

# *Canadian Alliance of British Pensioners*

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## **Commonwealth pensioners increasingly angry at Britain**

A Human Rights court challenge to the British Government by a UK expatriate pensioner resident in South Africa has received a new boost from a large group of expatriate pensioners based in Canada. The announcement came as Commonwealth leaders gather to meet in Queensland, Australia.

The major contribution of £35,000 (C\$80,000) towards funding the case costs has been collected by the members of the Canadian Alliance of British Pensioners living across Canada and in over twenty countries around the world. It follows a review of the case papers by Canadian lawyers acting for them. The South African case, which comes before the High Court in London on April 15 and 16, involves a new UK pensioner denied any future increases in her pension because she happens to live in South Africa. She will be forced to rely on an ever-diminishing value of her fixed pension income. The effects of this pension freezing by Britain results in an example of a 90 year-old single woman frozen pensioner living on the Canadian side of the Niagara River having to subsist this year on a pension of £6.75 /week when her expatriate pensioner twin sister living across the river in the U.S., or in the UK, or 35 other countries is receiving £75.50 /week. The sister with the frozen pension would have been short-changed more than £55,000 by Britain since she retired in 1972.

Although all British state pensioners were required to contribute on an equal basis while living and working in the United Kingdom, about half the expatriate pensioners never receive any uprating. 98% of the frozen pensioners happen to live in 48 of 54 Commonwealth countries including Canada, Australia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and most of the Caribbean countries. Their pensions are frozen at the level of their first payment. Britain is the only OECD country which discriminates against any of its contributory pensioners in this way. Other pensioners who may have moved to the United States, Europe, Israel or even Bosnia Herzegovina receive the same level of benefits as their colleagues living in the United Kingdom.

Britain's arbitrary discrimination increasingly angers pensioners in many parts of the world. The policy has been vigorously opposed by the Canadian, Australian and many Caribbean governments. Worldwide, Britain freezes the pensions of 490,000 of their expatriate pensioners. But 442,000 receive the same pension levels as those in the UK. In Canada there are 147,000 expatriates receiving some level of frozen UK state pension based on the time they lived and worked in the UK.

"The case is being brought by a sister organisation based in South Africa, and they appealed to us for financial help", says Bob McMullan, Chairman of the Canadian group, "When they said they needed £35,000 we asked Philip Tunley, the lawyer assigned by McCarthy Tétrault, to undertake a careful review of the case documents and advise us. It is one of Canada's leading law firms and we are pleased they have agreed to help us champion our campaign to win justice for Britain's forgotten pensioners."

"We took a deep breath, dug into our reserves and gave them the money. We are very optimistic about the South African case - it can blow a huge crater in the British Government's disgraceful Scrooge-like practice of short-changing our Members. But further legal and political action is needed and will still likely have to follow. We appeal to all the British expatriates in Canada and abroad - and to other people of goodwill - to help us rebuild and indeed increase our fighting fund. Our Members have provided the funding so far, but we urgently need contributions from a much wider group of British expatriates throughout the world. All frozen pensioners throughout the world will benefit from an end to this disgraceful policy."

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*World Alliance of British Expatriate Pensioners*

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