

# OBITUARY

## THE RT HON LORD MORRIS OF MANCHESTER

**ALF MORRIS was one of a rare breed – an MP who genuinely changed Britain for the better.**

In 1970 he successfully introduced the Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act which was the first legislation globally to recognise and give rights to people with disabilities.

The then premier Harold Wilson recognised his passion and commitment and in 1974 Alf became the first Minister for the Disabled, not just in Britain, but anywhere.

He turned disability rights into a mainstream political issue. He followed that up with more legislation in 1991 as a ferocious activist in the campaign to recognise Gulf War Syndrome.

Many obituaries omitted that he was similarly committed as a long-time member and trustee of the Parliamentary Science and Technology Information Foundation (PSTIF), set up in 1988 by the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee (P&SC) to support the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. He was chairman of the P&SC from 1989 to 1992 and served on its Council until his death.

Alfred Morris, Baron Morris of Manchester (23 March 1928 – 12 August 2012) was MP for Manchester Wythenshaw from 1964 until 1997. His main front bench role was as PPS to agriculture minister Fred Peart. But that brief resumé does not reflect his impact on public life. It is a great pity that he did not live long enough to be a spectator at the London 2012 Paralympics.

His concern for the disabled started young. His father George lost an eye and a leg and was gassed while serving in World War One, and then suffered a long decline in health and eventually death arising from his injuries. His mother Irene was not entitled to a war widow's pension!

"The injustice of that confirmed me as both a socialist and a fighter," he said decades later.

It took Alf 40 years to put the matter right by changing the law affecting armed forces pensions.

His childhood proved to be one of his main motivators in life, being raised in poverty-stricken Ancoats, Greater Manchester. In 1935 the family moved to a new purpose-built housing estate on farmland in Newton Heath.

"I saw fields and cows and sunshine," he said. "I realised that life need not be grim."



Lord Morris sharing a word with Arthur Butler at the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee 70th Anniversary Lunch on 15th October 2009

He was educated at Brookdale Park School along with his fellow pupil Harold Evans, who, as editor of *The Sunday Times*, wrote a leader saying that: "As time ticked away to the 1970 general election, Alf Morris's Bill was the only piece of legislation worth saving."

Evans was the editor who exposed the thalidomide scandal.

Alf worked from 14 as a clerk in the local Wilson's Brewery, did national service in the army, mainly in the Middle East, from 1946-48, studied at Ruskin College, Oxford (1949-1950), St Catherine's College, Oxford (BA modern history 1953) and the Department of Education.

He became a Manchester schoolteacher and university extension lecturer in social history (1954-1956) and an industrial relations officer to the electricity industry (1956-1964).

He was created a life peer as Lord Morris of Manchester in 1997. He was a life member of the GMB union and served as President of the 1995 Co-Operative Congress.

His brother Charles Morris and his niece Estelle Morris have also served as Labour MPs, and of course Estelle is also a Peer.

He died in hospital on Sunday 12 August 2012 after a short illness, aged 84. He is survived by his wife Irene and their two sons and two daughters.

Andrew Miller MP

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