

# ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM

The voice of Islington's older community

## December 2023-January 2024 Newsletter

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Charity no. 1043081

**NEXT FORUM MEETING WILL BE HELD ON**

**THURSDAY 18 JANUARY 2024 10.30 am IN ISLINGTON TOWN HALL**

**see page 6 letter from officers. . . . .**

*The Officers and Committee of  
Islington Pensioners Forum send  
SEASONS GREETINGS*



**The Man in the Moon knew exactly where to position himself  
for this lovely photograph taken by Maud Verstapin at  
Wakehurst Botanical Garden**

At the time of getting together this two-month newsletter, we are preparing for Christmas and the New Year, but the terrible, sickening scenes of the flames of war, death and destruction in Gaza are hanging over us. IPF President, and Member of Parliament for Islington North, Jeremy Corbyn has been in the forefront of the huge demonstrations calling for a ceasefire of the War in Gaza. On 17th November the weekly TRIBUNE published an article written by Jeremy, and I am sure you agree that it is right for this to be included here. *Dot*

## PEACE IS HARD BUT POSSIBLE — by Jeremy Corbyn

'Daddy, I love you very much'. Those were the last words of Gordon Wilson's daughter; Marie, on 8 of November 1987. Both Gordon and Marie had been attending a Remembrance Day parade in the Northern Irish town of Enniskillen when a bomb exploded, planted by the Provisional IRA just behind the cenotaph. Buried under the rubble, Gordon held his daughter's hand as she drifted out of consciousness. By the time they were rescued, it was too late. Marie was killed. She was just one of the 3,500 lives that were lost over the course of the Troubles.

IRA attacks in Northern Ireland frequently resulted in retaliation by loyalists. On this occasion, however, there was no immediate reprisal. "I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge", Gordon said only hours after her death; "That will not bring her back." In the depths of darkness, Gordon somehow found the courage to plead with the loyalists not to retaliate. At least temporarily, they listened.

Gordon spent the remainder of his life trying to break the endless cycle of violence for good. "I went in innocence to search for what my heart told me might be a way forward... I got nothing,"



Jeremy Corbyn MP (centre) & John McDonnell MP (second from right) at the Ceasefire march in London on 11th November 2023

Gordon reflected. However, seven years after Marie's death, his seemingly impossible dream of peace began to come true.

Two months after a ceasefire in August 1994, Gordon sat down next to representatives from Sinn Fein in a forum for peace and reconciliation. It wasn't until 1998 that the Good Friday Agreement was finally passed, when both sides recognised the shared yet often troubled and divisive history of the island of Ireland. Gordon's contribu-

tion lies in the lasting lesson of his remarkable humanity: that there is always hope for peace.

It is a lesson our political leaders desperately need to learn, now more than ever. With every passing minute, another human being in Gaza is killed. Survivors under siege are running out of the basic means of survival. Doctors are performing surgery without anaesthesia. Babies are fighting for survival in incubators running out of electricity. In face of such catastrophic loss, we should be asking one question only: how can we bring an end to this unconscionable horror?

Regrettably, most people in Parliament and in our media are not interested in this question. Instead, they seek to perpetuate a conversation that shuts down the possibility of peace.

I deplore the targeting of all civilians. That includes Hamas' attack on 7th October, which I have repeatedly condemned in Parliament, in print and at every demonstration that I have attended. And that includes the Israeli response; there is no meaningful sense that the Israeli army is avoiding civilian casualties when it drops 25,000 tonnes of bombs onto a tiny strip of land populated by 2.2 million people. If we understand terrorism to describe the indiscriminate killing of civilians, in breach of international law, then of course

Hamas is a terrorist group. The targeting of hospitals, refugee camps and so-called safe zones by the Israeli army are acts of terror too; and the killing of more than 11,000 people [this grew to 15,000 and then the bombardment of Gaza started again — editor] half of whom were children. cannot possibly be understood as acts of self-defence.

*continued on page 3*

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We should not entertain questions from those who have no interest in applying this basic consistency. We should stand up to those who insist on seeing some people as innocent civilians and others as collateral damage. And we should reject hectoring from those whose questions serve to justify the horror unfolding before our very eyes. Ultimately, we do not just have a responsibility to end the bloodshed. We have a responsibility to stop bloodthirsty voices from dictating the terms of debate, and to push back against cynical attempts to distract us from our urgent goal bringing about an immediate ceasefire.

This week, MPs had the opportunity to vote for this ceasefire. Unforgivably, the majority refused to do so. History will judge those who had the opportunity to stop this massacre, but chose to cheer on the war instead. A ceasefire is the most basic demand for an end to the killing — and it is a demand that should be made by any representative that wants to protect civilian life.

A ceasefire is just the first step to the release of hostages, the end of the siege of Gaza, and a just and lasting peace. The next step is a process of dialogue between the people of Israel and the people of Palestine. This requires facilitating a conversation between all parties, which includes people with whom we vehemently disagree, and whose actions we have condemned. This won't be easy, but what's the alternative? An endless cycle of occupation, terrorism and retribution, which leaves Israelis living in fear of hostilities and Palestinians with the promise of indiscriminate retribution.

Any dialogue must put steps in place to give the Palestinian people the right to decide who governs them. Many of the Palestinians I know are no supporters of Hamas, and their democratic voice will never be heard if we obliterate Gaza to pieces. Instead, this will simply embolden and amplify those who become radicalised by the memory of murdered children.

In any dialogue, it's essential to acknowledge that Palestinians don't just live in Gaza, but in Israel and the occupied West Bank too. Palestinians deserve to speak as a unified voice, if they so wish, just as Israelis do.

Peace is not possible without understanding the root cause of its absence. The Troubles in Northern Ireland, which bubbled to the surface in 1969, did not come from nowhere. They came from the abominable treatment of the Irish people by successive British governments over centuries.

They came from the great hunger of the nineteenth century. They came from the great lockout of 1912. They came from the Easter Rising. They came from the civil war. Just as we have to understand the history of the occupation of Ireland, we have to understand that Palestinians are living under occupation and a system of apartheid.

Without a serious political intervention, this endless cycle of violence will just go on and on. In the aftermath of horror, we need voices for peace and diplomacy, not pain and destruction. Voices like Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, leader of the Palestinian National Initiative, "How many more thousands of Palestinian children should die before the world supports an immediate ceasefire? For the sake of Palestinians and Israelis, this war must stop."

Voices like Gordon Wilson. "Don't ask me please for a purpose," Gordon said in the wake of his daughter's death. "I don't have a purpose. I don't have an answer. but I know there has to be a plan."

***We, too, know there has to be a plan. That plan begins with an immediate ceasefire to stop the further loss of life. And it ends with freedom and dignity for all Palestinians and Israelis, living in joy, friendship and peace.***

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**"PEACE IS HARD BUT POSSIBLE  
by Jeremy Corbyn MP  
Tribune 17 November 2023**

## Government White Paper is an attack on migrant care workers

***Prof Brian Bell, who chairs the government's Migrant Advisory Committee, said policies being pushed by (former) immigration minister Robert Jenrick, which include a cap on overseas care worker numbers, risked worsening the chronic staffing shortage. The end result, he warned, could be "lots of people won't get care"***

"The government has put the final hammer blow to our crumbling social care system. The new immigration plans will sacrifice immigrant care workers and risk a total collapse of the UK's care system, just to appease extremist Tory backbenchers."

These are the opening words of the union: Unison's response to the latest announcement of new immigration plans.

The union's response explains that the health and care visa was introduced in 2020 to plug workforce gaps, but because headlines of soaring immigration numbers are compounding Rishi Sunak's polling problems, he's playing roulette with our essential services. Staff vacancies will soar from the current number of 152,000, care homes will close and care companies will go bust.

In a new report: "Expendable labour" Unison highlights how care staff are propping up a crumbling care system and calls for the government to end the exploitation they face. The document calls for a change in visa rules so migrant care staff aren't deported when care firms collapse and these workers lose their jobs.

Foreign care workers are invited to the UK and "exploited on a grand scale". One worker from Botswana was working in domiciliary care from 6 am to 10 pm six days a week but was paid less than half the legal minimum. The company laid her off after losing the council care contract and she now fears deportation.

Another company, which recruited from abroad, shut during the time Unison was collating its report, leaving workers fearing deportation. In another case an employer demanded £4,000 for "training costs" when a migrant care worker tried to apply for an NHS job and a third care worker was hit with hidden administration fees including

£395 for a "cultural induction".

The Unison general secretary, Christina McAnea, said: "The care system would implode without migrant care staff. Demonising these workers will do nothing to solve the social care crisis."

About 78,000 people secured visas to come and work in social care in the year to June 2023. But

**"The care system would implode without migrant care workers" says Unison**

the new government White Paper means that if a worker is laid off, or the employer closes down they must find a new sponsoring employer within 60 days or face deportation.

One care worker from the Philippines said she and others were "dropped like we don't exist any more" by

a care company that went into administration. She explained that the closure was kept quiet until the last minute so they could use us until we weren't needed any more."

A government spokesperson said: "We do not tolerate abuse in the labour market and where we identify exploitative practices are being undertaken by sponsor companies, we take action and this can include the revocation of their licence".

What a cynical answer! The government cuts funding to local authorities so that they cannot run services themselves, and have to contract out to private companies, the social care workers are overworked and underpaid, then the company closes down and care workers face deportation!.

***Islington Pensioners Forum supports the National Pensioners Convention call for more government funding for a National Care Service alongside our NHS, with proper wages and conditions for the care workers and the service free at the point of delivery to frail elderly and disabled people.***

## The government-sponsored Covid Inquiry — “will not apportion blame — It is to learn lessons”

Chaired by Baroness Heather Hallett, the government-sponsored Covid Inquiry is taking place now and it is being relayed to us on the BBC News channel.

In brief, its terms of reference are: “to examine, consider and report on the preparations and response to the pandemic in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, up to and including the Inquiry’s formal setting-up date 28 June 2022. But it has been made clear from the start that the Inquiry will not apportion blame. It has been set up to “learn lessons”.

In meeting its aims, the Inquiry is considering any disparities evident in the impact of the pandemic, considering the experiences of bereaved families and others who have suffered hardship, highlighting where lessons identified have reasonable regard to relevant international comparisons, and producing its reports (including interim reports) and any recommendations in a timely manner.

Government ministers, civil servants, scientific advisors and previous special advisor, Dominic Cummings have submitted written statements and been questioned by lawyers. On the day of writing this report it was Boris Johnson’s turn to appear and four people, who were shouting their complaints were assisted out of the room before the chair would start the proceedings. On the pavement outside, bereaved families displayed pictures of their loved ones who had died, and when Johnson left the building to get into his car bereaved family members shouted their questions.

There is a long way to go before this inquiry is ready to make its final report, but so far there have been apologies from government ministers about failure to start the lockdowns early enough, about using nursing and residential homes for covid patients, for not recognising the problems of “long covid” among other things.

### The People’s Covid Inquiry — organised by Keep Our NHS Public — issued its findings (below) on 2nd December 2021

In February 2021 the campaign, Keep Our NHS Public, launched a People’s Covid Inquiry. This was chaired by world renowned human rights lawyer, Michael Mansfield QC, who, together with a panel of experts, delivered their findings and recommendations on all main aspects of the pandemic to date on 2nd December 2021.

The inquiry had nine sessions and covered all aspects of the government’s handling of the pandemic, hearing testimony from a wide range of people and organisations, including previous government advisors and key academics, as well as frontline workers and bereaved family members.

### People’s Covid Inquiry Findings

- 1. The depleted state of the NHS and other public services prior to the pandemic was a determining factor in poor outcomes and led to avoidable deaths.**
  - 2. The government was poorly prepared for the pandemic and moved too slowly, which led to avoidable death.**
  - 3. The government adopted the wrong strategy leading to loss of life and growing mistrust in its advice.**
  - 4. The government’s poor record on inequalities has put the most vulnerable at risk from illness and death from Covid 19.**
  - 5. Misconduct in public office. There has been dismal failure in the face of manifestly obvious risks.**
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# Aladdin at Hackney Empire

Wednesday 27th December 1.30 pm

Would you like to go? (Subject to availability)

If so, please ring Lydia asap

on her mobile 07804693461 or the IPF office on 0207 226 7687

If leaving a message, please speak clearly to give your name and telephone number so that Lydia can easily get back to you with the arrangements

Dear All,

We hope you have a happy Christmas and New Year!

At the last committee meeting on 4th December, we decided that at the first Forum meeting in 2024 we should discuss the future plans and activities of IPF. So as well as a speaker at our first meeting on 18th January 2024, we would continue that discussion so that everybody can have their say:

The proposed issues are:

1. The future of Peter Crockett's IT classes, which are organised jointly by IPF and Healthy Generations..... they have been run on line (zoom) during and since the lockdown, but should go back to face-to-face classes held in the IPF hall.
2. The film afternoon, starting at 12.30 pm (last Tuesday of the month in the IPF hall) with a hot meal beforehand.
3. Outings and other social activities organised by Lydia.

We know that many of our members are sad that The Cares Family charity (formerly known as North London Cares) has run out of money and been forced to close, and because of the cuts in government funding, Islington Council could not help them. The discussion at our Fom meeting is therefore even more important.

Looking forward to Spring and Summer, let's ensure that we have lots of things going on in 2024!

Don't forget — Forum meeting Thursday 18th January 2024 at 10.30 a.m. in the Town Hall

Best wishes, IPF officers:

Bob, Luke, Elaine, Frances and Eric