

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

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An Inquiry into the future of voluntary services

NCIA is part of a broad landscape of voluntary action which is designed to tackle inequality, social injustice, disenfranchisement from civic life and the environmental crisis. For many years, we have warned of the dangers to voluntary agencies of allowing themselves to be co-opted by government, and now the private sector, because the pressures in these relationships can sap capacity and willingness to speak out without fear or favour. The damage that has already been done is, in our view, extreme. It is time to ask whether voluntary agencies, providing professionalised, 'managerialised' services under contract to the state or private companies have a future within a radical tradition of social justice?

On the May 10th at a meeting in London we launched our Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services. Over the next 6 months we will explore and seek evidence on the issues, forces and factors that are shaping this part of the voluntary and community sector - privatisation, commissioning, social enterprise, social investment, sub-contracting, corporate charitable provision and the rest. We are keen to hear from people with views on these matters. More information about how we intend to go about this Inquiry and how you might contribute to it will appear on our website over the next few weeks.

Other news from NCIA

The big issues – from the cosmos to the Labour Party

One of the things said about NCIA is that our 'circle of concern' is bigger than our 'circle of influence'! The landscape of voluntary action on which we work is huge in itself and we continually try in turn to relate what is happening here to larger social, political and

environmental forces at large. To try and tackle the confusion that this inevitably generates we convened a special two-day event in April that brought together 20+ people from a wide variety of vantage points - reformist and revolutionary, engaged and alienated, but all from a starting point that the things we stand for and believe in need to be fought for. The result was inspiring, making visible the tensions and contradictions that exist within and between us, and looking for the ways that these can be accommodated to serve our shared aspirations. Our co-directors group is now folding the conclusions back in our own work and how this may need to be reshaped. More on this will appear on our website....

How are you affected by the rise of UKIP?

Adrian Barritt from Adur Voluntary Action finds himself with newly elected UKIP councillors, pondering about partnership working in this situation. In an article on NatCAN's NCI forum, Adrian does a quick review of UKIP's stated policies in the context of the relationship between the voluntary sector and local state, social cohesion, the environment, and internationalism.

Adrian unpacks the UKIP appeal to localism and independence, giving serious attention to their colonisation of the concept of "local action". He shows that the UKIP world does not address issues of social and economic equality, human or international rights. Their concept of "fairness" is stuck at the playground level.

Adrian asks how far should we work in partnership with those who espouse UKIP beliefs? If we hear some of these statements made locally by the newly elected local councillors, will we be challenging them? Even if UKIP take control of the local council that funds us? CVSs and similar organisations surely have a duty to offer a lead in this process?

You can read his article and join the debate here -

<http://nationalcan.ning.com/group/ncia/forum/topics/how-are-you-affected-by-the-rise-of-ukip>

Can CVSs offer a radical home for activism and dissent?

And on the same theme, London Voluntary Services Council and NCI are organizing a joint event with and for CVSs from all parts of the country to debate their role to support local communities under pressure and those active to resist cuts and austerity policies. The meeting will be on Friday September 13th at a central London location.

NCI's Inquiry into Activism and Dissent: [Here we Stand](#) showed a growth in local activism but an apparent absence in this of local voluntary groups, and their representative bodies, who may feel unable to speak out because of funding fears or who simply don't know how to respond to this very difficult landscape and the impact on local communities.

So how can CVSs stand alongside local people and community activists in what they face? What is the CVS role in supporting local campaigns? Who's already doing this and who wants to? Will Healthwatch groups run by CVSs take assertive action in patients' interests? How do CVSs respond to the Localism agenda, when it's not in the interests of local people? The CVS role provides offers much potential: providing information about

local campaigns; connecting up and joining with activists; encouraging those with less confidence to be active on local issues; sharing intelligence and connections; servicing campaigns and alliances; offering resources, financial and practical.

Places are limited to 25. So if you want to meet up with other CVSs about these issues contact penny@independentaction.net.

Debating the issues, making connections

Pissed off or puzzled about something? NCIA has set up a discussion forum for people to talk, challenge and find allies. Questions and issues currently being debated include *Why aren't CVSs a local home for activism and dissent.....Does dissent protect democracy.....Volunteers, cheap labour or free spirits.....Voluntary services, can they survive and as what?*

Start your own debate or join in at <http://nationalcan.ning.com/group/ncia>

The evidence builds....

Report from Newcastle shows pressures mounting

Newcastle CVS has published its fourth study tracking the impact of the cuts. 'Surviving or Thriving' based on responses from 50 VCS groups shows that over the last 12 months:

- § 69% have seen a decrease in funding
- § 33% have lost staff
- § 62% have experienced an increase in demand for their service
- § 52% are using reserves

A massive 57% expect to, or are considering closing a service and 30% reckon they may close altogether over the coming year. Common concerns included the shift towards large contracts, poor commissioning, reduction in grant aid, and more fragmented competitive relationships to the detriment of collaboration.

You can depress yourself here -

<http://www.cvsnewcastle.org.uk/representinginfluencing/our-research>

Social enterprise – Government cooks the books

Government publications show the number of social enterprises to have increased from 5,300 to 62,000 over a five-year period. However, a paper in the Journal of Social Entrepreneurship exposes this as a myth, by critically examining the four government data sources used to construct and legitimise the figures. Particular attention is paid to how political decisions influence the construction of evidence. The conclusion is that the apparent growth is mainly attributable to political decisions to reinterpret key elements of the social enterprise definition and to include new organisational types in sampling frames.

Clock the scam here - <http://bit.ly/12dnh0z>

Sir Stuart joins the barricades (well maybe)

In a rare outburst of radicalism, Sir Stuart Etherington of NCVO has told us all that we must not be fainthearted in the face of a "real hardening of culture and public attitudes toward those claiming benefits" and we should "hold our nerve" when campaigning against welfare changes. In a recent speech he assures us that NCVO "stands ready to push back against any attack on campaigning".

"Our sector is being hit from all sides" he said. "As soon as they speak out about the effects of the cuts, organisations are immediately accused of being political or scaremongering. I am frankly at a loss to understand how, as a country, we've got to the point where children's charities are criticised for speaking up about child poverty."

Whilst Sir Stuart's support is very welcome, sadly, a quick search of the NCVO website could find no trace of any NCVO involvement in countering negative attitudes towards benefit claimants nor any attacks on child poverty, and the only information about cuts relates to cuts to voluntary agencies funding.

Heros, heroines, & keeping on keeping on

Next round of legal aid cuts – don't forget detention

Government consultation on the next round of legal aid cuts is open until the 4th June. Many people and groups are protesting but the effect on people in immigration detention centres has not got much attention. The proposals are to withdraw the right to legal representation making it difficult to challenge their detention, even if they are detained unlawfully or are seeking freedom by arguing for release on bail. More information on this latest outrage from Detention Action here - <http://detentionaction.org.uk/timelimit/stop-legal-aid-cuts>

Barnet campaign bangs on despite High Court setback

Dismayed but undeterred by the failure to secure a judicial review into Barnet Council's outsourcing plans, Maria Nash supported by the Barnet Alliance for Public Services has been granted legal aid to appeal the decision and an application has been lodged. You can read about the judgment and BAPS' response [here](#). Disabled People Against the Cuts, which also supported Maria during the court case, published [its own response](#) on its website.

Meanwhile, the campaign around 'Your Choice Barnet' (YCB) is off the ground YCB delivers care and support services to disabled adults in Barnet and has been 'arms length' from the Council since February 2012. The Council hoped that the service would make a surplus - £263,000 by 2015 and £493,000 by 2016 - but instead it has been losing money. The management now want to reduce the level of service and are cutting staff pay and holiday entitlement. Barnet Unison estimates that the cuts could amount to around a 20% cut in the pay of these already low-paid workers. The campaign is demanding that the service is protected and taken back into direct Council management. You can cop the whole story here - <http://bit.ly/106CO15>

BAPS is a focal point for other opposition to cuts, outsourcing and other developments in Barnet that will disadvantage local residents. Check out their activities here - <http://barnetalliance.org/>.

TUC launches campaign plan

The TUC has launched its plan for campaigning between now and the 2015 election. This sets out priority objectives under the five headings of:

- § Jobs, growth and a new economy
- § Fair pay and a living wage
- § Good public services and decent welfare
- § Respect and a voice at work
- § Strong unions

There is an online version available at www.tuc.org.uk/campaignplan.

Stop G4S steps up the pressure

G4S came to prominence last year with its highly publicised failure to provide security provision for the Olympic Games. But neither this, nor the evidence of human rights abuses committed by the firm's employees, has stopped this vast (657,000 employees) global firm from continuing to Hoover up public services contracts. G4S, which began life as Group 4 and Securicor, has always maintained a strong contract base in the criminal justice and asylum sectors and now the Welfare to Work Programme as well. It is one of the firms that has signed up voluntary agencies as sub-contractors, such as Migrant Help and St Giles Trust, indeed the company boasts that it "...works in partnership with more than 500 voluntary, community and training organisations across the UK."

Stop G4S is a UK-based network of various grassroots activist groups, campaigns, NGOs and trade unionists that have a shared interest in holding G4S to account for its track record of human rights abuses across the world and in stopping the company from taking over public services or being given any more control over our lives. Amongst the group's objectives is to pressure charities and voluntary organisations to cut their ties with G4S, especially where G4S is using such relationships to whitewash its complicity in human rights abuses. You can check them out here - <http://stopg4s.net/>

Duncan Smith keeps his head down

Ian Duncan-Smith's assertion that he could live on £53 a week got a quick response from the doubting British public, for within a couple of weeks, 460,000 people signed a petition saying 'go on then, prove it'.

Duncan-Smith has maintained a resolute silence, despite a noisy UK Uncut demonstration outside his Buckinghamshire home (looks like he's got a few spare bedrooms there).

The petition is still open if you haven't already added your name - it's now up to 477,000 by the way. You can get there by clicking here - <http://chn.ge/13yNh9r>

Housing activists put their heads together

Between the 12th and the 19th May an Open House was organised at the Elephant and Castle in London, bringing together people faced with the housing crisis and to encourage collective action to meet housing needs. The hope was to agree the formation of a radical housing coalition, involving different groups working together to share resources, support fellow projects and organise joint relevant housing campaigns and actions. If you want to find out how they got on then email -

openhouse.ldn@gmail.com

TCPA celebrates 'utopia'

Delightful CD of words and music celebrating the Utopian tradition comes from the Town and Country Planning Association. Utopian values they say, were “artistic, collectivist, cooperative and occasionally eccentric, but most of all they were practical; building real places that immeasurably improved the lives of millions of ordinary people. The readings and songs on this album give a small taste of the debate about land and freedom which has raged in England since the 17th century.”

£10 secures a copy and you can order it here: <http://bit.ly/103wLtW>

Watchdog on the watchdogs

We have previously reported on government attempts to stifle the ability of the new local Healthwatch schemes to take a robust stand in improving health and social care services, in the interests of patients and users. Now comes welcome news that concerned activists are setting up their own watchdog - HAPIA, or the ‘Healthwatch and Public Involvement Association’. This will “continue the national campaign to build independent, powerful, community-led organisations, which actively inspect, influence and challenge health, social care and public health services, to provide safe, effective and accessible care.”

HAPIA will campaign for health and social care services that are genuinely accountable to the public, and oppose chaotic re-organisations and tendering processes jeopardising the safety of services. Membership is welcomed from Local Healthwatch schemes, its members and volunteers and other people and organisations who share their aims. It is rumoured that Healthwatch England are not best pleased by the arrival of HAPIA on the block. You can join up here - <http://www.nalm2010.org.uk/index.html> or email Malcolm Alexander for more information - NALM2008@aol.com

AgeUK in Workfare spotlight

Campaign group Boycott Workfare has been prodding AgeUK about involvement in the Workfare scheme. Though the national body announced withdrawal from the scheme at the end of last year, it is being somewhat coy about tackling the continued involvement of local AgeUK groups, which are separate and independent charities. In recent weeks Boycott Workfare has had a spate of tweets from people saying they’re being forced to ‘volunteer’ at Age UK or face sanctions - Age UK in East Sussex is an example. But all local AgeUK’s have to sign an agreement with the national association as a condition of using the brand name. So why not make withdrawal from Workfare a condition. Read

more about this on the Boycott Workfare website - <http://www.boycottworkfare.org/?p=2459>

Vicar goes on Council Tax strike

The Rev Paul Nicholson, well known for his steering of the Taxpayers Against Poverty campaign (<http://www.taxpayersagainstpoverty.org.uk/>), has gone on Council Tax strike in solidarity with those being hit by the cuts in benefits. This, he says, is a personal decision in support of the 26,000 people in his home borough of Haringey who have been sent Council Tax bills they cannot afford to pay. It is also a challenge to “the extreme free market addicts in government who see the unmanageable debt, misery, illness, hunger, fuel poverty and homelessness created by the government’s austerity policy as acceptable collateral damage on the journey to a free market heaven that will never be reached.”

You can congratulate Paul (even join him?) here - taxpayersagainstpovertytap@gmail.com

Disagreements over mass bedroom tax appeals

Campaigners arguing for a wave of mass appeals against the bedroom tax have been knocked back by establishment organisations who say that the tactic will block up the tribunal apparatus (presumably the point of the protest?). Those in favour believe mass appeals will make the bedroom tax unworkable due to the extra administrative burden and cost to the taxpayer. But the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Housing Federation have now been joined by the Law Centres Network in saying that blocking up the system would simply harm those whose cases are strong and give the rest false hope. But there is division in the Law Centre ranks for Govan Law Centre supports the mass appeal approach: “There are good reasons for most people to challenge their local authority’s decision,” they said in a statement. The Law Centre has also launched a free ‘toolkit guide’ to help tenants challenge cuts to their housing benefit with the introduction of the bedroom tax. Here it is: <http://bit.ly/YYe4g2>

Moves to save the Public Sector Equality Duty

Within a year of the Equality Duty coming in to force the Government is reviewing it. This means the writing is on the wall for the only law that challenges institutional discrimination and makes public bodies deliver services that meet everyone’s needs. Arising from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, the law is designed to tackle institutional discrimination and goes some way to ensure equal treatment for disabled people, women, ethnic minorities, older people and gays.

A petition has been started which you can sign up to here - <http://chn.ge/183qDaj>

The case for real democracy

As a contribution to the campaign for an Agreement of the People for the 21st century, World to Win’s editorial team has brought together a selection of their blogs on the crisis of democracy and the state. Borrowing its name from the heroic efforts of the 17th century Levellers’ movement, the Agreement project aims to build on past

democratic achievements through achieving a new constitution which answers the question of what kind of political and government system should replace the present failing one.

You can download the paper as a PDF here - <http://bit.ly/11GUqaa> or order a hardcopy for £2.50 +p&p here - <http://bit.ly/13yNE46>

The madness continues

Lords vote on section 75 opens the door to NHS privatisation

On 24th April the House of Lords voted through the NHS 'section 75' regulations, which open up the NHS to far more private sector competition. Despite overwhelming opposition from practically everybody, health professionals, patients groups and activists, the spectacle of Lords, many with private health care interests, voting them through, raises fundamental issues about our democracy. This move has implications for the many charities and voluntary groups working on health issues who can expect more pressure both to bid for public services or, more likely, to enter into sub-contracting relationships with multi-national healthcare companies.

The implications and possible strategies for opposition now are discussed in an excellent article by Caroline Molloy on the False Economy website - you can access it here - <http://bit.ly/18NcrUe>

Meanwhile NCVO deepens its links with the private sector

Not apparently swayed by either moral or political doubts, either about consorting with global firms, or conspiring with privatisation, NCVO and G4S look-alike SERCO have now published their Code of Guidance "to improve the relationships between prime and subcontractors in public services." This initiative arose from last year's debacle of the Work Programme contracts which exposed the profit-driven motives of the private corporates and the ways they dumped on their voluntary sector 'partners'.

Nick Hurd MP, Minister for Civil Society, was quoted as saying: "I welcome this Code of Practice which provides an important framework for VCSE and private sector organisations to strengthen their partnerships, in order to grow the market and deliver better public services." Can't say clearer than that.

Housing Associations look after their interests

The prospect of rising rent arrears as a result of benefits cuts and caps is galvanizing housing associations to take preemptive action. Reports are emerging of associations that are seeking Possession Orders against tenants BEFORE they have accrued any arrears, so they can be evicted immediately should they do so. This is apparently possible when the tenants involved hold assured shorthold tenancies, often used for temporary accommodation by homeless families referred by local authorities.

The associations involved include Genesis, Newlon, A2 Dominion, and Notting Hill Housing Trust. This provides more evidence of the ways in which these associations have

morphed away from being movers for social justice into corporate businesses. You can clock the dismal story here - <http://bit.ly/17yMMQ2>

....And are now into social engineering

Not just corporate businesses but also moral guardians it would seem.... A south west housing association is requiring new tenants to sign up to a plan to improve their lifestyle, which will be linked to their future access to housing.

Yarlington Housing Group is asking new tenants to commit to a 'household ambition plan' when they are issued with its standard seven-year, fixed term tenancy. Progress against the plan will be considered when the tenancy is reviewed. The plans will be created individually for each household based on the 'ambitions and aspirations' of the family. Yarlington executive director Phyllida Culpin said criteria could include 'gaining employment, adopting a healthy lifestyle, getting a qualification or contributing to their local community'.

Chances are that Phyllida will have a mortgage herself, so I wonder if she is badgering her lender to apply such conditions to homeowners?

Payment-by-results – here we go again

Plans for the further privatisation of the criminal justice system (called 'reforms' of course) have been announced by the Ministry of Justice. New approaches to rehabilitation will see "an enhanced role for voluntary and private sector organisations on a payment-by-results basis". Responses from sector organisations were pretty predictable - concerns from the Howard League for Penal Reform, welcomes from St Giles Trust and Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust and embrace from the Bubbists over at ACEVO. No-one, of course, raised issues of principle about the wholesale outsourcing involved (the media tend not to ask NCIA for a comment...)

Events coming up

Organising in our communities, struggling for change – 8th June

A practical day working towards "mass grass roots resistance and beyond", this event aims to bring together and link up activists across London. "Loads of us are involved in a wide range of struggles and campaigns, but we tend to do our own thing and generally don't link up with others who live or work near us. Many others hate the present system but don't know where to start to change things. So what do we do?"

Saturday June 8th, 10am-5pm at Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA. More information from event@radicallondon.net or check their FB page - <https://www.facebook.com/events/439705316119406/?fref=ts>

The Spark - 10th-15th June in London

“A week of social justice workshops, trainings, music, theatre and film from 10-15th June bringing together individuals and groups that don't normally work with each other, to explore what a more socially and economically just world would look like, and how to get there. It will be a space to learn from each other and strengthen our groups and movements.”

More information at the FB page <http://on.fb.me/15wHHrn>, or via hashtag #TheSpark and @ldnroots. Organised by the London Roots Collective - www.london-roots.org.uk or info@london-roots.org.uk.

The People's Assembly – some love it, some hate it!

The People's Assembly Against Austerity, scheduled for the 22nd June in London is showing some splits. Well over 2,000 people have now registered for the event and hundreds of organisations have pledged their support. But many are saying this isn't a people's assembly but another example of an old style rally providing 'leaders' with a chance to address the 'followers'. Either way, it can't be ignored and if you want to go register here - <http://thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/>

Kittens are Evil - Heresies in Public Policy - 10th July in Wales

We have previously reported on the 'Kittens are Evil' initiative, supported by NCIA and others, which aims to expose the flawed thinking behind 'outcomes-based' contracts, including payments-by-results. After a successful launch in Manchester in March, the Kittens crew are organising a second event in Wales.

Wednesday 10th July, 10am-4pm at the Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells, Powys. It will cost you £45 (plus VAT). More information from <https://www.vanguard-method.com/events/?story=26>