

ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM

The voice of Islington's older community February - March 2024 Newsletter

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Charity no. 1043081

FORUM MEETINGS AND OTHER EVENTS

Thursday 15th February 2024 10.30 a.m. in the Town Hall NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE
Speaker: Professor Sue Richards of Keep Our NHS Public (KONHSP) — we are really pleased that Professor Richards is able to speak and open our discussion. She has been standing up for our NHS for many years, is a member of the campaign's committee, worked in the Cabinet Office for several years, and is an academic and writer on public management.

Thursday 21st March 2024 10.30 a.m. in the Town Hall ENVIRONMENT/GLOBAL WARMING
Speaker invited from Islington Environmental Alliance.... see below for film

FILM AFTERNOON — will re-start on Wednesday 27th March at 12.30 p.m. in the IPF hall (address above) — £5 for a hot meal and the film — **AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH** — an illustrated talk on climate presented by Al Gore, aimed at alerting us to the increase in "planet emergency" due to global warming, and shows re-enacted incidents from his life history, which influenced his concerns about environmental issues. ****

**** Please book for the film at the Forum meeting on 21st March or by 22nd March with Lydia on her mobile 07804693461 or on the office no: 0207 226 7687 and if on answer'phone please leave CLEARLY your name and telephone number

In March there will be limited places on a tour of Arsenal Stadium — the date has yet to be fixed. So if you are interested, please contact Lydia on her 'phone: 07804693461

PLEASE SEE PAGE FIVE FOR INFORMATION ABOUT I.T. CLASSES

OUR NEWSLETTER IS NOW COMING OUT EVERY TWO MONTHS

Dear Members,

Unfortunately, the cost of producing and posting our newsletter has increased considerably — postage alone comes to around £300, and so, as reported at the January Forum meeting, the committee has had to take the regrettable decision to have only six issues a year instead of twelve, i.e. this issue is for February and March.

We decided at our last Annual General Meeting in July 2023 that the membership subscription would increase to £10 a year to help with our costs. When people join IPF they pay this subscription with their members' application, but we have not followed this up with reminders that this is an annual payment, and so have not properly collected the subscriptions each year, although many members do pay their annual subscription at the monthly Forum meetings.

But now we are going to set up a more up-to-date database on our computer system so that information about the payment of subs is easily accessible to the committee, and we can keep members properly informed. We are enclosing a letter and form for direct payments to your bank if that is helpful, and will send you a form with a future newsletter for you to give us the information needed for the new database.

In the meantime, thanks to all IPF members for your staunch support throughout the years, including in the Covid lockdowns. We are now looking forward to another year of campaigning and social activities.

With best wishes, Bob Collins (chair) Elaine Durack (secretary)

Holocaust Memorial Day in Islington was on Friday 26th January in the Assembly Hall from 9.30 am to 12.15 pm, and the Council announced that the event was open to the public, to schools, community and faith groups, as well as to the elected Council members and employees.



Holocaust Memorial Day is observed every year. It is an opportunity for us to come together to learn, share and remember. It commemorates the historical atrocities of genocides worldwide including the holocaust and places such as Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur and Cambodia. The theme for the 2024 Memorial Day was FRAGILITY OF FREEDOM.

Freedom means different things to different people. In every genocide that has taken place, those who are targeted for persecution have had their freedom restricted and removed before many of them are murdered.

Our Council's event included a presentation from a daughter sharing her mother's story of escaping arrest for being Jewish. Also 2024 marks the 30th anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda — it shattered freedom in Rwanda and this was acknowledged at the Memorial Day. There was also a Kurdish speaker sharing their account of the Halabja massacre. And there was music from the World Harmony Orchestra, whose musicians include refugees from around the world.

Islington Pensioners Forum is part of the NATIONAL PENSIONERS CONVENTION, so this is for new members (especially since the Covid Lock-down) to help them to understand our history and alliances.



When Jack Jones retired as general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union in March 1978 he was well aware that there was no single organisation which represented and campaigned on behalf of pensioners. Although some trade unions already had retired members' sections, and there were various pensioner organisations and charities in existence, there was no umbrella body that could co-ordinate and lead the campaign.

With the initial support of the TUC, in 1979 Jack worked on a blueprint for an umbrella organisation, made up of affiliated groups, and in-keeping with this idea he came up with the Chartist-inspired name, the **National Pensioners Convention**.

45 year ago, on 14 June 1979 the first National Pensioners' Convention was held at the Central Hall, Westminster; attended by 2,500 older people, who discussed and then adopted a Declaration of Intent. It stated:

“This Convention declares that every pensioner has the right to choice, dignity, independence and security as an integral and valued member of society”

The NPC's main objective is to promote the welfare and interests of all pensioners, as a way of securing dignity, respect and financial security in retirement. The NPC organises rallies and lobbies of MPs, leads delegations to parliament and makes submissions to government on policies affecting older people

The NPC represents around 1.15 million members in hundreds of different organisations across the UK. The NPC campaigns for both today's and tomorrow's pensioners; uniting the generations in defence of the welfare state and public services is an important part of the NPC's work.

Across the country, pensioners get together to actively campaign on a range of issues from the NHS and bus services, to saving local libraries and improving housing. Individuals or groups can be as active as they want to be — and the NPC has categories of membership for all ages.

COP 23....A NEW FUND FOR CLIMATE IMPACTS

Comment by Frances Bradley

In December 2023, COP28 climate talks in Dubai began with the promise of a new fund to address the increasingly severe loss and damage which vulnerable countries face from climate impacts, and concluded with the first international agreement to tackle reliance on fossil fuels, the biggest driver of climate change.

These bookends to the world summit will start to tackle key challenges by accel-

erating the transformation of key systems in order to dramatically cut greenhouse gas emissions, and by responding to the substantial impacts already occurring.

COP 28 saw the first-ever "Global Stocktake". This is the process, established by the 2015 Paris Agreement, to assess progress every five years and mobilise stronger climate action. In Dubai this assessment was dubbed the "UAE Consensus," and covers all drivers of unsustainable global heating. There are critical signals for energy, transport and nature, and it provides direction for the next round of national climate commitments (NDCs) due in 2025.

The decision to "transition away from fossil fuels" was the first time the term appeared in a COP's formal outcome since UN climate negotiations began 30 years ago. Despite the president of COP28, Sultan Al Jaber, being the CEO of the United Arab Emirates' state-owned oil company, and immense pressure from oil and gas interests, key country negotiators stood firm and agreed a deal that marks the beginning of the end of the fossil fuel era. A fitting close to the hottest year on record.

There was also significant progress outside the

formal climate negotiations, including new commitments to reduce methane emissions, create more sustainable food systems, protect forests and examine the role of cities. Cities and other subnational actors played a larger role at COP28 than any COP before.

The first-of-its kind "Local Climate Action Summit," assembled more than 500 mayors, governors and other subnational leaders to elevate the role of cities in climate action, including through Nationally Determined Contributions

(NDCs) and financing. The final COP28 agreement reflects growing understanding of cities as critical climate battlegrounds and partners for action, a fitting recognition since 70% of carbon dioxide emissions come from urban areas.

But it wasn't all good news. The lead negotiator for the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), a group of 39 nations, said the reliance on carbon capture technology is concerning because the technology is not yet developed. Unfounded dependence on a future solution must not become an excuse for fossil fuel use to continue at present levels, let alone expand as fossil fuel industries would like.

There was disappointingly limited progress in other areas of the negotiations. Adaptation targets lacked detail and it remains unclear how the world will pay for the massive clean energy transition it is now committed to.

Next year's climate summit in Azerbaijan (COP29) needs to offer breakthroughs on fundamental questions about finance, otherwise promises — such as the new fund set out at the beginning of COP28 to mitigate loss and damage that has already begun — will be meaningless.



A wildfire in USA in 2023

Mr Bates versus the Post Office

This article is based on the BBC News West of England report by Jasmine Ketbush-Foley and Simon Parkin

The post office scandal started in 1999 when the Post Office brought many of the cases to court. By 2015 it had prosecuted 700 people - an average of one person a week!

Journalist Nick Wallis was working for the BBC when he started his investigation in 2010. His ears pricked up when a BBC interviewee, Davinder Misa told him that his pregnant wife, Seema had been thrown into prison for a crime she did not commit. Nick said: "there was something about what he said".....

By that time there was already an investigation in the public domain, and Davinder pointed Nick to an organisation called *The Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance* run by sacked postmaster, Alan Bates. So within an hour Nick was speaking with Alan who said that although what happened to Seema and Davinda was obviously horrendous, they were by no means alone... there were many others who had suffered in the same way.

Building on a previous investigation by Rebecca Thomson, Nick joined with her to expose the situation. In 2021, two years before the ITV drama, his book — *The Great Post Office Scandal* — was published by Bath Publishing. It was the basis of the TV drama, *Mr Bates versus the Post Office*, for which Nick was a consultant.

The manuscript of the book was sent to about a dozen publishers, but Bath Publishing was the only one interested at the time. The co-founders, Helen Lacey and David Chaplin had followed the

news in *Private Eye* and were "horrified by people's stories". Not only did the victims hand over thousands of pounds creating their own bankruptcy, loss of their homes and their jobs, but there were broken families that the Post Office "just trampled through".

Nick was "so grateful" the publisher, which normally printed factual law books, was "willing and determined" to get this book into the public domain, he is "happy the families are now being listened to and believed" It is simply the most extraordinary response to a drama in living history.



Postmasters and mistresses outside the court

Now the government has been forced into legislation to have the convictions quashed. There is an ongoing inquiry into the government itself, Post Office bosses and security, the IT company *Fujitsu*, whose system "Horizon" (we have now been told) was known

to have faults, but these were covered up.

Let Nick Wallis have the final word....."There are some genuine horror stories out there on what happened to ordinary, lovely, law-abiding, hard-working people, who just wanted to make a living, but who were steam rolled by the state."

"The story of Martin Griffiths (who took his own life) is the one that haunted me for many years, and his wife had been reluctant to tell her story for a very good reason... To see that element in the TV drama was so powerful and I pay tribute to Gina and the Griffiths family for allowing it.

BREAKING NEWS: Alan Bates who, for two decades led the campaign for justice in the Post Office Horizon scandal has said he will reject an offer of compensation from the government.

In the midst of a public outcry, the government confirmed plans for "full and fair compensation" to sub-postmasters. But Alan Bates says the offer made to him is "offensive" and "cruel". it is "around a sixth" of what he requested, and

others affected by the scandal are having the same experience. In 2017, a group of 555 sub-postmasters took legal action against the Post Office and two years later it agreed to pay them £58m in compensation, but much of the money was swallowed up by legal fees.

We are sure there will be more about this in the media — the inquiry is still going on and we will go back to it in our future newsletters.

“Systematic underfunding of local government has left councils in dire straits!” — report by Dot Gibson

The Local Government Association, the Parliamentary Levelling Up, Housing and Community Select Committee and over 40 members of Parliament are among those who have expressed deep concern at the crisis facing local councils throughout Britain, and it is clear that this will be at the heart of this year’s general election.

It faces Islington Pensioners Forum with the necessity to campaign in defence of local services, especially those in the care sector, for both children, disabled and frail elderly people.

Following the Covid lockdowns, when we started having our regular Forum meetings in the Town Hall again, our first speakers were from the Islington Council team working to develop the Council’s care programme. It is now important that we continue those important and necessary discussions to hear about and do what we can to assist in this vital work, join with our council to demand an end to government cuts and bring to light, through our campaigns, the critical situation facing our council along with others throughout the country.

The Local Government Association says: “The evidence of the financial strain on councils has been growing. The [government] settlement does not provide enough funding to meet the severe cost and demand-pressure which have left councils of all political colours and types warning of the serious challenges they face to set balanced budgets. Councils in England continue to face a funding gap of £4 billion across this year and next. The 2024/25 provisional settlement does not change the funding gap facing councils.

Over 40 MPs, including seven former cabinet ministers, have written to the prime minister urging this government to provide an emergency injection of funding for councils to prevent major

reductions to local services.

The report of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee says that the government must act quickly to close the £4bn gap faced by English councils. The report points out that “systematic underfunding” of local government in England has left councils in dire straits. It highlights that the funding streams on offer to councils — which include central government grants, council tax and retained business rates — have not kept pace with these pressures”. This has led to a funding gap which is estimated to reach £4bn over the next two years.

Cuts to central government grant funding have left councils more reliant on locally raised revenue through council tax and business rates, which the report points out, has not provided them with adequate income to run services.

Councils are required by law to have a balanced budget each financial year and provide “Best Value” to residents. But more and more councils are finding it more difficult to do so. In fact there has been a systemic problem with local government financing over the last 13 years as we have seen the amount of money from central government cut by more than 40 per cent.

Councils technically can’t go bankrupt — but they can issue what’s called a section 114 notice, where they can’t commit to any new spending and must come back with a new budget within 21 days that falls within their spending envelope. In practice this means they are forced to make cuts in services with severe consequences for local people, especially the poor, sick and elderly.

Islington has already had 70 per cent cuts and IPF demonstrated our concern and opposition to this outside the Town Hall. In this general election year, It is definitely time to continue campaigning!

IT classes please note.....At the January Forum meeting eight members said that they would be interested to join the IT classes. We are glad to say that these will soon be held in the IPF hall. The tutor, Peter Crockett will come to the March Forum meeting to briefly explain the content of these classes, and members will be able to ask questions. Getting to know how to use your laptop, tablet , smart-phone is important in these “electronic” days!

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 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

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



SUNSET ON HILBURY FIELDS

There are some beautiful sights in this world, and this one is near to home!