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In This
Issue

A Digest of Current Social Information

- THE REMPLOY RUMPUS
- FOOTBALL MEANDERINGS
- FISCAL FAILINGS
- SUPREME COURT JUDGEMENT
- SAVERS SPIPLICATED
- THE BIG SOCIETY DIMINISHED
- UNFAIREST CUTS OF ALL
- THE WORK CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT
- DEMENTIA IS PREDICTABLE
- DILNOT DEFERRED
- ROYAL RIDES
- VOTING RIGHTS FOR PRISONERS
- DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES
- INACTIVITY IS A THREAT TO HEALTH
- ROAD DANGER
- BLUE BADGE UPDATES
- ACCESSIBLE LONDON app
- WE HATE NO. 56: POVERTY (AN UPDATE)



THE REMPLOY RUMPUS

On 10 July, Maria Miller MP, Minister for Disabled People, made a controversial statement in the Commons concerning the planned closure of many of the loss-making 54 Remploi factories. Some are to be saved by the acceptance of bids from private sources. Nevertheless it is expected that around 1,400 workers will lose their jobs. The DWP line is that the money spent on unviable production will be better used to support “thousands more” disabled people into work. How many and at what cost remains to be seen, as does the fate of the specific workers made unemployed. Certainly they would appear to be unconvinced, as 10,000 members of the trade union Unite are said to have e.mailed Iain Duncan Smith, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and a hostile group has protested outside his constituency home.

What lies behind all this, of course, is a particular construct of disability rights: one that sees the provision of ‘sheltered’ work (Miller called it ‘segregated’ and referred to the work forces as ‘shut away’) as outdated and casts those given such work as being branded second-class. Miller relied on the advice of “disability experts” and presented the argument as one of equality rights for disabled people. But what of the rights of those who are happy to be sheltered? Who have either found it impossible to get a mainstream job, or have faced bullying and harassment when working alongside non-disabled people? Surely the reality is that some disabled people are unable to compete on equal terms in the open market. “Don’t close Remploi; we want to work!” is their message.

FOOTBALL MEANDERINGS

It will not have escaped attention that after Spain’s emphatic triumph in Euro 2012, some critics have denounced the Spanish style of football as boring. They are fully entitled to dislike the Iberian passion for rapid, accurate passing, which can be seen as an over-indulgent art form. It is not unlike the censure aimed at the repetition and coloratura embellishments of Rossini’s effervescent operas, as against, say, the majesty of Wagner. But, unlike opera, football is a competitive game and there is no gainsaying a 4-1 thrashing of Italy in the final. Nor any consolation to be found in England’s predictable, ponderous style. But well done to the host countries, Poland and Ukraine, for a thrilling and well organised competition.

After the questions raised at the trial of former English captain, John Terry, is there not a case for on-pitch recording technology: perhaps Chris Bazeley and his twitterers can come up with a solution - Hawkear? - (Perhaps overly opinionated players might be brought to heel with a large

FISCAL FAILINGS

I have no business commenting on the question of which kind of inquiry is needed to sort out the misdeeds of our errant bankers, but I cannot refrain from thinking that the examination needs to be divorced from political interests, and that speed and expediency are recipes for half-baked legislation.

SUPREME COURT JUDGEMENT

In my biography of Alf Morris (pp 334-336, 357-358) I referred to a majority decision of the Law Lords in the case of *R v Gloucestershire County Council, ex parte Barry* (1997) which held that when assessing and reassessing a chronically sick or disabled person's needs, a local authority was entitled to take into account the impact the costs of providing the necessary services would have on its resources. The impact of this verdict appeared to be softened on 19 April 2000, when Lord Hunt said that the [Labour] Government did not believe that the judgment should have led to changes in the provision of social services. It did not give authorities a licence to take arbitrary decisions on the basis of resources alone. The Department of Health had made this clear in guidance issued in November 1997. It strongly emphasised that the judgment did not mean authorities were not under any legal duty towards disabled people. "Once an authority has decided that it is necessary in order to meet the needs of a disabled person for it to arrange a service listed in Section 2 of the [Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons] Act, it is under a duty to do so. Where individuals consider that their authority is not satisfying these requirements, it is open to them to make a complaint through the social services complaints procedure."

That essentially continues to be the official position. Today, however, we have a government of different colours along with an economic situation in which the resources of authorities are under increasing strain. It is therefore of some importance that the issue has again been raised in an appeal brought against Cambridgeshire County Council in the Supreme Court. The appellant, as part of his challenge, invited the Supreme Court to reconsider the 1997 decision. A court of seven justices was convened; and four charities and the Secretary of State for Health intervened. Essentially, the provision made for the appellant (in this case direct payments were made in lieu of services) was found to be sufficient and the appeal failed. At the hearing it became clear that the issue did not rest on the earlier case since the respondent did not rely on resource constraints to justify its decision. The Court therefore did not hear full argument on *Barry*, which was not reconsidered in its judgments. But the judgment provided guidance on the questions an authority must ask itself when it is required to consider whether it is necessary, in order to meet the needs of a disabled person, for that authority to make arrangements for the provision of any of the relevant services. Quoting from the summary provided to the press, these are:

- (i) what are the needs of the disabled person;
- (ii) in order to meet these needs is it necessary for the authority to make arrangements for the provision of any of the listed services; and
- (iii) if so, what are the nature and extent of the services for which it is necessary for the local authority to make arrangements? [15].

The guidance produced by the Secretary of State for Health in respect of the duties under section 2 of the Act reflects these stages of inquiry [16 – 18]. In considering the question of eligibility, at the second stage, the local authority can ask whether the needs of the disabled person can reasonably be met by family or friends, by institutions such as the NHS or charities, or out of the person's own resources [19]. The 1997 decision (AC 584) established that the availability of its resources is also relevant [19]. If the needs of a disabled person are deemed eligible, the duty of a local authority to meet those needs is then absolute, and the Court of Appeal erred in holding otherwise [19]." (*references in square brackets are to paragraphs in the judgment*).

In this case, where the appellant's needs were met by direct payments, a fourth question had to be asked:

- (iv) what is the reasonable cost of securing provision of the services for which it is necessary for the authority to make arrangements?"

In this calculation "the requisite services should be costed in a reasonable degree of detail to permit a judgement on whether the sum is correct [28]."

Paragraph 19 of the judgment is worth quoting in full:

“One important aspect of the question raised at the second stage is to ask whether the presenting needs of the disabled person can reasonably be met by family or friends (which I will describe as natural support) or by other organs of the state, such as the NHS, or by charities etc, or indeed out of the person’s own resources. But it will by now be clear that the question at the second stage goes far further and, in particular, encompasses consideration of the relationship between the scale of the local authority’s resources and the weight of other demands upon it, in other words the availability of its resources. The interesting debate about whether the notion of a necessity to make arrangements is sufficiently elastic to embrace consideration of the availability of resources has already taken place. It took place in the *Barry* case [1997] AC 584 and, albeit by the narrowest possible margin, the ayes had it. Whatever else was – or was not – decided in that case, the decision was that the availability of resources was relevant to the question at the second stage: see Lord Clyde at p610E-H, Lord Nicholls at p605E-F and p606B and Lord Hoffmann at p606C-D, but, to the contrary, Lord Lloyd at p597H-598C and Lord Steyn at p606C. Any statutory guidance given by the Secretary of State which ran counter to the legislative provision in relation to which it was given would be of no effect. But the Guidance, which states that the availability of resources is relevant to the question asked at the second stage of the inquiry, is precisely in accordance with the law.”

The above, of course, is intended only as a short briefing on a lengthy judgment, and indeed on the detailed reasons for that judgment provided for the press. For the full picture go to: www.supremecourt.gov.uk/decided-cases/index.html

SAVERS SPIFLICATED

For a long time now the rate of interest available on savings has been painfully low. Unless prepared to lock money up in fixed rate schemes, interest levels have fallen below even the prevailing depressed bank rate. The fact that for some time inflation has exceeded these paltry rates of interest means that the real value of savings has continued to fall. I suppose that this is a fact of life and that savers can only grin and bear it.

But I think that there should be one exception to this stoical tolerance: the sorry story of cash ISAs. These were introduced by government to offer an opportunity to put a limited sum of money aside annually free of tax. But the situation has now been reached where the interest attracted is so low that the tax benefit is derisory. Common practice is to offer cash ISAs at attractive introductory rates that then fall to ‘variable’ rates, currently very low. I know of one provider that gives 0.05 per cent! People who hold such cash ISAs are entitled to feel betrayed. Expert comments would be welcome.

THE BIG SOCIETY DIMINISHED

If any of you are still interested in the concept of a ‘Big Society’ you are likely to have noticed the Civil Exchange Big Society Audit published on 7 May 2012 (www.civilexchange.org.uk/the-big-society-audit). Bearing in mind that Civil Exchange promotes itself as “a catalyst to help civil society and government to work together in new ways”, the depressing tone of the audit has a special resonance. It notes that a lack of ‘buy-in’ to the concept is likely to prove a major obstacle to change. Crucially, that a “common vision and strategy for delivery forged with key partners, especially the voluntary sector, is lacking.

The audit was followed by a seminar at The Guardian on 10 July under the title ‘The Big Society, Where Next?’. Patrick Butler, who chaired the seminar, subsequently wrote up a ‘blog’ (12 July) focusing on an “electrifying speech” by David Robinson, founder of Community Links, and one of the most respected community activists in the voluntary sector. His comments are particularly significant in that he began as “a big society optimist”. Now, however, he delivered a “withering critique” of the Prime Minister’s social vision. If ever the Big Society meant a thing, he declared, “it doesn’t matter now, not in the disadvantaged communities that I know best. This is a Britain that isn’t broken and it never was but it has been battered... battered by the storms in the global economy and battered by a government who have chosen to pass on a disproportionate share of the sacrifice to those with the most limited capacity to bear the burden.” Choosing welfare cuts over tax rises,” he continued, “was a political choice: a legitimate and possibly publicly popular one, but one entirely incompatible with the Big Society.” The vaguely hopeful promise made in May 2010 can now be seen for what it was: “as much use as an ashtray on a motor bike”. David Cameron may still believe passionately in the Big Society vision, but such ideals are impossible to reconcile with, for example, his

notorious welfare speech in June.

For more please go to www.guardian.co.uk/society/patrick-butler-cuts-blog

UNFAIREST CUTS OF ALL

The Campaign for a Fair Society, a UK federation of organisations in England, Scotland and Wales, has published a manifesto which argues that the government's austerity cuts are unfair in targeting disabled people and those already living in poverty, that the cuts are inefficient, and that the government could do things differently. It makes eight proposals for a fairer society.

Pat Onions, a member of the campaign, has launched an e-petition. It demands that the government "stop and review the cuts to benefits and services which are falling disproportionately on disabled people, their carers and families." **More at www.campaignforafairsociety.com**

THE WORK CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT

Family doctors meeting at their annual GP conference (Liverpool, 23 May) called for an end to the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) "because of the harm it does to vulnerable patients." Representatives argued that it should be replaced with a more vigorous and safe process which takes into account the needs of long term sick and disabled patients.

Dr Andrew Holden, a GP from Petersfield in Hampshire, told the conference that the computer-based system was unable to differentiate between people who genuinely need to be on incapacity benefit and those who don't: "Since the system was introduced in 2008, people with terminal cancer have been found fit to work, people with mental health problems have complained their condition is not taken seriously, and people with complex illnesses say that the tick-box system is not able to cope with the nuances of their problems. The computer-based assessments are carried out by a healthcare professional but one not necessarily trained in the field of the patient's disability, which is particularly important when it comes to mental health issues."

Dr Laurence Buckman, Chair of the BMA's GP's Committee, said: "When 40 per cent of appeals against the assessments are successful at tribunal hearings something is clearly very wrong with the system. Being in work is good for people's overall health and well-being, but GPs are seeing too many patients who genuinely need to be on incapacity benefit coming in very concerned and confused by the system. It's not fair on these patients but it could also have a wider impact as well – having a lower income may lead to people having a poorer quality of health and could therefore increase health inequalities for our nation as a whole. The government needs to look again at the whole assessment process and replace it with one that is fit for purpose."

These views were effectively endorsed at the Annual Representatives Meeting in late June, which concluded that the computer-based system should be scrapped. London GP Louise Irvine said that the WCA system was causing distress to thousands of people with long-term health conditions deemed fit for work, as well as subjecting the doctors involved to 'McDonaldisation' of their careers. She went on to say that 40 per cent of those who appealed WCA decisions were successful and this success rate rose to 70 per cent for those who took up legal representation.

Dr Irvine said: "There is no empathy in the system, it is all accusatory." But one London consultant in occupational medicine, David Snashall, urged the meeting not to call for replacement of the WCA, arguing that there was a scrutiny process in place to improve the system. He said there was a fundamental misunderstanding surrounding the computer-based system, which was "merely a guide".

However, the meeting supported a call on the BMA to demand that the WCA should be ended "with immediate effect and be replaced with a rigorous and safe system that does not cause unavoidable harm to some of the weakest and vulnerable in society".

From BMA press releases.

DEMENTIA IS PREDICTABLE

The New England Journal of Medicine has reported that research undertaken by the Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis has found that "A series of changes begins in the brain decades before the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease are noticed by patients or families, and this cascade of events may provide a timeline for symptomatic onset".

The earliest such change – a drop in spinal fluid levels of the key ingredient of Alzheimer's brain

plaques – can be detected 25 years before the anticipated age of onset. The plaques themselves become visible on a brain scan, along with other indicators, 15 years before memory problems appear.

From Online Telegraph, 13 July 2012

DILNOT DEFERRED

The eagerly awaited government Care and Support White Paper turned out to be a disappointing shade of grey. As I predicted (no.46, June 2012) funding is the obstacle. The government's limited response has already been widely reported (and savaged). Charities and campaigners see it as a betrayal, putting off any decision on capping the amount of an individual might have to pay for the cost of social care, or extending the means tested threshold, at least until the next distant spending review. While accepting Dilnot in principle, the government is unwilling to commit to introducing a new system until a way to pay for it can be found. The Treasury, it seems, is the arbiter in these matters. Strange that £11 billion (by the Public Accounts Committee's reckoning) could be committed to the Olympic Games, but £2 billion a year is too high a price to pay for supporting social care. Dilnot himself spoke on the BBC's *World at One*, questioning whether his proposals were really unaffordable. As Polly Toynbee has pointed out, the government is caught between its dogma of shrinking the state and the outrage felt by its traditional middle class voters.

ROYAL RIDES

My friends at Republic (www.republic.org.uk) are caustic about royal spending, describing the monarchy as "one of the most profligate institutions in the world". They draw particular attention to the royal travel bill, noticing among other things that Prince Andrew billed the government £89,915 for a five-day trip to China. They compare the royal travel costs with those of Prime Minister David Cameron who last year spent less than £500 travelling on Eurostar to a Paris meeting with then President Sarkozy, and just over £2,000 on a visit to Afghanistan to meet forces and local leaders.

Conspicuously, he also sometimes travels by tube.

DENIAL OF VOTING RIGHTS FOR PRISONERS

I have referred to this issue before in Briefings 28 (December 2010), 30 (February 2011) and 46 (June 2012). Hitherto I have felt myself pretty much a lone voice in arguing against a blanket ban. It is therefore reassuring to read that Nils Muižnieks, the new human rights commissioner at the Council of Europe, has told *The Guardian*: "A blanket and indiscriminate ban is not in line with the European Convention on Human Rights. The UK government seems to have painted itself into a corner through the last few years...The [Strasbourg] ruling does not require states to give all prisoners voting rights but [depriving prisoners of the vote] has to be linked to the nature of their crime." The government now has until November to announce how it will implement the ruling by the European Court of Human Rights. If it fails to do so "it would be a huge shame and weaken the UK's influence."

The issue has been intensified by a new legal challenge to be heard by the Supreme Court from George McGeoch, who is serving a life sentence for murder. His case is based on a submission that his rights as an EU citizen to take part in elections are being denied.

From Owen Bowcott, Legal Affairs Correspondent, *The Guardian*, 16 July 2012.

DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

Louise Casey was appointed by the Prime Minister to lead a new unit overseeing issues raised by the riots, including problem families, school truancy, anti-social behaviour and gangs. In a report on 18 July, based on interviews with 16 families, she said that problems such as the sexual and physical abuse of children, teenage pregnancies, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency and educational failure often spanned and were repeated by successive generations. If the authorities were to take effective remedial action they needed to understand the complex histories of such families.

The government reckons that there are 120,000 dysfunctional families in England, costing taxpayers £9 billion every year [and giving grief to their neighbourhoods]. It has committed £448m over three years to provide English county councils and unitary authorities up to £4,000 per eligible family to address these problems.

Widely reported.

INACTIVITY IS A THREAT TO HEALTH

More and more of us are leading sedentary lives. We prefer watching rather than playing sport.

The Lancet has published a series on physical activity, including:

- *Rethinking our approach to physical activity*
- *Physical activity: more of the same is not enough*
- *Stressing harms of physical inactivity to promote exercise*
- *Physical activity for people with disabilities.*

An article *Effect of physical inactivity on major non-communicable diseases worldwide: an analysis of burden of disease and life expectancy* finds that physical inactivity has a major adverse effect throughout the world, impacting on coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and breast and colon cancers, shortening life expectancy. A decrease in or removal of this unhealthy behaviour could improve health substantially.

Details at www.thelancet.com

ROAD DANGER

My headline is intended to counter the customary appellation of 'Road Safety': for our roads are anything but safe. The House of Commons Transport Committee has published a report (17 July) that puts the subject into a more realistic perspective. It notices that in 2011, 1,901 people were killed in road crashes: the first annual increase in road fatalities since 2003 and three per cent up on 2010. 25,023 people were killed or seriously injured, an increase of two per cent from 2010 and the first annual increase since 1994. The Committee thinks that the government should provide an explanation for these increases and reassurance that they do not mark the beginning of a worrying trend in road deaths.

The government abandoned the use of targets in its *Strategic Framework for Road Safety* in May 2011. However, the new strategy does contain a set of casualty forecasts which look forward to a fall of 37 per cent by 2020 (compared to the average for 2005-09). The Committee regrets the scrapping of defined targets, which have been said to reduce road casualties and to have been an important contributor to improvements in road safety, but says that the evidence suggests that the principal factor in improving road safety is political leadership. In the absence of targets, the government should be "making more effort to provide leadership in other ways".

Localism is the key theme of the government's strategy, but the Committee reports considerable variation amongst local authorities in their performance on road safety. It is not enough for the Department of Transport passively to provide guidance. "Stronger leadership and a clearer vision are required from Government to communicate the importance of road safety to local decision makers."

Of great concern are the casualty rates for young drivers and cyclists. Road crashes are the leading cause of death for people aged 16-24, an issue which, in the Committee's view, is not reflected in the road safety strategy. Danger to cyclists is particularly worrying. In 2011, 3,085 cyclists were killed or seriously injured. The Committee had heard expressions of government support for *The Times* cycling campaign, but would now like to see this translated into action.

"The planned update of the *Strategic Framework for Road Safety* in September 2012 is an opportunity for the Government to reassess its road safety strategy. In particular, given recent road fatality increases, it should update progress against its action plan and outcomes framework." The Committee would "like to see the inclusion of plans...to name and shame local authorities that are under-performing on road safety, greater detail on the role of engineering to improve road safety and an outline of the Department of Transport's efforts to provide leadership by joining up road safety work across Whitehall."

See www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmtran/506/50603.htm for the full report, and <http://uk.news.yahoo.com/mps-warn-over-road-safety-deaths-increase-203138348.html> for comment.

BLUE BADGE UPDATES

A new Blue Badge design has been introduced in England, Scotland and Wales. There is now a central database of all issued badges, and new applications can be made online (www.direct.gov.uk). The system will allow traffic wardens to check badges against the central record. There is also a new national helpline on 0844 463 0213 for general enquiries, but local authorities will continue to administer the scheme.

A new edition of the *Blue Badge Guide for London* has been published. It contains information on

parking bays, car parks, petrol stations, accessible tube stations, taxi ranks, accessible toilets, Shopmobility centres, access facilities in theatres, parking options at the main London hospitals and sporting venues, and a directory of services. **To order, contact The Pie Guide, Caledonia House, 223 Pentonville Road, London N1 9NG, visit www.thepieguide.com or phone 0844 847 0875. Check for details of discounts.**

ACCESSIBLE LONDON app

A new iPhone app has been launched to help disabled people find accessible restaurants, shops and attractions across London. The app, *My DisabledGo London*, has been developed by DisabledGo and is free to use, featuring over 20,000 venues across the capital. It has been designed for anyone who wants to find out more about access, whether they are visitors or Londoners. The app is unique, featuring only those venues fully assessed by a trained access surveyor.

The app can be downloaded free on iStore or by visiting DisabledGo's website, www.disabledgo.com.

From *Forward*, June 2012.

WE HATE NO. 56: POVERTY (AN UPDATE)

"For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."

Matthew 13/12

I previously hated poverty two years ago in Briefing 24 (August 2010). But things are getting worse. Staying with whoever wrote the Gospel of Matthew, verse 26/11 (foreshortened) has it that "The poor are always with us", a famous quotation that represents the view of those who see poverty as the inevitable downside of a prosperous society, and see welfare for able-bodied people as a drain upon wealth creation: in contrast to those who want to do something about social deprivation. But what is poverty? It is easy enough to recognise in parts of the Indian sub-continent or historically in the odorous slums of Victorian Britain; manifested by overcrowding, malnutrition, insanitary filth and early death; poor people intimidated by the threat of the workhouse. Just how bad it was can be confirmed by reading Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*. He describes, for example: "low-lodging houses, where boys and girls are all huddled promiscuously together, [disclosing] a system of depravity, atrocity, and enormity, which certainly cannot be paralleled in any nation, however barbarous, nor in any age, however 'dark'."

But in modern Britain, since the introduction and expansion of the Welfare State, poverty is more difficult to define. We tend to think in terms of relative poverty, the measure of which relates to those whose money coming in is less than 60 per cent of the prevailing annual median (not mean) income: at present under £15,600 (three fifths of £26,000). In a speech at the Abbey Centre on 14 June, Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, said that the government remained committed to the targets set out in the Child Poverty Act, but that it was "increasingly clear that poverty is not about income alone." He announced that the government intends to consult on "developing better measurements of child poverty". He pointed out that the Labour government, despite expending massive amounts of money to top up low incomes, had failed to meet the target of halving child poverty by 2010. Its strategy had provided only temporary relief and had fuelled dependency. The coalition government, while committed to eradicating child poverty, now aimed to tackle the problem at its source by addressing the root causes, whether worklessness and welfare dependency, addiction, educational failure, debt or family breakdown. Its Social Justice Strategy concentrated on enabling people to move up the social ladder and realise their potential: supporting parents and their children to overcome the barriers that trap them in poverty, setting them on the path to an independent life "beyond the state". The strategy looked to replace a maintenance culture with a transformational one. While the most vulnerable would continue to need the protection of state support, work had to be seen as the best route out of poverty for those able to work. Work is not just about money, argued Smith, it is transformative. The message is that under Universal Credit work will pay more than a life on benefits, making the journey into work smoother and more rewarding. In today's economic climate, he concluded, the government's reforms look to changing the culture of welfare, so that it acts as a springboard rather than a trap.

There is, of course, some truth in this analysis, and the idea of transformation through work might seem credible if there were suitable vacancies in decent, well-paid jobs, if everyone deemed fit for work was genuinely fit, and even then if some people were not fitter than others. But let's get real. Unsurprisingly,

Smith's panacea has provoked a strong reaction. His perception has been seen as portraying people in poverty are victims of their own failings. As Polly Toynbee put it: "he paints all the poor as addicts or wastrels: purge their sins, and poverty cures itself." In reality, the government's assault on benefits has made matters worse. Negative stereotyping has portrayed claimants as shirkers and scroungers, a representation popular in tabloid land. (It appears that those who can afford only *The Sun* or *The Daily Star* are more hostile to benefits claimants than the lavish pay, bonuses and tax avoidance of the super-rich. Those with a similar lowly place in society divide between workers struggling to make ends meet and people supported by the state; at the bottom end it is perhaps natural that the former should aggressively resent the latter).

Smith's analysis is one that will be recognised by anyone familiar with 19th century thinking. The impact on disabled people is especially regrettable: there is clear evidence that a great many of them who have been found fit for work are clearly not, a scandalous situation highlighted by the unacceptable level of successful appeals (indicated in the BMA conferences referred to above). An array of changes to benefits and cuts in services are already having an adverse effect, in particular on the lives of disabled people and carers; yet they have barely begun. The Prime Minister has come up with 17 new ideas for cutting back on welfare benefits. As Professor Hartley Dean has put it: "The problem is not a culture of entitlement, but a culture of exploitation and indifference to need." And disability remains synonymous with poverty.

Efforts to get poor people into work are not new. They began under the previous government. But Smith's analysis ignores the fact that jobs are in very short supply, and that those that are available to people on the margins are poorly paid. He promises that his Universal Credit will make work pay, but the present reality is that it has not yet kicked in. Indeed the evidence is mounting that poverty is most prevalent among families where at least one member is in paid employment, but where the pay is low. Particularly damning was a report from Oxfam on 14 June which was particularly concerned over the rise in poor people with jobs, but unable to "make work pay". This was followed by a series of *Guardian* articles in June under the banner 'Breadline Britain'. The paper had commissioned a study of the finances of employed households living largely independent of state support. It found that almost seven million working-age adults were subsisting in extreme financial stress, one small push from penury. They had "no savings, nor equity in their homes, and struggle at the end of each month to feed themselves and their children adequately." Having no assets to fall back on, they were vulnerable to something as simple as an unexpectedly large fuel bill, or a broken washing machine. The findings challenged the government's claim that people are necessarily better off in work than on benefits. A succession of charities and benevolent trusts confirmed the squeeze on working-age families and reported increases in the numbers of working people seeking help.

On 20 June, *The Guardian* added a new and very real dimension to this dismal picture. A survey of 591 teachers across Britain who belong to the online Guardian Teacher Network revealed that 49 per cent had taken food or fruit into school for children who had not had breakfast. Almost one in five had given such pupils money out of their own pockets for them to buy lunch. 272 respondents indicated that the prevalence of hungry pupils had identifiably increased in recent years. 83 per cent of the teachers said that they saw pupils who arrive hungry in the morning, and 55 per cent thought that up to a quarter of pupils had not eaten enough.

These findings are supported by a considerably increased demand for emergency food parcels reported by the charity FareShare. The food it distributed in 2011-12 contributed to more than 8.6 million meals given to an average 36,500 people a day through 720 organisations in touch with people in food poverty. Demand is expected to continue growing for at least five years.

The auguries are not good. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) expects that austerity cuts will cause child poverty to surge by 100,000 a year, some half a million over the coalition government's term. No matter how poverty is redefined, it is clearly set to rise. No less a body than UNICEF notices that today 2.3 million children live in poverty in the UK – one of the highest child poverty rates in the industrialised world. It points out that growing up in poverty is one of the biggest barriers to children enjoying their rights. It has a profound impact on children's health, education, aspirations and well-being. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation its effects are estimated as costing the UK £25 billion each year. UNICEF goes on to say that while the UK did better than many other rich countries in reducing child poverty and deprivation during the early years of the financial crisis, the current government's policies to reduce spending will reverse this, and more children will grow up in poverty.

UNICEF's tenth *Innocenti* Report, written by Peter Adamson, sets out the latest internationally comparable data on child deprivation and relative child poverty. Based on the IFS report of October 2011,

UNICEF observes that the extent of relative poverty is expected to reach 24 per cent by 2020/21, compared to a target figure of 10 per cent. “This would mean a return to the relative child poverty levels of two decades ago.” It reminds us that “failure to protect children from poverty is one of the most costly mistakes a society can make. The heaviest cost of all is borne by the children themselves. But their nations must also pay a very significant price – in reduced skills and productivity, in lower levels of health and educational achievement, in increased likelihood of unemployment and welfare dependence, in the higher costs of judicial and social protection systems, and in the loss of social cohesion.”

Such findings do not bear comparison with the destitution found by Mayhew, nor do they prove absolute poverty. But they give rise to profound concern and raise questions as to whether Coalition policy is headed in the right direction. The real issue is one of inequality. It has been said repeatedly that action to cut the national debt has fallen disproportionately upon those already poor, a fulfilment of the quotation that heads this essay. The provisions of the March budget have been widely criticised but only partially redressed. I find it increasingly difficult not to see the present government as one of posh people for posh people. Top executives have already been allowed to make hay, while rank and file pay has been squeezed or frozen. (A startling example is that of Barclays trading arm, where it is reported that the top 238 employees took home a total of £1.01 billion in 2011, or an average of £4.27 million each).

I hate poverty, but hate even more attempts to spin it away.

Derek Kinrade