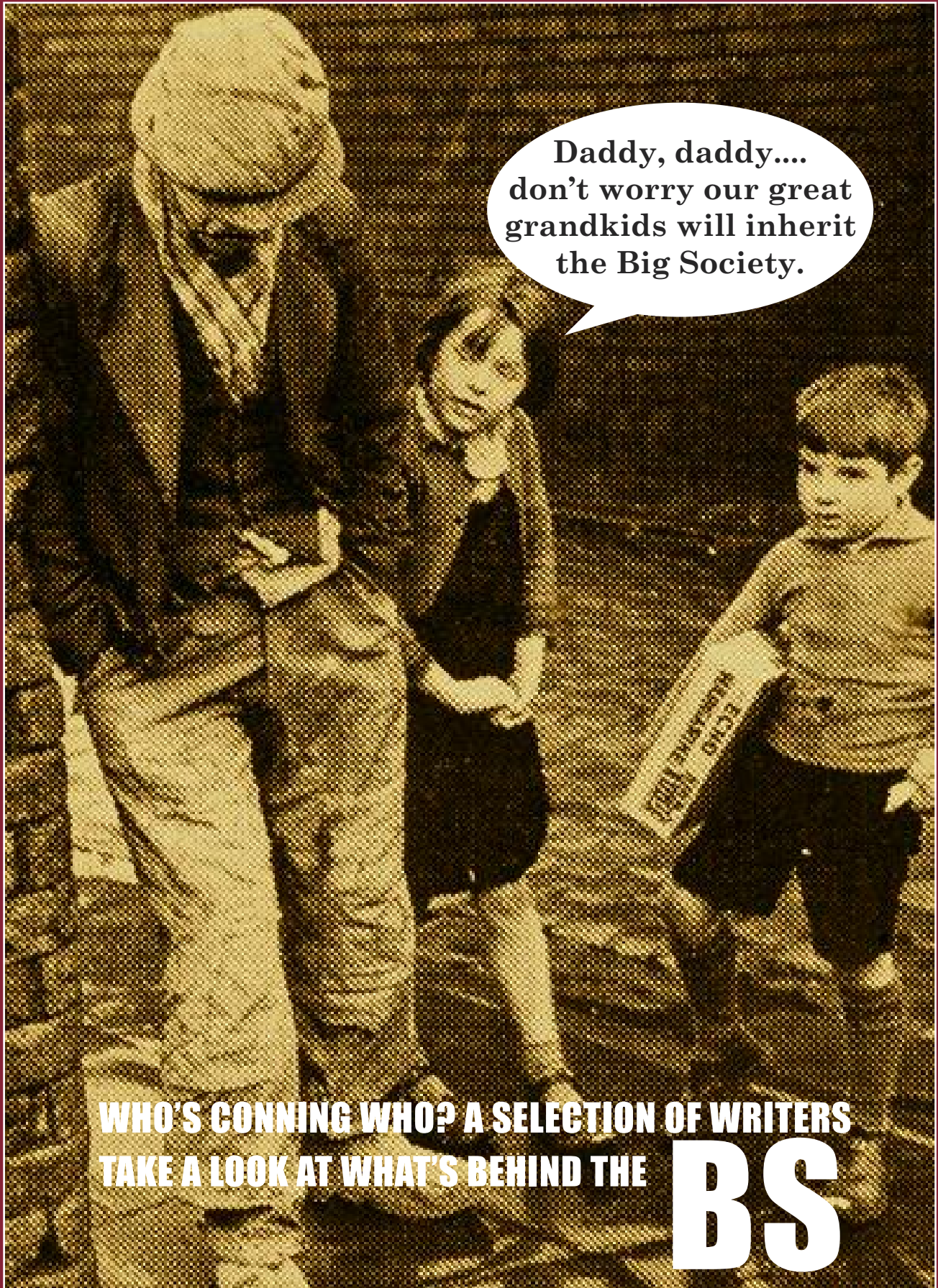


# NIPSANEWS

Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance

SUMMER 2010



**WHO'S CONNING WHO? A SELECTION OF WRITERS  
TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT'S BEHIND THE**

# BS

**THE MAGAZINE FOR UNION ACTIVISTS**

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**NIPSA NEWS EDITORIAL**

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# The mask slips on Cameron's Big Society

## DO we really believe David Cameron when he waxes lyrical about the Big Society?

A society in which neighbours help each other out and take control of their own neighbourhoods is something about which no one would disagree. It sounds a great idea – local people running their local facilities and services – until we ask where is the money coming from to run the services and, of course, the Prime Minister has thought about this. Volunteering is his answer.

The plan to roll back the boundaries of the state means in essence the dismantling of public services. It represents a return to the pre World War II scenario of limited public services; public services designed as a last resort safety net for the very poor with the rest of the population being encouraged to take responsibility for a whole range of personal and community needs through local voluntary arrangements which will involve an emphasis on Victorian charity principles. Progress marches ever on its way!

The aim of the Big Society is to create a populist smoke-screen to mask an unprecedented assault on public services. The Lib-Cons' objective is to reduce the budget deficit in a way which opens up public services to private sector market approaches, through massive cuts backs in services, thousands of job losses, attacks on public sector pay and pensions and the hiving-off by privatisation of public service functions. The expansion of the free market is at the expense of



**BRIAN CAMPFIELD**  
NIPSA General Secretary

people's services and in order to shift the emphasis, the myth of the Big Society is peddled to cover the real agenda of destroying public services.

There is another way to tackle the budget deficit. The objective of David Cameron's and Nick Clegg's Cabinet of millionaires is to cut the deficit by making the people pay for the crisis, a crisis created by very wealthy interests that will barely feel the pain from the government's austerity measures. The alternative to cuts in services, jobs, pensions, to VAT increases and attacks on the living standards of the vast majority of citizens who are in the lower and middle income groups is anathema to the new government.

That is because it would involve a commitment to real equality, to introducing higher taxes for those earning more than £100,000 a year, higher taxes again for those earning more than £150,000, an increase in the rate of Capital Gains Tax to the higher rate of tax, and a higher rate of Corporation Tax.

But the Government can also introduce a tax on financial transactions carried out by financial institutions including the banks, the so-called Tobin or Robin Hood Tax. What's more, the Government should invest in staff in the HMRC to aggressively chase the billions lost each year to the public purse through tax evasion, tax avoidance and uncollected taxes.

So there is an alternative but it means hitting the wealthy and the large corporations, the banks and the other large financial institutions not low and middle income earners.

That is the message we need to send to our local politicians. Despite their limited powers, our Assembly and Executive should declare that they endorse this alternative agenda for reducing the deficit and, as a consequence, they should launch a robust campaign, in co-operation with their counterparts in the other devolved administrations, to force the Westminster government of millionaires to take a radically different approach to the deficit.

They should declare that they were not elected to preside over the destruction of Northern Ireland's public services and our economy.

Returning to the Big Society, it should be recognised for what it is – a diversion designed to turn the focus away from the real agenda of cuts and privatisation and an attempt to enlist the active participation of the population for measures which are neither necessary nor fair and which penalise the vast majority of people, except the wealthy.

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# NICS staff are treated unfairly

## **NIPSA has expressed concern at the poor treatment meted out to civil servants in Northern Ireland in relation to pay.**

It comes against a backdrop of public sector spending cuts unprecedented in more than half a century.

Union representatives made their feelings clear at a meeting of the Central Whitley Council on July 28 and pressed the case for a decent increase based on NIPSA's 2010 pay claim.

Also calling for annual progression to be honoured, they stated that the union would be "exploring all possible avenues" to ensure this happens.

It is understood this may include legal action.

A NIPSA source said: "It is essential that members take an active role in highlighting the grossly unfair treatment of staff in the NICS and pay-related bodies."

Meanwhile, NIPSA has listed a number of factors that may influence any offer on 2010 pay.

These are:

1. Chancellor George Osborne's budget announced a freeze in public sector pay above £21,000 per annum (full time equivalent) and an increase of "at least" £250 for staff below £21,000.

There is still a lack of clarity about this statement, in particular whether all staff earning under £21,000 will automatically receive an increase of at least £250.

NIPSA is already aware that local government employers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have made a 0% offer for all staff and have reaffirmed this following the June budget.

However, the Northern Ireland Executive may wish to take its own view. NIPSA is aware discussions have already taken place within the Executive on a public sector pay freeze in Northern Ireland.

2. The Treasury pay remit for 2010/11 pay was 0-2%. Stormont Finance Minister Sammy Wilson justified withdrawing from the 2002 NICS pay agreement with NIPSA

because costs exceeded the 2% and therefore the NICS could not honour the terms of the pay agreement on progression without breaching Treasury pay remit figures.

However, the status of the Treasury pay remit is now under question given Mr Osborne's budget. NIPSA has sought clarification from the Management Side on this matter.

3. Progression/Increments: The Treasury has indicated that any contractual entitlements of public sector staff should be honoured.

Staff in most non-Civil Service public bodies, such as the health service and local government, are likely to receive their annual increment as normal even if a pay freeze applies.

NIPSA has claimed this highlights the grossly unfair treatment of staff in the Civil Service, where the cost of progression is counted against the overall pay increase figure – unlike other public sector areas.

4. In a bid to highlight this unfairness, NIPSA has published a booklet making the case for fair pay treatment for NICS staff. The booklet focuses on a number of issues and compares NICS pay increases since 2003/04 with movements in the Retail Price Index and pay in other areas of the public sector.

5. The NIPSA Civil Service Group Executive Committee is asking branches and members to make representations to their elected representatives, in particular MLAs, seeking their support for fair treatment of civil servant.

A union source said: "It is critical these representations are

made immediately as MLAs have an important role in influencing the decisions of their own parties and Executive ministers.

"Representations from constituents who are covered by NICS pay arrangements can be effective in securing support for fair pay for civil servants.

"It should be noted that in 2011 there will be an election to the NI Assembly so it is important that members actively lobby their MLAs on the issue of civil service pay."

## Northern Ireland Civil Service Pay

[www.nipsa.org.uk](http://www.nipsa.org.uk)

## 'No NJC pay offer for 2010'

**EMPLOYERS Side representatives have stated that they do not intend to make a pay offer for 2010.**

**They also made it clear at a meeting of the National Joint Council Executive on July 23 that they also do not intend to make an offer to staff earning less than £21,000 a year.**

**This is despite the fact the Government indi-**

**cated staff earning under that figure would receive an increase of £250.**

**This undertaking was made earlier this year as ministers announced a two-year pay freeze.**

**It is understood the NJC trade unions are now seeking to move to arbitration on both the substantive pay claim and the £250 payment for those earning under £21,000.**

# David Cameron's people power, a Neoliberal con trick

**DAVID Cameron's Big Idea, also known as Big Society, is anything but new. The idea of working people controlling the resources of society is a very old idea and ironically one that grew up in opposition to just the politics Cameron espouses.**

Unlike one of his Tory forebears, Margaret Thatcher, it seems Cameron doesn't believe that "there is no such thing as society"; rather he believes that it's not big enough. His neo-conservative approach to politics is the undying belief that market competition and privatisation of the state's assets is the best bet for improving the social good. It's clearly not based on any empirical evidence since the latest round of market-inspired competition for profit led to the biggest financial crash anyone can remember. So it is definitely a gamble, a bet, and one which has a history of losses.

But it is interesting to see how the right wing ideologues have appropriated key words such as "radical", "progressive", "modernising", and even "reforming", to describe a project which involves a substantial transfer of control away from democratic bodies to private industry and their owners. And since the Tory party has been so committed to handing over more and more of the state assets to private companies, how do they square that with claims from Cameron that they want to see a shift of power to ordinary working people?

Of course, Blair, Brown, Mandelson, Alistair Cambell, et al, were masters of spin, redefining and using their own vocabulary to shift the political agenda to the right, so much so that the word "modernise" came to represent privatising, selling off, sacking people, but without evoking a public response to the carnage. Such is spin.

The radical left, as contrasted with the pretend social democratic left, has long given strong support to the idea of working people having control of the means of production. So where's

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**By Bob Lloyd**

BLOGCRITICS.ORG

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the difference between Cameron's idea and the long-standing idea of workers' control?

Are local neighbourhoods going to get the veto on the placing of yet another mega-market in their area? Are local people going to be able to decide that instead of building luxury homes for the rich, the property company will have to build affordable homes for working class people?

Of course not. Cameron is not talking about power, but about choice and even that is a very limited choice exercised in a market that isn't controlled by working people at all. He doesn't see working people exercising power to make decisions about the allocation of resources, but about choosing where to spend the money amongst a range of private companies.

His idea is really quite simple as he says, but it's not what he says it is. His intention is to sell off essential parts of the state to private interests, and then to devolve the spending choices to local groups. From his point of view, this has all sorts of benefits not least being that it cuts spending. Since the state is no longer making the decisions, the responsibility also is devolved to local groups. And since the provision is no longer the responsibility of government, neither is the comeback when they fall short.

People are told they are being given power, given control over their local resources. In reality they are being taken for suckers. They are being given responsibility specifically without the power.

Exercising spending choices is not the same as democratic control. Take for example the health service. If there was actual workers' control of a hospital they would be able to make changes in the priorities of how it was

run. For example, they could insist that all private resources were scheduled for NHS use, that there was no fast track for those who could pay. They might decide that it would no longer use private companies to do the cleaning work, but would employ local people themselves with decent working conditions. That would be local democratic power. But that's nothing like the same as Cameron is pushing. He really does not want local democratic power.

By conflating the idea of spending choice, so-called consumer power, with democratic control, the Tories are obscuring the complete lack of power that really exists in local communities. Local people, even if they can choose which company to buy from, do not exert economic power; they do not have the power to change the social priorities.

If Cameron was serious about giving power to local communities, he would be terrified of the results. People would be able to reorganise production to meet social need, take over derelict properties and refurbish them for social use, they would be able to eliminate the payment of unnecessary profits, and there would start to be planning to ensure social needs are met in the future.

Cameron has no interest in planning for social benefit: his view is that the anarchic market will sort out social benefit by letting those without the cash end up with less and less influence. That is very consistent with the Victorian attitudes about the "underserving poor", the "feckless wasters", and those regarded as a drain on society.

Cameron's dressed-up rhetoric about Big Society is just more spin about the neoliberal agenda, that blind faith in the perfect justice of the market which even with the rubble of financial collapse all around us, is offered as some sort of panacea for all social ills.

Some may see more sinister devel-

opments in all this. The idea of generating local power elites able to tap into a state-sponsored bank for allocating social funding looks suspiciously like establishing a devolved corporatist state machine in which ideological allegiance, commitment to the power of the market, gets the attention of government. Embedding substantial power in the close relationship, or even integration between supplier companies and these local elites, provides a political force outside of parliament, which unites state-sponsored finance capital with a network of approved business interests.

This may suit the Tory party down to the ground, but it will suit the interests of capitalist firms even better. Instead of having to deal with forms of regulation which might insist on social benefits being considered, the task is simply to get the local elites integrated into the ideology of the market.

Cameron is right in saying that there will be a shift of power. But the power is being shifted to private capital and out of the control of democratically elected bodies. And that is consistent with the tenets of the old Washington Consensus, and the full-blown neoliberal agenda.

Social democrats who are tempted to go along with Cameron's call for more People Power should think about how the People might exercise that Power, and how they might use it to constrain the unbridled competition between capitals. Those reformists who argue that parliamentary activity can ameliorate the worst excesses of capitalism ("politics is the art of the possible", etc) might contemplate what happens when parliament no longer has the control over the important decisions any longer.

Beguiled by the redefinition of words like "progress" and "modernise", many New Labour politicians will be shocked to see the Tories simply appropriating their own Blair-spun language and force it faster than ever in the neoliberal direction. No wonder New Labour is in disarray. The Tories are aggressively pursuing exactly the policies that New Labour themselves proposed; privatisation, removal of regulation, flexible labour arrangements, temporary contracts and easy firing, and the rest.

The financial crash has provided the Tories with just the ideological justification to pursue their neoliberal policies with no effective opposition. New Labour can hardly claim that it was neoliberal policies and the unbridled competition between finance capitalists that brought on the crisis because they themselves encouraged it. Indeed it was Blair and Brown that committed the UK to the neoliberal agenda without parliamentary approval.



And Cameron is now exploiting the popular belief that "there is no alternative," to ride the crest of public sympathy for our apparently common economic plight. It will be a while before the mea culpa mood dissipates but in the meantime, capital will be rampant, working conditions will be worsened, profits will be pushed up, and the social wage will be slashed.

For those wanting to make a killing out of the sell-off of state assets, it

will be a bonanza but for those who depend on them, it's a return to Victorian times. People Power? Cameron's claim is little short of an obscene joke.

■ *Bob Lloyd is a contributor to Blogcritics.org, an online magazine, filtered microcosm of the blogosphere, and a full service news and reviews source, covering all aspects of contemporary culture and society.*

# Appeasement to financial markets will never work

Britain should not try to placate the banks with cuts that will damage it, says Ben Fox

**THE Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government has started its demolition job on public services with the emergency Budget. Ministers claim that Labour concealed how bad things really were; that cuts are a necessity and even that these cuts will lead to growth. This is a combination of downright dishonesty and economic illiteracy.**



The coalition's strategy is a combination of cuts and tax rises. An increase in VAT is regressive because it hits the poorest hardest. Swingeing public spending cuts can only undermine the improvements in schools and hospitals that we saw under Labour.

The coalition wants it to be regarded as accepted wisdom that we need cuts. Yet Nick Clegg promised his 2008 party conference that he would never be part of a Conservative government, let alone one that slashed public spending. Before the election, the Lib Dems claimed to agree with Labour that cutting too soon and too deep would damage the fragile economic recovery. Now they have performed a complete U-turn. Nevertheless, the emphasis should not be on cuts but on growth. It is properly directed economic investment and growth, not cuts, which will do most to reduce the deficit.

After abandoning Keynesianism during most of its 13 years in power, the Labour Government re-embraced that approach when the crisis took hold. Without the stimulus measures introduced by Gordon Brown and Alastair Darling, unemployment would be 500,000 more than it currently is.

Thanks to Labour's prompt and decisive action, tax receipts were higher and the cost to society less than if the Government had simply sat back and let market forces take their course. The social consequences could have been devastating. In contrast with much of the rest of Europe, there has been no rioting in British streets – at least, not yet.

The coalition's cuts are a recipe for calamity and must be resisted. Our economic recovery remains in its very early stages. When you have weak economic growth and a large budget deficit, the best way to tackle this is through a combination of efficiency savings and targeted investment at specific areas where there is strong growth potential: research and development, innovation and green technologies.

 Kow-towing to discredited rating agencies is a bit like a drunk driver crashing your car and then demanding the keys to a new one 

The disgraceful actions of credit rating agencies should not be forgotten. The financial crisis which hit the world in 2007 happened because banks and other financial institutions had been selling one another sub-prime securities that credit rating agencies had awarded triple-A status. When they turned out to be worthless, governments across the globe bailed out their banks in order to keep the financial system alive. Without this financial life support, the pensions and savings of millions of people would have disappeared. Incidentally, the effective nationalisation of British banks – which the Tories oppose – will eventually reap a handsome profit when, as seems inevitable, the Government sells the taxpayers' stake in them.

However, it would be wrong to pin the blame solely on the credit rating agencies. Part of the Faustian pact entered into by the Labour Government was that it would keep capital gains tax low and regulation minimal, and use the money generated by the City to pay for increased investment in public services. At least Labour saw the mistakes it had made and subsequently introduced significant taxes on bankers' bonuses alongside the 50 per cent top rate of income tax.

In contrast, rating agencies and their defenders in the City are not only unrepentant but are now holding countries to ransom. The social unrest seen in Greece has spread to other European countries. Spain and Portugal have also had their credit ratings downgraded, even on the back of painful austerity budgets.

This has given David Cameron's



Government a new line to push: if we don't implement our own massive cuts, the rating agencies will take away our triple-A credit rating. Kowtowing to discredited rating agencies is a bit like a drunk driver crashing your car and then demanding the keys to a new one. Politicians should have the backbone to call their bluff.

Three rating agencies dominate the market: Moody's, Standard & Poor's and Fitch. If they will not change their practices voluntarily, then democratically-elected governments must force them to change through legislation.

To have any meaningful effect on market practices, common European and global legislation is required. At European level, we finally have legislative proposals to regulate credit rating agencies. Socialist MEPs will work to ensure that this largely grey area of the financial market is made as transparent as possible.

The Tory-Lib Dem coalition should not delude itself or the country that a strict diet of austerity will work. A sharp increase in unemployment – the inevitable result of public sector job cuts – will lead to declining tax revenue, higher social security costs and a greater deficit that Labour's stimulus measures avoided. While

mass unemployment is never a price worth paying, wilfully creating mass unemployment in the misguided hope that it will appease discredited rating agencies is morally bankrupt and economically mad.

There are still strong and influential advocates of maintaining stimulus measures rather than embracing a rush to cuts. Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman has warned that stimulus measures should be relaxed only after we see a return to sustained economic growth. Tim Geithner, Barack Obama's Treasury Secretary, has warned that austerity measures before national economies have recovered from the recession could see what happened to Japan in the 1900s befall Britain in the next decade.

Krugman is right when he says the rush towards cuts in the desperate hope that this is what the markets want is nothing less than "utter folly posing as wisdom". The coalition should listen to voices such as his rather than to the financial markets which created this unholy mess in the first place.

*Ben Fox is political advisor to the vice-chairman of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee in the European Parliament*

## CAWC vow renewed campaign



**THE Coalition Against Water Charges has vowed to ratchet up its campaign to stop the introduction of separate household water charges in Northern Ireland.**

**It also called on the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure water and sewerage services continue to be publicly funded.**

**Stormont Finance Minister Sammy Wilson claimed recently that the introduction of the charges was inevitable, but the trade union-led CAWC insist householders are already paying for water in their domestic rates.**

**Chairperson John Corey said: "The predictions of massive public expenditure cuts don't justify the calls now being made to implement water charges in Northern Ireland.**

**"Householders are already paying for water services through their rates and that should be maintained."**

**Pointing out that water and sewerage services were as "vital" as education or health, the former NIPSA general secretary added: "Water charges are not inevitable.**

**"We believe that if the Executive needs to raise more funding to assist with the costs of water or other public services, ministers should instead be addressing the current domestic rate cap and freeze on rate increases which are benefiting the better off."**

# Chancellor Osborne is not a magician

BY DAVID  
BLANCHFLOWER

**GEORGE Osborne claims he is trying to avert a "catastrophic loss of confidence" in the economy by imposing swingeing cuts in this financial year. Yet the latest reliable data shows that the coalition government's actions have already had the opposite effect.**

"Nothing illustrates better the total irresponsibility of the last government's approach than the fact that they kept ratcheting up unaffordable government spending even when the economy was shrinking."

I came across this remark by David Cameron the other day and it made me despair. I hope he knows more about defence and conducting the fight against terrorism than he does about economics, or we are all in big trouble.

Thank goodness the Labour government did ratchet up spending in the face of the worst financial crisis in a hundred years. That is what saved us from entering a terrible economic depression, which is where we would have been if Cameron and George Osborne had been in charge - and they may yet take us there. Moreover, the spending was not unaffordable, as the money has been borrowed at very low rates of interest and invested in keeping activity up and unemployment down.

There is a growing consensus that Osborne's emergency Budget was based on very optimistic forecasts. If that is so, the case for cutting now would be much weakened. Even the ever-honest former chancellor and now Justice Secretary, Kenneth Clarke, conceded on BBC Radio's Any Questions that Britain may well enter a double-dip recession.

J M Keynes's biographer Robert Skidelsky put it very well in an insightful column in the Independent on 25 June. "I do not believe the government should take money out of the economy; it should pump it in," he wrote. "I don't understand how you help growth by reducing spending . . . In a slump, Keynes said, governments should increase, not reduce, their



deficits to make up for the fall in private spending. Any attempt by government to balance its budget in a slump would only worsen the slump."

## Animal spirits

I am amazed that there appears to be no plan to reverse course if the figures come in much worse than the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) is forecasting, as I suspect they will. Economic policy in the UK is being run by a bunch of ideological amateurs who are destined to fail, at enormous cost to the British people.

In his Budget speech, George Os-

borne said he was acting to prevent "a catastrophic loss of confidence". My concern is that confidence - what Keynes called "animal spirits" - is still fragile and requires nurturing. All this talking down of the British economy by Cameron, Osborne, Nick Clegg and Chris Huhne does not help and may return to haunt them.

In the months leading up to the financial crisis in 2008, UK data on confidence turned well before other more quantitative measures such as output or employment, and was a good predictor of the coming decline, especially in late 2007 and early 2008. This data has the great benefit that it

## Working families 'to lose £1k a year'

**THE TUC has claimed half a million working families in the UK are set to lose more than £1,000 a year because of changes to the tax credit allowances set out in the recent Budget.**

**Currently tax credits are calculated on a household's previous year's income.**

**If earnings fall during the course of a year – due to unemployment, illness, a marital break up, retirement, bereavement or a household member losing working hours – their annual tax credit calculation is adjusted to take account of their new income.**

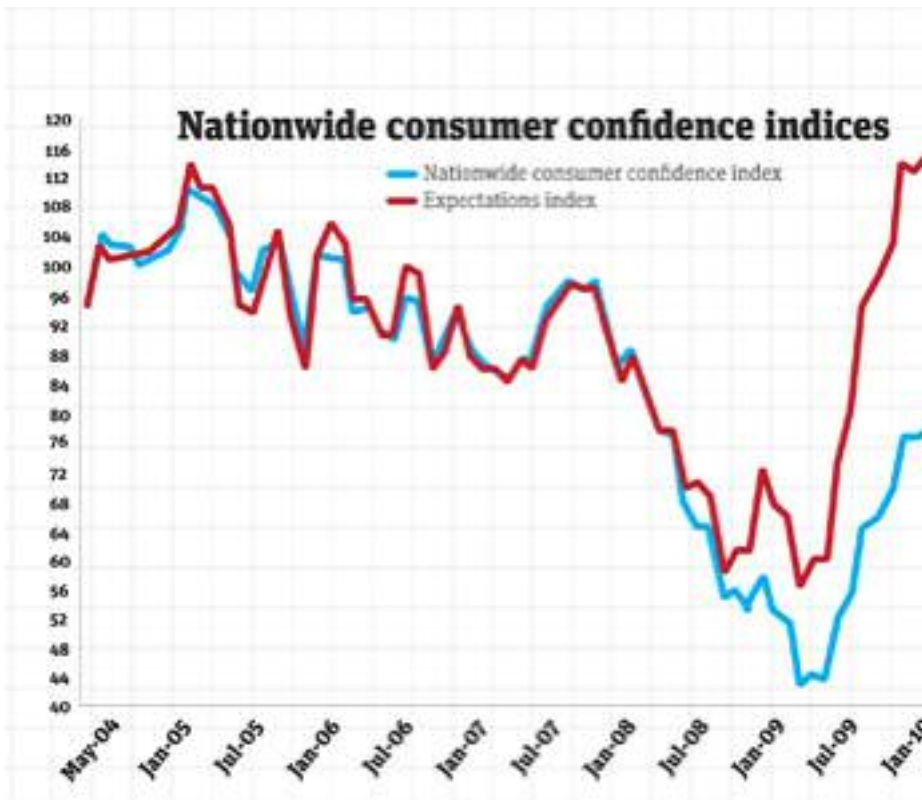
**However, changes announced by chancellor George Osborne on June 22, mean that from 2012-13, households receiving tax credits that see their wages fall during the year will have the first £2,500 of income they lose disregarded when their new in-year tax credit entitlement is calculated.**

**The move is expected to save the government around £550 million a year, but the TUC claims that many of the lowest earning families will be hardest hit as a result.**

**General secretary Brendan Barber said: "In his Budget speech the chancellor promised 'not to hide any hard choices from the British people or bury them in the small print of the Budget documents'.**

**"But this cut in tax credit entitlements was hidden in the detail and will make a real difference to some of our poorest and most vulnerable families, costing at least half a million households a year more than £1,000.**

**"This is another reminder that we are very definitely not all in this together. While the rich have been let off the hook, those on middle and low incomes are being left to pick up the cost of the recession."**



is timely and not subject to revision.

Monthly reports from the Bank of England's regional agents show that, from mid-2007, investment intentions across the UK collapsed, hitting their lowest points in spring 2009. In their latest report, for June 2010, the agents said that investment intentions had picked up, "but remained consistent with a gradual recovery from a low level, rather than a robust pick-up in spending. Intentions continued to be depressed by uncertainty about future demand and by the existing margin of spare capacity."

Business investment in the first quarter of 2010 is estimated to be 6 per cent higher than in the previous quarter. In spite of the quarterly rise, business investment was 11 per cent lower than in the same period in 2009. Investment in private-sector manufacturing was down by 1 per cent on the quarter and by 29 per cent on the corresponding quarter of the previous year. The OBR is forecasting that business investment will grow by 1.3 per cent in 2010, 8.1 per cent in 2011 and nearly 10 per cent a year on average from 2012-2015. It is unclear whether firms will increase investment, but for the government's Budget to succeed, it is vital that they do.

As for consumer confidence, it is again on the wane. The chart (above) plots data from the Nationwide Building Society's consumer confidence and expectations indices, which are available monthly. In a survey, respondents are quizzed on five areas: 1) appraisal of current economic conditions; 2) expectations regarding economic conditions six months hence; 3)

appraisal of current employment conditions; 4) expectations regarding employment conditions six months hence; and 5) expectations regarding total family income six months hence.

### Catalyst for a fall

The consumer confidence index takes the average of all five questions, while the expectations index averages questions 2, 4 and 5. The chart shows that both indices began to fall from around September 2007 to a low of 44 in the spring of 2009. Both recovered through early 2009, but have since fallen back.

The latest survey, conducted between 19 April and 23 May, covered the period after the general election and the announcement a £6bn spending cut. The consumer confidence index fell sharply by 10 points to 65. The expectations index fell even more, by 12 points to 93. This index has now fallen by 26 points since February.

Commenting on the figures, Nationwide's chief economist, Martin Gahbauer, said: "It is clear to see that the catalyst for the fall in overall confidence has been growing pessimism around the present and future economic situation." Respondents expected the economic climate to worsen, which implies lower consumer spending, which is negative for growth.

*David Blanchflower is Bruce V Rauner Professor of Economics at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, and visiting professor at the University of Stirling.*

# Life expectancy gap 'wider than in Great Depression'

A new report comes as a stark reminder of what the Con Dem Big Society idea could lead to

**THE health inequality gap in Britain is greater than it was during the post-World War I slump and the Great Depression, a study suggests.**

Despite the continued rise in life expectancy, it is well documented that the gap between richest and poorest has actually been widening in recent years.

Researchers from Sheffield and Bristol looked at early death rates since 1921.

They found the current gap was greater than it was in the 1920s and 1930s, the British Medical Journal reports.

The researchers analysed mortality data for England and Wales, obtained from the Office for National Statistics, and for Scotland, obtained from the General Register Office for Scotland.

Between 1999 to 2007, for every 100 deaths before the age of 65 in the richest 10th of areas, there were 212 in the poorest 10th.

This compared with 191 deaths in the poorest areas from 1921 to 1930 and 185 deaths from 1931 to 1939.

These decades cover probably the toughest economic and social period of the 20th century.

Britain was still struggling during the 1920s to recover from World War I.

Living standards had been driven down by low wages and high unemployment.

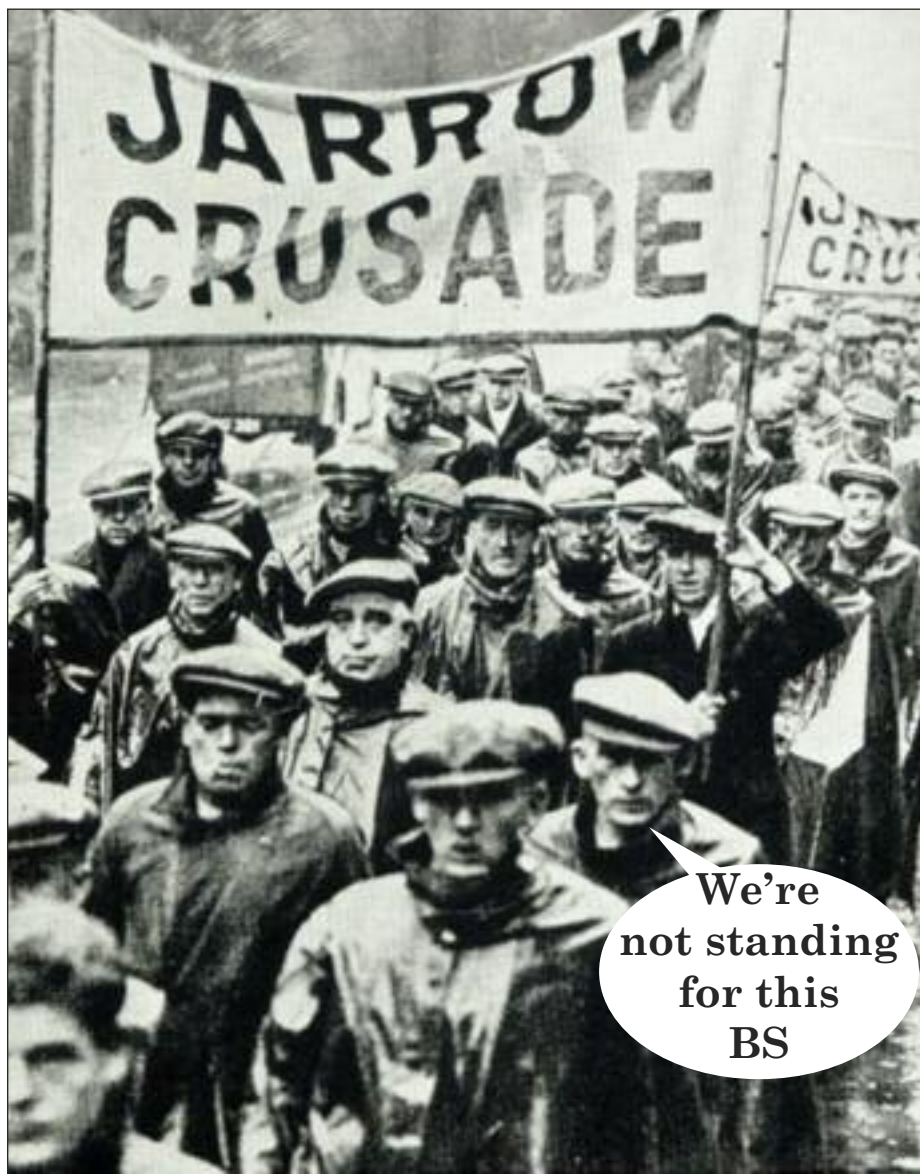
The Great Depression, therefore, could not have come at a worse time.

The 1930s saw Britain - and much of the rest of the world - slide into the largest and most profound depression ever seen.

The economy collapsed so much so that at one point a fifth of the workforce was unemployed.

The UK spent the 1920s struggling to recover from WWI and was then caught up in the Great Depression of the following decade which was sparked by 1929 stock market crash in the US.

From that period onwards health inequalities started narrowing until



We're not standing for this BS

the 1970s, the analysis showed.

Researchers said this was mainly due to the boom in manufacturing in the traditionally poorer parts of Britain.

But since then the gap has widened, particularly during the last 20 years.

This means that the pledge by the previous Labour government to reduce the inequality gap between 1997 and 2010 is almost certain to be missed.

Lead researcher Professor Danny Dorling said the findings were a "stark reminder" of the challenge facing the nation.

"Health and wealth are directly linked and, unless we tackle the income gap, we could well see life ex-

pectancy actually starting to fall for the first time in the poorest areas."

Professor Sir Michael Marmot, a leading health inequalities expert who has advised both the government and World Health Organization, said: "There are two major challenges: to improve health for everybody and to reduce inequalities. In Britain, we have done well on the first - not on the second.

"This should not be taken as a counsel of despair. Over the last decade, life expectancy for the bottom quarter of the population increased significantly, but their health did not catch up with the average, because of persisting social and economic inequalities."

# Council chiefs concern over Big Society drive

**A NEW survey of 300 local council managers has revealed fears that David Cameron's Big Society initiative could cost individual councils more than £10m each.**

Research by Northern Ireland based software firm Lagan Technologies found that when asked to estimate the likely costs involved, 31% of council chiefs said they thought it would total more than £10m, 24% thought it would cost between £1m and £5m while 43% indicated it would be under £1m per council.

Just over half of those quizzed thought the Big Society idea had not been thought through properly with another 47% expressing their concern about how the government would monitor compliance of community

groups that take charge of providing public services.

Less than a third (31%) said the Big Society was a positive initiative that would bring about social benefits.

Des Speed, chief executive of Lagan Technologies, said: "These cost estimates are preliminary, but it's clear that local government executives don't see a straight line between devolved power, community involvement and cost reduction.

"In fact, the vast majority see cost increases as councils and authorities pick up new responsibilities for compliance and support of local initiatives. What's clear is that local government executives believe that they will need to work even harder and even smarter."

## Discontent planned for the autumn

**UNIONS representing millions of public sector workers are planning an "autumn of discontent" with a series of national demonstrations in protest at cuts in spending, pay and pensions.**

The campaign will begin with a national day of action on 20 October

– the day George Osborne reveals details of proposals to axe £83bn from the government budget in his spending review.

A further protest along with demonstrations and marches, will be staged on 23 October and will herald the start of a series of strike days throughout the autumn.

## Job fears after COI cuts

**FEARS are growing that government press and information officers in Northern Ireland will be facing major job cuts after nearly 300 jobs are to be axed at the COI as part of restructuring to meet tough new spending targets.**

Press and information officers in Northern Ireland have been under constant attack and sniping by MLA critics for the past 12 months.

UK Government officials confirmed that 40 per cent of the 737 people working at the Central Office of Information face redundancy following a sharp fall in the amount being spent on advertising and marketing by the government.

A spokesman said the department needed to restructure to reflect the reduced volume of work and is to reduce its staff numbers by 40 per cent, with the loss of 287 jobs.

Staff have been offered the op-

portunity to be considered for voluntary redundancy initially, although compulsory redundancies – if required – have not been ruled out.

A formal 90-day consultation begins ends on 1 November 2010.

Chief Executive, Mark Lund said: "COI has always adapted to meet the requirements of government and the changing media landscape. A leaner COI is in line with new government priorities. Our future will be grounded in continuing to deliver excellent communications to achieve government aims, in the most cost efficient and effective way possible."

But, unions are concerned that work normally carried out by departments press and information officers will now be outsourced to PR firms who aided the Tory and Liberal parities during the General Election campaign.

## Fears of double-dip recession

**BRITAIN's powerhouse services sector saw its growth stall last month, jeopardising hopes of a sustained recovery.**

A survey of the sector that makes up the bulk of Britain's economic output showed that its growth slipped to its slowest since it emerged from recession a year ago – raising fears of a double-dip recession.

Many of the companies surveyed said cancelled public-sector contracts were beginning to hurt their businesses, forcing them to cut jobs and dealing a blow to hopes of reviving the private sector by reducing public spending.

The gloom was compounded by warnings from leading retailers that consumer spending is cooling off after a strong start to the year amid uncertainty about the economic outlook.

More gloom came with the publication of figures showing that growth in the service sector, which spans businesses from insurance to hotels and restaurants, fell more than expected to a 13-month low in July, according to the Markit/CIPS UK services purchasing managers' index.

"This has hugely increased the risks of a double-dip recession, perhaps even by the end of the year," said Chris Williamson, chief economist at survey compiler Markit.

The companies surveyed – which account for about 40 per cent of the economy – were only slightly more optimistic than in June, when Chancellor George Osborne's austerity budget hammered their hopes of a swift recovery.

Reflecting dwindling confidence and a slowdown in order book growth, they cut staff, casting further doubt over the private sector's ability to provide jobs as government departments are shrunk.



The two tier workforce appeared a happy marriage between private and public sector workers but times are changing

# A tale of two halves

Scrapping the two tier workforce code may help the government increase cheaper outsourcing but it could threaten the quality of services

**A MOVE by the government to scrap the informal code giving public sector benefits to thousands of outsourced private sector workers could threaten service quality, an employment expert has warned.**

Richard Kenyon, head of employment and pensions at law firm Field Fisher Waterhouse, which advises public sector bodies on employment law issues around outsourcing, said that the move could encourage private employers to compete predominantly on cost not quality.

"A good contractor will achieve savings by having good quality management and systems in place that create economies of scale and efficiency. On the other hand a bad contractor will just offer to do the work at a lower price and then hire in a group of low paid workers to maintain a profit margin. This drives down costs but also potentially service quality and therefore can often be a false economy."

Under European legislation, workers who are transferred to the private

sector - in areas such as waste collection, catering or health services - have many of their employment terms and conditions protected. In the voluntary 'two tier workforce' code agreed between unions, employers and the government in 2003, new recruits were offered terms that were "no less favourable" to those of transferred colleagues.

Earlier this month the coalition government said it was "minded" to abolish the code in an attempt to reduce the cost of future outsourcing, which is set to increase following cuts made to public sector spending.

The announcement has led to criticism that individuals doing the same job could end up having different rates of pay and benefits, a move that has drawn opposition from unions such as the TUC. Unions have also argued that removing the code would also leave public sector workers vulnerable to cheaper private workers.

Francis Maude, the cabinet office minister, said that paying new recruits and transferred staff equally "distorts the market when we are try-

ing to encourage new entrants into the outsourced [services] market."

While a fall in share values has knocked some of the largest service suppliers such as Capita and Serco, analyst Caroline de La Soujeole said a "golden age of outsourcing" could see the value of outsourced services nearly double from around £80bn (14%) now to £140bn in five years.

But any new arrangements, Kenyon says, are in danger of distorting the way in which private sector companies are encouraged to compete, handing over services to firms who just hire the cheapest workers.

"Although the two tier workforce code is not without its weaknesses, it has helped to create an environment where private contractors compete more on quality than on who can hire the cheapest workers," says Kenyon.

"Everyone accepts the need to cut costs but the Government should not look at this as an opportunity to provide the same volume of services for less cost, sacrificing worker rights and decent services in order to achieve that objective."

# Media myths about public service pensions blasted

**NIPSA General Secretary Brian Campfield has called for an end to attacks on public service pensions and claimed that – despite the many myths peddled in the media – they provided provision that was “affordable, sustainable, transparent and fair” to both taxpayers and public servants.**

He said: “First the Government attacked the jobs of thousands of public servants, then they imposed a pay freeze and now they are looking to erode the pension rights of millions of public service workers.

“Public service pensions are important to help people survive in retirement but they are not the gold-plated windfalls the Government and right-wing pressure groups claim – a quarter of Civil Service pensioners get less than £60 per week, while for NHS pensioners a quarter get less than £40 per week.”

Mr Campfield made the comments as the union put in its submission to the Independent Public Service Pension Commission, headed up by former Cabinet minister John Hutton.

NIPSA spokesperson Bumper Gra-

ham claimed pensions were not only essential in attracting people to work in the public services but helped the taxpayer avoid having to pay out billions of pounds in means tested pension credits.

He added: “This review came about because of the race to the bottom in pensions organised and supported by the likes of the IOD/CBI and those in boardrooms with million-pound pensions.

“That is the problem – not the average public sector pension of less than £8,000 a year.”

## NIPSA gives evidence to Hutton Review

**NIPSA has submitted its response to the Government’s Independent Public Service Pensions Commission.**

The Commission was set up in June under former Cabinet minister John Hutton (pictured right), to review public service pension provision.

The review is in two stages – with phase one assessing “current provision, identifying problems and considering the objectives that should set the framework for any changes”.

The interim report on phase one is due out in late September.

Union sources claim the process appears to be slanted towards “delivering savings on public service pensions ahead of the Government’s spending review” and assessing if “there a case for more immediate action on public service pensions”.

The review team intends to move on to phase two following the publication of the interim report when further evidence will be gathered on what “alternative pension provision shall look like”.

In its evidence to the Commission, NIPSA called for an end to the attacks on public service pension provision led groups such as the Institute of Directors.

The union also slammed media reports that tended to highlight the

pension arrangements of a few highly-paid people in public service rather than the millions of low to moderately paid public servants.

The NIPSA submission can be read in full at [www.nipsa.org.uk](http://www.nipsa.org.uk), and includes details of average public sector pensions ranging from £1,600 per year for women workers in the Local Government Pension Scheme to an average Civil Service pension of £6,500 per annum.

The submission pointed out that since the major reforms of five years ago, the average contribution increase is 55% from employees, while scheme costs over the same period have risen by 33%.

It continued: “Public sector pension schemes have and are addressing the impact of the demographic changes impacting upon pension costs. The basis of that reform is built upon sustainability, affordability and transparency.

“The real pension problem in the UK is the private sector’s retreat from providing fair and reasonable occupational pensions. Over two-thirds of private sector employees have no occupational pension.

“The picture is of course dramatically different for senior executives and the Boardroom who have unjustifiable excessive ‘rhodium-plated’ pen-



sions – many in excess of £1m per annum.

“The retreat from occupational pensions is at a cost to the taxpayer having to provide means-tested top-up payments to pensioners.”

The union called on the Commission to ignore the “siren calls” against public sector pensions coming from right-wing pressure groups voiced through a media “controlled by them and wholly opposed to public services” or by those employers that had abandoned occupational pension schemes altogether.

It is understood NIPSA has consulted with other public service trade unions and engaged in discussions through the Council of Civil Service Unions and the Local Government Pension Scheme Trade Union Side to ensure that a united and strong campaign is organised to defend public service pensions.

**Further bulletins will be issued once Hutton has released his phase one findings.**



## Medical Secretaries take to the streets in row over job cuts

**NIPSA Deputy General Secretary Alison Millar has slammed Belfast Health and Social Care Trust proposals to make 50 medical secretaries redundant and downgrade a further 120 posts.**

In response to the move, the union held protests at the City Hospital in Belfast and at Trust HQ in Knockbracken earlier this month.

Ms Millar said these protests demonstrated the anger felt by medical secretaries at the “appalling decision” to “effectively downgrade their work”.

She added that despite this the Trust still expected staff to “perform the same duties they currently perform”. “This is absolutely shabby treatment of a group of predominantly female workers who this Trust believes can be easily picked off.”

But Ms Millar warned: “This is not the case and NIPSA intends to fight to save the grading and pay rates of this vital group of staff”.

NIPSA Official Tommy Brownlee also claimed two of the Trust’s medical consultants responsible for the review had refused to sign off on the proposals.

He added: “This is a clear signal to NIPSA that the consultants are not prepared to sanction the downgrading of their staff who carry out a vital role for consultants across the Trust.”

**NI council leaders’ fury over ‘cuts by email’**

**NORTHERN** Ireland council chiefs have reacted angrily after more than a million pounds worth of cuts were announced in an email sent by the Department of the Environment.

Councils were informed the department was slashing the resources element of general grant funding previously allo-

cated for the setting of district rates.

John Matthews, president of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, described it as a “shocking blow for councils” that have already set their budgets and now must find additional funds for services.

He warned: “Any proposed cuts to funds

which will have an adverse impact on services must be discussed and contingency plans put in place.

“Changes to funding should not be imposed half way through the year when the funds have already been allocated.

“We find this a very unsatisfactory position for local government.”

# Jorge's brave stand must be supported



Pictured left to right: Heather McKinstry, Mariela Kohon, Jorge Gamboa and Trevor Smyth

**AS A delegate to the 2010 annual conference, I attended a meeting organised by the Global Solidarity Committee which included a presentation given by prominent Colombian trade unionist Jorge Gamboa.**

Jorge, through an interpreter, gave a stark and disturbing account of life as a trade unionist under the current Colombian regime.

With the aid of film footage, he was able to detail a catalogue of human right abuses ranging from assassinations of trade unionists – some of whom were close friends – to incidents of torture, forced disappearances and extra judicial executions.

All of these are on the rise in Colombia.

Those attending the presentation – and unfortunately a large number of delegates did not attend – were moved by Jorge's first-hand account.

You could see the pain etched in his face as he spoke of murdered comrades whose only crime was to be active trade unionists.

Indeed, on one segment of a film shown before his presentation, we heard a leading Colombian trade unionist predict the end of his own life at the hands of the death squads.

Unfortunately this grim prediction came true when a later clip showed his lifeless body lying in a street following his execution.

Jorge will at some point return to Colombia, possibly to face similar treatment from a regime with a terrible human rights record.

He is in danger simply because of his determination to obtain better wages, health benefits and job security for the workers he represents.

It was clear that Jorge understood how important the work of the Global Solidarity Committee and the Developing World Fund are to him and his comrades.

It follows, therefore, how important it is for NIPSA members to donate whatever they can – from £1 upwards – to the fund.

According to the 2009 annual report, NIPSA has more than 46,000 members – yet only 244 contribute to the Developing World Fund.

This represents a paltry 0.06% of our membership.

Clearly more can be done and needs to be done to increase the number of donors and, in light of my own experience, I would appeal to any members reading this to seriously consider becoming a donor as quickly as possible.

I would also appeal to branch committees to get more involved in promoting the objectives of the Developing World Fund, thereby increasing the number of donors.

We as trade unionists remember those who struggled and sacrificed historically so that we could function today

as a union.

We can help those brave Colombians who despite the threat from government backed death squads continue to fight for basic human rights for those they represent.

Although I am focusing on Colombia, the Global Solidarity Committee is also involved in other worthy projects, which need support and require funds to enable the work to continue to help and assist communities across the world.

I sincerely believe that if members are made aware of the conditions that workers in many countries have to endure, they will become donors.

The Global Solidarity Newsletter is important but perhaps not as widely read as it should be.

I believe, therefore, that the best way to ensure union members receive information is by talking to members face to face – a role that all branch committees can get involved in.

I make these points in order to highlight the work of the Global Solidarity Committee and congratulate them on their achievements up to now and also in the hope that comrades like Jorge can continue to benefit from NIPSA's involvement in trying to bring about the type of freedoms we have and they deserve.

Regards,

**Tony Conlon  
(Branch 29)**

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# Barber attacks CBI 'demolition job'

**TUC general secretary Brendan Barber has dubbed a CBI call for the tightening of UK labour laws a "demolition job" on workers' rights and "a charter for exploitation".**

His comments follow a controversial CBI report 'Making Britain the Place to Work' published last month.

The report's authors urged the Con-Con Dem government to tighten further the already stringent rules over balloting for industrial action as well as slash the consultation period for collective redundancies from 90 to just 30 days.

Justifying the call, CBI deputy director-general John Cridland (pictured right), said: "Strikes cause misery... Strikes also cost the economy dearly and undermine our efforts to help rebuild the economy.

"That is why we believe the bar needs to be raised, so strike action is not possible unless 40 per cent of the workforce has actively voted to withdraw its labour."

TUC chief Brendan Barber pointed that the UK already had some of the toughest legal restrictions on the right to strike in the advanced world.

He said: "The courts regularly

strike down democratic ballots that clearly show majority support for action. The number of days lost to industrial action is historically low and less than in many other countries.

"Any further restrictions would be extremely unfair and almost certainly breach the UK's international human rights obligations.

"The new government's commitments to civil liberties are welcome, but the CBI seems to think human rights stop at the workplace door.

"And while we expect the CBI to lobby against rights at work, please spare us the hypocrisy of pretending that a cut in the period for consultation over redundancy is for the benefit of employees.

"A 30 day period does not provide unions – let alone staff unrepresented by unions – any real chance to develop alternatives or effectively negotiate changes.

"The CBI's proposals add up to a demolition job on the rights at work of their members' staff – and a charter for exploitation by unscrupulous employers.

"It looks like the CBI's backwoodsmen are back in the driving seat."



## Majority of GPs "won't offer out of hours care"

**SEVEN out of eight GPs are not planning to offer out of hours services because they don't believe they will get enough financial support from the government, according to a poll of 415 GPs run by the magazine Pulse.**

The fear is that this would mean patients who want to be treated out of hours will have to go private. Also, the GPs' stance flies in the face of the Health Secretary Andrew Lansley's plans for GPs to revert to caring for their patients out of hours when their new responsibilities kick in in April 2013.

The survey said that 54 per cent of GPs backed taking a central role in commissioning out of hours care while 38 per cent were against it.

Pulse editor Richard Hoey said: "GPs need resources to make it work and they're not going to be railroaded into a return to the bad old days of round-the-clock work."

Dr Lawrence Buckman, head of the GPs' committee of the British Medical Association, said GPs were happy to take on the added responsibilities outlined by Lansley but they did not want to get back to working unsocial hours on top of their daily tasks.

The Department of Health said: "Out-of-hours care needs urgent reform and GPs are best placed to ensure patients get the care they need, when they need it."

## ETUC rally over austerity cuts

**THE European Trade Union Confederation is organising a day of action to coincide with a meeting of European finance ministers in Brussels on September 29.**

The theme of the Euro-demo will be "No to Austerity – Priority for Jobs and Growth!" and follows moves by EU governments to slash public spending, cut jobs, pay and pensions.

Though the focus will be on Brussels, organisers have called on ETUC affiliates to hold similar actions across Europe.

## NIPSA angry over changes to outsourcing

THE government's plans to cut the cost of outsourcing public services to the private and voluntary sectors has met with resistance from unions who have said the idea is a thinly disguised attempt to reduce the living standards of low-paid workers.

Cabinet Office minister Francis Maude said the government is looking to remove guarantees that people who are newly recruited by outsourcing firms receive "no less favourable" remuneration as public servants who transfer to the private sector (though this will have no effect on the current Transfer of Undertakings [Protection of Employment] Regulations or TUPE).

Claiming that he wants to make it easier for small-to-medium-sized firms to go after public sector outsourcing contracts, Maude said the current system "distorts the market when we are trying to encourage new entrants into the outsourced market".

However, a NIPSA spokesperson said: "Having people doing the same job on different rates of pay is not a recipe for a motivated and happy workforce

"We would be opposed [to these proposals]. This is no more than an attempt to drive down the living standards for low-paid workers."

# Rape: treat the cause, not the symptom

After the rape attacks on female festival-goers this summer, platitudes are not the answer, argues Amy Nicholson

**Safety advice given to festival-goers often covers the basics. Don't leave valuables in your tent, don't let fires get out of control, don't leave camping gas cans somewhere they might explode.**

Since the despicable attacks at this month's Latitude festival, standard safety advice will seemingly also extend to, if you are a female, be afraid of enjoying yourself, moving independently or wearing clothes that reflect the gorgeous weather we were able to enjoy.

Like every July for the past five years, I was at Latitude this summer. When word filtered through of first one, then a second rape attack, I was horrified, incandescent with rage and mightily sad for the women in question. This is nothing noteworthy - everyone, both male and female, I was with responded in roughly the same way.

In fact, a particularly bilious discussion followed on the mob justice that could ensue were the perpetrator found.

And it is this emotional reaction that often ensues in private discourse, no matter what the context of the rape. Crystal Castles, who played at Latitude, stunned and shocked a certain proportion of the family-filled crowds on Saturday evening when vocalist Alice Glass urged the crowd to find and castrate the perpetrator. (The set hit the news for other reasons. Alice left the stage early, cutting short the Castles' set because she got groped by someone in the crowd. I can't decide if this is ironic or just really depressing.)

Some argued this was unhelpful, and that quite rightly a violent response to violence is never justified, no matter what the motivation. This, I would agree with, but I wish that more acts that weekend, not to mention the organisers, had followed Alice's lead, harnessed that rage reac-



tion and shouted it from every stage and platform throughout the site. No-one wants to be reminded of a brutal attack when they're on holiday, but to let it slide out of consciousness in the one forum in which any potential witnesses were to be found is a great disservice to the victims and a wider justice.

The subsequent reaction from the festival's organisers, however, was an extra sucker-punch, a further swift kick that the women who were attacked, their friends and indeed everyone at the festival didn't need. Melvin Benn of Festival Republic, organisers of Latitude, was immediately reported to be upping security and providing additional information on how to be safe to "young girls", which included staying in groups after dark and avoiding unlit areas. This, I felt, was akin to banning cars because they keep getting stolen.

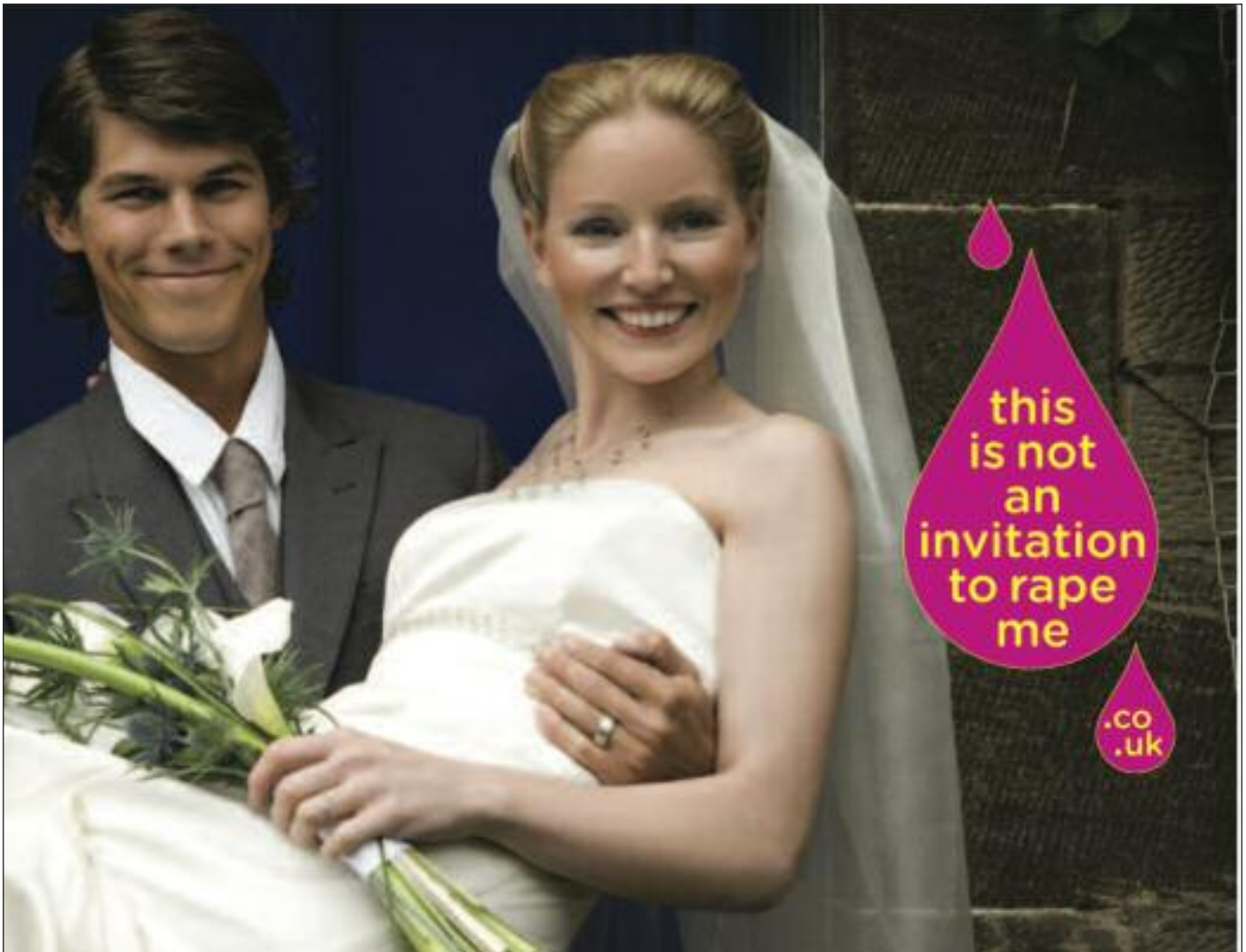
In doing so, Benn has followed the wrong path that so often happens in the light of such an attack - he has

shifted focus from the attacker, and the attack, to the victim. The implication is that had the 'girl' (the victims were 19 and 17 respectively. The use of the word girl is diminutive at best) were in some part responsible for the attack. Had they followed the soon-to-be-issued security advice, they could have avoided such a dehumanising ordeal.

## A woman's body is not a security risk

But the responsibility here is not with these women, nor the women who were similarly attacked at T in the Park earlier this month. The responsibility for the attacks lies with the men who committed them in the first place and this, as ever, remains in the shadows. With the criminally low prosecution rate for rape in this country alone, it is time to effect a cultural shift in the way that we respond in the aftermath.

Rape cannot remain as dirty a word



'This is not an invitation to rape me' campaign posters from Rape Crisis Scotland. Details of this campaign are available on the campaign website: <http://www.thisisnotaninvitationtorapeme.co.uk/>

as it is an act. It should not be something restrained from polite company. As long as it is happening, it should be in conversations taking place on every level to make it known that rape is not something to bring shame to anyone except the attacker.

It seems facetious to say that men should be told more regularly not to rape - of course it is beyond comprehension for the majority. But without greater targeting of anti-rape campaigning at men (the vast majority of perpetrators are male) we will not escape the cultural suspicion that, in a lot of cases, it was at least partly the victim's fault.

Rape victims are not to blame, and should not be held remotely accountable because of their clothes, their appearance, whatever they have chosen to imbibe. Stand up, Melvin, and say to your male festival-goers - don't rape people. Say it again. Put up posters if you have to, write a jingle and advertise it on the radio, just say it and say it again.

There is a dearth of direct education about rape for people of all ages. There is, further, a lack of education pertaining to the importance of re-

spect and trust, and the roles that these faculties play in a proper sexual relationship. This deficiency has led to a blurring of the definitions between what constitutes rape and what constitutes sex. And again and again, like throwing peas at a wall, we find ourselves returning to the problem of objectification.

Make the perpetrator, not the victim, the focus of your response.

A woman's body is not a security risk. A woman's body is not an unsecured fire, a wallet peeking out of a back pocket. A woman who wants to go to the toilet unaccompanied is not an invitation to a violent criminal, and the longer it is treated as such the more regularly attacks like this will be blamed on the victim.

I have been going to festivals since I was 14 and have had unilaterally brilliant experiences (unlike a friend of mine, who had the misfortune to be in a portaloos that got tipped at Reading) and I know that thousands of women every year continue to do so. Melvin Benn, Festival Republic, T in the Park, do not turn your attention to the women and frighten younger generations of music-lovers out of some of

the most incredible experiences of their lives. Make the perpetrator, not the victim, the focus of your response. Horrific crime may be proportionally lower per capita at a festival, but it is still abhorrent. Do not let it slip from your minds and be forgotten, dismissed as something that is almost inevitable, a simple matter of probability.

While these horrific acts can happen in the shadows and remain the topics of hushed conversation, they will continue to carry the stigma of shame. It is time for the responsibility to be put where it belongs, and the fury and rage to be directed where it should - at the rapists - at not left languishing in private conversation and out of the public forum. Learn from Alice Glass and wear your anger on the outside.

#### About the author:

Writer, editor, stand-up and feminist Amy Nicholson lives in Norwich. When she's not writing, editing, standing-up or feministing, she enjoys music, kung fu and being with her brilliant friends.

■ Article appeared in the *f word contemporary UK feminism website*: <http://www.thefword.org.uk>

## Council worker loses over breach of trust

BRINGING a claim of constructive unfair dismissal after resigning is a bold step. Often employers will try and dredge up anything they can, to undermine such a claim. But how relevant is the conduct of the employee in a constructive unfair dismissal case?

Mr Woodcock, a senior council employee, was suspended following allegations of financial irregularities. When discussing the suspension of Woodcock with colleagues, Mr McNeill disclosed allegations of sexual conduct between Woodcock and another employee — “GP”. As a result, “GP” complained that McNeill was bullying and harassing her.

McNeill was suspended and an investigation commenced. The council’s investigation exposed various additional allegations against McNeill, ranging from him having been drunk at work to having been merely uncooperative.

Almost a year later, the disciplinary process still hadn’t concluded. Unsurprisingly, McNeill therefore found that he had lost his trust and confidence in the city council — he resigned and claimed constructive unfair dismissal. The tribunal found for McNeill, but the employer appealed.

The Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) noted that, although the tribunal had found that McNeill was guilty of gross misconduct, it had not considered whether McNeill was himself in breach of the implied term of trust and confidence. The EAT also decided that the employment tribunal had downplayed the seriousness of the accusations against McNeill.

The EAT noted that where one party to an employment contract is in breach of their obligations, it cannot require the other party to honour a reciprocal term. In the view of the EAT, when McNeill resigned he was in breach of the implied term of trust and confidence. Accordingly, McNeill was not entitled to bring a claim of constructive unfair dismissal.

The situation would have been different if the employer had known about McNeill’s indiscretions all along (rather than discovering them when investigating him). If the employer had known all along, and taken no action previously, it would have been treated as having acquiesced in the breaches.

*Aberdeen City Council v McNeill*  
UKETS/0037/08

# Diabetic dismissed unfairly

**A CASE concerning a diabetic local government worker who allegedly viewed porn online shows that even seemingly hopeless challenges to disciplinary proceedings can succeed.**

At his disciplinary, Mr Dickson stated that he could not recall viewing porn online. He explained that he had probably suffered from hypoglycaemia.

The City of Edinburgh Council’s occupational health report stated that Dickson’s viewing of porn could have been caused by hypoglycaemia — although it noted that there was no evidence that that is what had occurred. Dickson also presented medical information showing that hypoglycaemia can lead to amnesia, automatism and personality changes.

However, the employer preferred the medical information it received from the HR director’s wife — a pharmacist. As a result, the disciplinary charges against Dickson were upheld and he was dismissed.

He successfully brought both unfair dismissal and disability discrimination tribunal claims, but the

employer appealed.

The Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) agreed that Dickson had been unfairly dismissed. The Edinburgh council had not properly investigated his medical condition. And the council had reached a decision — that Dickson had deliberately watched porn — which no reasonable employer could have reached.

However, the council’s appeal against the finding that Dickson had suffered disability discrimination was successful. The EAT held that there was no evidence that the disciplinary panel had been influenced by the fact that Dickson suffered from diabetes. It had dismissed him simply because it did not believe his account.

Where the health of an employee is relevant to a disciplinary dismissal (that is, not just in terms of a capability dismissal) reps should consider whether the employer has sufficiently taken into account an individual’s condition. In particular, whether it has commenced an occupational health report and accepted its findings.

## Vetting extension shelved

**Plans by the Con-Dem coalition government to scale back a vetting and barring scheme have been welcomed by groups who view elements of the law as intrusive and cumbersome.**

Home secretary Theresa May has announced that an extension to the scheme — introduced last October — to protect children and vulnerable adults was being shelved to allow it to be “remodelled”.

The last Labour government introduced vetting procedures in the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 following the high-profile abduction and murder of two girls by Ian Huntley the school caretaker in the village of Soham. The legislation was introduced after a government inquiry highlighted the failure of organisations to share informa-

tion that they held about people who posed a risk to the safety and welfare of children and vulnerable adults.

The established arrangements in the Act were due to be extended from 26 July. This was to cover voluntary registration for new employees working with vulnerable groups.

Despite the government’s decision, many of the most important provisions are already in place. In particular, employers who knowingly employ an individual who has been barred from working with vulnerable groups, face criminal sanctions.

Employers must still notify the Independent Safeguarding Authority if they move or dismiss someone due to concerns about their suitability for working with vulnerable groups of people.

# Con Dem Budget fails gender test

**A TOP THINK-TANK has claimed Chancellor George Osborne's June budget has failed the "gender equality test".**

The Women's Budget Group – an independent group bringing together academics, trade unionists and representatives from non-governmental organisations – put together an impact assessment of Mr Osborne's plan to slash public sector provision.

On the back of the appraisal, a legal challenge has been launched by the Fawcett Society.

The group – which campaigns for gender pay equality – has already filed papers with the High Court in London and is seeking a judicial review of the budget.

It is contesting that the Government has failed, as it is required to do under law, to assess whether proposals

contained in the budget would increase or reduce equality between women and men.

Meanwhile, the Northern Ireland Executive is engaged in a range of consultative meetings arising out of the budget.

NIPSA is to meet with Department of Finance and Personnel as part of this process.

A source said: "In addition to expressing our firm opposition to the UK budget measures which have a detrimental impact on the vast majority of citizens, we will be highlighting the report from the Women's Budget Group.

"We will be enquiring what, if any, steps the Northern Ireland Executive is going to take to ensure its comprehensive spending plans for the next three years does not increase gender inequality here."

## Equal pay crusade heats up

**TO MARK the 40th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has called on organisations to do more to close the pay gap between male and female employees.**

**Forty years on, the commission reports that women working full time are still being paid on average 16.4% less than men.**

**In some sectors, the pay gap is significantly higher. In the banking and finance sector, for example, women working full-time earn up to 55% less of the annual average gross salary of their male colleagues.**

**The commission's research attributes the continuing existence of the pay gap to a number of factors. These include stereotyping about women's capabilities and skills, women bearing the brunt of caring responsibilities, and discriminatory pay systems.**

**Commissioner Jean Irvine has called on employers to introduce pay systems that are both transparent and fair.**

**"Most employers should be able to measure their own pay gap, particularly those with combined payroll and human resource systems," Irvine said. "They should also be able to take steps to resolve it, including offering flexible parental leave."**

**The EHRC says that the rewards are well documented for the businesses that do link equal work to equal pay with boosts in workplace productivity and a good business reputation.**

**But Irvine warned that when the voluntary approach fails, the EHRC will use its enforcement powers to address any persistent and significant problems.**

# Cutting child poverty remains the challenge

**INCOME poverty and inequality remain a major problem in the UK, according to an official assessment at the start of the new government's term.**

The coalition government has said it will use the State of the nation report to inform future policy decisions, but the TUC has warned that the government will have its work cut out to match Labour's commitment to reducing child poverty.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said that the figures show that 100,000 children have been taken out of poverty in the last year.

"This means there are now 600,000 fewer children living in poverty than in 1996, an effort which took tremendous commitment and prioritisation by the last government," said Barber.

"It will be a tough challenge for the new coalition to match up to these reductions in child poverty."

However, the report states that severe poverty – defined as a household income lower than 40% of the median household income – has increased in recent years. Meanwhile, relative poverty – households with an income lower than 60% of the median household

income – has also increased since 1998-99 among single adults and couples without children.

In the UK today, wealth inequality is even more pronounced than income inequality. According to the latest data, the bottom third of UK households own only 3% of total wealth, while the richest fifth owns almost two-thirds (62%).

Barber called on the government to make the same commitment to end poverty for adults as for children.

"For those relying on part-time work – whether or not they have children – the risk of poverty is quite serious.

"The proportion of part-time workers in poverty has

gone up from six to nine per cent for those without children, and eight per cent for those with children."

He pointed out that with women over-represented among part-time workers, they will be left to bear the brunt of this growth in working poverty.

On some measures, social mobility also appears to have stalled in recent years. Family background is a bigger factor in determining a child's life chances in Britain than in many comparable countries.

**Women will be left to bear the brunt on this growth in working poverty**

# Asthma is not a good wheeze at work

Breathing in certain dusts, gases and vapours at the workplace can cause serious problems

**NIPSA delegates raised asthma fears at their annual conference earlier this year. We take a look at the condition in full with research supplied by the Labour Research Department.**

Asthma is a condition in which the airways of the lungs become inflamed and the airways narrow so less air gets in and out of the lungs. Symptoms include coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and shortness of breath.

Occupational asthma is caused by exposure to chemical or biological substances at work known as sensitising agents and is the most commonly reported lung disease in the UK.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) says that up to 3,000 people develop occupational asthma every year. But safety campaign groups and charities say that the numbers of workers affected are much higher. Hazards magazine for example, estimates the number of work-related asthma cases to be as many as 750,000.

A wide range of substances can cause occupational asthma (see box). And once "sensitised" to a particular substance or substances, being exposed to even tiny amounts of it will trigger an asthma attack. If exposure continues, symptoms are likely to become more severe. It can leave people so disabled that they can neither work nor enjoy everyday activities.

Beginning of panel

However, it is preventable and the law can help. Thanks to successful union campaigning, an approved code of practice on occupational asthma sets out what employers must do to prevent exposure to sensitising agents under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH).

As with other hazardous substances, employers must work through a hierarchy of controls:

- assess the risks and decide what precautions are needed;
- prevent or adequately control exposure by elimination or substitution and if this is not possible, by engineering controls, such as enclosure and extraction; and
- as a last resort, use respiratory pro-

TECTIVE equipment.

They must ensure that control measures are used and maintained, regularly monitor exposure and provide health surveillance to at risk groups.

Employers are also required to protect the health of employees who have developed occupational asthma, even though they may develop symptoms at a very low level of exposure.

Risk assessments must take into account how seriously ill workers could become if employers fail to control exposure to substances that could cause occupational asthma.

The HSE advises employers to ask four questions:

- Is there a problem?
- What are we using?
- Is there a safer alternative?
- Is there a safer way of doing the job?

Employers must have procedures for reacting to new cases of occupational asthma. If a new case is detected, they must have planned how to protect the affected worker, review their COSHH risk assessments to find out and put right what went wrong, and report the case to the health and safety enforcement authority (either the HSE or local authority).

Joint guidance produced by unions and safety experts points out that consultation with workers, safety reps and unions is essential and is a legal duty.

The guidance gives a number of reasons on the need for consultation. Firstly, health surveillance plays an important role in identifying the condition and those affected will be more at ease if their safety reps are fully involved in the process.

Secondly, unions are a good source of advice, for example on legal requirements such as data protection and disability discrimination, and identifying causative agents.

Finally, safety reps carry out workplace inspections, which include checking engineering controls, such as ventilation or personal protection equipment. They are fundamental to the risk assessment process and securing a good safety culture.

The approved code of practice and guidance is at: [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l5.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l5.pdf)

## SUBSTANCES AND JOBS

A wide range of substances can cause occupational asthma, but half of all cases are caused by the following substances:

- isocyanates (found in two-pack spray paints, for example);
- dust, such as flour dust, grain dust and wood dust;
- cutting oils and coolants;
- glutaraldehyde, a powerful disinfectant;
- natural rubber latex;
- solder and products used in some types of solder flux;
- animals; and
- resins and glues.

Some of the jobs with the highest risk of being exposed to substances causing asthma include spray painters, mechanics, workers in a car assembly plant or plastics workers exposed to isocyanates.

Workers who can be affected by dust include: bakery workers and those in food processing plants (flour dust); farm workers (grain dust); wood and building workers (wood dust); and people who work with animals exposed to dust containing proteins in either fur, feathers, urine or saliva.

Nurses, radiographers and darkroom staff can be exposed to glutaraldehyde; and medical staff, dentists and laboratory workers may be exposed to latex in rubber gloves.

Solder fumes can affect workers in the electronics and assembly industries.

Workers in a number of industries may be exposed to resins and glues.

And engineering workers can be exposed to mist or vapour generated by metal working fluids during machining and shaping operations.

# PSA warns against public-private partnerships

**PUBLIC private partnerships (PPP) for infrastructure projects could create unnecessary and expensive long term-risks, the New Zealand Public Service Association said.**

In July Finance Minister Bill English announced the new policy, saying government agencies would have to consider PPPs for projects costing more than \$25 million.

He said it wouldn't lead to privatising state assets.

PSA national secretary Richard Wagstaff said rigid long-term contracts with private providers could hamper planning around demographic and social changes and prevent timely responses to technological advances.

Private procurement options al-

ready exist, he said.

"The Government is once again presenting PPPs as a more efficient, value for money option but international evidence suggests these assumptions are wrong."

PPPs bring financial risk to the government and taxpayers and cause loss of public control over services and facilities, Mr Wagstaff said.

"Private companies are answerable to their shareholders while public services are accountable to both government and the public."

The Council of Trade Unions (CTU) said the Government could always borrow more cheaply than the private sector, so it was difficult to see why public infrastructure should be built with private funds.

## Too many fatalities on the waterfront

**WORKPLACE safety on Australia's waterfront must be overhauled to stem the mounting death toll among stevedoring workers, unions have warned.**

Three deaths and a spate of seri-

ous injuries and near misses in a little over six months is not good enough and suggests that waterfront deregulation has had a detrimental impact on safety, said Ged Kearney, the new president of national union confederation ACTU.

# Garment workers pay inhumane

**THOUSANDS of Bangladeshi workers in the ready-made garments sector, a key industry exporting to countries around the world, protested against a government announcement in July that the minimum wage would only be increased to Taka 3,000 per month instead of the 5,000 proposed by unions, and to delay implementing the increase until November.**

The International Trade Union Confederation is particularly concerned over arrest warrants issued against leaders of the Bangladesh Center for Workers Solidarity (BCWS), who are currently in hiding. The government had already cancelled the BCWS registration as an NGO in early June, confiscated its property and frozen its bank account. A BCWS staff member was subsequently de-

tained and severely beaten by security police before managing to escape. Factory owners supplying some of the biggest names in global retailing are thought to be behind the repression.

"The new minimum wage of 21 US cents per hour is not enough to live on, with workers putting in extremely long hours in difficult working conditions but still unable to make ends meet. It is an absolute disgrace that this industry, worth \$12bn a year, treats its workforce with such contempt. The government should stop the harassment of those defending the fundamental rights to a living wage and to union representation, and help push the multinational companies which control the global garment industry to ensure their workers get a fair deal," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

## Northern Cyprus repression attacked

**THE European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in a joint statement declared:**

**"We strongly protest against the arrest of 24 trade unionists on August 3 in Northern Cyprus while demonstrating against the austerity policy and the privatisation projects of the local administration.**

**"We call on the authorities to end the policy of anti-union harassment and to return to negotiations and social dialogue".**

**ETUC and ITUC express their solidarity with their affiliated organisation, TÜRK SEN, and will address the issue to the European Union.**

## BP's clean up safety claims queried

**BP monitoring figures that show even the oil clean-up workers in the riskiest jobs in the Gulf of Mexico are generally having minimal exposures to hazardous chemicals have been queried by experts.**

Eileen Senn, an occupational hygienist and long-time workplace safety official, pointed to 10 separate shortcomings in the quality of the company's data release, which OSHA said concentrated on workers with the heaviest potential exposures, including the move to sample for 11 chemicals when many more substances are potentially present in Gulf air.

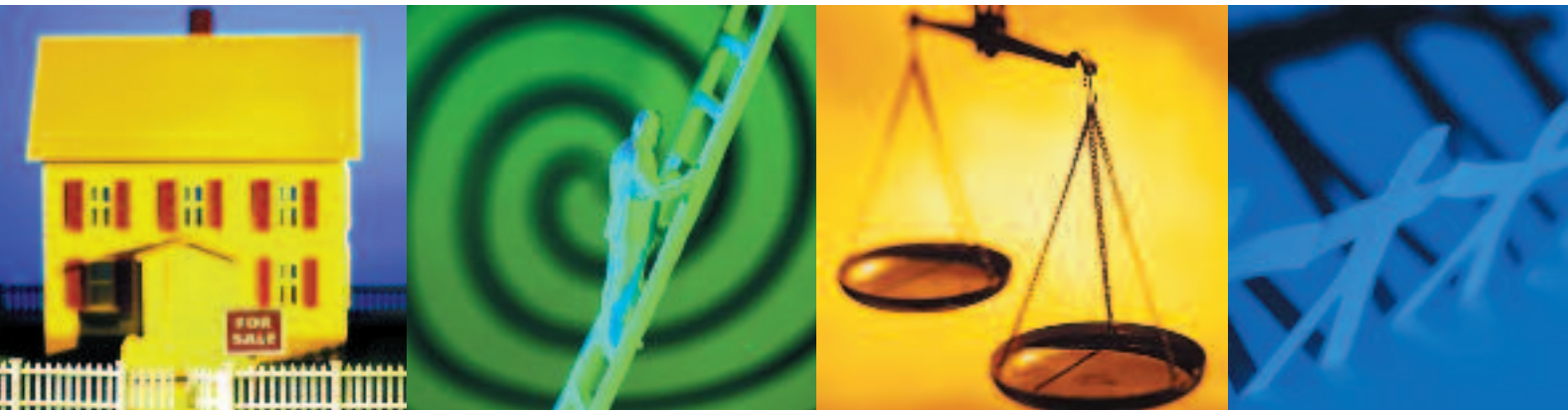
## Work death payouts increased

**CHINA'S basic work-related death compensation award is to nearly double next year to 343,500 yuan (£31,800), state authorities have announced. The State Administration of Work Safety says when funeral expenses and monthly pension payments to the relatives of the deceased are included, the total payment will average around 618,000 yuan (£57,350).**



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# Listening to Van Morrison

**Any reader hoping for a comprehensive history of the half a century of Van Morrison's career so far will be sorely disappointed by Listening to Van Morrison.**

"It becomes plain that any summing up of Morrison's work would be a fraud," writes Greil Marcus in the introduction, as firm an expression of what not to expect from his book as if he had given it the subtitle: "This is not a biography". Nor will you learn too much about Morrison himself, a performer whose temperament is infamous enough to be described as "stubborn" and "idiosyncratic" in the opening line of his Wikipedia page. This book is not, Marcus makes clear, in pursuit of what makes Morrison the musician he is, but a grateful and deeply passionate celebration of what it means to hear his music.

The format is unusual: each chapter is constructed around either a song or album from Morrison's back catalogue, often illuminated by the social and political context of the times. The book is prefaced by a brief mention of Morrison's appearance at Berkeley's Greek Theatre in California last year, where he played his definitive album, Astral Weeks, in full.

Not only does Astral Weeks get the book's longest chapter, but Marcus reveals that he has played it "more times than any other record I own; I wouldn't tell you why even if I knew". He also gives a detailed analysis of the frankly unremarkable Irish film *Breakfast on Pluto*, on the basis of the film's relationship with Astral Weeks's sixth song, "Madame George". (And this is before we get to the actual chapter about "Madame George".)

Marcus gives the finest account of this much-discussed album that I have ever read. The year in which Astral Weeks came out, 1968, scarcely needs introducing as one in which

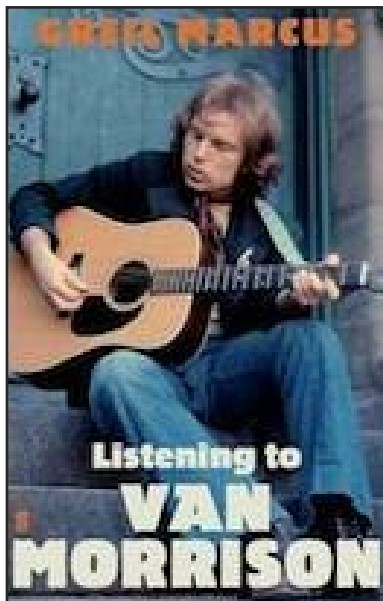
revolution – "faith, fervour and despair" – spread from Parisian streets to Olympic podiums, but Marcus makes a case for ranking the release of the album among the most notable events of that remarkable year. Somehow you are convinced that this intoxicating, mystical work was, if not quite as politically important as the black-gloved fists raised by Tommie Smith and John Carlos during the Olympics, at least on a par in terms of achievement with the record-breaking long jump by Bob Beamon.

Marcus continually returns to the subject of the "yarragh", that inimitable, guttural vocal style unique to Morrison. "The feeling is that whoever it is that is singing has not simply abandoned language, but has returned himself to a time before language, and is now groping towards it."

The yarragh, in Marcus's mind, comes from the stomach. It is the "long, happy hoyyyyy the singer shot out of the cannon of his own breath" in "Sweet Thing" – another song from Astral Weeks. Marcus also suggests, in discussing the 1972 album *Saint Dominic's Preview*, that the yarragh is an apolitical tool, a sound without words (but loaded with meaning) at a time when a Northern Irish singer could have his words misconstrued with

lethal consequences.

Marcus might play fast and loose with structure (one distracting footnote spans two pages and takes us from little-known Blues singer Mattie Mae Thomas to modern-day Greek techno), but he never rambles. To his credit, he circles his subject in eloquent detail without ever attempting to define with any finality what lies at the heart of Morrison's songwriting. In doing so, he has succeeded in creating a compelling appreciation of one of history's most remarkable, undefinable musicians.



■ Listening to Van Morrison  
■ by Greil Marcus  
■ 208pp, Faber, £12.99

## Ghost light

**THE new novel from the author of *Star of the Sea* plays with a real story: that of the Irish playwright John Synge (well-connected, Protestant, rich) and his much younger actress lover Molly Allgood (no connections, Catholic, poor).**

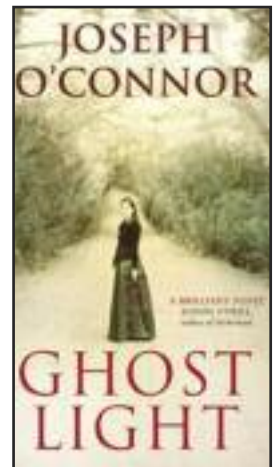
Joseph O'Connor details everything from old Moll's point of view, as she shuffles around forlorn, post-war London, remembering the brightness of her youth, when men fell at her feet, she took America by storm and Synge wrote a part for her in *The Playboy of the Western World*.

O'Connor plays out the affair with touching elegance, with bit parts for a committee-hungry Yeats and a grand Lady Gregory. In her old age, passers-by think Molly is a tramp; she smells of whisky and carries a carpet-bag, happy to sell her last letter from Synge for a fiver. But her personality remains a wellspring of joy and courtesy.

The raucous, joyous, yet terrible atmosphere of her past in Ireland is evoked with purity and precision, in telling contrast with the dreary English metropolis of the Fifties. Molly has been a victim all her life: first of the divisions that prevented her from marrying Synge; and, nearing the end, of the fading twilight surrounding her acting career, which helps turn her towards drink.

*Ghost Light* is as fine-boned and delicately wrought as a bird's skeleton, each part interlinking and making a beautiful whole. The pace is slow, but the novel comes to an acutely moving climax: a fitting end to a haunting book about the lasting importance of memory, and the absurdity of love.

■ Ghost Light  
■ by Joseph O'Connor  
■ 246pp, Harvill Secker, £16.99





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