# National Coalition for Independent Action



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

www.independentaction.net .... info@independentaction.net

Want to talk back to us? Plenty of opportunities to make your mark on our bloggy-friendly website <a href="https://www.independentaction.net">www.independentaction.net</a>

Newsletter No: 34 July 2013

## The sun may be shining at last but reality is decidedly cloudy

The arrival of summer and a Scottish Wimbledon champion may have allowed the nation(s) for a brief moment to throw off its mantle of depression. But behind the sunglasses things remain grim. The effects of the bedroom tax - escalating rent arrears and the 'cleansing' of poor families from high rent areas has begun (Hackney Council in London, for example, estimate that 700 families have left the borough since April to escape the tax). Asylum seekers continue to be vilified in the press. Half a million people now use food banks, but Baron Freud says "There is actually no evidence as to whether the use of food banks is supply led or demand led."(!) Meanwhile MPs are told they are underpaid and Milliband picks a fight with Unite. Osbourne's spending review makes it clear how much more misery they have in mind for the most vulnerable and the stock exchange breaks through the 6,500 mark. Enjoy the sunshine, 'cause it's going to be a bleak winter ahead.

### **News from NCIA**

### Calling all local CVSs facing dilemmas.....

After the last local elections, Adrian Barritt from Adur Voluntary Action is now faced by local UKIP councillors. How will he and his trustees respond? Will they find any "lines in the sand" which they will not cross? How many people in his area would take to the streets on their behalf? Can they be confident about their purpose, knowing that their communities and networks are with them and that their structure is robust enough to survive this new challenge on top of all the others?

If you want to know more about Adrian's answers and further questions find out more <u>here</u>. Add your answers and questions to his. And if you want to talk with other CVS colleagues about these and other dilemmas you're facing as a CVS there are a few places still left at the LVSC/NCIA event on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 11-3.30pm, at Fairbairn

Foundation London N1 9AG in London. Contact <u>penny@independentation.net</u> to book a place (please note, this is an event for CVSs only)

### Local activism - what does it mean for you? July 22nd 2013, 7-9pm

Places still left, book now! NCIA is organising a free event for those who can get into London, to discuss the implications of its Inquiry into Local Activism and Dissent, <u>Here We Stand</u> at 170 Community Project, 170 New Cross Road, SE14 (networking and refreshments from 6.30 pm). Book onto the event here.

The Inquiry was undertaken to answer two essentially political questions:

- Where can resistance and alternatives to injustice be found?
- Where are the homes for such action?

You'll find out about the Inquiry findings. We hope to spark a critical response from activists and other commentators and open debate and discussion about the ways forward. And if you'd like to invite us to have a similar event in your area, get in touch with penny@independentaction.net and we'll see what's possible.

#### **NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services**

We have now produced a full briefing for the work we are undertaking on our Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services. You can download this paper <a href="here">here</a>. If you want to know more about the inquiry or let us have evidence please get in touch with Andy Benson - <a href="mailto:andy@independentaction.net">andy@independentaction.net</a>...

#### 'Localism Watch' may be a goer

We have been looking into the feasibility of creating with others a 'Localism Watch' project to collect information and monitor the effects of the Localism Act and the localism agenda more broadly. This work is now nearing its conclusion and the results will be available soon. However, anyone wanting to express interest or know more please contact Laird Ryan who will be pleased to hear from you - lairdryan@bignall.free-online.co.uk

### The evidence builds....

### **Managing Democracy, Managing Dissent**

Serious bedtime reading comes in the form of a major publication from Corporate Watch. 'Managing Democracy, Managing Dissent' brings together a wealth of information about the ways in which neo-liberal Western 'democracies' are supporting sectional interests, repressing unwelcome opposition and maintaining a front that this is being done in the interests of freedom and democracy.

Closest to home for NCIA readers will be two chapters by Michael Barker: 'Celebrity Philanthropy: In the Service of Corporate Propaganda' and 'Do Capitalists Fund Revolutions', both of which examine the influence of the political establishment on the world of voluntary action and non-governmental organisations. Also of chilling significance is an article by Tom Anderson 'When Co-option Fails', which looks at the role of the state "..in the UK's strategies towards those who engage in acts of dissent over, roughly, the last 30 years."

There is much more besides in this lengthy production, which costs a mere £8, and you can order it here - http://corporatewatchshop.org/node/38

#### Finally charities start to come out about the cuts

Indications are beginning to show that the large charities are at last willing to show serious opposition to government austerity policies. In response to Osborne's to spending review document, housing charities have attacked the proposed further benefits cuts. The Children's Society said a cap on benefits would 'shift the pain of rising rents from the government on to children and families', while Crisis called a delay in claiming benefits 'cruel and senseless'. Shelter chief executive Campbell Robb said he was concerned about the benefit cap while Helen Mathie, policy manager for Homeless Link, said: '...the cuts...will have a direct impact on homelessness and the ability of services throughout the country to tackle the issue.'

#### Corporate donations to charity down by 27% in 2 years

Another blow to those who tell us that our new 'modernised' social support systems will be maintained by a willing alliance of philanthropy and corporate capitalism comes from a report by the Directory of Social Change. This shows that corporate donations to charity fell by 27% over the last 2 years, down to an estimated £603M or 0.4% of pretax profits of the companies surveyed.

The report's author Catherine Walker described the results as "underwhelming, and that's an understatement". She went on: "There is a small elite group that is responsible for most giving in the UK. On the whole, it's pretty tokenistic. And not only was their generosity pretty miserable, but they were giving in the wrong places. If you look at where companies give, it's not in areas of deprivation."

Sadly the launch of this important report at the House of Lords looks pretty corporate to me! You can clock the photo opportunities here - http://bit.ly/15igrbF

### 5% of charities get 85% of the dosh

Figures published by the online giving platform Charity Choice show that the top 5% of charities receive 85% of all charitable income. Small charities experienced 11% decline in annual income over the five years to 2011/12, while large charities experienced 31% increase.

These figures are based on all charities with five years' comparative data. The study found that the combined income of 115,803 charities with annual incomes of less than £1m fell from £7.69bn to £6.84bn in the five years to 2011/12 when measured in real terms. Over the same period, the income of the 5,345 charities with an income of more than £1m rose from £33.37bn to £43.62bn in real terms.

I couldn't find any report on this on the Charity Choice website, so you're on your own with this one.

#### 'Third Sector' has no-one to blame but themselves

In a powerful presentation to the Baring's Panel on Independence, commentator Les Huckfield lambasted the "London-centric" 'leaders' of the voluntary sector. "Rather than protecting voluntary and community organisations from the effects of Government policies and supporting their independence from Government," he said, "national Third Sector Organisations have assisted and supported Government

initiatives to fashion and develop commissioning and contracting policies under New Labour and the present Coalition Government."

We've uploaded Les' paper in full onto the website; you can read more and download it - <a href="http://bit.ly/15592g2">http://bit.ly/15592g2</a>. Comments to us or directly to Les please - les@huckfield.com

#### **Kittens are evil - Heresies in Public Policy**

We have previously reported on the Kittens are Evil programme. A note of the first Manchester conference is now available compiled by journalist Simon Caulkin. You can have a peep here - http://bit.ly/12jrZK0

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

### Campaigners secure opposition day debate on the impact of the cuts

Disability and other campaigners secured an opposition day debate on the 10<sup>th</sup> July calling for a 'cumulative impact assessment' of the cuts (and a letter in the Guardian). This looks at the way the different cuts in benefits and services impacts on specific groups of people. The government has so far refused to undertake such an assessment on the grounds that it is too complicated to work out the results of its policies. In other words it is too difficult to work out the cumulative impact of:

- cutting social care for children, adults and older people by 33%
- · reducing the value of income support
- terminating specific disability benefits like ILF and DLA
- · cutting benefits for disabled people looking for work
- · cutting housing benefit and mortgage interest relief
- · increasing VAT and other essential household costs

Looks to us like a fine case of 'don't care, won't care'.

To support the campaign, Simon Duffy of the Centre for Welfare Reform has produced a hard-hitting presentation in straightforward language on how the cuts target people with disabilities. This is available to anyone to use. You can view it as a slide-share here - <a href="http://slidesha.re/15y7Zrg">http://slidesha.re/15y7Zrg</a> but it is also available as a PDF (emailinfo@independentaction.net and we'll send it to you).

### Lewisham Hospital group has its own Inquiry

On 29<sup>th</sup> June, the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign held a high profile People's Commission into the circumstances surrounding the proposed closure of the hospital. Chaired by Michael Mansfield QC, the Inquiry Panel heard from witnesses who set out the fallacy of the case for closure as well as the undemocratic chicanery on the part of the authorities in dealing with it.

The Commission's initial findings are an excoriating criticism of the government's handling of this case - you can access it here - <a href="http://bit.ly/13PAeTf">http://bit.ly/13PAeTf</a> together with other information about this disgrace.

PS: Is a hospital near you closing? Are local health cuts affecting you? The Save Lewisham Campaign has joined with Open Democracy and 38 Degrees to gather stories about people's experiences of the changes to the NHS.

Email <u>guddi.s@38degrees.org.uk</u> to let the office team know your story; to read more about the project click here: http://38d.gs/15Q1yye.

#### **News from 'Agreement of the People'**

The Agreement of the People campaign has put out a newsletter of its recent activities, which you can download here - <a href="http://bit.ly/12t3CIE">http://bit.ly/12t3CIE</a>

### This month's 'That Takes the Biscuit' Award Goes to

Baron David Freud, Minister for Welfare 'Reform'

.... who has said there is 'no evidence' of a link between the government's welfare reforms and the surge in the numbers of people using food banks.

Asked in parliament about the trebling in the numbers of people turning to food banks in just one year, the noble Lord said it was difficult "to make causal connections". In a particularly nasty turn of phrase he went on "There is actually no evidence as to whether the use of food banks is supply led or demand led."

He asserted that food banks are not part of the welfare system and it is not the job of the DWP to monitor this provision, which is done on a charitable basis. Let's all move on then eh?

[PS - yes this is the same David Freud who said in 2008: "We cannot have people simply loafing about, doing nothing and expecting the state to finance their lifestyles. That is the way to the destruction of our society."]

### Children England plan a 'manifesto for children, young people and families'

In a bold move, Children England, the national body for voluntary groups working with children and young people, has launched a "democratic debate" amongst its members to create and promote a manifesto for children, young people and families. Targeted on the 2015 election, the aim is to present the economic, social and moral case for such a manifesto, with the combined and collective clout of the children's charities and voluntary groups.

The manifesto will be produced through an inclusive process, inviting policy suggestions and submissions, refined through working groups, culminating in a "voting summit" at Children England's annual meeting in February 2014. Each member organisation will then have the opportunity to vote on their preferred policies, effectively writing the manifesto that day. More information will appear in the CE website (<a href="www.childrenengland.org.uk">www.childrenengland.org.uk</a>) or you can find out more by emailing Kathy Evans: CEO - <a href="Kathy@childrenengland.org.uk">Kathy@childrenengland.org.uk</a> or Nick Davies: Policy Manager - <a href="Mick@childrenengland.org.uk">Nick@childrenengland.org.uk</a>

#### People's Assembly draws 4,000 but what next?

Well over 4,000 people attended the People's Assembly on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, for the first time bringing together the mass of organisations fighting and resisting austerity since the financial crash over five years ago. Video and pictures of the day will be available on their website soon.

Tensions between an old left way of doing things and a more horizontalist approach seem to have been kept in balance and follow up action agreed included mass protests and demonstations (old left!) and promoting and supporting local People's Assemblies (horizontalist!). A list of local activist meetings will be compiled for the website.

Useful links if you want find out more and get involved are:

- § National People's Assembly www.peoplesassembly.org.uk
- § People's Assembly Network <u>www.peoplesassemblies.org</u>
- § Occupy Movement www.occupylondon.org.uk

#### Europe-wide call for 'unconditional basic income'

Optimistic folk are using the 'European Citizens Initiative' to call for a Europe-wide 'unconditional basic income'. The ECI enables EU citizens to call for new laws to be made within the remit of the European Union but.... It needs a million signatures to allow it to kick in. An unconditional basic income would guarantee basic living standards for all men, women and children within the EU. You can help build to the million by adding your name here - <a href="http://basicincome2013.eu/ubi/faq/">http://basicincome2013.eu/ubi/faq/</a>

### **New Self-Help Guide for Asylum Seekers and their Supporters**

Self-help is crucial to winning asylum and immigration cases especially in the face of changes in the law, cuts to Legal Aid and increased witch-hunts against immigrant people and legal aid cuts. A new self-help guide has been launched by Legal Action for Women, which brings together information that is not usually available so that anyone determined to get protection and justice can find out how to do it. Free to Asylum Seekers; £2.50 other individuals; £5.00 organisations; £10.00 professionals/institutions+ p+p. You can order online here - http://bit.ly/154Svsu

### The madness continues

### Big Society Network caught in smelly dealing

Dark manoeuvring by the Big Society Network, launched by David Cameron in 2010 to bring his big society vision to life, has been exposed by the Observer (see<a href="http://bit.ly/15y8CB9">http://bit.ly/15y8CB9</a>). Despite a catalogue of failures revealed in documents shown to the paper, the BSN continues to be given large amounts of public money. One project to encourage healthier lifestyles amongst children failed so badly that the Cabinet Office refused to pay the final cash instalment of £100k and decided to "end support". Despite this, the Society Network Foundation (the BSN's charitable arm) subsequently received £1m from the Lottery in a 'preferred provider' deal, and a further£150,000 from the Cabinet Office, bringing its total public funding to nearly £3m.

A number of trustees and staff at the BSN have close links to the Conservative party, including Giles Gibbons, a former business partner of the prime minister's former

strategist Steve Hilton. Rumours are now circulating about private meetings at No 10 and special advisers being 'moved on'. Dear oh dear....

### Meanwhile witness SERCO's onward march into the voluntary sector

Ever heard of the SERCO foundation? Not surprising, it was only registered as a charity (No: 1150338) on 4th January 2013. This is probably not a selfless philanthropic endeavour when one considers that their objects are: "....the promotion and improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of charities, in particular by the provision of advice, services and other forms of support to charities and such other purposes for the benefit of the public as shall be exclusively charitable as the trustees from time to time may determine." Getting charities ready for sub-contracting to SERCO seems more like it.

And interestingly at least one of our new benefactor's trustees overlaps with Society Network Foundation - none other than Giles Gibbons.

### Jimmy Mubenga's inquest verdict: G4S guards guilty of Unlawful Killing

Jimmy Mubenga from Angola, a father of five, was unlawfully killed by G4S guards in 2010 whilst being deported on a British Airways flight. This was the verdict of the inquest into his death which reported on 9<sup>th</sup> July. The Crown Prosecution Service has now announced that it will re-open the investigation into whether the three guards involved should face prosecution.

Mr Mubenga's widow Adrienne Kambana has been fighting for justice for her husband with the support of the All African Women's Group. A spokeswoman said: "It could have been me. Many of us have had to resist violent deportations; one of our members was dragged naked through the corridors of Yarl's Wood, another's room mate Jackie Nanyonjo died shortly after being deported to Uganda, probably as a result of injuries caused by the same restraint techniques which killed Jimmy Mubenga."

It is to be hoped that one effect of this tragedy will be to discourage voluntary groups from entering into partnership deals or sub-contract relationships with G4S.

### **Legal Aid: it just gets worse**

As if the cuts already made to Legal Aid were not bad enough, the government's continued attacks on access to justice continue. If you want to depress yourself further then currently Our Kingdom, part of the Open Democracy network, is publishing strong material on the latest outrages:

- S Clare Sambrook's article on the recent House of Commons debate MPs on Justice by Tesco, Stobart & G4S http://bit.ly/1dlYw77
- from the Garden Court Chambers crime team, there's: Justice is not a commodity looting and pillaging, economic illiteracy, craven cowardice. A response to the government's attack on legal aid. http://bit.ly/1761ri0
- § Sadiq Khan's open letter to Justice Secretary Grayling: Lord Chancellor, respect the rule of law the government's reviled proposals for 'reform' of Legal Aid.http://bit.ly/15y92Y9

§ Also Frances Crook on probation reform - a dangerous, dodgy scheme is rumbled in the House of Lords. http://bit.ly/18aRc19

### MIND exposes extent of physical restraint on mental health patients

Nearly 40,000 incidents of physical restraint on mental health patients in England were recorded in one year (2011/12), with more than 3,000 in the "dangerous" face-down position, according to figures released by national MIND.

The data - obtained under the Freedom of Information Act - showed that these incidents resulted in at least 949 injuries to people with mental health problems. There was huge variation between trusts in the use of physical restraint - Surrey and Borders NHS foundation trust, for example, reported 38 incidents over the year, where as Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS foundation trust reported 3,346.

A separate survey by Mind of 375 frontline healthcare staff involved in physically restraining people with mental health problems showed almost a quarter (22%) had not had face-to-face training on physical restraint techniques in the past 12 months.

Paul Farmer, Mind's chief executive, said: "Physical restraint can be humiliating, dangerous and even life-threatening and the huge variation in its use indicates that some trusts are using it too quickly. Face-down restraint, when a person is pinned face-down on the floor, is particularly dangerous, as well as extremely frightening to the person being restrained. It has no place in modern healthcare and its use must be ended."

You can find out more here - http://bit.ly/1adsV70

### Etherington and Bubb find common cause – they are both being ignored!

Both Stuart Etherington (NCVO) and Stephen Bubb (ACEVO) seem upset that the golden future they eagerly anticipated with the Coalition government appears to be evaporating. Etherington recently complained ay NCVO's Evolve conference about the "blatant indifference" shown by some ministers to charities' concerns. Whilst raising proper issues like Legal Aid cuts, equalities duties and judicial review, however, it was clear that his real beef is about sector involvement in pubic services - NCVO will be spending the coming year campaigning for the voluntary sector to take a "bigger and better role" in public services delivery.

Meanwhile Stephen Bubb complains in a recent Third Sector interview that "... the government hasn't got a narrative on the sector any more" and "... I would like to have seen a bigger push on public service reform, but Nick Hurd is not sufficiently high in the hierarchy."

What neither of them seems to understand is that the government is more interested in privatisation, shutting down the welfare state and curtailing our liberties than any plans that our undistinguished leaders have for the voluntary sector. Dream on, boys.

### East Sussex CVS in the dog house

3VA, the CVS for Eastbourne, Lewes and Wealden has come under fire for organising a meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> July to look at ways community groups can help minimise the effects of welfare reforms on communities. "Come along to our voluntary sector gathering and

meet like-minded voluntary and community groups, discover individually and collectively what we can do to combat the effects of welfare reforms and what is being done in other towns."

Our complainant writes: "This is a good example of the ways in which the local sector is being passively corralled into trying to substitute for cut services, rather than actively protesting and campaigning. It would not matter quite so much if they took a position and did both. Note the widespread use of the term "reforms" rather than "cuts"."

#### Rough sleeping in London up by 13%

The number of rough sleepers in London has gone up 13 per cent in the past year, reaching over 6,400, according to statistics commissioned by the Greater London Authority and local authorities. Just over half of those seen rough sleeping were non-UK nationals (53%) and 28% of these were from central and eastern Europe.

Leslie Morphy, Chief Executive of the homelessness charity Crisis, said: "The mayor of London pledged to eliminate rough sleeping in the capital by 2012. Instead we see today the number of people sleeping on London's streets - in absolute destitution in one of the world's richest cities - has more than doubled on Boris's watch."

Meanwhile a fresh row has broken out over soup runs in the capital, unpopular with the local authorities, local residents and businesses and some of the larger 'professional' charities. Pressure has been mounting on the groups running soup runs to move their activities inside, but a spokesperson for the Simon Community said; "If some soup runs are to move indoors then suitable venues have to be identified. No one, including Westminster City Council, has come forward with any constructive suggestions on this. ... The Simon Community has fed people on the streets for the past 50 years and we are not about to stop."

And Westminster Council has decided to introduce payment-by-results into its contracts to tackle rough sleeping so that it can "focus on commissioning services that make a difference", together with a new fund that will "foster the development of a marketplace for innovation within the sector" by nurturing social enterprise from existing providers and other groups. That should sort it out then.

### Healthwatch confusion still reigns

Attempts to clarify government intentions towards 'activities of a political nature' by the new NHS 'watchdog' Healthwatch (see <a href="http://bit.ly/188Jktv">http://bit.ly/188Jktv</a>) have been met with further confusion. First a guidance note issued by the Department of health and Local Government Association basically took the line that there just wasn't a problem as long as any campaigning is "...not influenced by political considerations in how they fulfil their purpose of being a consumer champion..." Err, right.

Next a letter to various folk, Norman Lamb, Minister for Care and Support, writes that promoting or opposing policies is fine as long as this is "..incidental to the local Healthwatch organisation's main activities, focussed around improving the quality of local health and care services..." All of which confusingly restates what they said in the first place. The meta message to Healthwatchs being pretty clear - 'we (the government) do not expect to see campaigning as a significant activity for you, whatever the need or demand for it.

Then along comes Healthwatch England, Compact Voice and Regional Voices who offer us a guidance note setting out how Healthwatchs can keep their independence and "... maintain a critical friend approach to funders" (of course, nothing nasty). Unsurprisingly, the magical power of the Compact figures prominently, it even being suggested that representatives turn up to meetings clutching a copy. Beyond that, Healthwatch members are urged to be open and transparent with their commissioners (huh?) and have a look to see what the Barings Panel on Independence has to say about it all. That's it.

### **Events coming up**

### **UK Uncut targets HSBC - 20th July**

With over 500,000 in the UK going hungry, forced by the government's brutal and unnecessary cuts to make the choice between paying the bills or feeding themselves, on Saturday 20th July, UK Uncut will be transforming HSBC banks across the country into food banks! A mass attempt to shut down the UK's biggest, bonus-munching, crisis-causing, tax-dodging bank.

Information on the call-out is here - <a href="http://bit.ly/100qTrV">http://bit.ly/100qTrV</a> - including how to connect with your local action (or even organise one yourselves).

### Social Action - perspectives for public health: theory, methods, action - 25<sup>th</sup> July

Interesting looking event to take place at 6.30pm on the 25<sup>th</sup> July, hosted by Glasgow Caledonia University at their London campus (40 Fashion St. E1 6PX). The focus will be on the role of social action/community development in public health and in relation to the NHS. Speakers include Professor Antony Morgan, Elizabeth Bayliss and David Burbidge.