

ANDREW PARR
9 Sept 1944 - 22 Jan 2019
R.I.P.

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing last Tuesday morning of our great friend and leader, Andrew Parr, aged 74, after an illness bravely fought in his usual stoic and pragmatic style.

Andrew was one of the main instigators and founders of the Pensions Action Group, following the collapse in 2002 of his employer, Allied Steel and Wire (ASW) in Kent with another plant in the same group suffering the same fate in South Wales.

Andrew, a Chartered Engineer responsible for the Steelworks process controls, and his colleagues not only lost their jobs but then found that they had lost most, if not all, of their work pensions that they had contributed to all their working lives. Andrew was part of a small group of workers who were not going to accept this sitting down, and he and others quickly rallied further support locally and nationally by raising awareness of the situation. He contacted his local MP, Derek Wyatt, who too became very active, and so the formation of the Pensions Action Group began.



Andrew at one of our
trademark PAG
demonstrations

Ros Altmann, a pensions expert who advised the Government, went to South Wales with the BBC's Panorama Programme to highlight the plight of ASW Cardiff and then met with Andrew Parr and his colleagues to work out how to get the Government to arrange compensation for their 'stolen' pensions. It soon became clear that ASW workers were not the only people to find themselves in this horrific and financially devastating predicament. Several other companies throughout the UK had also closed down with thousands of people now affected. A meeting was called at Portcullis House in Westminster, in September 2003, and this was publicised by the Press, including the Mail on Sunday. Many representatives of various companies whose pension schemes had failed attended this meeting to see what could be done. Andrew and his co-founders were joined at the meeting by Derek Wyatt and Ros Altmann.

This meeting really instigated the well-publicised activity of the now Pensions Action Group, with Andrew firmly at the helm. Ros Altmann arranged a Fringe Meeting at the Labour Party conference in Bournemouth in September 2003 to explain why the Government should compensate, at which Andrew spoke eloquently about the plight of those affected. This was followed by the first 'Stripped of Our Pensions' demonstration, which attracted further media coverage. An action plan was drawn up at a meeting famously held in the Reading Services on the M4 in November 2003, which was followed by a further rendezvous in Leicester, another meeting in the House of Commons and the first active sit-down protests in Oxford Street and later outside New Scotland Yard, where our 'Pensions Robbery' was reported.

The campaign continued alongside political and legal proceedings. Andrew's calm and intelligent manner meant that he was the mainstay in the technical negotiations that followed, while his dear wife Alison, always supportive, joined the now hundreds of protestors at numerous protests including two all-night vigils outside Downing Street and the Houses of Parliament, at the various Political Party Conferences and wherever we could find a sympathetic ear. Andrew enjoyed joining in with all of the 'Stripped of Our Pensions' trademark demonstrations, clearly and very effectively

designed to raise public awareness. Indeed, Andrew and Alison travelled to all corners of the UK to deliver the message of how being robbed of our pensions was the biggest social injustice of modern times.

Over the following years Andrew steadfastly helped lead the group. He single-handedly set up the Pensionstheft website, which enabled other scheme members to join the PAG and keep in touch with each other to find out about the latest news or upcoming demonstrations. Andrew attended the ECJ, Parliament, the Parliamentary Ombudsman and even the High Court. He also met every Pensions Minister to demand action. This culminated with the supportive Parliamentary Ombudsman's report 'Trusting in the Pensions Promise', which clearly blamed successive governments for allowing the collapse of pension schemes with insufficient funds to pay the members their pensions. Andrew, with three others, put his own house at potential risk of costs being awarded against them when he and three others took the Government to court in the 'Robbins and Others' legal case. Ros Altmann had arranged for lawyers to represent PAG on a no-win, no-fee basis, but the Government refused to guarantee that it would not pursue Andrew for its legal costs if PAG lost. Andrew would not be cowed into submission and continued with the case, which was about the Government's rejection of its own Ombudsman's findings and recommendations, and also about compliance with Article 8 of the EU Insolvency Directive. Thankfully, the case was successful and costs were not awarded. However, having lost in the High Court, the Government then decided to launch an Appeal against the ruling and once more refused to agree to cover its own costs if PAG lost. Andrew was determined not to be frightened away and continued with the Appeal case, which once again resulted in a PAG victory.

The Government faced significant opposition in Parliament, including from its own MPs and trade unions, which led to a decision to create the Pensions Protection Fund (PPF) in 2004. However, this would only help victims of any future pension fund failures and did not apply to schemes that had collapsed before 2005. To stave off Parliamentary defeat, the Government tried to pretend it would help the pre-2005 victims with a 'Financial Assistance Scheme' but Ros Altmann's research calculations showed this would not help more than a tiny proportion of those who had lost their pensions and each would receive a small fraction of their losses. So Andrew and the PAG, with continued lobbying, campaigning and media support, had to fight once more to improve the Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS) to provide assistance to help all those in his group. Andrew never stopped campaigning and fighting for proper improvements. Eventually, he and the PAG succeeded, although the current scheme benefits would not be won until December 2007, when Peter Hain (Secretary of State) and Mike O'Brien (Pensions Minister) finally gave in to Andrew and the PAG's arguments. Andrew had skilfully and patiently worked to achieve these results and at last the FAS benefits were aligned with those of the PPF.

Andrew and his fellow campaigners still carried on to try and restore some of the many benefits from their original schemes that were not included in the FAS, or the PPF. This legal work involved Andrew up to last year and the PAG campaign will continue this fight. We know that Andrew will be watching us and leading us from above.

Andrew's leadership of the PAG was simply outstanding. He was very articulate, passionate, witty, decisive, informative, intelligent, motivational and tolerant. He worked closely with Ros Altmann, later herself to become a Pensions Minister, to support all the work of the PAG. Ros was so convinced by the injustice of the pensions situation, and was so passionate about helping Andrew and all those who had suffered the pension losses through no fault of their own, that she put her own career on hold for five years to help lead the struggle for pensions reform and recompense for those affected. On hearing of Andrew's passing Ros said 'Andrew did so much for so many and

always had a smile, a wise word and kind heart. His Bravery and determination helped all of us and his work has enriched the lives of many people who never even knew him.'

Andrew was also key in helping Ros to motivate the media to highlight the just cause of the PAG struggle, giving countless TV interviews and featuring in hundreds of newspaper articles. Jeff Prestridge, Personal Finance Editor of the Mail on Sunday was an early recruit, and is still supportive. Jeff summed up his involvement with Andrew in this way: 'Andrew was a great individual who was key in the battle for pensions justice. Someone I had huge respect for and who gave a lot in the quest to help others. As far as my dealings with him are concerned, he was a journalist's dream. Articulate, modest and always willing to give a comment. Kind and gentle. A vital cog in the PAG wheel.'

Thankfully, following his dedication and leadership of the PAG, Andrew was able to enjoy some years of retirement before he became ill, travelling with Alison and enjoying her company along with their three sons Jamie, Nicholas and Simon, and their six grandchildren. Andrew was also very heavily involved in the Church near his home in Sheerness, and was a respected and very valued member of the Institute of Electrical Engineers.

Andrew will always have a place in all our hearts, he will be very sorely missed, but the memories of his wonderful, cheerful and positive company will help heal our sadness at this time.

Our thoughts and condolences go out to Alison and Andrew's family and friends.

Pensions Action Group
25 January 2019