

January 2021 Newsletter - John Cryer MP

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January 2021 Newsletter

Dear resident

May I wish you a Happy New Year, and hope that you are doing well at this challenging time.

Covid and Casework

We continue to deal with the effects Covid on a daily, or even hourly, basis. Every month has seen an increase in casework, although there has also been a recent increase in policy emails.

I am still operating weekly surgeries by phone (by appointment) and people can contact me and the team at the office, by email or by phone.

Over the last 12 months we have seen a large increase in cases after a significant spike in those few months after the first lockdown. Again, we have seen a steady growth in cases toward the end of 2020 following into the New Year, with cases closed and a further around 400 so far this month.

Universal Credit

As you may know, the government was hell-bent on cutting UC, and therefore cutting an already inadequate lifeline to some of the most vulnerable people in Britain. We voted against the cut in parliament. Sadly and predictably, we lost the vote.

More and more casework is coming in now, generated by UC, as I have predicted in previous reports. It should not have been introduced in the first place. The government is now determined to make its inadequacies even worse. However, it now seems that the government has decided to back down.

Cladding

Seemingly dozens of leaseholders are contacting me each week regarding issues surrounding fire safety on blocks of flats, and around a hundred directly affected constituents have now been in touch in total. I have written here previously about this vexed issue.

I supported the opposition day motion in the House of Commons this week which expressed the view that leaseholders should not have to pay for essential remedial work on flats declared unsafe, which was passed partly due to Conservative MPs boycotting the vote. Whilst these motions carry with them no legislative consequences it is a clear statement of support for the principle, of which the government ought to take note.

I have also signed the McPartland-Smith amendment to the Fire Safety Bill which has broadly the same aims, and will support Labour amendments to the Bill which would fill a few gaps which that amendment leaves.

Palestine

I recently met with a group of constituents who lobbied me about the continued ill-treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories. I made clear my opposition to the expansion of illegal settlements (illegal, that is, under clear UN rules).

I tweeted my view at the time that we should not trade with such settlements but that should not affect our trade generally with Israel itself.

Additionally, there are concerns that Palestine's access to coronavirus vaccine doses is woefully inadequate, despite Israel's world-leading rollout. Whilst it has this in common with much of the developing world I have contacted the Foreign Office and expressed my view that Israel, as occupying power, has responsibility under the Geneva Convention to ensure the medical welfare of the Palestinian people and therefore to ensure adequate supplies of vaccine get there. I have also asked what the government is doing to improve vaccine supply to Palestine as an urgent humanitarian issue for the international community in general.

Criminal Record Deletion

It was extremely worrying that records of approximately 400,000 crimes have been deleted from the Police National Computer, including swathes

of DNA evidence which will be unrecoverable. The consequences of this do not need spelling out.

The Home Secretary has been conspicuous by her absence, and statements from junior ministers blaming clerical error sound very much like the usual tactic of pushing the fault downwards. It simply should not be possible for so many records to be deleted in one go. Victims and communities deserve an urgent explanation and reassurance that changes will be made to prevent this from ever happening again. The Home Secretary made an appearance in the Commons earlier this week but only because the Labour front bench had submitted an Urgent Question, which was granted by the speaker.

Loneliness

Many people, especially older constituents, face struggles at the best of times with loneliness, in particular at this time of the year. Please keep an eye out for your neighbours. You can get information and help here: www.walthamforest.gov.uk/content/mental-health-and-wellbeing-0 and www.ageuk.org.uk/walthamforest/our-services/just-connect-befriending-service/

US Elections

The attempted coup by Donald Trump on Capitol Hill – which is what his call to surround the legislature amounted to – reminded me of a number of historical parallels from not-too-distant history, and again we see where the systematic deprecation of democracy led, as we did numerous times in the twentieth century.

Trump's speech pretty clearly led directly to the bloody events that took place and like a majority of the planet am glad to see the back of him. If subsequent events lead to his conviction and a bar from ever holding public office again, so much the better. I fear Americans will be dealing with Trump's poisonous legacy for some years to come, however.

There are already plenty of political purists saying that Biden is not truly radical. That, I suppose, is true in a narrowly ideological and largely academic sense. But radicalism can also mean knowing what to do and doing it quickly and in his first days, at least, the president is showing every indication of possessing that capacity.

Indian Farmers

Most of us will be aware of Prime Minister Modi's attack on farmers in India. I am actively working with my colleagues on this deeply worrying situation in India which is having a profound impact on millions of farmers and their families.

There is unprecedented support from the Sikh diaspora and in general from Indian communities for the farmers. The entirely peaceful protesters in India are enduring extreme weather conditions to get the Indian government to listen to them. Thus far over 60 people have passed away. The farmers' grievance is genuine. They suffer from debt; poverty ill health and their documented suicide rates are at alarming levels.

The background to the protests is that the Indian government passed three farming laws, without any consultation with the farmers, using dubious parliamentary processes under the cover of the Covid-19 crisis and during the lockdown. It is clear that the laws will only benefit corporates and the large farmers by removing government protections for small farmers and tenants.

The farmers and their supporters are asking the Indian government to repeal all three of the Farm Bills recently passed, and preserve Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for their farm produce. All of these demands carry the central theme of resisting the liberalisation of state protection of the agriculture sector which opens the door to increased corporate power. India is a nation of highly productive small farmers, with over 86 per cent of the farms being small and marginal. Nearly fifty per cent of India's population depends on farming and agriculture. Small scale farming is also important for the maintenance of food security.

I co-signed a letter to the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister asking them to make a statement in support of the agricultural workers. This is on behalf of the 1.5 million strong British Indian community, which has close links to Indian farmers through shared heritage and are very concerned about violation of human rights and democratic processes.

The epidemic

I hope that you and your loved ones are coping through this very difficult third lockdown. For parents trying to home school and get their own jobs done it can feel like an exercise in spinning plates, and with no clear end in sight many of you might be struggling to cope. Others are worried

about their financial future as businesses and jobs continue to go to the wall.

Every day seems to bring a mixture of hope and worry: hope for the continued rollout of the vaccine, and the prospects now that the Astra-Zenica one could well be slowing transmission of the virus; worry about the South African strain of the virus, which may already have taken root in several areas.

All I can say is that my office is here to assist with whatever practical problems you may be experiencing as a result of all of this, and you should not hesitate to get in touch. With regards to your mental health, GOV.UK has published helpful information on looking after your mental well-being during the pandemic. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing>

Quiz answers

Regular subscribers will no doubt be waiting with bated breath for the answers to my Christmas Quiz, and I shall leave you in suspense no longer!

1. If LEYTON gets 9 and LEYTONSTONE get 14, what does WANSTEAD get?

A:12- (Scrabble scores)

2. What band or artist has had the most UK Number Ones?

A: The Beatles with 4

3. Born in Leytonstone, Stuart Freeborn designed which green Jedi for the Star Wars films?

A: Yoda

4. If the Central Line scores 1, the Circle Line scores 2 and the District Line scores 3, what does the Northern Line score?

A: 7- the value of their colour in snooker

5. Who insisted on a cameo as a condition of letting film makers inside his hotel to film Home Alone 2: Lost in New York?

A: Donald Trump

6. According to the 2011 census, how many Waltham Forest residents identified their Main religion as “Jedi”?

A: 542

7. Which Liberal MP for Leyton East defected to the Communist Party and became the first Communist to sit in the House of Commons?

A: Cecil Malone

8. Which former Leyton Orient footballer went on to become the first black player to represent England at Under 21 level?

A: Laurie Cunningham

9. Born in Leyton, who created the Tube Map?

A: Harry Beck

10. Winston Churchill was the MP for Wanstead. Name the actor who played Winston Churchill and the actor who played Clementine Churchill in the film *The Darkest Hour*?

A: Gary Oldman and Kristin Scott-Thomas

11. Janet Lee appears in which Hitchcock directed film of 1960?

A: Psycho

12. Born Phyllis Pechey, who appeared with her husband Johnnie as one of the earliest TV Cooks?

A: Fanny Craddock