

Lewisham Pensioners' Forum—Local Hustings 20th April 2010



A BIG THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO CAME ALONG FOR OUR LOCAL HUSTINGS

The party representatives included:

**Sir Steve Bullock—Labour / //John Hamilton—Lewisham People Before Profit
Chris Maines—Liberal Democrats / //Simon Nundy—Conservative
Dean Walton—Green**

Each representative was given 7 minutes to share with pensioners from Lewisham their Party's response to the NPC's 'Pensioners Manifesto' which we displayed above the speakers for ease of reference (see photos top right and left). The postcard 'Beware Pensioners Have a Vote' (which we have been distributing throughout Lewisham for pensioners to remind people of the value of the grey vote) was also very evident. Yet surprisingly, despite all the obvious reminders, one representative gave no party manifesto reference to the Pensioners Manifesto in their presentation, fortunately the remainder did, and we were able to get some insight into how each party might respond to the demands of the manifesto were they to get into power. Only one party indicated that their manifesto had had regard to the Pensioners Manifesto when it was being written, Dean Walton also stated quite clearly that his party would immediately introduce a non means tested state pension of £170.00pw.

Sir Steve Bullock agreed that the question of Social Care for older people needed to be high on the agenda, commenting that "people are living longer and as a country we have to work through how we are going to deal with this...we need to find ways that respond to the needs of the individual and not be pressured into using big companies that try to shoe horn people into the type of care that they offer".

Chris Maines confirmed his Party's support for 5 out of the 6 Manifesto requirements, immediately linking the state pension to earnings once they took office, but they would want to see the winter fuel allowance spread to include all disabled people rather than increase it to £500 for the benefit of pensioners only.

Simon Nundy stated that his Party were committed to re-establishing the link between state pensions and earnings in their first term of office resulting in an increase in pensions over time.

The agenda for this meeting sought to focus on local issues but the financial bail out of the banks and the resulting cuts that many politicians are accepting without question was clearly a great cause for concern. Many of our members were simply not prepared to accept this position and challenged all the parties to come up with solutions that did not threaten or damage vital front line public services. The Public Sector should not be expected to pay for the what has taken place within the banking and finance industry particularly when it is tax payers money that was used to bail out the banks in the first place.

One question that captures the essence of Forum Hustings was put by Beatrice Scott, a forum member, when she asked the panel "Can each panel member tell us something that they have done for older people recently." The answers were a little unclear as the panel and audience were very lively at this point—perhaps the Forum could ask all the candidates to remind us of what they said or wanted to say so that we can let you know?