

Full speed ahead north

by Tony Bockman & John Markham, Directors, CABP & International Consortium of British Pensioners

SOUTH OF THE EQUATOR

We were pleased to succeed at engaging the attention of a large Commonwealth-wide audience of influential activists in October. Tony Bockman, along with British Pensions in Australia (BPiA) chairman Jim Tilley and British Australian Pensioner Association (BAPA) committee member Derrick Prance, achieved this by participating in the Commonwealth People's Forum in Perth, Western Australia, in the run up to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) taking place there. The two-day People's Forum, the single biggest opportunity for 'the people' to engage with Commonwealth leaders on issues of concern, is sponsored by the Commonwealth Foundation, which itself was created by CHOGM some 50 years ago to facilitate such exchanges.

Tony stressed the fact that pension freezing affects anyone who has worked in the UK, including many thousands resident in Commonwealth countries in the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean. He requested the assistance of the Commonwealth Foundation in making the governments of each of these countries more fully aware of the fact that Britain's pension freezing policy not only hurts each one of their countries but also appears to contravene the core values of Commonwealth membership, as expressed in the Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, to which Britain is a signatory. Specifically, Britain committed to "use all our efforts to foster human equality and dignity everywhere."

We will follow up with the Commonwealth Foundation on this tactic in order to engender greater activity by the governments of 'frozen' countries beyond the big four (Australia, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand). The ball is now rolling in that direction.

We are pleased to have made valuable new contacts in Commonwealth countries and within the Commonwealth Secretariat. We are also newly energized by the level of support provided by pensioners in Australia: BPiA and BAPA volunteers facilitated demonstrations, handed out informational brochures, brandished eye-catching signs, and enthusiastically supported our public presentations at Speakers Corner leading up to and throughout the formal events in Perth. Thanks largely to their efforts, we were highly visible to the media as that city hosted heads of government from around the world.

NORTH OF THE EQUATOR

Our crucial campaign to motivate the 'man and woman in the street' in Britain to join us in lobbying their government to stop freezing the UK State Pension is progressing nicely. Bringing British voters onside is a key strategy in our efforts to win the hearts and minds of decision makers in Her Majesty's

Government. Regional media campaigns are ongoing, each campaign featuring three major components: local (and formerly local) pensioners with compelling stories to tell, the participation of local MPs, and the coordination of local media around publication.

The Yorkshire campaign was successfully launched in early October, as detailed in the last issue of *JUSTICE*, with the West Midlands campaign beginning later that month and the one in London getting underway in November. As it is such a large and diversely populated area, London has actually been broken down into sub-strata in order to achieve the greatest impact. We have enjoyed particular success in reaching the city's ethnic communities, e.g., an interview John Markham gave to Sunrise Radio (the self-described 'Greatest Asian Radio Station in the World' with an audience of some five hundred thousand) was broadcast hourly in London from 0600hrs to 1400hrs.

The next region to be targeted will be North East England. It is always extremely helpful if members can send us stories relating to their pension experience that we can use with local media in the area where they formerly lived (or still do) in Britain!



Call from within UK for pension parity

Adding another string to our bow, the Runnymede Trust has now come strongly on-board. In December, this London-based race relations think tank issued a clarion call to the government to unfreeze overseas pensions. Their independent research within black and ethnic minority communities has shown that many of these people, after being encouraged to move to Britain to help rebuild the country in the decades after the Second World War, are unable to return overseas in their retirement because their pensions will be frozen, and those who do relocate suffer a huge impact on their quality of life after contributing to the British economy for decades. John provided a foreword to their report.

& south of the Equator

In addition, the Trade Union Congress (TUC), which represents the vast majority of Britain's organized workers, is working with our media consultancy, Champollion, to expose the negative impact of pension freezing on British workers, in particular those belonging to Britain's black and ethnic minority communities, many of whom may hope to move or return overseas upon retirement. As well, UNISON, Britain and Europe's

largest public sector union, has agreed to promote informative articles in various publications going out to its extensive membership. Our thanks to UNISON's Maggie Barr and to the TUC's Wilf Sullivan for once again putting their money where their mouth is in their commitment to the cause.

The financial community in Britain is also being brought into the loop. Following interviews with John and Champollion earlier in the year, IFAonline featured an informative article on its respected, multi-award winning website, which specializes in delivering independent financial advice.

Meanwhile, the *Telegraph* also continues to promote to the public-at-large the value and virtue of global pension parity. John has met with our daily point of contact at the paper, Leah Hyslop of the *Telegraph Expat*, and with James Flint, editor of both *Expat* and the *Telegraph Weekly World*, to discuss future articles for publication. He stressed the need for these articles to engage people of pre-retirement age and also

the seven million Brits who currently work abroad and who may consider staying there upon retirement.

Advances within Westminster

John briefed Shadow Pensions Minister Gregg McClymont, finding him very supportive indeed; followed by Conservative MPs Stephen Phillips and David Jones, recipients of emails from pensioners expressing a great deal of frustration at the government's lack of movement towards pension parity. Clearly, it is extremely effective for CABP members and others to keep communicating with the MP in their former UK constituency on this issue. The following link on our consortium's website lists MPs' email addresses: www.pension-parity-uk.com/UK-MPs.htm.

A strategizing session with Lord John Shipley was next on the agenda. John and he discussed the current political and economic situation in Britain in detail and agreed that with everything else preoccupying MPs' minds – the Eurozone crisis, the domestic economy, the development of a new pensions/benefits scheme – the best way to keep frozen pensions firmly on the radar is to table a series of Parliamentary Questions which would oblige the Pensions Minister to explain and defend the freezing policy in the House at regular intervals. We have since supplied Lord Shipley with a copy of the reports produced by Oxford Economics (see *Our pas de deux with Treasury* in this issue) on the positive effect of global pension uprating on Britain's finances, which he will use to formulate a series of cogent PQs.

John also found Gordon Campbell, the newly appointed Canadian High Commissioner to the UK, to be well informed regarding the subject. He promised continuing active support by Canada House in London and confirmed that all visiting Canadian ministers and MPs are briefed and told to raise the issue in their meetings with UK government officials.

John then met again with John Sykes, chairman of the Equality for Veterans Association, to discuss the possibility of holding a number of joint Town Hall-style meetings in various locations in the UK during 2012 in order to increase interaction with leaders at the grassroots level. Both the National Pensioners' Convention (with 1.5 million members) and Age UK have generously committed their support to any such initiative.

Anticipating . . .

As yet another year gets underway, we are cautiously anticipating that the feel-good experiences of The Queen's Jubilee and the Olympics may usher in a more kindly environment in the midst of the current austerity in Britain, leading to good news not too far down the road. Please help us get there by signing our petition on the Government website (<http://bit.ly/BritPensions>) and encouraging people you know to do the same!

'Down Under' at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (clockwise from top): BPIA chairman Jim Tilley addresses the crowds at Speakers' Corner; Jim & Tony Bockman take note of their place on the speaking schedule; BPIA & BAPA supporters clad in specially made t-shirts handed out information on the streets and around the Central Perth railway station; Ardent supporter Nicky Goodall teases Tony for not having a sign of his own to wave.