

EDITOR'S NOTES

Welcome to the first edition of Backnumber 2020. We wish all our readers and members a Happy New Year and hope that the Festive Season was happy and enjoyable. We know that, for many, this can be a very difficult time, especially when the rest of the world seems to be on a permanent happiness pill. So we acknowledge that and hope that the New Year brings some cheer to all.



Given the events of 12 December 2019 that may be a tough ask. We now have a Government that will bring about Brexit by 31 January but seems less than clear about what happens after that. A Government which claims it will revitalise the NHS but which seems to have problems in accepting that the state of the NHS has been their responsibility for the last 9 years. A Government which claimed to have a plan for fixing the Social Care crisis but seems only to suggest that they will undertake cross party consultation in order to find a solution. This edition includes our recipe for fixing Social Care and we will campaign vigorously to bring that about.

The Government also has some sinister objectives hidden away in Page 48 of their (extremely thin) manifesto. This talks about changing the relationship of Government to the Legal System and closing down ways in which it can be challenged in the Courts. They also now tell us that they will decriminalise the failure to pay the TV licence and consider the contractual arrangements in relation to Channel 4.

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Activities

Winter Wednesday Talks continue on January 22nd with an insight into making T.V. soap operas by **Lilie Ferrari**. Lilie is a scriptwriter, editor and novelist who has worked on **EastEnders** among many TV programmes.

On February 26th **Charlotte Paton** will present "**A thousand years of Romany History**". Charlotte is a writer and historian who is restoring a Romany caravan and learning the Romany language.

A topic and speaker are still to be confirmed for our Talk on March 25th.

Our Talks begin at 10.30, with refreshments from 10 am, at the Sports and Social Club in the grounds of County Hall.

On **Monday mornings** from 9.30 am at the NCC sports and Social Club we continue to offer **table tennis** and a mid-morning natter over a cuppa. Other activities [short mat bowls, pool, darts etc are available if there is sufficient interest.] On the **third Thursday** of each month from 2 pm, also at the social club, there is a friendly afternoon of **Whist**.

All these activities are free of charge to our members and their guests. We should love for more people to come along and enjoy these events so why not join in?

Our 2020 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will be at 10.30 am [refreshments from 10 am] on **Wednesday, 19th February** at the Sports and Social Club, County Hall.

There will be **Guest Speakers** and a **prize quiz**. After the meeting a **free buffet lunch** will be provided.

We welcome colleagues who have recently retired

We wish you all a long, happy, healthy and rewarding retirement. Do come along and join in the Section's activities, you will find a warm welcome.

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This is a clear signal to public broadcasting authorities not to cross Government or the even more sinister Dominic Cummings.

The opposition is, of course, in disarray. The Labour Party will no doubt descend into introspection until a new leadership emerges and the Liberal Democrats simply imploded to the extent that their Leader was thrown out by her constituents. It is worth just considering how we all voted. It turns out that Johnson and his cronies, along with the Brexit Company achieved about 47% of the vote. Parties who opposed Brexit, or at least wanted a second referendum, achieved 53%. And yet the Tories have a majority of 80 and can do what they like. So, has the time come for a serious push for electoral reform? This would require a serious and massive campaign which would have to involve cross party co-operation on the grand scale.

Unison Retired Members have a part to play but if Unison is to engage with issues which will lead to improvement in fairness and in justice in our lives, it needs to be the working members who effect this change. We can cajole, encourage and agitate but approved action can only be taken by them. We will do our best to urge that examination of all the options takes place and that Unison ends up in the right place to lead the resistance.

SOCIAL CARE

At the Retired Members Annual Conference there was a major debate on Social Care to which we, as a Branch, made a major contribution. Broadly, the policy adopted is to support the idea of a Social Care Service, free at the point of need and funded through taxation which should be provided by the Public or Voluntary Sector.

The Branch Retired Members Committee has decided to make this a major campaign for 2020 and to pursue this we e mailed all 42 candidates standing in the General Election on 12 December. We received

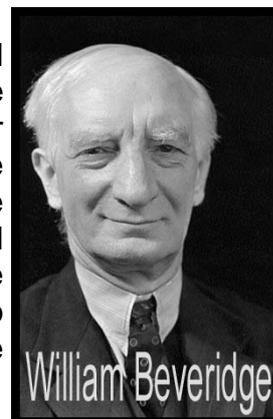
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10 responses, 3 from Labour, 2 each from the Green Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Tories and 1 from the Brexit Party. The Greens, Liberal Democrats and Labour broadly supported our position with Labour perhaps the most enthusiastic in support. The ones that count, given the result, are those from the Tories, George Freeman and Chloe Smith. Mr Freeman welcomed Mr Johnson's promise to increase funding by £1 billion per year and Chloe Smith referred us to the manifesto which promises a cross party initiative. It therefore seems all to play for. Opposition Parties will give support to this while the Tories will no doubt be listening to what is said and will recognise the seriousness of the position.

We will now involve the County Council and local NHS organisations in this campaign as well as voluntary organisations across Norfolk, in particular Age UK, as well as lobbying the Older Peoples Partnership Board to apply as much pressure as possible in order to achieve major improvement to the Social Care system. If the Government is serious about improving our NHS (which we have some doubt about) then they will need to see that this cannot be done without serious improvement to the Social Care system.

As a myth buster, Committee member, Biddy Rawlence, has produced a short guide to the history of Social Care.

The debate about social care is not new. Debate about who should pay for what goes back as the 1834 Poor Law. But the current crisis in social care funding can be traced directly back to the National Assistance Act in 1948.



The post-war period saw the rise of Labour's welfare state. Systematic services for older people were provided through the National Health Service Act of 1946 and the

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National Assistance Act of 1948. The first gave older people the right to medical treatment in hospitals, free at the point of need. The second made it a duty for local authorities to provide accommodation for those who (through age or infirmity) were in need of care. These services were means-tested and home ownership was always taken into account.

So ambiguity between the roles of the hospital and the local authority were built-in from the very start and tension between free and means-tested services has been a political hot potato ever since.

Hospitals such as Whitlingham were created to cater for "geriatric patients" and those not so infirm were placed in Residential Care, although to begin with this was often in Poor Law institutions such as Gresenhall or Pulham Market. Even today some people equate going to Residential Care as going to the Workhouse.

In the 1980s and 90s, deregulation of National Health provision alongside a change to DHSS benefits led to a huge rise in private residential and nursing home care. The old hospitals were sold off to private developers. Despite all these changes in provision, residential home fees and the non-nursing (social care) element of nursing home fees are still means-tested unless paid for privately. Demographics, deregulation of the care 'market', greater home ownership and the squeeze on local authority and NHS budgets have created a perfect storm around social care funding.

Nothing new then. The tension between free and means-tested services has been going on for a very long time.

"Democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people.!"

Oscar Wilde

"Democracy is a device that ensures we shall be governed no better than we deserve."

George Bernard Shaw

CONFERENCE REPORT

Last year's Annual Retired Members Conference took place in Southport in early October. Southport is a good place for our conference. It's quite flat, so easy to get around, the conference venue is very good



and it has more really good Italian and French restaurants than you can shake a stick at.

The first day of conference is taken up with workshops or a Panel Debate which I attended as it was about Intergenerational Co-operation, an issue on which we had a motion (which was not reached). The overwhelming theme was opposition to Divide and Rule and setting the young against the old. There was a lot of agreement that young people have an even worse deal than older people and that the solution is to fight the Tories and not each other. How long this truce will last given the demographics of Brexit and the General Election is a moot point.

Conference itself was brilliantly chaired by Josie Bird, this year's President, who is from Newcastle. She is not at the end of her career, as many Presidents are and she showed terrific composure in handling the agenda. The major issues discussed were Social Care, Austerity, Intergenerational Co-operation and transport improvements, particularly in rural areas. The first 2 of those will go to National Delegate Conference in June. There was a fiery debate on volunteering using the Helpforce Initiative which was defeated last year and defeated even more heavily this. Conference is far from convinced that this does not affect jobs and conditions and also cuts across other approved volunteer schemes in the NHS.

REPORT ON TUC LONDON, EASTERN AND SOUTH EAST PENSIONERS' NETWORK ON LONELINESS.

This meeting took place on 3rd September. Well supported but a little tetchy at times.

Speakers - Terry Pullinger from CWU expressed concern that workers on zero hours contracts and no pension provision would fall into poverty and therefore loneliness in older age as they wouldn't be able to sustain networks when retired.

Main speaker was Olivia Field talking about research into loneliness in the older BAME population. This also led to revelations such as 9 million people (of all ages) feel trapped in loneliness, that 200,000 people can go for a month without talking to anybody and that 67% of pensioners are not on line. Interestingly, the research discovered that 18-24 year olds are the most vulnerable to loneliness.

There were a series of speakers talking about aspects of loneliness with community initiatives such as "Men's Sheds" being highlighted as a means to combat loneliness. There was universal condemnation of the decision to end free TV Licences for Over 75s particularly as many pensioners rely on terrestrial TV for their information and "company". The blame was seen to be with the Government rather than the BBC.

Jackie Mitchell
Vice Chair

Reminder
Our 2020 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will be at 10.30 am [refreshments from 10 am] on Wednesday, 19th February at the Sports and Social Club, County Hall.

"Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow"

Albert Einstein

GENERAL ELECTION BONUS

In the week following the General Election I looked out of my window to see the successful culmination of a dedicated campaign by people in the village, to wit, the erection of a bus shelter at the bus stop opposite. This had been a long running campaign and it was heartening to see the new shelter, especially as on the day in question it was raining cats and dogs! Could there possibly be a downside to this (clearly) Johnsonian intervention? Alas, there is. From the 6 January, the bus service is being slashed from an hourly to a ninety minute service. A fine introduction to the Government's new found enthusiasm for buses!

James Porter

THE CASE FOR ELECTORAL REFORM.

The editor has highlighted the disparity between the number of votes cast in the 2019 election and the number of MPs elected for each party in a constituency-based first past the post system. The number of votes needed **per MP** in the main parties was:

GREEN	865,697	[12]
LIB.DEM.	336,038	[70]
LABOUR	50,835	[216]
CONS.	38,264	[288]
SNP	25,882	[28]

The figures in brackets show the number of seats that would have been won under a proportional representation system. No surprise the **Turkeys** won't vote for Christmas PR.

Find out more from electoral-reform.org.uk or makevotesmatter.org.uk

WHERE TO FIND US

If you have letters, comments or issues about **Backnumber**, please e-mail the Editor Jim Porter at porterjames172@gmail.com

or contact the Unison Branch Office at County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich NR1 2DH. Phone 01603 222384

E-Mail

Retiredmembers.norfolkcounty@btconnect.com

If you received this edition of Backnumber by post and you have an e-mail address, please let us know by sending a message to our e-mail address.