



UK Government "sympathetic" to our cause

by John Markham, CABP & International Consortium of British Pensioners

The UK Government has issued a letter of sympathetic acknowledgment of our cause. In the letter, Minister for Government Policy Oliver Letwin, who has been given responsibility for the Frozen Pensions File, states that he is sympathetic towards our position, recognizes that the government's freezing policy is a product of history and not of rationality, and that while the cost of resolving the issue is "significant" considering the state of the UK economy, the government is continuing to review the situation.

We understand that Treasury agreed to the contents of this letter and so too did the Department for Work and Pensions, which makes it quite exceptional and noteworthy even in the continuing absence of any specific commitment for change. In response, we have requested that the Treasury working group formally charged with examining the matter provide a detailed response to

the report we provided them last year showing that Britain stands to experience significant economic *gains* from resolving the issue and introducing global pension parity. Readers will remember that Oxford Economics, an independent UK forecasting consultancy headed by a respected former Treasury senior economist, compiled that report.

Leading up to the issuing of this historic letter, I had a series of meetings in London. The first was with the staff at Champollion, our media relations consultancy, to discuss ways of taking our campaign more deeply into Britain's ethnic minority population, which constitutes fully eight percent of the UK electorate and is known to be particularly impacted by the pension freezing policy. Over at the TUC, Race Equality Officer Wilf Sullivan was very pleased to hear we are giving priority to making Britain's Black and minority ethnic population aware of the threat to their state pension if they retire

overseas after decades of working in Britain. He helpfully suggested several broadcast networks we could use to reach this target audience, including Colourful Radio, a commercial station which broadcasts in the Greater London area and which can be accessed everywhere via the Internet, an increasingly popular source for information. After returning home to Canada, I gave an interview to Colourful Radio at three in the morning Ottawa time – but worth it in order to reach their reputed 400,000 listeners, many of them from the 'frozen' Caribbean.

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Canada continues to support us



Photos: left, Prime Minister's Office; right, Don Smith

At his Calgary Stampede BBQ, CABP Vice-chair Sheila Telford spoke to Prime Minister Stephen Harper about the importance of keeping up pressure on the UK to end pension freezing and of the support recently committed by his Minister of Foreign Affairs (see p.4). Mr. Harper confirmed that he had spoken with British PM David Cameron not long ago.

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The scale of the disparity of pension payments to Black pensioners who have left Britain became glaringly apparent as a result of a question formally posed in the House of Lords by Baroness (Floella) Benjamin. The fact that those living in Jamaica receive an average of £82.57 a week, while those in Trinidad and Tobago receive an average of only £44.02, earned valuable press coverage.

Next, with the assistance of Champollion, I finalized the co-signing parties for an open letter to The Queen asking that pension freezing be ended during Her Majesty’s Jubilee Year for the hundreds of thousands of Her Majesty’s Commonwealth family members and all others who are affected. Co-signatories to this letter included the leaders of UK agencies who work daily with people who suffer because of the freezing policy – Runnymede Trust, the National Pensioners Convention, Age UK, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), and the Equality for Veterans Association. Our joint letter was released in late May and was picked up by the media.

I spent a busy hour with the deputy editor of *The Guardian’s* money section, Rupert Jones. His subsequent full-page article was published in the Saturday edition, giving us national coverage, and the online version (please see link elsewhere on this page) included a link to the new website of the International



Minister for Government Policy, Oliver Letwin

Consortium of British Pensioners: www.PensionJustice.org. Subsequent issues of the paper followed up with coverage detailing the impact of freezing at the level of the individual pensioner – “*The 100-year-old woman whose state pension is frozen at just £6 a week*” – and also a number of readers’ letters on the

topic. We need more of these personal stories! The media pays a great deal of attention to them and they are frequently favoured for publication.

Over at the *Telegraph*, I met again with reporter Leah Hyslop, who writes frequent columns on our issue, to keep her informed of what has been happening. Her paper continues its campaign on our behalf, including

publicizing anti-freezing statements issued by the governments of Canada (Minister Diane Finley) and Australia (Minister Jenny Macklin). We sent copies of these statements to UK MPs and Peers and received a number of messages of support in response. Shadow Pensions Minister Gregg McClymont’s office committed to working with us to keep the issue alive in the House of Commons.

Finally, during a face-to-face meeting with Oliver Letwin, the Cabinet minister

who signed the letter of sympathetic acknowledgement, I pressed the issue of Britain ending its moratorium on signing reciprocal agreements with ‘frozen’ countries. Even though such agreements are not at all necessary in order for pension indexation to occur, we are determined to use every possible device to accomplish our goal.

The British Parliament is now in recess until virtually mid-October, as the summer break is quickly followed by ‘time off’ for fall party conferences. Meanwhile, our own work will continue unabated. Though I have had to step down from CABP’s board of directors because the bylaws do not permit anyone to serve longer than five consecutive years, my work with the International Consortium will continue.

Brian Havard

With the passing of Brian Havard in January 2012, the International Consortium of British Pensioners has lost an invaluable resource and a stalwart campaigner for justice. Brian was a founding member and the past president of consortium partner organization British Australian Pensioner Association (BAPA). In 2001 he was awarded the Centenary Medal by the Australian Government for ‘Outstanding Service’ to the association, and by extension to ‘frozen’ pensioners everywhere.

The Saturday Guardian article

www.guardian.co.uk/money/2012/apr/27/ex-pat-pensioners-upratings-pension-frozen

“Frozen pension buys just three loaves of bread for 100-year-old woman”

The media in Canada and the UK are looking for more stories like this!

Centenarian Annie Carr lives in Australia, where she moved in 1970 to be with her only daughter. Today, her weekly UK State Pension – frozen, of course – barely covers the cost of purchasing three loaves of bread. You can read Annie’s story in *The Guardian* at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/money/2012/may/08/state-pension-frozen?INTCMP=SRCH>

Please tell us how pension freezing has negatively affected your life or the life of someone you know, whether a ‘frozen’ pensioner or someone ‘trapped’ in the UK because of the policy.