

We're not an arm of the state – we have our own arms

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Newsletter No: 26

April 2012

Charities Fight Back!

This was the headline I noticed in yesterday's Metro and this morning the Today programme is full of reports of how 'charity executives' are up in arms about the £50,000 tax relief limit on charitable donations - and how Cameron is back-peddalling on the proposal. So it is possible to object forcibly to Government policy and get a result?

Last month saw the enactment of the Welfare Reform Act (9th March) and the Health and Social Care Act (20th March). The first will further impoverish the lives of hundreds of thousands of the poorest people in the land. The second will begin the wholesale dismantling and privatisation of the NHS. Whilst simultaneously the number of academy schools passes the halfway mark - that's half of our schools outside of democratic control.

Where were the 'charity executives' when these measures were being proposed?

News and events

Money available to work with us!

NCIA has £2,000 available for projects to link us with others (events, training, policy work, other ideas of your own...). But the deadline is quick - next week April 16th, but we only need a couple of paragraphs from you! So please get a wiggle on....

NCIA would like to take its arguments about the effects of privatisation on the voluntary sector to as wide an audience as possible. It would also like to create working alliances with other organisations/groups/movements and do joint

projects with them in their own spaces. To make this happen, we have set aside a fund of £2,000. This could fund one large project or several smaller ones.

See <http://bit.ly/I3pDDr> for more information.

'Drive to the Market – the marketisation of youth and community work' – 26th and 27th April

In alliance with the 'In Defence of Youth Work' campaign, we are helping to mount two events to look critically at the implications and contradictions of the marketisation of youth and community work and the wider voluntary sector as a whole. The aim is to help us all to get our own heads around what's going on, to give people and organisations a chance to share experiences of what is happening and how they are dealing with the new policy landscape.

Both events will run from 11am - 4pm. The first will be on April 26th in London at Garden Halls, Cartwright Gardens, WC1H 9EF. The second will be on April 27th in Manchester at Greater Manchester Council for Voluntary Organisation's St Thomas Conference Centre, Ardwick Green (close to the city centre and Piccadilly rail station).

Both seminars will be free though we'll welcome donations towards refreshments (but bring your own lunch, this is not ACEVO!) More information on the background is on our website (www.independentaction.net). To book a place and get more info on the events themselves contact Tony Taylor on tonymtaylor@gmail.com

Growing People Power - Grassroots 2012 – 26th May 11.30 – 5.30

Grassroots 2012 is an event jointly organised by trade unionists and community activist organisations committed to tackling the big challenges we face right now. This year's gathering will focus on three areas:

- Rise up! Building support - How we campaign effectively on issues.
- 2, 4, 6, 8: How will people congregate - How can we build membership organisations that engage?
- Reaching Out - How do we communicate our messages effectively?

For each theme there will be three speakers with 20 minutes to put forward their idea and demonstrate its practical use. After the ideas, there is a networking session to allow all participants to discuss what they've heard and share experiences.

NCIA is hoping to have a presence at the conference. Find out more and sign up for the day here - <http://grassrootsuk.org/>

The evidence builds....

The marketisation of charities in England and Wales

A new paper from the Third Sector Research Centre looks at the impact of marketisation on charities annual returns between 2002-2008. It analyses the proportion of revenue attracted through commercial sources (fees for goods and services; and surplus generated from subsidiary trading operations), and voluntary income (grant and private donations).

The results showed that charities' commercial revenue has increased relative to other income sources in England and Wales, across almost all fields of activity. Charities are increasingly dependent on commercial revenue, and this is a substitute for grants and donations. That is, as grants and donations fall, commercial revenue rises. This shows that charities in England and Wales are succumbing to market forces, albeit to a small extent. The paper concludes that "...charities should give careful consideration as to whether to develop commercial revenue streams. These may not be as stable as has previously been assumed, and it remains unclear what the longer term effect will be on grants and donations."

You can unpick this one here - <http://bit.ly/HuulQl>

Research Centre calls for a 'national debate'

A new paper from the Third Sector Research Centre argues that "the 'settlement' between the third sector and the state is being unsettled" and "there is precious little discussion of what the sector is becoming, or what role it should play through and beyond the contemporary politics of austerity..... Caught like a rabbits in headlights, there appears to be no sustained sector-wide debate about the potential transformations underway". The paper then goes on, puzzlingly, to focus on the role of leadership in the sector (why is everybody so obsessed with leadership?) and urges the 'leadership organisations' (ACEVO, NAVCA etc.) to get into "strategic narrative".

You can sort this one out for yourself here - <http://bit.ly/IxHatg>

One in five local authorities ignoring equality legislation, claims new campaign

A new campaign has been launched on the back of responses to a Freedom of Information Act request, which suggested that one in five local authorities is failing in its equality duty to black and minority ethnic (BME) communities when planning cuts.

Led by The Afiya Trust, and supported by Carers UK, the Living in the Margins campaign's provisional findings are based on the responses of 118 local authorities. A key driver was to establish how many adult social services departments conducted Equality Impact Assessments as part of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

Patrick Vernon, from the Afiya Trust said: ""There is clear evidence that many local authorities are not delivering on their legal requirement.....This comes at a time when BME communities are experiencing one of the largest increases in health inequalities and one of the largest reductions in social mobility since the 1940s. Yet, from our initial findings, they are bearing a significant brunt of the cuts."

Read the sorry tale here - <http://livinginthemargins.org/>

New book defends the public sector

'Public Service on the Brink' is a new anthology of essays which mounts a robust defence of the concept and practice of public service. The authors question the ill-conceived assumptions behind the endless programmes of reform imposed by successive governments. "After a long period of denigration of the public sector, here is the voice that has not been heard clearly through these decades of reorganisation". The contributors "share an allegiance to the value and purpose of working for the common good and an enthusiasm for getting things right and for the opportunity to recount their experience through this book." Looks good to me.

You can snap up this cheering bedtime reading here - www.imprint-academic.com

Heros, heroines, & keeping on keeping on

NEW TUC local organisers

The TUC has just employed workers in some key marginal constituencies to engage trade unionists, activists and the voluntary and community sectors in local campaigns. If you're based in the Black Country, Lancashire or North West London, get in touch and help point your organiser towards the real 'big society' in your area...

Contact Carl Roper, National Organiser on cropper@tuc.org.uk

NatCAN conference – 23rd February – Preston

The report from the lively NatCAN conference at the end of February is up on their website and as a PDF. It is still open for comments and input. Those who attended the various conference workshops might like to add further details but anyone else is welcome to put in their threehappence worth.

You can clock it here - <http://nationalcan.ning.com/forum/topics/the-conference-report>

Tate Soundscape Hijacked by Artists

BP's environmental record is appalling yet many people are prepared to turn a blind eye to the fact that Tate is in bed with BP, one of the 'ten worst corporations' based on its environmental and human rights record.

A new series of artworks questioning Tate's relationship with BP has been commissioned by three activist organisations Platform, Art Not Oil and Liberate Tate. Cheekily entitled 'The Tate ã Tate Audio Tour' these new works are designed to be listened to inside Tate Modern, Tate Britain and on Tate Boat, (the riverboat crossing between the two buildings) and there is a soundscape for each of the three. You can download them onto your smart phone or and MP3 player. Check it out here - <http://tateatate.org/>

Surrey Council unlawful over library cuts

And in an example of the flouting of the equalities duties, the High Court judge has ruled that Surrey Council Council's decision to replace all paid staff with volunteers at 10 community libraries was unlawful. Not that it seems to have much impact on the Council as a spokesperson was quoted as saying: "There is nothing in today's ruling that suggests we can't go ahead with the plans. It is based on a technicality, which is that when the councillors made the decision they did not have an equalities impact assessment in front of them, and they should have." Bit of work to do there then.

Justice for All still banging on

The campaign to reverse the cuts plans for Legal Aid has harnessed opposition to the bill in the House of Lords and the Government has suffered a number of reversals as a result, including a vote to keep legal aid for children under 18, and protection for people with disabilities and victims of domestic violence. The ping pong between the Lords and the Commons will continue when MPs return from their holidays on 17th April. If opponents can drag the whole thing into May, then the bill might fall altogether as they reach the end of the parliamentary session. Well, good riddance to that one!

Get the up to date situation here - <http://www.justice-for-all.org.uk/>

Community Sector Coalition "alive and well".... Just out of sight

Following the end of its funding last year, the CSC has had its head down. And now it has been dropped by the Government's DCLG Partnership Board. Undeterred, a spokesperson for the Coalition said that a meeting of the network will be convened in the summer. Of the removal from the Partnership Board, he said: "We have significant reach and credibility within the grassroots, and will not be deterred by exclusion from elite forums (which so often are only accessible to organisations which maintain dubious credibility with Government by not raising their grassroots members' struggles)"

No Borders Convergence targets immigration regime

A six day No Borders Convergence in the middle of February saw activists causing a ruckus at various border regime targets around London. The week kicked off with three days of discussions and workshops about all things border-related. Then Thursday and Friday were scheduled days of action, but over forty eager activists, unwilling to wait 'til the end of the week blockaded Harmondsworth and Colnbrook detention centres on Tuesday.

Barnardo's got the treatment on Friday which saw a noise demonstration outside their HQ in North-East London. Barnardos, the cheery children's charity, have been involved in providing 'welfare' at the new 'family removal centre' at Pease Pottage, south of Gatwick. Several people entered the offices in an attempt to get a formal response from the CEO about Barnardo's involvement in child detention. This was refused, but finally three people were granted permission for an interview, provided the others leave. Then Barnardo's quickly changed their tune and had police drag the three out of the building as soon as the others left. Barnardo's staff then left the building by a back exit.

You can read the whole story here - <http://bit.ly/Iwsnu6>

What has the council ever done for us?

In an innovative move that could usefully be copied elsewhere, the People's Republic of Southwark, a local activist network, has started work on a 'mid term review project' of the Council's performance, to "highlight the council's achievements and failures over the last two years." The call is out for evidence and residents are invited to send in their views. Worth a look -

<http://www.peoplesrepublicofsouthwark.co.uk/>

This month's 'That Takes the Biscuit' Award goes to:

Emma Harrison for Profitable Plundering of the Public Purse

A light has been shined on Emma Harrison, the ex-Chair of welfare to work company A4E and ex-'Family Tsar' to reveal her considerable ability to profit from taxpayers money, whilst A4E itself is investigated for fraud. According the Guardian, in addition to her £365,000 salary Emma managed to squeeze out a personal dividend of £8.6M (yes £8.6M), plus £316k for A4E's use of her family stately home, plus £1.4M for leasing out 2 other properties to the firm. Emma's career as a close mate of David Cameron may be at an end, but at least she can stay home and count her money.

Cuts, clobberings & continued chaos

Advocacy Alliance bites the dust

Another casualty of the 'clash of the titans' in the advocacy world is the Advocacy Alliance which has been supporting people with learning disabilities in Bedford, Luton and Northampton for nearly 20 years. After being cut by £171k, the group then faced the ordeal of a re-tendering exercise for its remaining sources of income. Which it lost to "a national organisation" believed to be POWHER, an aggressive national agency which is engaged in a head-to-head with Voicability, another corporate, to see who can Hoover up the most local advocacy contracts. Both are reported to be doing very well, thank you. Meanwhile the established local agency goes to the wall. Fairly typical tale of our times....

Fears over BLF independence & 'paying for services'

Voluntary organisations are increasingly concerned about the independence of the Big Lottery Fund, according to a new report published from the Third Sector Research Centre. *Wherever There is Money There is Influence: Exploring BIG's Impact on the Third Sector*, which was part funded by the BLF, says the organisation has always played down its formal links with government. But a combination of coalition policies, the transfer of BLF responsibility within government from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to the Cabinet Office and the delivery of non-lottery programmes were increasing fears about independence, it says.

Commenting on the research, Peter Wanless, chief executive of the BLF, said: "We are shortly expecting our new policy directions from the Office for Civil Society.", which seems to clinch the argument as far as I can see. Sure enough, since that quote, the van from the Cabinet Office has arrived with the new instructions. And out comes *'Fresh Thinking, the Next Chapter'*. Surprise, surprise, it focuses on the development of 'social investment' and encouraging private sector involvement, or as Peter puts it "the BLF would act as a broker for charities - particularly small to medium-sized bodies - and private companies. It's not about us saying to charities 'you should work with the private sector'; it's about orchestrating those partnerships for those who want to make it happen." As Jay Kennedy, from Directory of Social Change, pointed out this "reads like a Government policy".

And NAVCA weighs in

More pressure on the BLF comes also from NAVCA, representing CVSs and look-alikes, in criticism of the BLF's discussion paper *Building Capabilities for Impact and Legacy*. This suggested that the BLF should move away from its traditional model of giving grants to local infrastructure groups in favour of allowing front-line charities to pay for the support service providers they want.

NAVCA is concerned that such moves would increase the funding pressure on local infrastructure groups and provoked other concerns, such as the possibility of companies that won the contracts expecting infrastructure groups to help them for free. "We are aware of many examples where support providers fail to

deliver on their contracts, so organisations in need of support turn to our members, even though they are not funded to provide the service," he writes.

But just when you think NAVCA has got sensible, they give it away by arguing that a BLF programme of this sort might contradict the government's £30m Transforming Local Infrastructure programme, set up to reduce the number of local infrastructure groups. "If the BLF wishes to pursue a market-based competitive approach, this is likely, at least initially, to lead to a proliferation of providers and could undermine efforts to rationalise." Oh dear.

Funny old world!

MyGeneration, the charity set up by the government's former big society ambassador Shaun Bailey, has closed because of funding problems. The charity which was set up to support young people in deprived communities had an income of £292,000 in 2009/10.

Bailey, who stood unsuccessfully as a Conservative Party candidate at the 2010 general election, was appointed as an ambassador for the big society agenda by Prime Minister David Cameron last year and then moved on to be a special government adviser on "youth, crime and welfare issues".

The closure will result in some services being taken over by other charities but only one member of staff will retain their job. The rest would "go their separate ways", obviously a Tory way of saying "you're sacked". Shaun is quoted as saying: "We saw that in this tough funding environment it was hard to sustain that level of services, so we sought a partner to continue that work. I think it was an appropriate response to a changing climate."

Cuts mean that one in five community advice organisations could close

Justice for All publish estimates that independent advice agencies stand to lose £100m of funding by 2013/4 because of cuts to legal aid and other funds. And that, they say, is a conservative estimate. One in five community advice organisations is threatened with closure because of severe funding cuts, these figures being based on a poll of 230 community advice organisations

Will Horwitz, campaign manager of Justice for All, said: "The government must put its money where its mouth is when it comes to advice. Politicians of all parties and ministers have repeatedly said they know how valuable free advice is in our communities. Yet advice agencies are facing a desperate struggle just to stay afloat, as they see funding sources dry up one after the other."

You can make yourself miserable here - <http://bit.ly/GECgva>

Banning criticism protects integrity says Grayling

Readers are probably fed up hearing about the disastrous Work Programme, but Chris Grayling did recently give us a wonderful example of the 'black-is-white' school of rhetorical deception. Asked about the contractual clause that the organisations involved will "not do anything which may attract adverse publicity for the DWP", Grayling said: "A charity can't deliver services to the Department for Work and Pensions and at the same time be doing things that bring the Work Programme into disrepute.... We have a duty to protect the integrity of the Work Programme." But there was "a world of difference" between criticising the programme in a way that might undermine confidence in it, and "saying you are having a tough time delivering it". Oh right!

Community Organiser bandwagon trundles on

The community organiser brand continues to spin money, though Locality and Community Organising Foundation may still be arguing over who has the franchise on the name itself. For now Renaisi, a 'social enterprise' of course (i.e. a private sector firm), has blagged itself into the Lottery's £200M 'Big Local Programme' to train 'Big Local Reps'. This programme, overseen by the Community Development Foundation (also a social enterprise of course) brings together a number of national groups who are passionate about making local change and will "provide expert advice and support for residents."

To get us all started, Renaisi are now 'tendering' nationally for these Big Local Reps (well tendering is how we do it these days), 150 of them. The opportunity is "a 'light touch' role only and would particularly suit those working on a freelance basis or those who have capacity to manage it alongside other employment responsibilities."

Be-suited Renaisi are well known in Hackney where they were dubbed 'the boys from Renaisi' and where they showed an unerring ability to sniff out any regen money going and promptly Hoover it up. Gosh, 150 local communities are going to be delighted.

If you're minded to tell them where to stick it, then email to recruitment@renaisi.com