

Press Release: 3/11/15

## Make or break time for charities and the voluntary sector

### NCIA goes out with a challenge .... and a promise that the work will go on

After nearly 10 years the National Coalition for Independent Action is [closing down](#). In an act of defiance not defeat, NCIA believes that now is the time to make space for new forms of opposition to the stifling co-option of charities and voluntary services groups as servants of state and private sector interests. In a final gesture, NCIA today published an excoriating analysis of the current situation [Our Last Word: Fighting for the Soul of Voluntary Action](#). This sets out the scale of damage done to independent voluntary action from successive government policies with the complicity of many in the sector, and a call to arms to regain the impetus to speak out for service users, beneficiaries and vulnerable communities.

And in a message of solidarity, more than 50 voluntary groups – including activist groups, local service organisations, CVSs, academics and national bodies such as **Children England, the Refugee Council, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations** and **Unite the Union** – have pledged in an **open letter** that their voices will not be silenced.

In a statement issued today, Penny Waterhouse, Co-Convenor of NCIA said:

*“The future of charities and voluntary groups as an independent force for social change looks bleaker than at any other time. Why is it a surprise to anyone that public trust has fallen and so much reputational damage done? When charities outsource fundraising to harass donations out of people, compete aggressively for a share of privatised public services and form partnerships with profit-hungry global corporations, it is no wonder that the public has become cynical and suspicious. And it is no surprise that government is targeting the campaigning work of charities, in efforts to shut down opposition to the policies that are damaging millions of poor and vulnerable people.*

*Back in 2006 when we started, our message - that voluntary groups were losing their independence and must fight back – was seen as scare mongering and off beam. The truth of this has now been accepted throughout the voluntary sector, with the consequences only too visible. NCIA does not need to make the case any longer; nobody can say they have not been warned.*

*But NCIA cannot rescue voluntary groups from the mess they are now in – only they can do it, if they so choose. So we have decided to stop and we leave with pride and gratitude. The future lies with new alliances and ways of organising amongst voluntary and community groups, activists, unions, academics and others determined to halt the erosion of our social protections, the rise of gross inequality, the worship of profit and the demonisation of those damaged by such ideologies.”*

Groups that have signed the open letter say that they will continue:

*“...to advance NCIA perspectives for voluntary groups independent from, and unfettered by, powerful outside interests, and committed to stand visibly and practically in solidarity with those facing injustices; to speak plainly about these injustices; and campaign vigorously for their end. “*

[ends]

[1] NCIA – [www.independentaction.net](http://www.independentaction.net)

[2] Further information from Penny Waterhouse – [penny@independentaction.net](mailto:penny@independentaction.net) or Andy Benson – [andy@independentaction.net](mailto:andy@independentaction.net) ; 0208 800 7509

[3] The National Coalition for Independent Action is an alliance of individuals and organisations who have come together to defend and promote a radical political view of the principles and practice of independent voluntary action in the UK in 2015. NCIA was established in 2006 in response to the perceived co-option of voluntary action by the UK Government and State agencies as a way to implement their policies and plans. More recently, NCIA has added to its purpose the intention to oppose the progressive incorporation of voluntary effort within private business interests, especially in the context of public services privatisation.

[4] Full text of the open letter reads:

### **Open letter about the closure of the National Coalition of Independent Action**

Poverty, homelessness and inequality are increasing at break-neck speeds. Safety nets, rights and services are being eroded. Mean-spirited policies stalk the streets. Protest is on the increase. So we, the undersigned, are sorry to hear that the National Coalition of Independent Action (NCIA) is closing down ([www.independentaction.net](http://www.independentaction.net)).

Over the last 10 years NCIA has rung an alarm bell alerting us to the progressive silencing of charities and voluntary groups as a force to resist the impoverishment of people and communities, the loss of rights and the privatisation of public services. Whilst we have not always agreed with NCIA's positions, its voice has been essential in reminding us of the duty to dissent within civil society. A duty often lost in the clamour for public service contracts and insider influence.

But, as NCIA's closing statement says, “something else is needed to occupy the space we have taken”. In particular, NCIA calls for continuing the alliances built between voluntary services, activists, unions, academics and others determined to halt the erosion of social protections, the rise of gross inequality, the worship of profit and the demonisation of those damaged by such ideologies – both inside and outside the UK.

We say thank you and goodbye to NCIA, and affirm that we will continue – in our own ways – to advance NCIA perspectives for voluntary groups independent from, and unfettered by, powerful outside interests, and committed to stand visibly and practically in solidarity with those facing injustices; to speak plainly about these injustices; and campaign vigorously for their end.

## Signatories:

- **42<sup>nd</sup> Street** - Simone Spray
- **Adur Voluntary Action** - Adrian Barritt
- **Mike Aiken** - independent researcher
- **Assemblies for Democracy** - Paul Feldman
- **bOLDr** - Steve Lancashire
- **Boycott Workfare**
- **Bradford Resource Centre** – Mike Quiggin
- **BRAP** - Joy Warmington
- **Bullian Community Resource Centre** - Belinda Lewis
- **Camden Voluntary Action** – Kevin Nunan
- **Centre for Welfare Reform** - Simon Duffy
- **Children England** - Kathy Evans
- **Chilypep** - Lesley Pollard
- **CO2Connections** - James Murphy
- **Communities Inc** - Shamsheer Chohan
- **Community Action Derby** - Kim Harper
- **Community Action Milton Keynes** - Alissa Pemberton
- **Community Development Network London** - Matt Scott
- **Community Sector Coalition** - Nick Beddow
- **De Montfort University** - Jonathan Davies (personal capacity)
- **Detention Forum** - Eiri Ohtani
- **Directory of Social Change** - Jay Kennedy
- **Disabled People Against the Cuts Steering Group** - Linda Burnip
- **Disabled People Against the Cuts, NE & Cumbria** - Gail Ward
- **Dudley Council for Voluntary Services** – Lorna Prescott
- **Edge Hill University** - John Diamond
- **Equanomics** – Karen Chouhan
- **European Services Strategy Unit** – Dexter Whitfield
- **Faiths4Change** - Laird Ryan
- **Glasgow Caledonian University** – Les Huckfield
- **Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit** – Denise McDowell
- **Hackney Unites** – Jane Holgate
- **Housing Justice** - Alastair Murray
- **In Defence of Youth Work** - Tony Taylor
- **Institute of Race Relations** - Jenny Bourne
- **Keep Volunteering Voluntary** - Penny Waterhouse
- **Lincolnshire Community Foundation** - Gordon Hunter
- **Livestroughfriends** – Bob Rhodes
- **London School of Economics** – Armine Ashkanian
- **Manchester Community Central MACC** - Mike Wild
- **Manchester Metropolitan University** - Carol Packham
- **Middlesborough Voluntary Development Agency** – Dinah Lane
- **Migrants Resource Centre** – Ros Lucas
- **Muslim Community Helpline** – Sarah Sherif
- **National Community Activist Network** - Joe Taylor
- **Neighbourhood Networks** - John Dalrymple
- **North Tyneside Women’s Voices** - Penny Remfry
- **Our NHS** - Caroline Molloy
- **People’s Republic of Southwark** – Liliana Dmitrovic
- **Question the Powerful** - Henry Tam
- **Refugee Council** - Maurice Wren
- **Renters’ Rights London & Waltham Forest Renters** - Rosie Walker
- **Sue Robson** - community development practitioner
- **Salford Star** - Stephen Kingston
- **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations** - Ruchir Shah
- **South West Foundation** - Jan Crawley
- **Sussex Defend our NHS**
- **Unite the Union** - Sally Kosky & James Lazou
- **University of Northampton** - Bob Colenutt
- **Voluntary Action Harrow Cooperative** – Alex Buckmire
- **Voluntary Action Lewisham** – Tony Nickson

- **Volunteer Centre Lewisham** - Kay Kelleher
- **Volunteer Cornwall** - Ian Jones
- **Water Adventure Centre** - Lilian Pons
- **We Own It** - Cat Hobbs
- **West Northumberland Foodbank** - Jo Walker
- **World to Win** - Corinna Lotz

