

ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM

The voice of Islington's older community

April - May 2024 Newsletter

1a Providence Court, Providence Place, N1 0RN 'phone 0207 226 7687

email: ipf@islingtonpensionersforum.org web: www.islingtonpensionersforum.org

Charity no. 1043081

FORUM MEETINGS AND OTHER EVENTS

FORUM Thursday 18th April 2024 10.30 a.m. in the Town Hall — speaker Peter Crockett on the importance of knowing how to use your 'phone, tablet and desktop. He will introduce his colleague who will be taking the classes in the IPF hall, and asking the members present at the Forum what day and time of the month is best to hold these classes.

The second speaker is Luke Daniels, our committee member, and president of Carribean Labour Solidarity

FORUM Thursday 16th May 2024 10.30 a.m. in the Town Hall — speaker Sophia Stevens (Islington Adult Social Care). Sophia spoke at our Forum meetings when we returned to having our monthly Forums in the Town Hall after lockdown, and the Social Care team was working on the needs of frail elderly and disabled people in the borough. In May she will be reporting progress and explaining the problems to provide services when government cuts the grants to local councils.

FILM AFTERNOON — Wednesday 24th April and Wednesday 29th May 2024 at 12.30 p.m for lunch, followed by the film at 2 p.m. in the IPF hall (address above) — £5 for a hot meal and the film IN APRIL WE WILL BE SHOWING THE KEN LOACH NEW FILM "The Old Oak"

***** Please book for the film at the Forum meeting or with Lydia on her mobile 07804693461 or on the office no: 0207 226 7687 and if on answer'phone please speak CLEARLY your name and telephone number**

100 ***!!!!!!!**
IPF member, Florence Searle



Well, a "little bird" called Lydia told us your "secret" and so Florence, we are now sending you our love and very best wishes for your 100th birthday, and from these pictures, we can see that you and your family put up the decorations and had a special cake as well as receiving the King and Queen's card to mark the day!

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Jeremy Corbyn MP is our President, and for over 40 years has been the elected Labour member of Parliament for Islington North.

But now, although remaining a member of the Labour Party, the Labour leadership has decided that he cannot officially stand in the next election as a Labour candidate, and so "Friends of Jeremy Corbyn are circulating a leaflet asking "We want Jeremy Corbyn to be our MP, do you?" and a petition for people to sign if they want Jeremy to stand as an Independent at the next election.

The petition can be signed on line at:

BT.LY/FRIENDSOFCORBYN

Also there will be copies of the petition at our next Forum meeting.



FUEL POVERTY ACTION

speaker: Ruth London

February Forum report by Frances Bradley

30% of UK population are living in fuel poverty. Pensioners are better off compared to young people. Data does not include people in fuel poverty who live in homes that are well insulated.

Although the cost of fuel per unit is going down, the standing charge is going up, on average by 5%. Private fuel providers are profiteering through price hikes and re-investing in fossil fuels.

There is huge unfairness in payment structures, e.g. storage heaters (more commonly used by older people) are not cheaper at off peak times, whereas electric car charging is cheaper at off peak times.

If you have a prepayment meter you have to pay the standing charge before you can use any electricity. **Fuel Poverty Action** is campaigning to stop pre-payment meters being compulsorily forced on people in fuel poverty and there were no new meters installed by force last year. However, this practice is coming back. There is no justice in the different methods by which payment is extracted.

Around 10,000 people die of cold in UK. People also die of overheating. Cold and overheating blight people's lives by causing preventable health problems. There is massive inequality across the population at all ages.

Housing: insulation and repair is the worst in Europe. Damp and mould in poorly maintained properties is a known health hazard. The government has cut the house insulation programme started in 2011 and Labour has just announced it is cutting their £28 billion investment in insulation

and other green policies to £5 billion. This makes Labour only slightly better than the Tories.

Air source heat pumps can work well. District heating can work well, but it needs to be maintained and well run. Lambeth council is in dispute with residents over a district heating system which due to poor management is running at only 30% efficiency. **Fuel Poverty Action** is running a campaign called "Making Green Come True", highlighting that green policies should fulfil their promise and do what they say they will.

Fuel Poverty Action's manifesto "Energy for All" aims to make people who use more/excessive energy pay more, and for a fairer billing system. The manifesto is supported by the National Pensioners Convention and affiliated branches, the TUC and 250 further organisations. They advocate that the cost of electricity and gas should be evened out.

Ruth suggested that IPF passes a motion in support of the "Energy for All" campaign. Their ambition is for local authorities to sign up. There is a series of live educationals online, for example, "Fuel for Thought" (15/2/24) entitled "Robbing the Poor".

Supporters of the campaign organise "Warm Up" days, the right for people who cannot afford to heat their homes to make themselves warm and comfortable in public buildings. Southwark Pensioners organised for members to go as a group into the Southbank Concert and Exhibition Centre in support of the campaign. Of course this needs to be sensitive to the fact that people do not want to be seen as victims.

The Post Office scandal

We reported on the Post Office scandal in the last issue of our newsletter, and said that we would up-date the news on this, but so much has happened since then that we would need a whole newsletter for the report! Perhaps we can ask our film team to see whether we can deal with this at one of our film afternoons! A BBC report presented documents which show that the Post Office bosses knew that the Horizon IT system could be changed on line to give a report that the postmasters and postmistresses were stealing post office money! So this scandal may now mean a criminal case. .

KEEP OUR NHS PUBLIC speaker: Prof. Sue Richards

February Forum meeting report by Frances Bradey

Keep Our NHS Public (KONP) started in 2005. and it grew massively after the Health and Social Care Act (2012) — it is now the biggest campaign organisation for the NHS

The right wing press presents a barrage to us about the NHS model being broken. Currently the long waiting lists are the same as before the Labour government was elected in 1997 and, as then, are due to gross underfunding.

To properly fund the NHS requires a 4 per cent increase above inflation year on year. When properly funded under the 1997-2010 Labour government, life expectancy greatly increased. Underfunding means key targets are missed, such as to see a hospital consultant within 18 weeks of referral; max four hour wait in A&E; suspected cancer diagnosis — two week waiting time to see a consultant and 62 days from initial referral by GP to treatment starting. **All missed.** Since 2010, the annual increase of 1 per cent above inflation has not always been met. The result is the NHS is in tatters, but the model is not broken as the right wing press claim.

The Commonwealth Fund (a health research body) used to rate the UK health system either top or second out of 11 comparable countries. The UK is now ranked 10th. The USA is a basket case and always ranks 11th (bottom). Comparative spending: France £40 billion, Germany £73 billion — i.e. way more than the UK. But the right wing press never mention that the NHS is under-funded, and claim that Artificial Intelligence and better health will solve the funding problem. This is complete nonsense.

But the NHS is not safe under Labour's current plans, and if there is a Labour government, we will still need to campaign to save the NHS.

The NHS is desperately understaffed. 10% of posts are vacant, equating in hospitals to a shortage of more than 10,000 doctors and 40,000 nurses. Historically the UK has always undertrained the NHS workforce, preferring to recruit from overseas. Post Brexit, recruitment is now from further afield, like the Philippines and Nigeria, who need staff even more than we do. Doctors and nurses in the UK need to take a student loan to pay for their studies. After KONP lobbying, at least Labour now mentions training and retention of staff.

The selling-off of GP practices is a big concern. Planning is done at sub-regional level e.g. Islington is part of the North Central London (NCL) sub-region, which comprises Islington, Camden, Haringey, Barnet and Enfield. This Integrated Care Board (ICB) holds budgets and commissions services. GPs are (and always were) private contractors to the NHS.

Most GP practices are not APMS — (Alternative Personal Medical Services) contracts which mean anybody or any organisation can run a GP practice. This led to Centene — an American healthcare giant providing services for Obamacare and basic state medical care for people without health insurance in the US — taking over local surgeries. Research reveals there are multiple legal cases against them. Operose is the UK subsidiary of Centene and runs seven practices in the North Central ICB and 44 surgeries across London. Two years after buying the UK practices Operose put them back on the market. They propose to sell to T20, a private equity company which is less than a year old and has bought a majority stake in Virgin Health Care. The change of control needs to be approved by the Integrated Care Board (ICB), but in practice the board will rubber stamp the sell-off to avoid the risk of litigation. Islington KONP campaigns to raise awareness.

When for-profit organisations run GP practices their ambition is to cut costs. Training is expensive — It takes 10 years to train a GP to become an expert diagnostician. So, to save money the for-profit organisations use the new role of Physician Associate in their surgeries. These PA jobs are open to any science graduate after two years of training. PAs are meant to be supervised by GPs, but given the shortage of GPs, adequate supervision is impossible. Lack of safety is no obstacle for private companies over use of PAs and under employment of GPs, as effective scrutiny is impossible. GPs regularly work 60-80 hours/week, hence many choosing to work "part time" to limit their work to 40hrs/week.

Lack of midwives and underfunding are the main issues for maternity services. There was a public consultation "Start Well" which ran until 17 March about the North Central London sub District proposals to improve maternity, neonatal and children's services across North London. There are basically two options A) Improve the maternity unit at the Whittington and close the unit at the Royal Free (ICB's preferred option) or B) Close the unit at the Whittington and improve the unit at the Royal Free. The rationale is that the birthrate has fallen, on average mothers are older and in poorer health so need more specialist interventions. **(KONP would like to see both units remain open, fully staffed and funded)**

The ICB also suggest changing the Edgware Midwife-lead Centre so that it only offers ante and postnatal care rather than services for women in labour, and make changes to children's surgical services by bringing together surgery for very young children at Great Ormond Street, and for under 3 years of age.

Thames Water (its private shareholders) are calling for a 40 per cent increase in our payments in an effort to overcome huge debts on loans and to raise money for repairs and improvements. The text below is from the “We Own It” campaign group’s web site, calling for privatisation of water companies.

English water companies work for a handful of shareholders around the world, while pouring sewage into our rivers and seas and allowing water to leak from the pipes. We should copy Scotland and France, and bring water into public ownership.

Margaret Thatcher privatised water in England and Wales in 1989 — couldn’t get away with it in Scotland so they have publicly-owned Scottish Water. Welsh Water is now a not for profit company. England has a unique model of privatisation. Mrs. Thatcher didn’t just give private companies a right to operate, she sold off our assets and infrastructure wholesale.

Your private water company has a monopoly in your area and there is no market, you have no choice about the water company you use. Privatisation was supposed to mean lower bills and a better service but the opposite has happened.

Privatisation is a legalised scam. Since the 1990s, investment from the privatised English water companies has gone down 15%, and they’ve built up a debt mountain of over £60 billion (paid for by us). Meanwhile, shareholders have received £72 billion — £2 billion a year on average.

The privatised English water companies pour raw sewage into our rivers and seas, which kills fish and wildlife and makes people ill. A huge amount of water is leaked away every day. Instead of spending money on infrastructure to tackle sewage and leaks, the water companies prioritise their shareholders. We rely on Ofwat and the under-funded Environment Agency to slap their wrists when it goes wrong.

The English water companies are more than 70% owned by shareholders abroad, for example:

- Wessex Water is 100% owned by a Malaysian company, YTL
- Northumbrian Water is owned by Hong Kong businessman Li Ka Shing
- Thames Water is partly owned by investors from the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, China and Australia

Welsh Water is a not for profit company. Scottish

Water and Northern Irish Water are both in public ownership.

The water companies have built up a debt mountain of over £60 billion and used this to finance dividends for shareholders

The average pay for a water company Chief Executive Officer is £1.7 million a year. The biggest earner is Steve Mogford, CEO of United Utilities, on £2.9 million. Meanwhile our bills have gone up by 40% in real terms since privatisation

Water companies are leaking away 2.4 billion litres of water a day (up to a quarter of their supply)

The Environment Agency has said that by 2050 some rivers will see 50-80% less water during the summer months — so water is a precious resource we need to conserve

Every day, the water companies discharge raw sewage into our rivers and seas more than 1000 times on average — over 9 million hours since 2016

Only 14 percent of English rivers are considered to have good ecological status

In Scotland, water is in public ownership. Bills are lower and rivers and seas are cleaner Publicly owned Scottish Water has spent £72 more per household per year (35% more) than the English water companies. If England had invested at this rate, an extra £28 billion would have gone into the infrastructure to tackle problems like leaks and sewage

In France, a number of cities have brought water back into public ownership. They didn’t sell off the assets like England did which means they can just wait until contracts come to an end

In Paris water came back into public ownership in 2011. The publicly owned company L’Eau de Paris has built still and sparkling water fountains throughout the city!

69% of the British public want water back in public hands

70% of so called Red Wall voters want water in public ownership

Announcing the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race on Saturday, 24th March the news programmes made sure to let us know that this historic race could endanger the lives of the student rowers due to the “alarming levels of E.coli bacteria in the river. Official data shows that sewage spills hit a record high in 2023 — the sewage from Thames Water Treatment works was discharged for more than 3.6 million hours last year!

WHO KILLED THE ELECTRIC CAR?

A LACK OF CONSUMER CONFIDENCE... OR CONSPIRACY?

We had our last film afternoon on Wednesday 27th March, and after a tasty spaghetti bolognese from Lydia, we watched one of the Sony Pictures Classics — title above.

At the beginning of the film, Sony explains that all the interviewees in the film express their own views which are not necessarily the views of Sony or its employees.

The film opens with campaigners at the “funeral” of the General Motors electric car EV1, Then we are informed that 100 years ago there were more electric cars than petrol cars, but mass production of the internal combustion engine won the day.

However in 1991 there were 41 stage-one smog alerts in the state of California, and there was alarm and concern at the increase in lung cancer and other respiratory diseases put down to exhaust from the traffic. and so there was an interest in a zero emission mandate for vehicles.

General Motors set up a division to pursue this, and in 1996 launched their EV1 car. Hollywood actors, Tom Hanks and Mel Gibson are interviewed at this point and explain how they like and use the EV1 car...it was travelling 70 or 80 miles on one shot of electricity, and that was the usual distance for them.

However, 10 years later the EV1 was not being produced and by 2004 there was only 1 with a driver on the road in California.

How did this hapapen? The film then goes on to show in detail that:

- Consumers were being told that these cars were only for rich people; the environmental claims were dubious; and they wouldn't go very far without batteries;
- The producers of batteries backed this up;
- The oil companies opposed an eectric infra-structure in garages to deal with electric input; the price of oil was reduced to encourage sales of petrol vehicles;
- The car companies said the electric car was unprofitable, and therefore not worth producing and threatened jobs.

National and state governments “confirmed” the above; General Motors and the state of California got permission to take electric vehicles off the road, even to the length of depositing them into a special secret compound in Arizona, where they were smashed up and crushed out of all recognition. Campaigners were arrested.

The film does prove that the main oppositionists conspiratorily joined together with the backing of the main political leaders of the time to kill the electric car, but with the increasing problems of global warming; its effects on every country in the world, including the health and living conditions of millions through floods, fires and famine, campaigners who have stood up for the EV1, are now preparing for their future battles for the production of electric cars.

NEXT FILM AFTERNOON WIL BE ON WEDNESDAY 24th APRIL, 12.30 FOR LUNCH, 2.00 pm FOR FILM..... “The Old Oak” Director Ken Loach£5 for lunch and film. See address at the top of page 1. it is just across the road from Islington Green, and next to the cinema. Lots of buses stop nearby.

ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM

Officers

Bob Collins — Chair
Luke Daniels — Vice Chair
Elaine Durack — Secretary
Frances Bradley — Assistant Secretary
Eric Hill — Treasurer

Committee Members

Margaret Diffey
Hannah Fagbesa
Dot Gibson — Newsletter editor
Irma Gomez
Alan McDonald
David Milner — Members list

[Committee meetings](#) on the first Monday of the month at 10.30 a.m. in the IPF Hall

[Forum meetings](#) on the third Thursday of the month at 10.30 a.m. in the Town Hall from January 2024

Committee Members continued

Jan Pollock
Philip Richard
Juliana Simon
Annette Thomas
Pam Zinkin

Delegates

to the National Pensioners

Convention (NPC) London Region

Elaine Durack and Frances Bradley

Staff:

Bronwen Handyside — Co-ordinator
Lydia Batchelor — Outings/events organiser

ISLINGTON CLIMATE CENTRE

Whenever we talk about or report on environmental issues, the beautiful smiling face of Ella Kissi Debra, comes into my mind. When this nine-year old little girl died in 2013 with an asthma attack, her mother fought for and won a legal decision that the death of her daughter was an environmental disaster arising from the constant exhaust fumes from passing traffic. To me this little girl is a symbol of the environmental campaign. Dot



At the March Forum meeting, the speaker was Anna from Islington's Climate Centre, and at our film afternoon we viewed Sony's documentary, "WHO KILLED THE ELECTRIC CAR?" (review page 5)

The establishment of a borough Climate Centre is an important development, Until recently the environmental campaigners were finding it difficult to get a hearing, and risked arrest and even imprisonment when their campaigns took to the streets and stopped the traffic.

There are so many older people, who talk about their fears for the future of their grandchildren and great grandchildren after seeing pictures and reports of flooding, fires, land slides and the illnesses arising from global warming.

Those who take responsibility for the Islington Climate Centre say community action and individual change can make a real difference but, despite their concerns, many people can feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenge. Working together to create a more sustainable future together with projects towards greater adaptation and resilience is vital.

The mission of the Islington Climate Centre is to engage, inform and connect via a series of lively events and workshops, swap shops and repair shops, talks and panels and much more, giving Islington residents the knowledge and skills they need to address local concerns.

Please think about and discuss with each other what you think would be good to be reported in our newsletter. Your short letters are welcome, questions you would like answered to help everybody else.... please let us know (phone no. on page 1).