

CESPA - CAMPAIGN FOR EQUAL STATE PENSION AGES (NOW PARITY)

THE EARLY DAYS

This summer (1996) CESPA celebrates its tenth birthday. After ten years of tilting at government obfuscation, it is gratifying that this tenth year should be crowned by our success in the European Court in the prescription charge case. Moreover, there is a good chance that a similar favourable ruling will be given by the Court, possibly also sometime this summer, in the bus-pass case, which CESPA was instrumental in initiating and has staunchly supported.

So how did CESPA start?

The impetus really came from the European Court ruling in February 1986 in the Marshall case that employment retirement ages for men and women had to be the same. The UK then had the situation that retirement ages had to be equal but pension ages didn't have to be. This was an absurdity since, for most people, retirement is synonymous with pension.

The UK Government subsequently responded to the ruling with the 1986 Sex Discrimination Act which amended the earlier 1975 Act so that compulsory retirement ages for men and women in the same organisation had to be equal (from 7th November 1987). But still the Government did nothing about pension age, either in the state scheme or in occupational pension schemes.

Following the ruling in the Marshall case, various people took up the issue of inequality in pension age, including letters to the press, e.g.. those from Joe Feely of London published in The Guardian on 3rd April 1986 and from Sam Watt of Glasgow published in the Glasgow Herald on 8th April 1986. However, it was independent actions of five persons in particular that led some months later to the birth of CESPA.

These actions comprised essentially contact with Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) by three of these persons and letters published in the national press by the other two.

In late February and March 1986, Geoff Alderton and John Bennett, both in Cheshire and Geoff Williams in Dorset, separately contacted the EOC about the continuing inequality in pension age. Geoff Alderton informed the EOC that he was keen to form or join an action group to press for pension age equality. The EOC subsequently relayed this on to other enquirers, including John Bennett and Geoff Williams. John Bennett then phoned Geoff Alderton to make their first direct contact.

Some weeks later, David Yarwood and David Lindsay, both in Berkshire, but acting separately, had letters on this issue published in The Guardian on 23rd April 1986 and in The Times on the 2nd May 1986 respectively.

Geoff Williams read David Yarwood's letter in The Guardian (which attracted a response from two other readers, one of them George Burdett) and wrote to him on 24th April 1986, confirming similar views and advising him about Geoff Alderton's intention.

David Yarwood replied to Geoff Williams on the 11th May 1986 and wrote to Geoff Alderton to express interest also in some group action.

By then also, David Yarwood had seen David Lindsay's letter in The Times (which attracted letters from three other readers) and wrote to him on the 18th May 1986 to advise the interest of Geoff Alderton in forming an action group and asking whether he would also be interested. David Lindsay responded positively by phone the next day.

It was agreed between the three main contacts at that time (David Lindsay, Geoff Alderton, and David Yarwood) that a more coordinated approach on the issue of pension age inequality and related benefits should be attempted, since there appeared to be no existing organisation doing this.

Thereafter, information on individual actions was exchanged between these three contacts. Geoff Alderton kept in contact with John Bennett and others in the north.

On the 12 May 1986, the TUC publicly declared its support for an equal state pension age of 60 for men and women.

A letter by Geoff Alderton on pension age inequality published in the Manchester Evening News on the 6 June 1986 attracted a response from only one person. A further letter by Geoff Alderton published in the same paper on the 16th June 1986 attracted responses from three more readers. Sam Watt had a similar letter published in the June issue of CHOICE magazine.

On the 12 June 1986, Geoff Alderton and John Bennett visited the Equal Opportunities Commission in Manchester to seek their help and spoke with Myra Oates. However, although the Commission was supportive in principle and was prepared to back any supportable case on discrimination by commercial organisations it could only offer advice and information on the issues of inequality in pension age and in local authority benefits.

This was because the Commission then deemed that both these matters were excluded from both UK and European sex discrimination law, and so the Commission had no remit to act on them. (Successes in the James case in 1990 on non-statutory benefits and in prescription charge case in 1995 later proved the Commission wrong on this)...

During June 1986, a coordinated approach to letter writing was started by the three main contacts. Letters were written to the EOC, DOE and to a selected range of politicians likely to be sympathetic on the pension age issue, including Sir David Price MP, who had tried in 1983, unsuccessfully, to introduce his Bill to equalize state pension ages.

On the 24 June 1986, David Lindsay and David Yarwood met for the first time, in London, prior to meeting with Sir Paul Dean MP at the House of Commons, who was sympathetic on the issue and suggested other politicians to write to.

By this time, there was general agreement by Geoff Alderton and John Bennett in Cheshire and by David Lindsay and David Yarwood in Berkshire, that there was need for a meeting in order to decide how best to proceed.

The first meeting of what was called the "Steering Group" took place accordingly in an upstairs room of a pub called "The Old Rose" in Medway Street, Westminster, London on the 3 July 1986.

The title CESPA dates from this meeting.

A second meeting of the Steering Group (but without Bernard Shilling) took place at the same pub on the 18th August 1986, when, amongst other things, the form of a constitution was discussed, an initial leaflet was approved and arrangements for an inaugural meeting at the end of August in Manchester were agreed.

The inaugural meeting of CESPA was held on 29 August 1986 in Committee Room 1 of Manchester Town Hall. Eleven persons were present. The proposed objects of CESPA and the form of the proposed constitution were explained. The terms of the constitution were agreed by all present and a copy was signed by ten of those present.

The original CESPA constitution was thus authorised as follows:

"We, the undersigned, being gathered together in meeting this 29th of August 1986 at the Town Hall, Manchester, HEREBY AGREE to form an Association to be know as "Campaign for Equal State Pension Ages" and to adopt the document annexed hereto as the Constitution of the said Association".

The ten founder - member signatures comprised those of G.W. Alderton, D. Higgins, D.J.D. Yarwood, J.H. Bennett, E.L. Anderson, J. Greenwood, M.D. Davidson, J. Graham, D.G. Lindsay and J. Bradfield.

The meeting appointed David Lindsay as Chairman, Geoff Alderton as Vice- Chairman, David Yarwood as Secretary and John Bennett as Treasurer. John Graham, Dennis Higgins, and Michael Davidson were appointed members of the Executive Committee.

The first meeting of the Executive Committee of CESPA took place on Saturday 30 August 1986, also in the Town Hall, Manchester.

CESPA was thus launched in Manchester at the end of August 1986, with a membership of 26 persons.

The First General Meeting of CESPA was held, some seven months later, on 4th April 1987, again at Manchester Town Hall. Membership by then had increased to 106 persons.

The First Annual General Meeting of CESPA was held on 26 March 1988, again in Manchester but this time at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology. The meeting was attended by 30 members. By then membership had further increased to 432 persons, reflecting the sterling efforts of the Officers and Committee and of individual members.

CESPA had been established.

Committee meetings continued at 'The Old Rose' until 15 August 1988 and from October 1988 to 16 January 1989, they were held at the Quaker International Centre in London. From the 17 April 1989 to the present, the Committee has met at the Institute of Professionals, Managers and Specialists (IPMS) in London, who support CESPA by offering this facility free of charge.

David Yarwood
Honorary Secretary
1 July 1996