

# June Newsletter - John Cryer MP

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Newsletter – June 2020

## **John Cryer MP – Report June 2020**

All our lives continue to be dominated by Coronavirus and my caseload remains at unparalleled levels. The coming weeks and months will bring uncertain times for us all, be it work and employment, children and their schooling, the survival of local industry and business and the thousands of people waiting for operations and procedures. The lifting of lockdown on 4<sup>th</sup> July will bring with it new unprecedented challenges to everyone in Leyton and Wanstead.

As lockdown measures are eased, we must do all we can to prevent a second wave. Whilst we hope that the number of Covid-19 cases remains low, we must be prepared for the possibility of outbreaks and spikes. To support a localised approach we need urgent information about the Government's plans for mobilising and delivering the response to local outbreaks.

This is easily the busiest the office has ever been, and we are working - sometimes around the clock - to help as many people as we can. Most constituents who contact me are in desperate of help. My staff and I are doing everything we can to assist everyone who contacts the office in a timely and prompt manner.

### **The BAME communities and COVID 19 – We need a public inquiry**

The impact of COVID-19 on these communities in Leyton and Wanstead and across the country has become increasingly clear in recent weeks. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows clear disproportionality that black men and women are nearly twice as likely to die from coronavirus than white men and women.

The true harsh reality is that plans to lift the lockdown will potentially hit BAME communities harder because of their high level of representation in the NHS, transport and other public sector roles.

I know the BAME communities are frightened, yet they are at the front line against coronavirus- saving and protecting lives and keeping London moving through the worst of the pandemic. The government has just published its own report into BAME COVID 19 -related deaths. This is not enough.

The government must make it clear what actions it will put in place to support and safeguard our BAME communities, who have already suffered disproportionately at the hands of this crisis. With a recession on the horizon and during the previous financial crisis' the BAME communities of the UK and US were the hardest hit, we need to make sure this does not happen again

I can therefore confirm that I have written to the Prime Minister asking him to take urgent action and calling for a full independent public inquiry into the disproportionate effect of covid-19 on BAME communities. This should offer clear recommendations for systemic and transformational change in the role of the public sector and race equality.

### **Black Curriculum**

Educational experiences and outcomes significantly affect people's life outcomes. Racial inequalities continue to persist across the education system, including attainment, results, access to the best universities, school exclusions and the lack of black teachers, professors and senior management.

Children from minority ethnic communities, especially African-Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, have been held back by devastating Government cuts resulting in school budgets falling in real terms and bigger class sizes. The shortage of black teachers is a national issue. Representation is still not in line with British society.

We announced proposals to increase the proportion of black history taught in schools, along with the

history of the British empire, colonialism and slavery. I believe it was vital for future generations of schoolchildren to understand the role that BAME Britons and those who largely came from former colonies had played in the nation's history and the struggle for racial equality. Also to learn about the history of the British empire, colonialism and slavery.

The curriculum must include significance of the stories of black British role models who campaigned for racial equality and justice in Britain, as well as those who struggled for liberation from colonial rule overseas. They include Mary Seacole, a pioneering nurse during the Crimean war and Walter Tull, a footballing trailblazer and war hero. Learie Constantine, the first black peer, the writer CLR James and the politician Sharpuji Saklatvala also spring to mind.

I raised the matter in parliament on 11 June 2020 where I asked the government for an urgent debate on incorporating black history into the national curriculum. I can also confirm that I have written to the Education Secretary urging him to take steps to make Black histories mandatory in the National Curriculum.

### **Universal Credit and the benefit cap**

If you receive Universal Credit you may have received an increase in your allowance of between 19.1 and 36.1% as a response to the pandemic. I say "may", however, as many families will not see the benefit of this due to the pernicious policies this Government have pursued previously.

This is because the benefit cap has affected an additional 22,000 households in London since coronavirus took hold (prior to the pandemic, 64,014 households in the capital were already affected). The cap particularly affects larger families but this is by no means the whole story; in many cases simply having expensive rent is enough for a claimant to reach the limit.

As you will recall the cap was designed by Messrs Cameron and Osborne- and facilitated by their sidekick Clegg- to curry favour with the tabloids who chose to scapegoat ordinary families for the global financial crisis. The legacy of these malign policies and many others are still very much with us, whatever Johnson might now say about austerity.

Indeed, the increase has the effect of merely cancelling out another miserly Government policy- the benefit freeze. As the government has made it clear that the uplift is temporary, it is clear that it will be "business as usual" as soon as the government decides it is out of the woods.

### **Jobseekers' Allowance unfairness**

At the same time as the government have uprated Universal Credit it has failed to apply the rise to one of the benefits it replaced, Job Seekers' Allowance. I appreciate that is easier to do this with UC but there must be a mechanism to apply the same uprate to claimants in receipt of JSA.

With this unbalance the government has left behind approximately 200,000 people who are still in receipt of this older benefit. I simply do not understand, when there are 2 sets of people in the same circumstance (unemployed with no regular income), one of these sets has been assisted while the other has been ignored - both are suffering the same hardships and should be treated equally.

I have made several representations to the DWP Minister calling for an urgent review and for reassurances that the DWP will offer full parity to those on JSA and UC.

### **Israel's West Bank annexation**

I wholly condemn the Netanyahu government's plans to annex large parts of the West Bank which, as others have commented, could kill the two state solution, towards which so many have worked for so long, stone dead.

Along with 1,080 European parliamentarians I have signed this open letter:

<https://www.scribd.com/document/466688615/Letter-by-European-Parliamentarians-Against-Israeli-Annexation>.

### **Blind and partially sighted – Public Transport**

It appear social distancing measures look like they will be in place for a long time to come. It is important that transport operators get ready now to provide safe support to passengers with sight loss as movement restrictions are relaxed. I agree that the transport operators have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities, and assistance will be more important than ever to help people with sight loss navigate new and very different environments.

I know the government guidance is that all but essential travel should be avoided where travel is essential, transport operators need to ensure that services and assistance are provided appropriately.

I can therefore confirm that I have made urgent representations to the London Mayor and the Chief Executive at Transport for London. I have asked that essential services such as Turn Up And Go and Passenger Assist are protected and that disabled and older passengers are not forgotten about, left behind or further marginalised by social distancing efforts. I have also asked transport operators redeploy resources and staff to support people with sight loss can safely access public transport when movement restrictions are eased but with social distancing measures still in place.

### **Lack of support for the performing arts and theatre sector**

I can confirm that I have been campaigning since March 2020 for the government to offer parity and the same level of support to everyone who is self-employed. I have written to the Chancellor on several occasions to urgently fix these gaps or in the absence of doing so to create a specific scheme to support those who have been excluded.

I welcomed the announcement that the government is extending the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) until August. For hundreds, if not thousands of my constituents who have been unable to work due to Covid-19, this scheme, and the opportunity to be furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, have proven invaluable lifelines of support for those eligible to receive them.

However, too many creative workers are currently excluded from SEISS and will be waiting until 2021 before workplaces, including theatres, pubs and live entertainment venues are able to fully re-open, enabling many to earn a living. I am aware that the performing arts sector play a hugely important cultural role in our society.

Coronavirus has shut down this thriving sector by forcing the closure of all live performance and therefore freezing these businesses' income streams. Even with partial lifting of lockdown the government must take action now to prevent further damage and to secure the livelihoods of all those who rely on this sector.

I can therefore confirm that I have written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer urging him to take immediate steps to introduce a package of support to save the performing arts sector and to protect the heritage and future of our world-leading theatre sector.

I have again urged him to review the JRS and SEISS to include everyone that has been excluded or to create a specific scheme to support those who have been left without any support.

### **Government Free School Meals campaign**

In Leyton and Wanstead, just over 2,000 children are entitled to free school meals. They are concentrated in the four or five poorest wards in my constituency, which means they are among the poorest wards in London, which means they are among the poorest in the country.

I find it inexplicable that the Government had to be dragged kicking and screaming into making a U-turn after days and days and days of pressure from outside this place, from within this place and most notably from Marcus Rashford, If Ministers had not finally done the right thing and decided to make this U-turn, that would not have been inconsequential for the people living in Leyton and Wanstead among those poorer communities, it comes on top of a history of deprivation and of working long hours.

### **Covid-19 Update**

My office continues to receive large amounts of casework related to Covid-19.

We are still dealing with lots of people in touch about issues and specific cases and effects upon their lives from the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown.

These continue to include (though not exhaustive) –  
loss of earnings (self-employed, small traders etc),  
benefits claimants,  
small businesses about things like access to grants, loans and rate holidays,  
people concerned about children going back to school and an ability to properly social distance there,  
people facing the possibility of eviction – even though the Government announced there was no

possibility of evictions,

concerns about TfL changes – to things like the freedom pass and Childrens free travel, changes to the furlough scheme and concerns over ability of businesses to pay but also concerns that businesses actually may abuse furlough and renegotiate terms and conditions.

I have also now started to receive hundreds of campaign emails everyday (many templated) from people about things like abortion in Northern Ireland, Black Lives Matter, Black Curriculum, Justice for Belly Mujinga, Justice for Skukri Abdi, Delay the Brexit Transition, Gender Recognition Act and many others. If you have not already received a response, you will over the next few days. However I am still having to prioritise casework. If you do get in touch, please can you provide full names and postal addresses and an email address – I need this for verification. Many of these campaign websites only allow me to respond to them, **I can only respond to you if I have your details.**

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