

# National Coalition for Independent Action

*Celebrating voluntary & community action to change and challenge the world around us*

Newsletter No: 4

December 2007

Welcome to the 4<sup>th</sup> newsletter of the National Coalition for Independent Action. Bit shorter than the last one but your editor is rushing to escape to the summer heat of Australia (hee, hee). But, putting aside Hazel Blears chilling talk of the need for action on Britain's "ungoverned spaces", our news in this edition is generally upbeat and positive. As befits a festive season.....

The big news back at the office is that the Coalition has been awarded funding from the Tudor Trust. We will receive £30,000 a year for two years. This will allow us to properly establish our core operations and carry out some of our project work in local areas. In addition to the dosh, for which we are appreciative, this statement of support for the Coalition and its work has given our morale a big boost. So look out for a higher profile in 2008, in which endeavour, we hope many of you will join us.

And our resolutions for the year ahead? Well how about:

Speak plainly.... Tell the truth.... Be ready to disagree and dissent when needed.... Put power, politics and ideology back on the agenda.... Look for solidarity not consensus.... And, above all, mistrust a State that says it wants to empower us whilst stealing our liberties.

## Independent Action – who's busy?

### Equanomics

Our friends over at the 1990 Trust are now really motoring with their new initiative Equanomics UK – equality and economics. The aspiration is "an ambitious attempt to address issues of poverty. Focusing on wage inequalities, international trade policies, the impact of credit, loans and debt, and the impact of poverty on social conditions such as education, employment, health and housing, Equanomics UK **intends** to mobilise all committed people to help us meet our long term goal of Human Rights for All." A UK tour in the summer, fronted by Rev Jesse Jackson, reached thousands of people and an impressive list of supporters is now being built, alongside a work programme located in the creation of City-based Equanomics Action Teams across the country.

Meanwhile, the 1990 Trust is having to fight off attacks from Andrew Gilligan and his paper, the Evening Standard, attacking many BME activist groups in the capital. The 1990 Trust has published refutations of Gilligan's and the Evening Standard's accusations. For the full story, and for the latest news and updates of the fight against this backlash, see [www.blink.org.uk](http://www.blink.org.uk). Letters of support will be appreciated. More information from Karen Chouhan on [kchouhan1990@ntlworld.com](mailto:kchouhan1990@ntlworld.com)

### Refugee charities slam the Big Lottery for blocking grants

Refugee charities working to help provide front-line support, education and assistance have spoken out against Britain's major grant providers for squeezing their resources following the "demonisation of refugees".

A group of 20 charities helping asylum-seekers and refugees are campaigning for better funding from grant-awarding bodies. The Big Lottery Fund has been accused of "conservatism and a risk-averse culture" following the furore over its funding of an anti-deportation campaign. More information from the Iraqi Association who is leading the protest - [iraqicomunity@btclick.com](mailto:iraqicomunity@btclick.com)

## **National Advice Network warns government of 'disaster about to happen'**

Advice UK, the national network of independent advice services, has written to Phil Hope, our very own 'Third Sector' Minister, to warn of the damaging consequences that the Government's Legal Aid reforms is having on advice services, which "...are being forced into rushed and unwanted mergers in order to compete to retain their existing funding. Their main competitors in the new national market are multi-million pound national private-sector organisations such as Capita and A4E. Where third sector bodies are unsuccessful in bidding for the new larger contracts (now containing their existing funding) they stand to lose so much of their income that they will almost inevitably have to close. Where private sector bidders are successful they will be one step closer to realising their obvious interest in securing as large a share of the new national market as possible." Full text of this punchy letter from Steve Johnson, Chief Executive of Advice UK on [steve.johnson@adviceuk.org.uk](mailto:steve.johnson@adviceuk.org.uk).

## **Protests to Commission on Integration on 'single issue funding'**

Hazel Blears response is awaited to the Commission's recommendation that funding should only exceptionally be given to BME groups that are seen as 'single issue' (i.e. only deal with one community or faith). Following protests from NAVCA, Voice4Change and others, it is now anticipated that Blears will not support the recommendation. More information from Kevin Curley on [kevin.curley@navca.org.uk](mailto:kevin.curley@navca.org.uk) or Vandna Gohil on [vandna@voice4change-england.co.uk](mailto:vandna@voice4change-england.co.uk).

## **LSPs ineffective say survey respondents.....**

The Directory of Social Change quick survey to gather views about the workings of Local Strategic Partnerships concluded that most people thought that LSPs are "bureaucratic, unrepresentative, ineffective, controlled by the local authority, and in many cases simply do not serve the community's needs". Quite a lot to do there then.

## **Directory of Social Change set up a 'soapbox'**

Training and sector support agency the Directory of Social Change has set up a 'soapbox;' to allow people to sound off about stuff that pushes their button. Send in a maximum of 400 words and they'll put it up on their website - [enquiries@dsc.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@dsc.org.uk). Mind you, the first piece that's up there is railing on about the inequity of the State paying charities in arrears. Not exactly cutting edge of protest.....

## **nef launches new Clonetown Britain survey**

Coalition partners, the new economics foundation is re-running its Clonetown Britain survey to do a new health check on the country's High Streets. Two years ago **nef** revealed the extent to which our towns have been taken over by chain stores and the damaging effects on local economies and communities. The information now needs updating. To take part - which will mean 30 minutes of your time having a stroll around your town - please contact Nina Jatana ([nina.jatana@neweconomics.org](mailto:nina.jatana@neweconomics.org)) at **nef** or ring her on 020 7820 6362.

## **Floating residents fight that 'sinking feeling'**

The 150 people who live on an assortment of boats in London's Poplar Dock and Blackwall Basin, have won the right to stay where they are. Threatened to be displaced by plans for the new Crossrail link, residents only found out by accident that they were being expected to move on. Hurried petitions and

representations resulted in an 18 month silence but finally negotiations began and residents pressed their case with the Crossrail Select Committee. The outcome? Crossrail have abandoned their plans to displace the community and have found another way to complete the construction work. More information on this successful action from Lucie Stephens on [Lucie.Stephens@neweconomics.org](mailto:Lucie.Stephens@neweconomics.org) .

## **Glasgow's warm welcome for asylum seekers**

A story from Positive Action for Housing to warm the cockles of your heart. This tells of 2 residents in Scotstoun Kingway flats, who were determined to turn a notorious tower block into a community they could both be proud of. Now, the flats are home to 350 refugees and asylum seekers, where they are welcomed and supported by the local community. Defending families against dawn deportation raids, working to help families integrate in school and community, running a local carnival are amongst the achievements of this impressive local action. Read the whole story at <http://paihnews.wordpress.com/2007/10/11/a-towering-achievement/>

## **Save the Community Champions Scheme**

The Community Champions Awards Scheme which has provided funds to loads of active individuals to "do extraordinary things and make a real difference in their communities" is threatened with closure next March. A No10 petition has been raised to defend the scheme. Please take a few moments to sign yourself up to the petition at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/save-champion>. More information from Dorothy Newton at the Scarman Trust [dorothy.newton@thescarmantrust.org](mailto:dorothy.newton@thescarmantrust.org).

## **Café Politique**

At the beginning of November, 38 people came together in Durham to debate 'the values and role of community action and development in promoting social justice'. Seems like a lively discussion took place but not sure where this one is going. If you want to find out more, then contact Sarah Banks, Durham University, [s.j.banks@durham.ac.uk](mailto:s.j.banks@durham.ac.uk) or Sue Shaw, at the Community Development Exchange, [sueshaw@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:sueshaw@globalnet.co.uk)

## **And the talking in Scotland continues.....**

The Scottish-based emerging network concerned with the future of community education and development continues to meet. A draft 'alternative statement' has been produced taking the form of Ten Propositions (statements of principle) and Ten Proposals (statements about practice/action). If you'd like a copy of this or to plug into their discussions generally, contact Ian martin of Learning for Democracy - [ian.martin@ed.ac.uk](mailto:ian.martin@ed.ac.uk)

## **Including Direct Action.....**

### **Activism on the net**

Interesting offerings on the subject of the use of the internet to further human rights and social change are to be found on the Internet Artizans website - [www.internetartizans.co.uk/](http://www.internetartizans.co.uk/)

Down in the activist section we found a useful list of 198 Methods for Non Violent Action – you can check how many you're on top of by visiting [www.internetartizans.co.uk/blogtags/activism](http://www.internetartizans.co.uk/blogtags/activism)

### **First bulletin from London Coalition Against Poverty**

LCAP, an alliance of London-based activists has published their first news bulletin – 'Against Poverty' - which describes their approach – 'direct action casework' – and the ways they are using these tactics in their

struggle with Hackney's Homeless Persons Unit and elsewhere. Copies can be had from Dermot on [lunchout90@hotmail.com](mailto:lunchout90@hotmail.com)

## **New e-group for militant agency workers**

A new yahoo group for agency workers to share information and tactics on how to win battles, get rights, organise, and so on. You can find it at <http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/agencyworkers/>

## **Barnet care workers dispute shows the power of e-campaigning**

Barnet care workers have been in dispute with their employers the Freemantle Trust. Supported by activists from Labourstart they started an on-line campaign which resulted in 12,000 protest e-mails being sent to Freemantle's Chief Executive. Freemantle threatened legal action and nearly shut down Labourstart's site, 'til they transferred it to Australia and thus avoided UK jurisdiction. The new site is called [www.wewillnotbesilenced.org](http://www.wewillnotbesilenced.org). We're not sure where the strike has got to but will try to find out.....

## **Derby Playhouse gets local support**

This is such a nice little story that we decided to include it verbatim as it came to us.....

"They tried to close down the Derby Playhouse - one of the few beacons in dreary Derby. Long story why, but they did it about 2 weeks ago at 3pm one Wednesday afternoon, and told everyone they were sacked, even though Treasure Island their Christmas Show was due to start that night. When I heard the news, everywhere I went people were saying how awful it was, and a friend rang up and said what shall we do? So I suggested meeting at 4pm the following Monday on the steps of City Hall - even if it was only a few of us, for a candlelight vigil. This friend went to the Theatre to see if anyone was around, which there wasn't, and put a notice on the wall outside. Someone saw it and put a notice on Facebook, and when I turned up on Monday in the rain, I could hear singing, and there were over a hundred people there, loads of children, people of all ages. I stood there in shock for about an hour, and then started talking to people - it was very moving. Lots of people said they'd never been on a demo before. We were on TV and radio, people hooting horns etc.....and to cut a long story short, the theatre opened again on Saturday! Only guaranteed for the run of this play, but there's been tremendous publicity etc. It's all on [www.savederbyplayhouse.org](http://www.savederbyplayhouse.org). So it was a great feeling - and so little effort!!!!!!"

## **Naked ramblers claim police harassed them**

Now here's an interesting one. The Guardian reported that naked ramblers have exposed a police force they claim used heavy-handed tactics during a charity walk. Dorset police reportedly deployed 10 officers, patrol cars and a helicopter to marshal about 20 naturists taking part in the June fundraising event - for the Marine Conservation Society. One rambler was arrested and charged but the case was dropped because of a lack of evidence, but the retired IT consultant from Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, plans to complain to the Independent Police Complaints Commission. "It was completely unnecessary", he said, "and such a waste of resources. I'd be interested to know exactly what it did cost. In a word, the police harassed us far more than we could have harassed anybody else by our presence." He claimed passers-by happily greeted the ramblers, who were wearing rucksacks and hiking boots, until officers intervened.

## **Parliament Square sees 14 fold increase in protests**

New figures reveal that legislation designed to restrict protest outside parliament has backfired. In 2007 so far, there were 963 demonstrations around Parliament, 14 times as many as 2005. Jenny Jones, Green Party London Assembly Member, called for limits to the freedom of speech to be lifted immediately.

*"The facts clearly show that Londoners refuse to be cowed by draconian legislation. These laws have only encouraged protests in Parliament Square, which have taken significant police resources to manage."*

*"We have to realise that trying to block legitimate, peaceful protest only serves to divert limited police resources and ends up making London less safe. The sooner the Government lifts these increasingly unworkable restrictions the better."*

Mind you, quite a number of these actions were by comic Mark Thomas and his chums who have entertainingly run rings around the Police and the legislation. If you're quick you can catch Mark's London show (the Venue, Leicester Place) until 15<sup>th</sup> December or check his website for more information on his campaign - [www.markthomasinfo.com](http://www.markthomasinfo.com)

## **The madness continues**

### **Who's looking upwards then - NAVCA adopts the 'right' language**

From now on third tier agency NAVCA will talk about representing "the local third sector" rather than "the local voluntary and community sector". At a recent Board meeting NAVCA Trustees agreed that "third sector" better embraces the wide range of organisations supported by Local Infrastructure Organisations including social enterprises, faith groups, cooperatives and housing associations. NAVCA representatives will in future be saying "NAVCA speaks for local infrastructure organisations which support the local third sector". From now on NAVCA will be talking and writing about "local third sector organisations" rather than "local voluntary and community sector organisations". NAVCA Trustees say that they recognise that this change will not be welcomed by all members. It has however become increasingly difficult for NAVCA to speak one language at national level and a different language at local level.

Well, well, well.....

### **When it comes to commissioning, apparently we *all* need our capacity built**

People on both sides of the fence are now scrabbling to get ahead with commissioning. London Councils has been inviting tenders for trainers to train CVSs to train their local agencies 'to respond effectively to the new commissioning and procurement environment across the capital.' And at the same time going into a venture with the Government Office for London to offer a Certificate in commissioning and purchasing for public care: children, young people and family services in London.

Not to be outdone, the University of Leicester is also offering a 2 year part-time diploma in Commissioning, Contracting and Procurement. No doubt such a course will soon be available at a college near you.

And even more exciting (sic), we've learnt that there are to be new National Occupational standards for Commissioning, Contracting and Procurement. Now those of you with experience of NOS will know that they tend to make one wish for the end of life. Anyway, with all this training going on, maybe it will mean that they are too busy with each other and will leave us alone. ....(some hope).

### **Phil Hope and Ed Milliband provide remedy for insomniacs**

In an extraordinary outburst of inanity, Phil and Ed recently did a double act in front of the Parliamentary Public Administration Committee on the subject of Third Sector Commissioning. In a master class demonstration of how to talk a lot without saying anything, the terrible two managed to gobble-de-gook their way through more than 2 hours of the Committee's time. The transcript, which should definitely be tackled at bedtime, will soon have the zzzzzzzzzs going. You can line up your good night's sleep at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmpubadm/uc540-v/uc54002.htm>

### **Hazel Blears heads for our 'ungoverned spaces'**

In a speech at the end of October, Hazel Blears lectured a conference audience on *preventing terrorism, strengthening communities*. With reference to terrorist recruitment she said "They look for ungoverned

spaces where they can approach the vulnerable: not mosques so much these days, but places like cafes, bookshops and gyms". This theme was further explored in TV and radio interviews where the expression 'ungoverned spaces' was repeatedly used.

We googled 'ungoverned spaces' - the top hit is the US Defense Intelligence Agency and an article by its Director entitled *Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States*. Here's a flavour:

*"We are also increasingly concerned over "Ungoverned Spaces," defined as geographic areas where governments do not exercise effective control. Terrorist groups and narco-traffickers use these areas as sanctuaries to train, plan and organize, relatively free from interference.....Ungoverned spaces include densely populated cities where terrorists can congregate and prepare for operations with relative impunity."*

Whilst in no way suggesting that our communities do not need to be protected from violence, what does this signify? And what role does the Government have in mind for the VCS in bringing 'ungoverned spaces' under its control?

## Threats continue

### Newly proposed laws threaten even more police power

Stung by criticism over the farcical restrictions on protest outside Parliament, Gordon Brown pledged a review of the controversial sections 132 to 138 of the Serious Organised Act (SOCPA). Now, in a classic New Labour attempt to turn concern for democracy on its head, the Home Secretary has published a 'public consultation' document as part of the series of green papers titled, 'Governance of Britain'. Although posing as a simple review of the laws surrounding protest in Parliament, it really has a far wider remit. In fact it proposes a major redraft of existing Public Order Law, in the interests of 're-invigorating our democracy' of course. At the moment, the Public Order Act 1986 is the basic framework used to hassle people on street demos and gives the Police broad powers to decide for themselves just what constitutes legitimate protest activity. But the Police are pressing for more extensive measures of control including 'harmonising' the differences between marches and assemblies, and adding to the powers to confiscate banners and slogans.

The consultation document is called *The Governance of Britain: Managing Protest around Parliament*. You can find it at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/cons-2007-managing-protest](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/cons-2007-managing-protest) . The closing date for responses to the Home Office is 17th January 2008. E-mail them to:

[ProtestaroundParliament@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ProtestaroundParliament@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk) or write to:

Managing Protest around Parliament, Public Order Unit, Home Office, 5th Floor Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF

### Whilst the British Legion is now seen as 'dangerous'...

The Royal British Legion has been biting back after a Labour MP, Kevan Jones, accused it of "venturing into areas of politics where it should not go". This relates to the Legion's current campaign 'Honour the Covenant', which seeks to ensure the government upholds its lifelong duty of care towards its service personnel. The Legion says that its campaign is no more political than other campaigns it has run recently and that the charity stands by its message.

## Writings, musings and resources

### Commissioning – not all it's cracked up to be

New economics foundation publishes a critique of current Government approaches to commissioning, arguing that the way things are done in many areas will result in eroded public services, poor out-sourced

provision and a voluntary sector that cannot fulfil its proper role and potential. The report is called 'Unintended consequences: how the efficiency agenda erodes public services and a new public benefit model to restore them' Copies from **nef 's** website:

[http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/z\\_sys\\_publications.aspx?page=826&folder=140&section=society](http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/z_sys_publications.aspx?page=826&folder=140&section=society)

## **Why (and What Is) this Newsletter?**

This newsletter is the voice of the planning group of NCIA. We aim to issue newsletters regularly to keep you informed of what we and others are doing or saying. We send out a newsletter whenever we've got sufficient material and when one of us has the time to get it together. We will also issue Action Alerts as pressing news and opportunities for action arise. We will err on the side of inclusiveness, adding people willy-nilly to our mailing list — and of course giving every opportunity to unsubscribe.

## **How Can You Participate?**

Tell us your news, write articles, sound off with your opinions and feedback but - most important – find ways of taking your own practical action to defend and protect the independence of your work and aspirations. Our website has forums for debate and for making connections. There is a space to offer and to ask for help in taking independent action.

Please try to communicate with us via the website ([www.independentaction.net](http://www.independentaction.net)) or the accompanying email address there – [indyaction@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:indyaction@yahoo.co.uk) as this eases our administrative burden.

We are all volunteers here and we welcome more offers of help. If you'd like to help make this initiative prosper then please get in touch with us.

## **Unsubscribe**

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