

*We're not an arm of the state (or the private sector) – we have our own arms*

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**Newsletter No: 31**

**February 2013**

## **Is the barometer swinging at last?**

The task of producing this newsletter provides a regular opportunity to read the barometer of what is happening, how people are feeling and what they are doing. Though the stream of mailings, blogs, research papers and news items that lands in my inbox is somewhat random, lately there is a discernable trend. More people are openly acknowledging the threats to their independence - especially when speaking out in dissent is needed - and more people are waking up to the true horror of the Government's plans and intentions, which creates the obligation to speak out in dissent.

Contrast, for example, the first and now the second annual report from the Barings Independence Panel. This latest report is an impressive summary from 'insiders' of an analysis that we have been promulgating for the last 6 years, (though the recommendations are a disappointment). Meanwhile the 'outsiders' are busy wopping in judicial reviews, mounting impressive demonstrations, writing exposes, and winning small victories and concessions. None of this will stop the outrage of austerity and the marketisation of public services but, here and there, it can slow it down. 'Independence' is, of course, an abstract idea. The real point is not whether you are independent but what you choose to do with it. If ever there is a time for the democratic force of independent thinking and radical action, surely it's now?

## **Events coming up**

**Kittens are Evil: *Heresies in Public Policy***

A major national conference on the evils of payment by results and outcomes based commissioning - Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March, 10am- 4.00pm, [King's House Conference Centre](#), Manchester (refreshments from 9.30am). £45 (plus VAT).

Our old friends at Vanguard Consulting with some of their pals have teamed up to expose the truth behind PbR and those 'transforming' performance management systems. At the end of the day they will launch a campaign "calling for an end to bad performance management in the voluntary and public sectors, calling instead for a more authentic, proportionate and meaningful approach to improving what we do.

Sounds like a good place to be on March 6<sup>th</sup> - you can find out how [here](#). Or by emailing [janice.mack@vanguardconsult.co.uk](mailto:janice.mack@vanguardconsult.co.uk)

### **Lobbying for women's rights in the UK – 27<sup>th</sup> February**

Workshops on how international human rights instruments can be used to lobby for women's rights in the UK. This will take place on 27<sup>th</sup> February from 10am-4.30pm, at Amnesty Human Rights Action Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA.

For further information please contact [charlotte@wrc.org.uk](mailto:charlotte@wrc.org.uk)

### **Community development at the cross roads: the challenges faced by communities in the light of Coalition policy and economic austerity - 13<sup>th</sup> Feb 6.30-8.30pm**

That's a mouthful but is the title of an upcoming meeting organised by Community Development Network London. The speaker will be Dr Henry Tam Director of the Forum for Youth Participation & Democracy, at the University of Cambridge.

The meeting will be in London - Henry Thomas Room, 166-220 Holloway Road N7 8DB. You can book yourself in here - <http://fourthcdnl.eventbrite.co.uk/> or call Matt Scott on 020 8692 8784

## **The evidence builds....**

### **'Outsourcing and Austerity' conference report now available**

The report from the October conference that we organised with the TUC, Unite, Unison and NAVCA is now available and can be downloaded here - <http://bit.ly/150AKMD>

### **Barings Independence Panel comes out fighting**

A breath of fresh air comes in the form of the Barings Independence Panel's 2<sup>nd</sup> annual report, presenting a commentary which is pretty well pure NCIA-speak. And in an article in Third Sector magazine, the Panel's Chair, Roger Singleton, sets out the litany that is already so clear to so many involved in the voluntary sector - explicit government challenge to independence, disapproval of campaigning, silencing through contracting and the self censorship of the groups taking part in these

activities. Whilst trying to deal with an unfolding catastrophe for people at the bottom of the heap.

But the political context in which these pressures are being applied - the privatisation of public services and the voluntary sector role in this - is barely acknowledged. This leads the Panel to look outside of the sector to ask the state or the market to stop doing these nasty things to them - like gagging clauses, or sub-sub-sub contracting in a 'supply chain'. Why wouldn't you expect all that - goes with the turf? Also nothing on collective action and not much talk of practical resistance, but nonetheless definitely worth a read - you can clock it here - <http://bit.ly/Y121qU>

## **Are children's charities too afraid now to 'bite the hand that feeds'?**

Interesting article from magazine Children and Young People Now reports that children's charities are now recognising the extent to which their voice has been muted by state funding and close relationships with Government. And that the cuts to services and benefits now create a demand that they stand with their users and speak out. It reports that the 4 largest children's charities (Action for Children, Barnardo's, The Children's Society and NSPCC) - have resolved "to pool their energies and resources to speak more as one over the coming year in championing children's wellbeing". Link to the article is here - <http://bit.ly/WLfkym>

## **Shocking expose of political and business links with trusts and foundations**

Inter-locking directorships are an established way of tying business interests together for maximum mutual gain and personal profit. Now evidence reveals the extent to which this is also a feature of the charity and philanthropy world. An article by Michael Barker in State of Nature, details examples of the way crossover relationships between individuals act to cement together corporate executives, politicians, think tankers and public service privatisers. 'Big Society Charity: Capitalist Philanthropy in the UK' is quite an eye-opener - you can have your own eyes opened here - <http://www.stateofnature.org/bigSocietyCharity.html>

## **Lest we forget....**

Britain is now the most unequal country in the Western world, an authoritative new United Nations report reveals. The gap between rich and poor is as great as in Nigeria.

Detailed statistics in the Human Development Report published last week also demonstrate that inequality has grown sharply during Conservative rule and that the poor in Britain now have to live on much the same incomes as their equivalents in Hungary and Korea. Check out this disgrace here - <http://ind.pn/VLaVJF>

## **New definitions of social enterprise bring 'coaches and horses' to mind**

As the new Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 comes into force, the government and private sector is rev-ving up to make sure that demonstrating 'social value' will be easier than ever. A new definition of social enterprise is contained in the regulations being laid for the Healthwatch service being set up around the country. Local Healthwatches will be **required** to be social enterprises and these are defined as bodies that any reasonable person would conclude exist for the benefit of the community or, failing that, where the Secretary of State says it does. This very sneaky quasi-definition can now be equally sneakily extended out to other activities and services. For a blow-by-blow explanation of the detail see Les Huckfield's excellent blog - <http://bit.ly/WVHnw8> .

## **More powerful evidence from the Campaign for a Fair Society**

Another powerful report from the Campaign for a Fair Society publishes a detailed analysis of how the cuts target disabled people and people in poverty. The report goes on to explore the political factors that have led to such a significant attack on the rights of disabled people. You can [download a free copy of the report here](#), or you can [watch a short film](#) explaining how the cuts have been targeted. Good stuff, mandatory reading ....

## **Ignorance drives support for benefit cuts, finds TUC-commissioned poll**

A poll commissioned by the TUC from YouGov has shown appalling levels of ignorance about levels of benefits and that voters least able to give accurate answers about benefits are the most likely to back the government's policy on cutting them.

Amongst the poll results are that people think:

- 41% of the entire welfare budget goes on benefits to unemployed people, while the true figure is 3%;
- 27% of the welfare budget is claimed fraudulently, while the government's own figure is 0.7%;
- almost half the people (48%) who claim Jobseeker's Allowance go on to claim it for more than a year, while the true figure is just under 30%.

The poll confirmed hostile attitudes to welfare are widespread - 42% thinking that benefits are too generous and nearly three in five (59%) agreeing that our current welfare system has created a culture of dependency. But greater hostility rested with those who gave the least accurate answers to the survey.

You can see the full results here - <http://bit.ly/YoQhV0>

## **Opponents claim research paper as their own**

Arguments have raged over a new discussion paper from the Third Sector Research Centre which asks whether the voluntary sector has been 'overwhelmed' by the state and the market. Those who reckon the paper says 'yes' to the proposition point to the

inclusion of damaging evidence of commercialisation, government contracting, undermining competition and the rise of sub-contracting. On the other side, Nick Hurd and his pals at NCVO and elsewhere say that because most voluntary groups receive no state funding, this is not really an issue - the sector remains independent and not overwhelmed by anyone. You can make your own mind up here -

<http://bit.ly/UOEwHi>

## **Heros, heroines, & keeping on keeping on**

### **The cost of inequality – presentations available**

Equality NW, the Equality Trust regional group, has developed two presentations showing the social & financial consequences of inequality. One is specifically designed for business related audiences and the other designed for conferences or meetings with more general audiences. If you want to snap this up then

contact [joe41@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:joe41@blueyonder.co.uk) or [philip\\_duval@hotmail.com](mailto:philip_duval@hotmail.com)

### **Citizens UK criticised for close relationship with the UK Border Agency (UKBA)**

The Institute of Race Relations has criticised Citizens UK for its involvement with the UKBA and Reliance, a private sector corporate involved in immigration control, and for proposals for a "Community Sponsor Scheme". Citizens has fought back saying that it is trying "...to make the immigration system humane, fair, accountable and transparent.' You can make your own mind up here - <http://bit.ly/YMqWbn>

### **ATOS assessments in judicial challenge**

Disabled People against the Cuts, Public Interest Lawyers and False Economy are backing a judicial review brought by Patrick Lynch against the notorious ATOS 'Work Capability Assessments'. The specific demands are that recordings should be made of all assessments and that WCA reports should be given to claimants before decisions on eligibility are made. Read all about it here - <http://bit.ly/150BW2t>

### **Weary Dale Farm residents win small concession**

Gypsy and Traveller families have been offered a small concession by Basildon Council, the authority that evicted them from their Dale Farm homes last year. The Council has given planning permission for 15 pitches to be created by the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain, working with Home Space Sustainable Accommodation. This will go only a small way to compensate for the eviction but was welcomed by the traveller community. For more have a look here - <http://travellersolidarity.org/>

### **Boning up on the NHS**

The Socialist Health Association is looking to launch a new project to help people understand how the NHS works, how they can become involved on the inside and then use that knowledge can be used to defend it. NHS for Beginners will cover issues like What is the NHS exactly? If we want to defend it what are we defending? How can we defend it? Already in preparing a syllabus a lot of useful information has been

assembled which you can use for yourself here - <http://bit.ly/150C3uP>. For more information contact Martin Rathfelder: [admin@sochealth.co.uk](mailto:admin@sochealth.co.uk)

## **This month's 'That Takes the Biscuit' Award**

### **ATOS comes out on top as Britain's fishiest outsourcing firm**

False Economy has announced that the winner of their competition to find Britain fishiest outsourcing firm is none other than ATOS, notorious for their uncanny ability to find seriously disabled people fit for work. The debate is on to find a suitable prize. 2nd prize went to Capita for their total f\*\*k up of the Court's Translation and Interpreting Service and 3rd prize went to A4E, Emma Harrison's lucrative cash cow.

### **Lewisham Hospital campaigners up the anti**

Astonishing for a local protest, but some 25,000 people marched in Lewisham, South London on 26<sup>th</sup> January to defend their local hospital from closure. The following week, in a magnificent display of weasel wording, the Minister, Jeremy Hunt, announced that the closure will take place, whilst feigning the opposite. Dismayed but not defeated the campaign immediately resolved to redouble its efforts and to elevate this local struggle into a national one - as the issues involved are being played out all over the country. You can plug into their anger and help join up the dots by visiting their website here - <http://www.savelewishamhospital.com/>

### **LCAP publishes lessons of experience**

The activist group London Coalition Against Poverty has published a booklet on its experience, 'Building Mutual Support and Organising in Our Communities', sharing experience and explaining how they work and organise the way they do. It's online here - <http://bit.ly/WAITY3> or you can get a printed copy by emailing [londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com](mailto:londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com)

### **TUC report makes the case for greater union involvement in community struggles**

Useful document from the TUC, working with Goldsmith's College, examines the case for closer connections between the unions and local community groups fighting for positive change. 'Swords of Justice and Civic Pillars' includes case studies of local experience and looks at the role of community organising in the mix. You can download the report here - <http://www.tuc.org.uk/union/tuc-19609-f0.pdf>

### **People's Assembly against cuts and privatisation**

The Coalition of Resistance is building support for the People's Assembly Against Austerity. They are asking individuals and groups to pledge support to the initiative which will hold a major rally on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June at Central Hall, Westminster. Find out more and sign up here - <http://bit.ly/XusjSt>

## **Case against 'One Barnet' will go to the High Court**

The High Court has announced it will judicially review the £320 million services contract due to be outsourced by Barnet Council to Capita. The case is being brought by Maria Nash, a disabled Barnet resident. The JR, likely to take place in March, means the signing of the deal - which was supposed to happen at the end of January - has been delayed. The case is based on the argument that the council has failed to consult on the decisions, has failed to meet its public sector equality obligations and based its decisions on "grossly inadequate assessments of the relative merits and risks involved and hence are unreasonable and amount to a breach of its fiduciary duty." There's a [Guardian](#) report on the matter.

## **Merger-itis hits Suffolk but West Sussex says 'no thanks'**

10 infrastructure bodies in Suffolk have announced that they are all going to merge into a single organisation to try and save money, whilst also asserting that the change will mean "better support and guidance for voluntary sector organisations in the area". The new organisation, Community Action Suffolk, will be launched in April.

Meanwhile in West Sussex the argument about local effectiveness and local accountability has been won and all the local authorities in the county have agreed to support district-based CVSs and Volunteer Centres - and signed up to 3 year agreements. The full story is on our website here - <http://bit.ly/14JshfL>.

## **'Agreement of the People' calls for support**

As previously reported, the 'Agreement of the People' is a call for a new democratic constitution to establish political, social, economic, legal and ecological rights. The Steering Group for this initiative is appealing for groups to become co-sponsors of this initiative, for feedback on the proposals put forward so far and to help spread the word and provide resources. Presentations are available for interested groups and the organisers are happy to meet to discuss progress.

There is a temporary home on A World to Win's ning platform here - <http://bit.ly/Y12Q2V> and there is a Facebook page here: <http://on.fb.me/YhuRnJ>

## **The madness continues**

### **'Transforming Rehabilitation' – here we go again**

On January 9 the Ministry of Justice published *Transforming Rehabilitation*, its latest plans for the management of convicted lawbreakers in the community. "The case for change and the principles and rationale for extending competition of probation services and effective offender management remain compelling" says the Government. Thus we are faced with the next assault on public services via outsourcing to the private and voluntary sectors, based again on payment-by-results, and emasculation of the Probation Service.

You can be shocked, though not surprised, by the proposals [here](#). And if you want to be refreshed by a critical review of the plans then have a look at this from UK Justice Policy Review - <http://bit.ly/11Yi4xo>

## **Locality slammed by the librarians**

Locality has been criticised by Phil Bradley, President of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, for their recent report on library takeovers by volunteers. The report - [here it is](#) - boasts that community libraries run or supported by volunteers are likely soon to rise from 5% to 13%. Bradley says that Locality is encouraging a "headlong rush" to increase community management of libraries "without understanding the consequences". and that the Locality report "will be used to justify further library closures and our communities will suffer greater damage. Our public library service and our communities deserve better than this," he said.

## **Resident loses legal challenge to Haringey Council over cuts to Council Tax Benefit**

A legal challenge to Haringey Council's plans to slash Council Tax Benefit was thrown out at the High Court on the 5<sup>th</sup> February, though the claimants were given the right to appeal. Under the council's proposals all households of working age who have previously not paid council tax will have to pay 20 per cent towards their council tax bill. The claim against Haringey was one of five court actions being brought on behalf of residents by solicitors Irwin Mitchell against local authorities. The law firm has also said it is investigating potential action against more councils.

## **Freedom Press firebombed**

London's oldest anarchist bookshop and publisher Freedom Press was firebombed early on 1<sup>st</sup> February. Other groups with space in the building are affected - LCAP, Corporate Watch, Advisory Service for Squatters and the Solidarity Foundation. Luckily no-one was in the building at the time and there was much damage but no injuries. You can see more on You Tube here - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7juTVY\\_ikJI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7juTVY_ikJI)