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December 2010

Speak up or Shut up?

We reach the end of 2010, after 9 months of the new ConLib regime. These are bad times and will certainly get worse. There are Big Issues involved and they are about the kind of society we want to live in and be part of. I was struck just today by something written in 1999 by Henning Mankell (he of the popular Wallender novels) about the theme of his books - Novels about the Swedish Anxiety: "What is happening to the Swedish welfare state in the 1990s? How will democracy survive if the foundation of the welfare state is no longer intact? Is the price of Swedish democracy today too high and no longer worth paying?"

Though our concerns in the NCIA go beyond the welfare state, the point is well made. The exercise of our liberty and our commitment to voluntary, collective action is one part of the rich tapestry of a healthy human community. But equally, our welfare and public services represent a necessary, precious and proud institutional demonstration of how we respect and look after one another. Both are needed. This is why we cannot and should not separate the empty rhetoric of the Big Society Show from the dismantling of the welfare state and our institutional protections.

These issues are, of course, complicated and, as they say 'nuanced', but we need to keep reminding ourselves of the Big Picture. And beyond that we must feel free to say what we think, most especially when that involves disagreement with and dissent from Government, State and other vested interests.

This issue of speaking out is now firmly on our doorstep. The spat involving the Community Sector Coalition, reported in this issue, is a case in point. Kevin Curley from NAVCA says: "'I think there is a risk that the Community Sector Coalition will get itself associated with an anti-Big Society position and that's a risk I want to hold it back from.'" This echoes the stance of practically every so-called representative or 'leadership' organisation in the voluntary and community sector; pander to the government agenda ('helping to make the BS vision a reality', 'how to do more for less', etc. etc.), sit on your anger about the

cuts, be managerial and technocratic about it all, and hope that this will be enough to keep your Strategic Partners Grant and a 'seat at the table'. This not only does the issues - and their momentous gravity - a disservice, it also fails to represent the views of those of us who don't want our spokespeople to take this line.

And there are **loads of us** out there who think this. Another - hilarious - example will, I hope illustrate the point. Yesterday I visited the website of the Yorkshire and Humberside Voluntary Sector Forum ([Yorkshire and the Humber Forum](http://www.yorkshireandhumberforum.org.uk)) and confronted by the plethora of references to the Big Society nearly missed the button which said 'Big Society cartoons'. And here was a goldmine - the authentic voice of those who attended their Big Society conference. Have a look at what the cartoonist Fran made of the event - right on the button - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/yorkshirehumberforum/sets/72157625423809071/>

So, off we go into 2011. New Year is an occasion for renewal and resolution. Mine this year will pretty much repeat what I wrote in our newsletter at this time three years ago:

Speak plainly.... Tell the truth as you see it.... Be ready to disagree and dissent when needed.... Put power, politics and ideology back in the conversation.... Look for solidarity not consensus.... And, above all, mistrust a state that says it wants to empower us whilst stealing our liberty, our money and our common wealth. Happy New Year!

News from the Coalition

Next NCIA Assembly meeting: Putting the politics back into voluntary action

Thursday 27 January 2011, 1.30pm to 5pm

Quaker Meeting House, 10 St James Street, Sheffield S1

2EW <http://www.sheffieldquakers.org.uk/node/7>

Cuts, privatising public services, commissioning replacing grants, community groups ignored, voluntary agencies being run like businesses, managers who don't understand the front line work, nonsensical targets... If you're feeling angry, you're not alone!

At the last NCIA assembly we discussed ways in which voluntary groups, workers and community activists are responding to the cuts. Now we want to look at alternative ways to organise ourselves:

- how to tell our stories about how privatisation is killing voluntary action
- how to work with communities wanting to speak up and seek changes

- how to keep hold of our politics and values in our organisations and fight hierarchies and rigid management
- how to make trade unionism relevant for voluntary and community action

We have three speakers followed by three facilitated workshops.

Speakers: Steve Radford, The Community Union; Susi Miller, Federation for Community Development Learning; Penny Waterhouse, National Coalition for Independent Action

Workshops: Voluntary groups, public services and privatisation; Supporting activism;

Alternatives to 'managerialism' & managing for independence

Cost: There is no charge for the meeting. We'll have tea and biscuits but bring your own lunch.

Travel: We may be able to pay your travel expenses if you're coming from outside Sheffield, especially if you book in advance and get a cheap ticket. Megatrain has cheap train tickets to Sheffield from a few destinations. Go to <http://uk.megabus.com/default.aspx> and select 'all' in 'travelling by' to get trains as well as buses.

How to book: Contact Rachael or Melaina to book your place: rachael@independentaction.net; melaina@independentaction.net;

Telephone: 020 8536 3828

About the NCIA assembly: You can read more about the assembly and see notes from the last meeting on our

website: http://www.independentaction.net/?page_id=2993

Dates for the year....

We know how busy activists' diaries fill up so we've set dates for the year ahead and they are:

Assembly meetings - afternoons

- 27th January - Sheffield
- 5th May - London
- 2nd August - the South West
- 3rd November - London

Planning Group - afternoons and in London, unless otherwise notified

- 7th February
- 5th April
- 8th June
- 1st September
- 21st November

Organising, mobilising, and keeping on keeping on

Cats amongst pigeons at the Community Sector Coalition (CSC)

An open meeting on the 7th December to discuss the Big Society Show, convened by the CSC seems to have raised a few hackles. For the meeting had the temerity to be openly critical of the government's motives and intentions, and even discussed the need to resist them! About 30 groups were there, including some members of the CSC (including us). The meeting was written up in Third Sector, which - rather mischievously - drew attention to the fact that national agencies NAVCA and Community Matters are members of CSC. This prompted both to distance themselves from the meeting and its anti-BSS stance. Kevin Curley from NAVCA wrote a letter of complaint to CSC, was extensively quoted on the Civil Society website, and even given a right of reply by Third Sector to comment on a meeting that he wasn't at.

"NAVCA and its members are pragmatists...We have approached the big society with an open mind", says Kevin and comments to Third Sector: "I think there is a risk that the Community Sector Coalition will get itself associated with an anti-big society position and that's a risk I want to hold it back from."

Matthew Scott, director of the CSC, told Third Sector: "This was not a formal statement of CSC's position. Our purpose is to allow a range of voices to be heard."

For us over here at NCIA the last word goes to John Plummer, the Third Sector journalist who put the moggies in with the ferals, who writes of the meeting in his blog: "Many voluntary sector conferences can be a bit sterile and formulaic. This one, organised by the Community Sector Coalition, was passionate and anarchic. It was probably the last conference I will attend in 2010 and it was certainly the most fun. It was also, without doubt, the most representative of the majority of people who work and volunteer in the third sector." Quite so.

You can catch the original Third Sector piece

here: <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/News/DailyBulletin/1045683/Community-groups-meet-discuss-opposition-big-society/OE35CD8881CC911C7189DBDCFD4F883B/?DCMP=EMC-CONDailyBulletin>

Kevin's complaint

here: <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/Article/1046258/Navca-distances-itself-criticism-big-society/>

And John's blog comment

here: <http://community.thirdsector.co.uk/blogs/thirdsector/archive/2010/12/09/big-society-conference-has-a-whiff-of-civil-disobedience-about-it.aspx>

Spending cuts will break Big Society, warns nef

A new report from think tank new economics foundation, says that spending cuts will break the Big Society idea. "What we are seeing here is the end of the post war settlement", said Anna Coote, from nef. "The Big Society shifts responsibility away from democratic government to self-help, mutual aid, philanthropy, local enterprise and big business. The cuts mean there is a much heavier responsibility for dealing with more acute poverty, unemployment, distress and social conflict. It is madness to imagine that in these conditions civil society can fill the gaps left by a retreating state."

You can download the report 'Cutting It: The Big Society and the new austerity' here: <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/cutting-it>

Wish it had been us!

Nice story on highjacking Transport for London's 'Together for London' poster campaign. Spoof stickers have been appearing which promise 'I won't confront the state' and 'I won't dissent'. If anyone knows where we can get hold of these, let us know as we can put them to good use... You can see them here:

<http://www.channel4.com/news/transport-for-london-ad-campaign-spoofed>

Anti-poverty activists target A4e

Supporters of Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty invaded A4e's Edinburgh office on 15th December to distribute leaflets urging the unemployed people attending the Flexible New Deal provider to stand up for their rights. The action - organised as part of the Britain-wide Day of Action against Welfare Cuts - was a response to A4e's refusal to accept claimant's wishes to have ECAP represent them in meetings with A4e staff.

A4e are recommending to the DWP that unemployed people who insist on being represented by ECAP have their benefits stopped. An ECAP spokesperson said: "We have won the right to accompany claimants at the Jobcentre and New Deal providers JHP and Ingeus, and we also accompany claimants at the Council and at ATOS healthcare - we can't let A4e get away with their dictatorial attitudes. We invite people to join our solidarity phone tree and get involved." You can see where they've got to here: www.edinburghagainstopoverty.org.uk

Big Society partnership? – Directory of Social Change hits the spot

In a telling spoof, the Directory of Social Change recently responded to the Government's 'call to action', highlighting some of the holes in the perspective and approach. Have a good laugh here:

<http://www.dsc.org.uk/NewsandInformation/News/DearHMGovernmentssomefeedbackonyourBigSocietyapplication>

'In Defence of Youth Work' comes out for youth resistance

The 'In Defence of Youth Work' network has posted a statement of support for the recent displays of opposition to cuts in education. This calls on youth and community workers to do everything they can to build a social movement, which seeks to defend and extend, amongst many other things, a democratic and emancipatory youth work practice.

Further signatures, comments and criticisms welcomed. You can sign up here: <http://www.indefenceofyouthwork.org.uk/wordpress/>

New black activist network to fight the cuts

Black Activist Rising Against the Cuts (BARAC) is a new coalition of black trade unionist, voluntary sector groups/service users and community organisations, including the Afiya Trust, 1990 Trust and Operation Black Vote, combined with PCS and Unison Black members. The aim is to create a broad black community based platform for those opposed to the cuts. You can check them out and egg them on here: www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=108132359239521&ref=ts

Kinship carers demand parity with foster carers

An independent association has formed to campaign for better rights and entitlements for kinship carers and their children. The National Association of Kinship Carers (NAKC) demands:

- recognition by statutory agencies of the particular role and impact of kinship carers
- Comprehensive and accessible free legal information for kinship carers
- All necessary support for children's behavioural difficulties and educational needs
- Rights to financial assistance on a par with payments to foster carers
- Social, emotional support and health care for kinship carers
- Changes in social attitudes and political responses to and on behalf of kinship carers

More information from Julian Wootton - 0208 445 4819 or email: jsculpt@dialstart.net or nakinshipcarers@gmail.com

Our fracturing society: Clobberings, cuts, and closures

The gloves are coming off and the pace of shredding jobs, services, even whole organisations is accelerating. It is no longer possible to keep up with the cuts as they are announced around the country but here are some sites that are trying, two of whom are also committed to fighting back:

- The False Economy - <http://falseeconomy.org.uk/cuts/uk/all/t1>
- NCVO's, 'Crowdsourcing the Cuts' - <http://bit.ly/bI9esi>
- Coalition of Resistance - <http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk/>

This week also saw the local government funding announcements for the next two years. If you want to know how much your council is being cut you can check it out here:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/xls/1796201.xls>

Here are some examples that will give you a flavour of what's going on around the country....

On the advice front.....

Immigration advice group keeps up the pressure

Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit will not say die in its struggle with the Legal Services Commission. The Unit had its legal aid funding cut by 70% and has mounted a vigorous campaign to get it back. They have won permission to take the LSC to judicial review, scheduled to be heard in January. They are now trying to force the LSC to reverse the decision rather than pay out the costs of the court proceedings, which will be considerable. If you want to help them put a shoulder to the wheel then get more information and sign up from <http://www.gmiau.org/update-ongoing-campaign-restore-funding-gmiau-031110>

Government proposes £350M cut in Legal Aid

The broader context for GMIAU's struggle is the proposal from the Ministry of Justice to slash £350m (about 33%) from the legal aid budget. This will decimate an already under-funded independent advice sector, whose role is vital in helping people assert their rights and access their entitlements. A campaign has been set up to oppose these cuts, supported by the Law Centres Federation, Unite and many others. You can check them out at the Justice For All campaign - <http://www.justice-for-all.org.uk> and there is a Facebook site - <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Justice-for-All/109923889070414?ref=nf>

Advice agencies hit as part of London Councils cashback scheme

Advice agencies, especially those working with BME communities will be hard hit as a result of a London Councils' decision to hand its grants budget back to individual boroughs. In all, more than 200 voluntary organisations in the capital are now facing funding cuts totalling up to £16.5m over two years. The money handed back to local councils will not be ring fenced, so they can spend it as they like. The decision, recommended by London Councils' grants committee last month, was rubber-stamped by its leaders committee despite a vigorous campaign by voluntary groups, including protests outside the meeting. In a statement, the [London Voluntary Service Council](#) and the [Voluntary Sector](#)

[Forum](#) described the cuts as "disproportionate" and called for repatriated funds to be ring-fenced for voluntary sector projects.

AdviceUK vows to campaign

AdviceUK, the second tier support agency for the advice sector has made it a priority to campaign for local authorities to protect community advice provision and for the Government to preserve its funding of social welfare advice under legal aid. A survey of AdviceUK members commenced in the summer had found that 41% had been cut already and 58% expected cuts to be made to next years funding. 71% were subject to a review of voluntary sector or advice funding.

"We intend to work with other organisations, members, networks and the general public to form a united coalition", so they say. A key strategy will be bringing the effects of the cuts to the attention of local MPs and councillors. Find out more here: <http://www.adviceuk.org.uk/news-and-campaigns/campaigns/cuts>

Southwark Council tells voluntary groups 'get ready for 25% less'

Groups in South London have been told to prepare for funding cuts of at least 25 per cent.

The Labour council, which currently spends £35m on the voluntary sector, expects to have to reduce its overall budget by £80m over four years. Peter John, the leader of the council, has written to not-for-profit organisations saying: "Our advice to you at this stage is that you begin early planning for reductions of at least 10 to 15 per cent in 2011/12 and a total of at least 25 per cent over the next three years."

In a dramatically underwhelming statement, a spokesperson for [Community Action Southwark](#), the local CVS, said it needed to know more about the impact of the cuts before commenting. Groups in the area should perhaps not expect too challenging a response from their local sector 'representatives'.

Gloomy predictions from Yorkshire and Humberside

A survey in Yorkshire and Humberside revealed that 63% of voluntary organisations in the region who responded (70 of them) expect to cut staff numbers in the next three months and 70% expect their financial situation to worsen over the year. The survey was conducted by the [Yorkshire and the Humber Forum](#), the regional voluntary sector network. "We've carried out this survey every three months, and it has got worse over that time", said Alison Haskins, deputy director of the forum. "Another major finding was that 48 per cent of respondents expect the public sector to have a negative effect on their organisations, compared with only 14 per cent nine months ago. This is likely to be the effect of impending cuts."

Voluntary youth services decimated by cuts

More than two-thirds of voluntary and community organisations working in the youth sector have seen their funding cut in the past year, according to a report by the [National Council for Voluntary Youth Services](#). Nearly 70 per cent of the 135 organisations surveyed in September for the [Comprehensive Cuts](#) report said they had experienced funding reductions over the past year. Significantly, more than 80 per cent of those surveyed said that, because of cuts or anticipated reductions, they would be ending whole programmes. The NCVYS found that of the organisations that have suffered cuts, the majority were facing a loss of more than 20 per cent of their funding. The report says that the majority of these cuts have come from local authorities.

Susanne Rauprich, chief executive of NCVYS, said: "A wide range of respondents to the survey painted a picture of a sector that is clearly preparing for the worst. Cutting youth services now is risking the loss of vital support to the most vulnerable at a time when it matters greatly. Big visions like the big society need small investments."

This month's 'That Takes The Biscuit' award goes to.... COMPACT VOICE

Not a stranger to our little award, Compact Voice this month gets the Huntley & Palmers again. This time because they are the living testament that cuts in state funding are by no means inevitable when your face fits with the right people.

Compact Voice's funding settlement has been agreed with the Office for Civil Society for the next four years. This year they got £307,000. Next year it will be a whopping 14% more and comes in at £350,000. Thereafter £358,000, 368,000, £378,000. Nice work if you can get it.....

The madness continues.....

Now you see it, now you don't

Another recent neat example of Government-speaks-with-forked-tongue. A few weeks back the Office for Civil Society issued a report to local authorities and government departments ('Exposure of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector to cuts in public funding') warning them "not to cut funding to the voluntary sector first as an easy option" and David Cameron was on his feet in the House of Commons mouthing the same sentiments. The report says that such cuts would "risk a disproportionate impact on the sector, threatening the services the sector provides for some of the most vulnerable in our communities, and potentially slowing progress towards the vision of a stronger civil society".

But on the 9th December, Cameron's next door neighbour, George Osborne told an audience that the government should not ring-fence funding for the voluntary sector because doing so would hinder its ability to pay off the budget deficit. Osborne said: "We've tried to protect the voluntary sector, but I don't think you can ring-fence it," he said. "You can't ring-fence everything because you'll never eliminate the deficit if you do."

Presumably this leaves public authorities with "the easy option" of cutting voluntary sector funding whilst asserting that it was a 'very difficult decision'. That would seem to square the circle nicely.

And evidence of all these 'difficult decisions' emerges in an almost continuous stream. For example a survey published by the Charity Finance Directors' Group and Institute of Fundraising ('Managing in a downturn') shows that 93% of the 256 charities who replied had already experienced a reduction in real income levels from statutory sources in the 12 months to August and almost 40% per cent of respondents said they had seen an increase in demand for their services as a result of the recession. Respondents are expecting average cuts of 8 per cent over the next year - equating to a £1.2bn reduction.

Building a stronger civil society – the grand plan

The real poverty of perspective is revealed in the government consultation document 'Building a Stronger Civil Society: a strategy for voluntary and community groups, charities and social enterprises'. To call this a strategy is an exaggerated claim. There is plenty of cheap rhetoric (e.g. "The Big Society agenda is not a Government programme; it is a call to action"). Beyond that, it reads much like a New Labour production - 'empowering communities'; 'opening up public services'; and 'promoting social action' leavened, of course, with some 'real world' perspectives on slashed public spending.

The new 'freedoms' trumpeted by the document are likely to be illusory (reforms to the planning system, for example) or merely pass the aggravation of spending cuts down to local level ('freeing up local funding' for example). The approach involves stealing other people's clothes (citizen action supposedly rooted in the work or writings of Alinsky or Freire) and emasculating progressive traditions (co-ops and mutuals morphed into social enterprises). If this is the best that can be said for the Big Society plan..... You can digest the whole thing in 10 minutes of your time here: <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/default/files/building-stronger-civil-society1.pdf> and leave plenty of room for your Christmas dinner.

When libertarian left meets libertarian right....

One of the headbangers about responding to the current environment is that every now and then the Government's spokespeople come out with something that you think you agree with and then you think 'hang on that's not quite right'...

So it was with Big Society Show adviser Lord Nat Wei. In his recent Lord's speech he said amongst other things that:

- Some charities are "overly competitive, bureaucratic and unresponsive"
- Others had become ""non-critical arms of government, either deliberately or unwittingly, through strings that come attached to contracts" and of "corroding individual responsibility, rather than helping to release people to become active citizens"
- And the previous Labour government had "led thousands of charities up the garden path" by making them "so dependent on state funding that they are now over-exposed".

Can't argue with that and pretty much a word-perfect NCIA line. But hang on, isn't the government talking up charities as public services providers, encouraging 'contestability', revising its commissioning protocols, awarding contracts to the very organisations likely to remain 'non-critical arms' of government policy and, as far as the rest of the scene is concerned, effectively saying 'make your own arrangements for looking after the sick, the poor and the dispossessed and don't bother us?'

Thin end of the wedge for TUPE regulations in the race to the bottom

The Cabinet Office has abolished regulations that say charities taking over public services from councils should give new staff equivalent employment conditions to staff that have transferred from a local authority. This is seen as the first step towards abandoning the TUPE regulations that protect staff conditions in such transfer situations. Francis Maude, Minister for the Cabinet Office, said: "The code did little to protect staff, while deterring responsible employers from delivering public service contracts. We should not be making it more difficult for small businesses and voluntary organisations to succeed in the public service market."

Shamefully, the decision was welcomed by ACEVO, the charity chief executives club, who think it doesn't go far enough. Now they are pressing for charities taking over public services to be able to strip transferring staff of their pension entitlements.

Commissioning trundles on despite the evidence (and the Compact breach)

The Office for Civil Society has issued a green paper called 'Modernising Commissioning' which 'consults' on proposals to move to payment by results, setting targets for service delivery by independent providers, streamlining the procurement process and giving voluntary organisations a new 'right to challenge' local authorities when they think they can provide better services. The green paper itself breaches Compact principles by giving less than a month

(and including Xmas and New Year) for responses and in a great display of gobbledygook says of this: "This falls outside of the Compact but the shorter timeframe will be mitigated by more targeted engagement." Eh?

If you're short of Xmas reading (and that sad) you can get the paper

here:<http://download.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/green-paper/commissioning-green-paper.pdf>

Meanwhile, private sector consultant John Seddon lines up with others to dish the principles and practice of commissioning as we know it. For example, talking of the fashion for mergers and bigger-is-better he said to the Health Select Committee: "Most of the Ministers concerned with the public sector believe in bigger is better, that we should, for example, share services, share front offices and back offices and these kinds of things which have IT-led change. The greatest example of this failure at the moment is HMRC. I think the numbers are that something like 1.7 million people have paid too much, more than 4 million people have paid too little and 17 million people they are not sure about, which must be most of the people on PAYE."

New Compact on the skids

In the culmination to an on-off-on-off farce that was less resonant of Whitehall and more of the Whitehall Theatre, the new Compact finally appeared in the middle of December. Having set a Compact-breaching deadline for the consultation ("to protect voluntary organisations from badly managed funding cuts caused by the comprehensive spending review..." (sic)), the government then failed to publish its proposals in time to be considered, and then was late publishing the final version. Which - not to our surprise - fails to address the shortcomings of the previous 'refresh' exercise. Once again, there is a primary focus on voluntary agency contractual relationships in privatisation programmes and continued neglect of the 800,000 community groups that form the backbone of voluntary action. You can catch the dismal culprit

here:http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_compact_with_page_numbers.pdf

Once again the famous faces are wheeled out to offer their warm support - here they

are:http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/statement_of_support_from_leading_sector_organisations_2.pdf

though Debra Alcock-Tyler from Directory of Social Change is notable by her absence this time (well done Debra, if indeed you have done anything).

And once again we (NCIA) have criticised the whole entertainment: "This exercise is another example of a flawed, technocratic approach to understanding the relationship between voluntary action and the State.

It ignores the vast bulk of sector and its current activity, and it ignores the political context within which the debate is being conducted, that is, massive,

regressive, unjustified, cuts in public expenditure, increasing pressures on vulnerable populations and communities, and the dismantling of the welfare state."

BASSAC and DTA get into bed together

Old timers in the voluntary sector will be dismayed to see the merger of the British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres with the Development Trust Association. Despite the tiresome spin of their press release ("Members are clear that the merger will put them at the forefront of shaping public policy to tackle the major social challenges of today and tomorrow."), this move represents a shift towards the thrusting pseudo-business world of social enterprise. Settlements have a long tradition of social action stretched back to the 19th Century and their association, previously the British Association of Settlements, a good record of outspoken and non-conformist campaigning. May it rest in peace. The new organisation will be headed up by Steve Wyler, erstwhile director of the DTA (salary £73,000 a year).

Government's favoured friends begin to emerge

The scramble for government contracts to 'realise the vision of the Big Society' and 'be at the heart of the Big Society agenda' has thrown up its first winners. Six organisations have been selected to administer the bulk of grant funds from the Office of Civil Society for the next four years. They are the Big Lottery Fund, the Community Development Foundation, the volunteering agency 'v', the Social Investment Business, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Tribal Education. These could be asked to deliver one or more of the programmes, or none. These will include the £100m Transition Fund, the Communities First fund (successor to the Grassroots Grants scheme set up by New Labour) a new endowment fund. The OCS has not yet specified how much these funds will be worth, to whom they will be available or what the funding criteria will be. The six will also be able to bid competitively with each other to administer funds from other government departments. Sounds like great collaboration.

Meanwhile, 12 organisations will divi-up £15M to run pilot schemes for the National Citizen Service. The largest amount - £4.2M - went to The Challenge Network, a charity created with the help of its big society adviser, Lord Wei. Labour criticized this decision saying it raised "serious ethics and transparency questions". Next largest amount - £2.1M - went to Catch 22, the young people's charity.

Whilst, the most favoured friend of all, the Big Society Network, co-founded by government advisor Lord Wei and launched by David Cameron, is to form a charity called [the Society Network](#), alongside a trading arm Big Society Network Ltd, part funded by the Big Lottery Fund and NESTA.

Events, reports, actions

Beyond Resistance Teach-in – Saturday 15th January

Explore the issues in A World to Win's booklet 'Beyond Resistance: fight the cuts and build People's Assemblies'. Saturday 15 January 1.30-5.30pm in Room 416 Birkbeck College, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX.

Register to book a place

here: <http://www.aworldtowin.net/about/eventPA15Jan2011.html>

And download Beyond Resistance free here:

(<http://www.aworldtowin.net/about/BeyondResistance.html>)

'Building Alliances, Defending Services' - Social Work Action Network conference April 15-16, Birmingham

Working with the 'In Defence of Youth Work' network, SWAN is mounting a national conference 'Building Alliances, Defending Services'. Presentations are invited for seminars and workshops on the theme of building alliances and defending services or related topics. To submit a proposal (deadline 17th January 2011) or for more information about the conference please email: swanconference2011@gmail.com

The Glasgow Papers: Community Empowerment

Our radical friends in Scotland have produced yet another challenging group of articles focused on community empowerment. The papers aim to "highlight different perspectives that examine how collective decision-making and action can be used either to strengthen or undermine social justice claims for marginalised groups. In doing so, we wish to present this volume as a contribution to critical debate about the role and effectiveness of community development in contested contexts."

You can download the articles here: [The Glasgow Papers : Community Empowerment](#)

About this Newsletter

This newsletter is the voice of the NCIA. Views expressed are not necessarily that of everyone involved with NCIA. We aim to issue newsletters regularly to keep you informed of what we and others are doing or saying.

How Can You Participate?

Tell us your news, write articles, sound off with your opinions and feedback but - most important - find ways of taking your own practical action to defend and protect the independence of your work and aspirations.

Talk to us and others via the Coalition website www.independentaction.net or the Coalition email address -indyaction@yahoo.co.uk .

We also welcome offers of help. If you'd like to help make this initiative prosper then please get in touch with us.