

Passion and commitment inspire Canadian Government

Sheila Telford received a call came from Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird's office, setting up a meeting with the Minister for June 11. John Markham and I put together a background file that we could give to the minister, who of course interacts with his counterpart in Britain, William Hague.

Mr. Baird became animated when John and I spoke to him about the substantial financial benefits to be gained by the UK if pension freezing was to be abolished, instantly recognizing that this should be a potent argument for persuading the UK Government to do what is right. These financial benefits were identified last year in a report by a respected British economic forecasting company. John filled the minister in regarding the Treasury working group that has been examining the report and the effect on Britain of the pension freezing policy. He also offered to make himself available to go through the report, line by line, with Mr. Baird's staff, if this would be helpful.

We then suggested that a joint Australia/Canada approach to the UK could be effective at this time, building on the Canadian Government's most recent statement condemning pension freezing and supporting CABP's activities (see p.5: 'Canada salutes frozen pensions fighters') and a similar recent statement by the Australian Government. Mr. Baird said he would discuss this with Minister Diane Finley, his Cabinet colleague with responsibility for pensions and also his Common's seatmate. He further indicated that Prime Minister Stephen Harper may raise it with Australian PM Julia Gillard at the next G-20 summit, and also once again raise Canada's concerns directly with British PM David Cameron.

I brought up the case of Geoff Dancer, one of the minister's own constituents, who is now in his nineties and has lost fully two-thirds of his pension although he paid into the system for 44 years. Mr. Baird responded by saying how important it is that societies look after their most vulnerable and he could see the efficacy of taking care of the most elderly frozen pensioners first, if staged pension increases were the only possible way forward. As we parted, he reiterated firm support for what CABP and ICBP are working to achieve, applauding our passion and commitment. He also said that he would seek to be more aggressive in pursuit of the unfreezing of pensions. A month later, I spoke with Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Calgary and told him of our conversation with his Minister of Foreign Affairs.