

national information forum

Working for the inclusion of disabled and other disadvantaged people
by encouraging better information provision

News Briefing No. 22. June 2010

In This
Issue

*A Digest of Current Social Information
For members of the National Information Forum*

- **DETENTION OF THE INNOCENTS**
- **CARE SYSTEM COMES UNDER FIRE**
- **A VERDICT ON THE COALITION**
- **NATIONAL INSURANCE CHANGES**
- **SNOWDON AT 80**
- **GOD'S LAW**
- **NEW GUIDANCE ON END OF LIFE CARE**
- **THE SILENT DESTROYER**
- **WE HATE NO.30: HYPOCRISY**

DETENTION OF THE INNOCENTS

The Coalition Government has announced (www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk) that it is committed to ending the detention of children for immigration purposes. Immigration Minister Damian Green will be leading a wide-ranging review to achieve this, setting out plans in the coming months. The review will be considering alternatives, and opening a dialogue with those who have a relevant interest. The government is nevertheless firm in its resolve to return those with no right to stay in the UK.

In the meantime, evidence from The Children's Society and UNICEF indicates that destitution among asylum-seeking children is growing and that unaccompanied immigrant children struggle to cope with the mental trauma experienced on their journeys to the UK and are vulnerable to exploitation.

CARE SYSTEM COMES UNDER FIRE

In a blistering article on the TES Connect* website, Adi Bloom reports on a lecture given by Sonia Jackson, Professor of Social Studies and Education at the Institute of Education in London. The lecture followed a long-term study of 200 children in care.

Professor Jackson said that there are approximately 60,000 children looked after by local authorities in England. Children who have been in care make up less than one per cent of the population, but account for half the inmates in young offenders' institutions and a quarter of adult prisoners. As young adults, 80 per cent end up unemployed and a significant number also homeless. Girls in care are eight times more likely to be teenage mothers than their peers elsewhere. Professor Jackson saw this as the continuation of a tradition begun in 1834, when the Poor Law mandated that destitute children should be placed in workhouses. She argued that 150 years on little had changed: "coming into care was...equivalent to being thrown on the educational scrapheap." Education could play a vital role in determining the future of children in care, but in practice they are routinely steered down vocational routes and away from paths that might lead to higher education.

**For the full report go to www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6043027.
Thanks to John Vincent for drawing attention to this site.**

*The TES Connect website is published by TSL Education Ltd which is also behind the Times Educational Supplement.



A VERDICT ON THE COALITION

Harmer Parr in a letter to *The Guardian* (18 May) finds that the political philosophy underpinning the new coalition government is Groucho Marxism: "I have my principles, but if you don't like those, I have others." We could not possibly comment.

NATIONAL INSURANCE CHANGES

From April a new Carer's Credit and changes in the way that Carer's Allowance can be claimed have been introduced. The credit will mean that many more carers will be able to build up their basic state pension and second state pension. Details at www.direct.gov.uk and in the March edition of *Touchbase*. No doubt there will be much more to come in the near future, and perhaps less welcome.

SNOWDON AT 80

We were remiss in issue 20 to omit the news of Lord Snowdon's 80th birthday, which was celebrated on 5 March by a splendid reception at Porchester Hall in West London. This slip was particularly unfortunate given that two of our Forum people, Ann Darnbrough and Dr. Richard Lansdown, are long-standing members of the selection panel of The Snowdon Award Scheme, which organised the event.

The Scheme began in 1981 when Snowdon, himself affected by polio as a child, saw that many physically disabled young people were being denied the opportunity to pursue further education or training simply because they could not afford the extra costs resulting from their disability. He set up a trust using £14,000 he had earned for photographing the royal family. His continuous personal commitment, allied to dedicated fund-raising, has allowed the Scheme to grow. Six students were helped in the first year; since then nearly 1,600 people have benefited from around £2 million in grants.

The reception was suitably spectacular, including performances by members of the Royal Ballet, an indoor rowing challenge between past and present members of the top six university rowing clubs – including all four members of Great Britain's gold-medal coxless four team from the Beijing Olympics – and singing from Maria Friedman. In the historic photograph at right, trustees, members of the selection panel and Esther Rantzen join Lord Snowdon in a celebration of both a special personal anniversary and a voluntary job well done. You may recognise some of them.



GOD'S LAW

On her US radio show, Dr. Laura Schlesinger said that as an observant orthodox Jew, homosexuality is an abomination according to Leviticus 18:22, and cannot be condoned under any circumstance. The following response is an open letter to Dr. Laura, penned by a US resident and posted on the

Internet.

“Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God’s law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination...End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God’s Laws and how to follow them.

1. Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, providing they are purchased from neighbouring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can’t I own Canadians?
2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?
3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness – Lev.15:19-24. The problem is how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offence.
4. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odour for the Lord – Lev.1:9. The problem is my neighbours. They claim the odour is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?
5. I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself, or should I ask the police to do it?
6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination, Lev.11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don’t agree. Can you settle this? Are there degrees of abomination?
7. Lev.21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?
8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev.19:27. How should they die?
9. I know from Lev.11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?
10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev.19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? Lev.24:10-16. Couldn’t we just burn them to death at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev.20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively and thus enjoy considerable expertise in such matters, so I’m confident you can help.

Thank you again for reminding us that God’s word is eternal and unchanging.

Your adoring fan.

James M.Kauffman, Ed.D. Professor Emeritus, Dept of Curriculum, Instruction and Special Education, University of Virginia.

(It would be a damn shame if we couldn't own a Canadian).”

Thanks to Chris Bazeley for this.

NEW GUIDANCE ON END OF LIFE CARE

In May, the General Medical Council published new guidelines for doctors on advance care planning for patients nearing the end of life, including how to manage advance requests and refusals of treatment. It emphasises the need to follow the wishes of dying patients and the vital importance of good communication between doctors, patients, their families and the healthcare team.

Unsurprisingly, the guidance is rooted in a key principle that doctors must start from a presumption in favour of prolonging life and must not be motivated by a desire to bring about a patient's death. But it accepts that there is no absolute obligation to prolong life irrespective of the consequences for the patient, and irrespective of the patient's views.

For the first time, the guidance covers how to respond to 'advance decisions' made by competent adults against the possibility that they may not be able to make their wishes known when decisions are to be taken. There is also advice on doctors' responsibilities after a patient has died and how they should approach conversations about organ and tissue donation.

The full text of the guidance, *Treatment and care towards the end of life: good practice in decision making*, is available at www.gmc-uk.org. Advice on making an 'advance decision' can be found at www.compassionindying.org.uk, where a form can be downloaded.

THE SILENT DESTROYER

Paul Desmond, director of the campaigning organisation 'Am I Number 88', has produced a simple poster drawing attention to the dangers posed by hepatitis C, which is said silently to have infected 100,000 Britons, often causing fatal liver damage.

According to the poster, many will have been infected through transfusion or inoculation. Most harm occurs over a 20-30 year period by alcohol and the common use of medicines whilst undiagnosed. Early diagnosis and simple advice avoids this.

In this country, particular risks are attributable to major surgery or transfusion before 1992, a caesarean section or the use of immune and clotting products before 1994, and transplants or dialysis. Surgical risks often remain across Africa, Asia, South America and Eastern Europe, and from syringe re-use in some overseas inoculations and injections.

Hepatitis C tests are recommended for anyone who has been exposed to any of the above risks, all prison inmates and street injectors and, routinely, employees who handle blood.

The danger is exacerbated by the fact that most hepatitis C patients have no symptoms until real damage has been done. If in doubt you are advised to consult your GP or contact the Hepatitis C NHS helpline on 0800 451451.

WE HATE NO.30: HYPOCRISY

“Be as you would seem to be”

Thomas Fuller: 'Gnomologia (1732)

Double-speaking has been a favourite convention in the theatre for many years, much exploited by Shakespeare as when in 'The Merchant of Venice' the money-lender Shylock, being introduced to

Antonio, says in an aside to the audience: “How like a fawning publican he looks! I hate him for he is a Christian...” But to Antonio’s face he says “Rest you fair, good signior; your worship was the last man in our mouths.” In this way characters in life, as on the stage, will say one thing, but carry another in their minds. To be hypocritical, in its literal meaning and in practice, is to play a part.

When Gordon Brown was heard to refer to Gillian Duffy as “a bigoted woman”, the media seized on that comment, accidentally picked up on air. Yet the essential point, surely, was that it exposed the insincerity of the blandishments previously heaped on the unfortunate woman. To be fair, Brown’s lapse, which has cost him dear, was made in the heat of the moment, under pressure. Sadly, even in less stressful circumstances, it is part of many politicians’ stock in trade to flatter people and say what they are thought to want to hear, rather than telling them the unvarnished truth. The received wisdom is that this is the way to win votes, and that the Prime Minister’s fatal error was only to leave his microphone switched on.

But this view could be mistaken. The electorate is cannier than politicians think. A classic example of this arose during the 1966 general election. Alf Morris, who first took his seat in the House of Commons in 1964, had supported Sidney Silverman by agreeing to act as a teller for his successful bill to abolish the death penalty. Friends and colleagues told Alf that by supporting Silverman he had committed political suicide, given the fierce opposition to the measure in Manchester. His Wythenshawe constituency was home to both parents of Leslie Ann Downey, one of the child victims of the Moors murderers. Thus when the 1966 election was called, Alf was told by even his closest friends that he had no chance at all of being re-elected. Canvassers reported that the only issue being raised on doorsteps was Alf’s involvement in the campaign to end the death penalty. In practice, however, Alf stood by his controversial stance yet doubled his majority over his Conservative opponent. He drew the moral that most voters are concerned more about trust and a readiness to stand by firmly-held convictions. Whereas, voters generally are able to sniff out hypocrisy and self-interest.

Yet it can be argued that hypocrisy is part of the human condition: that even our acts of kindness and goodness have an element of self-interest. Alain de Botton in *Citizen Ethics in a Time of Crisis* argues “What looks like goodness must involve either obedience or perverted forms of egoism (the biographers can be expected to unearth the details in due course). Self-interested motives are glued to the underside of every apparently benevolent act.” In political leaders it may be difficult to distinguish between the national interest and self interest – the quest for power.

Certainly there is a hierarchy of seriousness in the hypocrisy stakes. Most of us, from time to time, have been guilty of what Dean Inge called ‘innocent hypocrisy’. As when we give effusive thanks for a gift that we detest. The motive here is not to hurt the giver’s feelings rather than a desire to deceive.

Somewhat more dubious are those who lead a double life: allowing themselves to be seen as pillars of society when secretly having some very questionable habits. Dr. Johnson made the point – you may think oddly - that there was nothing more unjust than to accuse someone of hypocrisy because they failed to live up to the values they professed and to which they aspired. In particular, of course, sexual infidelity is ordinarily a prime, though commonplace, source of hypocrisy. One that is certainly hated by its victims.

But it is religion that is the happiest hunting ground of hypocrisy, all too often blurring the line between genuine sanctity and the pretence of sanctimony, (companions these two in the Concise Oxford Dictionary). In hating hypocrisy in this context we even have the support of the 1662 *Prayer Book*, which asks the “Good Lord” to deliver us, among other things, “from hypocrisy”.

Most sinister of all are those priests who, having been ordained into holy orders, purporting to be 'God's representatives on earth' and seen as occupying the moral high ground, have systematically and persistently sexually abused young children. For them there is really no excuse, and we concur, at least metaphorically, with Matthew 18:6. And those who suppose that by protecting them they are preserving the reputation of their church are not only hypocritical but misguided.

This information sheet has been compiled by Ann Darnbrough and Derek Kinrade. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the National Information Forum. Earlier News Briefings and the 'We Hate' series are available on the Forum's website: www.nif.org.uk.