardens.

cheques payable to "IPF" FORM ON BACK PAGE

INFORMATION

BINGO	This is suspended for the time being. We will keep you informed.
Lunch and a chat on Wednesdays	Last one of the year will be on Wednesday 5th December 1 pm in the IPF Hall, 1a Providence Court, Providence Place N1 0RN
IT and Smart Phones on Wednesdays	3.30 p.m in the IPF Hall, address above

There is no Forum meeting in December.
NEXT FORUM MEETING WILL BE ON THURSDAY 17TH JANUARY 2019, 10.30 a.m.
ISLINGTON TOWN HALL, UPPER STREET

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE : ART AND SOCIAL GROUP : ISLINGTON
St. Mary's Church, Upper Street, London, N1 2TX
2 - 3.30 p.m. 16th December 2018 and 20th January 2019
To find out more: Sophie: sophwoolven@gmail.com

ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM (membership £5 a year, cheques payable to IPF)

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Email: ipf@islingtonpensionersforum.org

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

Chair: 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

**TO BOOK FOR THE
PENSIONERS PARLIAMENT 10-14 June 2019**

Name.....

Address.....

Tel:..... Email:.....

Enclosed £10 deposit (cheques to "IPF")

**Post to: Pensioners' Parliament, IPF, 1a Providence Court,
Providence Place, Islington N1 0RN**