

# national information forum

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

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

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## **ARE CHARITY EXECUTIVES PAID TOO MUCH?**

In her memoir *A Rebellious Disposition*, Ann reflected on 'the deadly influenza virus'. She particularly regretted that escalating salaries were becoming commonplace in the 'third sector', and were "very off-putting to potential donors".

Her view is widely shared and recently found expression in two letters to *The Times*. W.K. Shooter, a partner in a firm of accountants and tax consultants, drew attention to the fact that the published accounts of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution for 2009 showed that 28 people were paid between £60,000 and £79,999, while 40 were paid between £60,000 and £139,999. By contrast, many volunteers and lifeboat crews were paid very little. Could this be justified, he asked.

Philip Circus responded that the greatest scandal of all was the number of charities that still provide final-salary pension schemes for their staff. Donations were increasingly going to fill pension black holes rather than helping those in need.

Is this perhaps a prime opportunity for 'the big society', with charity executives voluntarily scaling back their pay? Everyone needs enough to live on, but could we not return to modest salaries and the principle of service being its own reward? Otherwise, why should the general public continue to give to charities that top-slice donations for the benefit of their own staff?

## **POLIO REAPPEARS IN EUROPE**

After an interval of 12 years a resurgence of polio has been reported from Tajikistan. In April, the World Health Organisation's regional reference laboratory in Moscow confirmed wild poliovirus type 1 as the cause of the outbreak. At 28 June, Tajikistan had reported 334 laboratory-confirmed cases, of which 15 had led to death.

**Edited from a report in the British Polio Fellowship's *Bulletin*,  
September 2010**

## **DRUG CONTAINING CANNABIS LICENSED FOR NHS USE**

Sativex, an oral spray developed specifically to relieve the symptoms of multiple sclerosis and having cannabis as an ingredient, has been licensed by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. The MS Society is now leading a campaign to ensure that the drug is made available



throughout the UK. But primary care trusts in the South Central region have already decided not to prescribe the drug, which would cost on average about £11 a day for each patient. [Extrapolated over people with MS across the UK this would represent a total annual cost of over £400 million].

**Edited from a report in the RNIB's magazine *NB*, September 2010**

### **EQUALITY ACT TO BE GIVEN LEGAL EFFECT**

The much heralded Equality Act came into force on 1 October 2010. Guidance can be downloaded from the EHRC website.

### **THE AGEING SOCIETY**

Under this headline the August issue of *The Pensioner* magazine (for the Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance) reports part of a speech by Professor David Oliver, the Department of Health's National Clinical Director for Older People. Among other things, Professor Oliver said that when the Health Service was founded in 1948, 48% of people died before retirement age. That figure is now 9%, and the number of the very old has doubled in 20 years, with the biggest increase being in the over 85s.

Has anyone noticed that if this trend continues there will be something of a problem come 2030?

### **AN INTRANSIGENT PROBLEM?**

The Chancellor of the Exchequer says that welfare spending is out of control. We can understand that. But there are many thousands of people who, though perhaps marginally capable of work, have lapsed into dependency and are decidedly unattractive to employers even if and when they have vacancies. Might not the cost of trying to make them fit for work and get them into employment outweigh the cost of keeping them on benefits?

While most people recognise a need to reduce our national indebtedness, opinions differ on how this should be achieved: the depth and pace of cuts and where they should fall. We have made it clear that we are on the side of those who think that the government should not target the most vulnerable in society. In particular, the idea that work is a panacea to fix a broken society seems to us absurd at a time when jobs are so hard to come by. On the other hand we are attracted by the thoughts of Professor Greg Philo. He argues that the national debt could be paid off by imposing a one-off tax on the wealthiest of the population. A YouGov poll reported in *The Guardian* in June found that 74% of respondents would favour such a tax, and the results tend to show that the rich would not necessarily oppose such a move.

For details see [www.glasgowmediagroup.org](http://www.glasgowmediagroup.org), and for statistics on wealth go to [www.statistics.gov.uk/pdffdir/wealth1209.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdffdir/wealth1209.pdf).

### **'GREEN' COFFINS**

We have been intrigued to read of the availability of coffins made from board produced from recycled newspapers. You can't choose a particular newspaper and you may need to persuade your funeral director to go down this route. But this should be a cheaper and more environmentally friendly alternative. The coffins are supplied by Sunset Coffins, Draycott Business Park, Cam, Dursley, Gloucestershire GL11 5DQ, tel: 01453 890804, e.mail: [sales@sunsetcoffins.co.uk](mailto:sales@sunsetcoffins.co.uk).

### **YOHOHO**

Chris Bazeley, our webmaster, seems to have found the perfect way to travel in a wheelchair. A further report is promised for our next issue.

“From MV Azura, Thursday 09-09-10. 3.07pm.

“Well folks, we're about 1,800 miles from Southampton and at present about 80 miles east-north-east of Algiers and heading further east at around 23 knots. The sea is calm and the sun is warm, high and bright. We left Malaga last night at around 5.30pm, (at present we are one hour ahead of GMT, but will jump another hour ahead tomorrow night,). We still have around 800 miles to go to the Katakolon (Greece – think Mount Olympus)

but will try to bear up under constant strain of fabulous food and the perfectly temperate weather.

“The two days sailing down the Channel and across the Bay of Biscay was a little rough with a steady stiff gale blowing in from the Atlantic but it wasn’t bad enough to spill the champagne or G&Ts at the captain’s reception on Monday night. We both awoke around 4am Wednesday morning to see the Rock of Gibraltar silhouetted against the night sky.

“There’s an exhibition of Rolf Harris paintings and sculpture on board, so I am frequently asked for autographs and seem to get preferential treatment in most lifts, bars and restaurants, but then; who am I to argue????

“Malaga was fun, nosing around the backstreets and getting caught up in a local festival with lots of flamenco dancing and brass bands etc., and we really managed to get a genuine taste of Spain and its people as all the tourist traps were closed for the day.

“The ship is all of the huge ‘floating gin palace’ we’d been led to expect, it being a gentle ten-minutes walk/trundle end to end. It weighs in at 116,000 tons and is by far the biggest thing in most of the ports we visit (including the buildings!). There are 15 public decks, 8 major restaurants and 5 swimming pools. There are also many ‘up-market’ retailers littered about the place (Calvin Klien, Dior etc.) and a part of their licence seems to be that they hold a ‘free-drinks’ reception at least once during a cruise so the biggest problem we have is just who do we let buy us drinks each evening!

“Well, it’s almost time to slip into the old white tux again so I will be in touch.....”

When he returns, Chris can be contacted at:

The Drawing Office

[www.thedrawingoffice.co.uk](http://www.thedrawingoffice.co.uk)

01386 700611.

### **A STATEMENT IS NOT ENOUGH**

You will be aware that Ofsted has produced a report asserting that too many children are being identified as having special educational needs. I am currently reading about a boy who was born ‘almost dead’ and not expected to live. He survived only to contract scrofula, a tubercular infection of the lymph glands, which scarred his features and may have been responsible for his damaged eyesight – totally blind in his left eye, with only partial vision in the right one. As he grew up he was prone to ‘odd gesticulations and movements’ and was known for being ‘a large uncouth presence in the classroom’. His limbs were large and awkward; he lacked social graces and was coarse and ferocious in manners, temper and appearance. Would he nowadays have been regarded as having special educational needs? His name was Samuel Johnson.

### **SHOPPING ONLINE**

Online shopping is of particular interest to disabled people. The UK now has the highest percentage of retailers using e-commerce/internet sales (71 per cent). This compares with the EU median of 51 per cent. In 2009 internet users spent £38 billion – 9.5 per cent of the UK’s retail trade.

The Office of Fair Trading, concerned that online consumers should be adequately protected, has launched a consultation. Details at [www.offt.gov.uk/news-and-updates/press/2010/83-10](http://www.offt.gov.uk/news-and-updates/press/2010/83-10) .

### **CITIZENSHIP**

In News Briefing no.14, October 2009, we commented on The Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009. We were concerned about a provision which would allow the Secretary of State to reduce the normal qualifying periods for naturalisation by two years if the applicant had participated in prescribed activities as a volunteer. We now understand (from *Migrant Rights News* reported in John Vincent’s Network E.bulletin no. 60) that immigration minister Damian Green has made it clear that the Coalition Government is not in favour of compulsory voluntary work being a factor in allowing British citizenship. We have not been able to verify this, as it were from the horse’s mouth, but note that no such provision features on the Home Office website.

### **DISABLED PEOPLE SAID TO BE “INVISIBLE” IN BRITAIN TODAY**

Scope, the charity for people with cerebral palsy, reports a commissioned survey by the polling organisation ComRes. 2,030 adults were interviewed online in August 2010, the data being weighted to be representative

demographically of all adults in Great Britain. The survey is reported as finding that

- nearly 40% of people (who are neither themselves disabled nor have a disabled family member) don't know any disabled people
- 90% of Britons have never had a disabled person in their house for a social occasion
- 91% of people believe that disabled people should have the same opportunities as everyone else
- only 21% of Britons have ever had the chance to work with a disabled colleague.

Scope concludes that despite a widespread view that disabled people should be given a level-playing field of opportunity they are “largely hidden in day-to-day life”.

We belong among those who have a disabled family member, have many disabled friends and have regularly worked alongside disabled colleagues. The suggestion in the Scope report, however, is that if you do not have any personal experience of disability you will remain cut off from disabled people and that they are therefore “invisible”. We think this is questionable. The figures highlighted by Scope (at the time of writing) are poorly set out. We presume that the large majority of respondents were neither themselves nor another family member disabled. Leaving aside the fact that some 60% of them appear nevertheless to have known a disabled person, we think that the fact that the remaining 40% did not know any disabled people, and that only just over a fifth had ever had the chance to work with a disabled colleague is not indicative of wholesale invisibility, but is merely a matter of limited social cohesion. In much the same way a significant number of white people do not associate with black people, and *vice versa*. It does not follow that either group is invisible.

We are regularly informed that there are approximately 10 million disabled people in the UK (roughly 16% of the total population) and such numbers (along with the Paralympics) would be very hard for anyone to miss.

### **A SENSE OF URGENCY**

This new report from Sense indicates that there are now 356,000 deafblind people in the UK, approximately 62% of them aged 70 and over, 32% between 20 and 69, and 6% young people up to 19. It predicts that by 2030 the total will rise by 60% to 569,000, 74% aged 70 and over, 22% between 20 and 69, and 4% young people. It is yet another reminder that increased longevity is a mixed blessing. Sense advocates improvement in identification, planning and budgeting, assessments, social care services and government policy.

**Full report and summaries at [www.sense.org.uk/what\\_is\\_deafblindness/urgency](http://www.sense.org.uk/what_is_deafblindness/urgency).**

### **HIV RATES CONTINUE TO RISE**

The Health Protection Agency regards HIV as one of the most important [deadly?] communicable diseases in the UK, with a serious morbidity rate, high costs of treatment and care, significant mortality and shortening of life. Unfortunately (at the time of writing) the latest estimate of its incidence on the HPA website dates only from the end of 2008, when the total number of people living with HIV in the UK was estimated at 83,000, of whom 27% had been unaware of their infection.

In our *The Sex Directory* (Woodhead-Faulkner, Cambridge, 1988) we reported the then total as “not less than 30,000 and perhaps as many as 50,000” and predicted that “this figure is likely to rise steeply over the years”. It gives us no pleasure to have been proved right.

**Details of the HIV scourge and the incidence of other STIs is available at [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk).**

### **WE HATE NO.34: FANATICISM**

*“Fanaticism consists of redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim.”*

George Santayana, quoted in ‘Esquire’.

*“There is no place in a fanatic's head where reason can enter.”*

Napoleon I, ‘Maxims’ (1804-15)

We must first distinguish between fanaticism and enthusiasm, for the latter is a life force that can be both measured and rational. As Emerson, in an essay of 1841, remarked, “Nothing great was ever achieved without

enthusiasm”. Fanaticism, by contrast, is always both irrational and excessive; but even then we must make a distinction between its harmless and dangerous manifestations. Examples of the latter – persecutions and massacres – stretch back through history, usually attributable to religious fundamentalism, or racial/political enmity. Anti-Semitism is one of the most persistent ingredients, providing in our own time a particularly monstrous example of the extremities that can derive from wrong-headed fixations. The Holocaust, as we all know, was largely rooted in a concept of Aryan purity in sharp contrast to perceived Semite decadence. What is less well known is that one of the sources of such thinking began life in Britain, in Southsea to be precise. Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927), regarded by some Nazis as the spiritual founder of the Third Reich, was the son of a rear-admiral and became a man of high scholarship and deep culture. He rallied to the cause of Germany during the First World War, venerating first Kaiser Wilhelm II and later Adolf Hitler. He was also a great admirer of Richard Wagner and his wife Cosima, and married their daughter Eva in 1908. William Shirer, in his *History of the Third Reich* argues that much of the philosophical basis of Nazi anti-Semitism stems from a single chapter of Chamberlain’s *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (The Foundations of the 19th Century), published in 1899. Shirer recounts that Chamberlain was one of the first intellectuals in Germany to see a great future for Hitler. He met him first in Bayreuth in 1923 and was “swept off his feet by the eloquent young Austrian”. “You have mighty things to do,” he wrote to Hitler on the following day. The point here is that the most appalling consequences can stem from regressive ideas, with small beginnings, and continue to do so. Today, terrorism has become a global plague, and enormous power to wreak havoc is now available to idiot minorities. In hating these poisonous cults and their bizarre beliefs we may be accused of contributing to the odour of animosity; our view rests upon a concurring hypothesis that responding with active hostility (as in Iraq and Afghanistan) merely compounds the problem. Defence may be justified; offence is not.

We should also say something of (relatively) harmless fanaticism. The recent football world cup is a good example. We love our country, but flying the flag of St George on one’s car or house is surely over the top. The more so in that anyone of even average sagacity should have been aware that the England squad had neither the personnel nor the strategy to do well in the competition. Yet thousands of good people travelled an enormous distance at extraordinary expense to see our team and its manager humiliated. That, in our book, is fanaticism (though one of us watched it on television).

Another fertile field (sometimes literally so) for an excess of over-zealous adoration is that of popular music. Now at least one of us knows next to nothing of the genre, beyond hearing some of it in charity shops, where its purpose seems to be that of keeping the volunteers awake. He thinks that much of such music has been given over to the barbarians, but is aware that there are favoured performers and prestigious awards, and is content to say ‘each to his own’. But what is more difficult to accept is the mass hysteria with which cacophonies are greeted. Is this not a form of collective madness?

We began by quoting Napoleon Bonaparte. He is one who knew something of extremists. On Christmas Eve, 1800, en route to the Paris *Opéra* to hear Haydn’s *Creation* for the first time, a contrivance, ostensibly a water cart, was exploded between the carriage of the Consul and his lady. The attempt on his life failed, and as Napoleon calmly took his seat he is famously said to have remarked: “The rascals wanted to blow me up, bring me a book of the oratorio”. Let us try to be similarly calm in the face of terrorism, and avoid matching hatred with more of the same. Declaring and waging war on terror simply extends the carnage. Better that politicians lose face than that our soldiers should continue to lose limbs.

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**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](http://www.nif.org.uk).**