

# not the national information forum

But still working for the inclusion of disabled and other disadvantaged people  
by encouraging better information provision

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In This  
Issue

*A Digest of Current Social Information*

- DEMORALIZING THE DISABLED
- AGEING ACROSS EUROPE
- A BOOK BONANZA
- FUNDING CARE
- FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
- A BETTER LAW ON ASSISTED DYING
- FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
- SEE ME SAVE ME
- COPYRIGHT CONFUSION
- FISCHER-DIESKAU
- CELEBRATING 20 YEARS
- OLYMPIC MANIA
- RATIONALISING HEALTH INFORMATION
- PAINE AND BURNS
- FOOD LABELLING DANGEROUSLY CONFUSING
- SINGLE PARENTS
- PRISONERS' RIGHT TO VOTE
- WE HATE NO.54: HATE-CRIME

## DEMORALIZING THE DISABLED

I can't find it now but, if my memory serves, Ian Duncan Smith was recently quoted as explaining that it is necessary to restrict benefits in order to ensure that people are better off in work. If that is true it reveals a curiously negative approach. I am on firmer ground in respect of an interview with IDS in the *Daily Telegraph* of 14 May in which he confirmed that he remains determined to introduce radical reforms to disability benefits that will involve the reassessment of more than two million claimants over the next four years. According to earlier reports, this action is expected to cut benefit payments by £2.24 billion annually and reduce the number of claimants by half a million.

To my mind there is something distasteful about saving money by finding people hitherto accepted as incapacitated as suddenly 'fit for work', when employment is so hard to come by. I regard disability as a misfortune and believe that the role of government, as far as possible, should be to ameliorate its consequences. I concur with the comment of Labour shadow, Liam Byrne, who accused IDS of going ahead with reform "with all the finesse of a bull in a china shop".

Of course, the drive to balance the nation's books, which has hardly begun, goes much wider than its effects on disabled people. Already there are signs that public services are falling apart. There has long been an underclass in this country, but current policies are making matters worse. Despite having equality legislation, we have rampant *inequality*: the rich getting richer while poor families are at their wits end. It is dangerous territory, and we are beginning to see the consequences in social breakdown, not least the exploitation of young girls. The need to reduce the national debt is undeniable, but I take the simple view that it would be preferable to tackle the fiscal deficit through targeted, direct taxation, combined with judicious cuts in non-essential services. Whereas what we have had is a reduction in income tax for everyone earning up to £100,000, a 5% abatement of the 50% rate, alongside crude 'across the board' cuts in government spending, justified by the mantra that everyone must share in reducing the burden of debt. The case is often made that an ordinary family faced by hard times would curtail its spending. Just so, but it would first prudently cut back on unnecessary, wasteful expenditure.

We would do well to remember Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), in which he wrote of "Two Nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by different breeding, are fed by different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same



laws...the rich and the poor.”

If you missed it, I also urge you to look out Sir Stephen Bubb's recent memorable speech (*Third Sector Online* and *The Guardian*, 10 May 2012), in which he observed that “we are in danger of creating, in the midst of one of the richest countries in the world, a ‘forgotten Britain’ – swathes of our society whose plight is getting worse...The homeless, victims of domestic violence, those with mental health problems, the elderly and alone. Children in broken homes – the support for these people looks likely to be eroded over the next decade, without the nation they are part of appearing to notice or care.”

It is surely time to consider a change of direction.

## **AGEING ACROSS EUROPE**

This is the title of a 143-page report prepared by DEMOS for the charity WRVS. It considers income & poverty; health and health provision; well-being; social inclusion & participation; and age discrimination. In the media it has been widely reported as finding that Britain is ‘lagging behind’. But, overall, Britain is rated a close third, and the comparison is hardly ‘across Europe’: the survey was limited to the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. For a downloadable copy go to [www.wrvs.org.uk](http://www.wrvs.org.uk), and search for ‘Ageing Across Europe’.

## **A BOOK BONANZA**

World Book Night (23 April) was celebrated in the UK by handing out 480,000 free books chosen by some 20,000 volunteers. A Routemaster bus toured London streets to help the giveaway as part of a campaign in Britain, Ireland, the USA and Germany to encourage more people to read. In addition to this visible initiative led by the boroughs of Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea, and Hammersmith & Fulham, a further 620,000 books will be distributed to isolated readers in prisons, care homes, hospitals, sheltered housing, homeless shelters and through libraries.

More at [www.worldbooknight.org](http://www.worldbooknight.org)

## **FUNDING CARE**

Amid calls for the government to speed up its response to the report of the Dilnot Commission, a single offering has appeared from the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), a ‘thinktank’ set up by Ian Duncan Smith before the election. This takes an entirely contrary view to Dilnot by arguing that resources should be concentrated on the poorest pensioners, those solely reliant on state support. CSJ refers to “those who have not been fortunate enough to own their own houses but instead find themselves dependent on the state in their old age”. This carries the implication that home owners, and by extension those with assets, have been fortunate. The reality is that for the most part they have worked hard, scrimped and saved through lengthy mortgages to buy their own homes, only to find that if they need care in later life they must pay the full cost.

Effectively, the CSJ report recommends the status quo. As such it would involve the government in the minimum cost, a prescription that is bound to appeal to the Treasury in the current climate. Why am I suspicious?

Having said that, with medical science continually discovering ways to extend our lives, the potential cost of funding care is frightening. It is reported that the number of vulnerable older and disabled people receiving home care without charge has already fallen by 11% in England in the past two years. With growing numbers of people needing care the point will be reached when local authority budgets can no longer cover the cost. I take the view that we must all find ways, by all means possible, to avoid ‘professional’ care.

## **FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, 10 MAY 2012**

Draft Bill to modernise adult care and support in England included in Queen's Speech

The Queen's speech has announced the government's plan to publish a draft Care and Support Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny (PLS) in Parliament, and for wider engagement amongst the care and support sector. This follows last year's *Caring for our future engagement*, which was co-led by the government and the care and support sector to understand people's concerns and priorities for reform of the system. These learnings are informing the white paper on care and support, which will set out the government's plans for modernising the care and support system, and which will be published alongside a progress report on funding shortly.

For more information, go to: [www.dh.gov.uk/health/2012/05/draftadultcarebill/](http://www.dh.gov.uk/health/2012/05/draftadultcarebill/)

## CONSULTATION FOR A BETTER LAW ON ASSISTED DYING

Heidi Alexander, MP for Lewisham East, has been elected as chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Choice at the End of Life. In a Commons debate on 27 March 2012 she spoke of the need for change, so that people are able to have a choice that would enable them to end their lives in a dignified way, if that is possible and if that is their wish; and a choice that does not put their family or friends at risk of prosecution. In the Spring issue of Dignity in Dying's magazine *Campaign* she makes the case that Parliament has a duty to address public demand for a change in the law on assisted dying and the need to improve access to quality end-of-life care. Later this year, taking forward the recommendations of the Commission on Assisted Dying, the Parliamentary Group will launch a public consultation on the safeguards needed as part of any assisted dying law.

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

The refusal of the government to publish a full assessment of the impacts of its Health and Social Care Act, against a ruling by the Information Tribunal, calls into question its sincerity in making out that it favours transparency. It also invites cynics to conclude that the findings of the so-called Risk Register were damning.

It can be argued that there should be limits to the release of information. The former Cabinet Secretary, Gus O'Donnell, is reported to have said that he favoured "maximum openness", arguing that "We need a culture change: a presumption, once you have data, to get it out there". But he "would want a safe space for ministers to disagree with each other – for us to keep accurate records of that, but for it to be kept private for a certain time." This would "allow Cabinet a safe space to consider the pros and cons of a particular policy."

That's fine; maximum openness would make many FOI requests unnecessary. But we will continue to need a power to seek information that governments would like to keep secret. The Risk Register is one such example. The Attorney General, Dominic Grieve, has told the Commons Justice Select Committee that he could not second guess why Health Secretary Andrew Lansley chose to exercise a ministerial veto and overrule a tribunal ruling that the Risk Register should be released. He gave an assurance that the government had no initiative to curtail FOI requests.

Lansley had argued that the veto was necessary to ensure civil servants remain free to speak their minds openly about government policies behind closed doors. But here we are not concerned with internal discussions; rather their conclusions.

## SEE ME SAVE ME

This is a new campaign website launched by RoadPeace and dedicated to reducing the lorry danger to pedestrians and cyclists, and to saving lives. The danger is very real. For example, although lorries account for only 5 per cent of trips in London, they are involved in half to two-thirds of cyclists' deaths each year. Since 2000 in London alone over 220 pedestrians and cyclists have died in collisions with lorries.

The key call of See Me Save Me is for the use of HGV safety technologies of proximity motion sensors and cameras to be mandatory so as to eliminate lorry blind spots, a move that 401 MEPs have already supported (Declaration WD81). The new website will collate information on what is being done to tackle lorry danger.

RoadPeace's newsletter (Spring 2012) comments: "This is an iconic problem that highlights the iniquity in our transport and justice system. That the largest, heaviest and most unwieldy motor vehicles are allowed to operate on crowded urban streets is bad enough; but it is neither safe nor fair that they are allowed to do so with known blindspots when much of the damage they inflict could be avoided with a simple technical remedy."

The website is at [www.seemesaveme.com](http://www.seemesaveme.com).

## COPYRIGHT CONFUSION

For the fourth year in a row the UK has come in the bottom three of a survey looking at how copyright is implemented in 30 countries.

Reported in *CILIPUPDATE* and *Consumer Focus*, May 2012. For more go to <http://bit.ly/HNq6fn>

## FISCHER-DIESKAU

Having last month written a few words about Kathleen Ferrier I cannot resist mentioning the passing

of the German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau at the age of 86 (four years older than me); if only to do something to balance the coverage (I nearly said 'inordinate coverage', but that would be unkind) given to the deaths of Donna Summer and Robin Gibbs. Fischer-Dieskau was a fine opera and oratorio singer, and probably the greatest Lieder singer of my generation, indeed perhaps of any generation. I first heard him in the 50s at the Royal Festival Hall. My seat was at the back of the stage, so that his back was to me throughout the recital. The sound of his voice was nevertheless ample and exquisite, his technique peerless, and his interpretations spellbinding; quite unforgettable. He had, even in his late twenties, enormous presence and authority. I assiduously acquired his 78 rpm discs, and progressively much of his huge treasury of LP recordings. Such singing of monumental lyric poetry thrusts into its proper perspective the television contest 'The Voice' (as regards sonority), and the Eurovision Song Contest (as regards music). I'm all for diversity but for me, Fischer-Dieskau's recordings disclose the current poverty of popular British taste. Now his death also reminds me of my own mortality.

### **CELEBRATING 20 YEARS**

On 7 April 2013 Roadpeace, the first-ever UK charity for road traffic victims, will celebrate the anniversary of its inaugural conference. Back in 1993 that day was chosen because it was also World Health Day, when the theme was 'Handle life with care: prevent violence and negligence', a plea that resonated – and continues to resonate – with RoadPeace's hopes and demands.

### **OLYMPIC MANIA**

I made clear my views about the Olympic Games in 'We Hate' no.7, volume 13, no.1 of *Innovations in Information* (2007). Nothing has happened since to persuade me otherwise. I am, of course, aware that millions of people think differently and are somehow excited about the progress of the so-called Olympic flame. But it is good to hear of at least one ally. In a piece headlined 'Artist in reticence' in *The Guardian* of 21 May, I read that Neville Gabie, artist in residence in the Olympic Park between September 2010 and January of this year, has launched a public discussion through his blog on where he should spend the night of the opening ceremony. He is said to have become disillusioned with aspects of the modern Olympics, in particular its commercialisation, and wants to explore how far we have moved from the original spirit of the Games.

### **RATIONALISING HEALTH INFORMATION**

A scheme has been launched to ensure that clinicians and staff in the NHS can access information designed to maximise their healthcare results. Unlike much that is happening in today's NHS, the initiative has been backed by eleven royal colleges, the BCS (the Chartered Institute for IT) and more than 70 IT healthcare companies. The scheme will be led by a network of local Chief Clinical Information Officers. For more go to [www.bcs.org/content/conWebDoc/43667](http://www.bcs.org/content/conWebDoc/43667)

### **PAINE AND BURNS**

I have just finished a first draft of an essay on the radical parallels shared by these eminent 18th century writers. Having wrestled with Burns's dialect poems, I doubt if he could ever qualify for a Plain English award. When his first edition of poetry and songs was published in 1786, most critics regretted that they were written in some measure in "an unknown tongue" which limited their audience to a small circle. But I have found that better acquaintance reveals the hidden genius.

Now Paine is another matter. I wonder if the Plain English Campaign has ever considered historical awards. Thomas, as well as coming up with proposals for a welfare state, would be hard to beat for plain English.

### **FOOD LABELLING CAN BE DANGEROUSLY CONFUSING**

In the Spring issue of the aforementioned Plain English Campaign, founder Chrissie Maher challenges supermarket giants to lead the way in providing clear public information about the food they sell. A critical article asserts that "regulatory bodies and manufacturers in the UK have lost the plot when it comes to food labelling" and that "tiny text with figures and words from a science laboratory can drive customers away from supermarket shelves, instead of increasing sales and helping the customer".

The Campaign echoes the sentiments of the US Food and Drugs Administration which has recently

warned food manufacturers that they should review their current labelling.

## SINGLE PARENTS

Gingerbread, the charity for single parents, has published a report drawing attention to the impact of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Single parents who are not in paid employment and whose youngest child is aged five or six can no longer claim Income Support. Instead they will need to claim Jobseeker's Allowance or another benefit.

The report presents the emerging trend in the employment patterns of single parents since the introduction of targeted welfare-to-work interventions in 2008. It examines how prevailing labour market conditions, the provision of childcare services and back-to-work support from JobCentre Plus will impact on the ability of this group of single parents with younger children to move off unemployment benefit and into work. The report can be downloaded from:

<http://gingerbread.org.uk/content.aspx?CategoryID=839&ArticleID=722>

## PRISONERS' RIGHT TO VOTE

On this issue I find myself at odds not only with the coalition but with the united will of Parliament, which is apparently prepared to resist the ruling of Strasbourg's judges. Nevertheless I continue to think that on this one the European Court of Human Rights has justice on its side. Britain is one of only a few member states to uphold a blanket ban, and I believe that to deny *all* prisoners the right to vote is surely unreasonable. I feel that my conclusion in issue no.28, December 2010, is worth repeating:

The idea that prisoners should *automatically* be stripped of their basic rights ought to be an anathema in a democratic society. We cannot fail to observe that it follows an historical pattern which has in earlier times deemed people low in the social and economic scale and women as unworthy to vote. There was in the government's case in 2001 an implied recognition that parliamentary and local government representation extends to prisoners. The right to have a say in who that representative should be is potentially more important to those behind bars than to free citizens. This raises a further anomaly in that there is an increasing tendency towards non-custodial sentences. Are such offenders more worthy of rights than those who are locked up? Politicians may find it inconvenient and exasperating, even abhorrent, to extend the vote to prisoners, but the grounds for that view are mistaken.

There was, however, some elbow-room in the Strasbourg ruling. The finding was that a blanket ban was "disproportionate". The judgment nevertheless went on to accept that "a wide margin of appreciation should be granted to the national legislature in determining whether restrictions on prisoners' right to vote can still be justified in modern times and if so how a fair balance is to be struck." Thus a restriction might be tailored to particular offences, such as those of particular gravity. This again is surely correct. What is reasonable is to consider individual fitness to vote, as (though not in the same way) we assess fitness to become British citizens. What we hate is a legal bar on a prisoners' right to vote *in any circumstances*.

## WE HATE NO.54: HATE-CRIME

*"It is by its promise of a sense of power that evil often attracts the weak."*

Eric Hoffer: *The Passionate State of Mind* (1954)

At last a subject on which I can vent hatred full-on. I have to concede that the title 'We Hate' is usually over the top. We don't really 'hate' traffic wardens or the Olympic Games, merely regret them. Some people, indeed, would say that hate is an ignoble sentiment. I don't share that view. I believe that hatred has its place. To go to the extremes I will always hate Hitler and his henchmen for the Holocaust and other barbarities. Recently I hate those men convicted of grooming and abusing young girls. Some people of a religious persuasion are prone to say 'God hates the sin, but loves the sinner'; but I believe that such benevolence – making excuses for horrible people - is misplaced. It blurs the meaning of kindness and love.

To my mind, hate-crime against individuals, some of it within institutional care, comes well up the scale of behaviour that is itself objectively hateful, and its perpetrators thoroughly deserve the contempt of society and the retribution of justice. The Home Office has come up with a definition, but is surely on

legally dangerous ground by relating the offence to the perception of the victim or any other person. I prefer a straightforward description as 'hostile conduct motivated by prejudice related to a person's disability, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion or belief, or sexual orientation'. This will include those who take advantage of people of limited intelligence and financial savvy. There is a scale of abuse, which includes name-calling, bullying, harassment, spitting, physical attack, exploitation, malicious communications and damage to property. There is also a scale of persistence, from a one-off incident to prolonged harassment; and a commensurate gravity in its effects, as far as driving victims to suicide.

The Home Office has published statistics for 2010, when 48,127 hate crimes were recorded by police forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

- 39,311 (81.68%) were racist crimes
- 4,883 (10.15%) were based on sexual orientation
- 2,007 (4.17%) were religious hate crimes
- 1,569 (3.26%) targeted disabled people
- 357 (0.74%) targeted transgender people

But research suggests that hate crime is hugely under-reported (as much as 80% of cases). The Home Office website observes that some victims may be reluctant to come forward, for example for fear of attracting further abuse or because they don't believe that the authorities will take their complaints seriously.

I want to focus on disability hate crime. A survey conducted by the polling and research consultancy ComRes for Scope, published on 15 May 2011, found that 56% of disabled people surveyed ( of some 2,050 adults) said that they had experienced hostility, aggression or violence from a stranger because of their condition or impairment, and 37% said that people's attitude towards them had worsened over the past year. This was followed by an in-depth, 236-page inquiry by the Equality and Human Rights Commission into disability-related harassment, published in September 2011 under the title *Hidden in Plain Sight*. I commented on this briefly (too briefly) in issue 38, October 2011, reporting a finding that "hundreds of thousands of disabled people regularly experience violence and bullying, much of which is going unrecognised by public authorities". The report first focused on ten cases in which disabled people had died or been seriously injured, before drawing attention to a massive scale of largely unreported abuse: "a serious problem that needs to be better understood". The evidence presented to the EHRC indicated that for many disabled people harassment had become a commonplace experience, which many had come to expect as inevitable. The fact was that people with disabilities in the UK faced harassment, insult and attack almost as a matter of routine, while a collective denial among police, government and other public bodies meant that little had been done to challenge the situation.

One of the factors, on which we commented in issue 43, March 2012, was that the government itself, by focusing on alleged fraud and over-claiming of disability benefits, had stimulated resentment and abuse towards disabled people, who often found themselves perceived in the popular media as scroungers. To relate this portrayal to hate-crime might be tenuous, but it has certainly not been helpful. Yet in all this it is important to retain perspective. Forty years ago, Alf Morris, as the first Minister for Disabled People, led a change in thinking that has done much to lift disabled people from the shadows. Today, by and large, disabled people are still surrounded by goodwill, admiration and a plethora of charitable enterprise. Disability hate-crime is an aberration, and its perpetrators aberrant, contemptible, loathsome and repugnant. Its motivation is no doubt complex. The EHRC report comments: "Disability-related harassment incidents and crimes are not motiveless – they often stem from deep-seated animosity and prejudice which feeds off the wider cultural devaluation and social exclusion of disabled people". But I am tempted to see it as simply animalistic: an uncivilised tendency in a minority strand of our society to despise and assert power against those who are seen as vulnerable or just 'different'.

The good news is that the Home Office is at last taking hate-crime seriously. A website statement dated 3 May 2012 carries the banner 'Challenge it, Report it, Stop it'. The blueprint is to:

- challenge the attitudes and behaviour that foster hatred,
- encourage early intervention to reduce the risk of abuse escalating,
- encourage the reporting of hate crime by building the confidence of victims to come forward and

seek justice, and working with partners at national and local level to ensure that the right support is available when they do,

- work with the agencies that make up the Criminal Justice System to improve the operational response to hate crime.

This to create a more effective end-to-end process, with early identification, joint management of cases, and robust action against offenders. The government believes that a successful response to hate-crime depends on deep *local* knowledge of victims, offenders and communities. The lead must therefore come from professionals at the front line, working with the voluntary sector and communities. I await developments.

Derek Kinrade