

# not the national information forum

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

## News Briefing No. 50. October 2012

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### ANTHEM FOR THE 200 METRES SILVER MEDAL

Oscar Pistorius,  
Angry and furious,  
Long blades victorious  
No more supreme.

### FEEDBACK

My radical proposals for restructuring income tax have attracted some comment. Dr Richard Lansdown remarked that he said at the last election that he would vote for any party that would put up income tax rates. Peter Salter, however, regretted that my idea would not work in a complex world. £10,000, he points out, is less than the income of someone on the minimum wage doing a 40 hour week. He went on: "I think they should be out of tax. The starting point would need to be £15,000. Your 50% rate comes in at only £50,000 plus, which is far too low. Imagine a family faced with London house prices and higher and higher commuting costs. You do not mention NI, nor reliefs, nor any difference between doms and non doms."

These are all valid points Peter, but I did say "One can adjust the figures, but the principle seems fair to me." The single point I was making, leaving aside other complexities, was the need to get rid of tax thresholds which benefit not only those on low pay, but higher earners as well. As to National Insurance, I had my say in issue no.8 (February 2009), when I made a plea for contributions that apply consistently above the upper earnings limit. Both arguments go to my belief that we need to increase the direct tax take rather than cut important benefits and services.

I thought long and hard about criticising religious opposition to changes in the law on assisted dying, given that we are all free to believe what we like, but eventually concluded that it is imperative to speak out against deep-rooted prejudice based on outdated dogma that actually discriminates against our right to choose to die. **Chris Bazeley** has no such inhibitions. He writes: "When I look around me I note that the great majority of my neighbours, friends, relatives and associates are not of any real religious persuasion and are perhaps waiting for some sort of sign from God as to what they should do, or have given up waiting entirely. I see no independently offered reason to give any credence whatever to anything that the organised religion industry tells me or offers as an example in how to administer one's life.

"Christianity as a religion has proven beyond doubt that it is self serving, cruel and to a great extent perverse. Looking back to the crusades, the treatment that was handed out to the Cathars and any other body that

tried to explore the concept of a God outside the christian church (*my spell checker insists that 'christian' should be spelt with a capital 'C' while 'human' does not have a capital 'H'*) was regarded as religious extremism in the extreme. And looking more recently at the beliefs and morals of the American/Western (In God we Trust) resistance to the population-led events in the middle-east (*don't mention Israel!*) I cannot for one moment imagine that it is for the good of anyone but a 'Christian or a Jew'!

"When I hear statements and readings from the christian church containing the words mercy, love, care etc. my eyes rotate skyward in the hope of some sort of clarification or explanation as to why the actions do not match the words. None has yet been forthcoming but perhaps the phone is off the hook this end? With regard to the church's response to and/or recommendations on assisted dying - euthanasia etc, I find them in complete alignment with all their other anti-human doctrine such as that on female excellence, same-sex marriage, elitism of the clergy, fancy dress parades during services etc. etc....

"I don't think that you are unwise to confront the church. You've never been adverse to attacking nonsense of any sort in the past, so why stop now just because they've got pointed hats that are more pointed than the police hats. Looking back at my first sentence; you have a lot of people behind you - including me!"

### **PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE PAYMENTS (PIP)**

The Disability Benefits Consortium of more than 50 charities and organisations is concerned that many disabled people will be stressed by and fearful of the new PIP process. With Department for Work and Pensions figures estimating that 500,000 fewer disabled people will be eligible for PIP than under the existing Disability Living Allowance, the benefit it will replace, many people fear that they will be among those losing this vital support to independent living.

Reported in the September issue of the RNIB magazine NB.

### **OWNFONE**

Modern-day mobile smartphones such as those produced by Apple and Samsung have a number of special features, turning the portable telephone into a computer, personal organizer, games console, and more besides. OwnFone, however, takes the opposite approach, offering an inexpensive, easy to use handset stripped down to the bare essentials.

OwnFone's interface features only just enough buttons to cover the basics. The handset has a minimum of two, and a maximum of 12 contact buttons, each of which is printed with a contact's name which corresponds to a predefined number chosen upon purchase. The user simply selects the relevant contact name to make the desired call.

Remaining buttons cover on/off, answer and hang-up, and volume adjustment. There's no support for SMS messaging, no display (a blue light indicates that the phone is ready to place a call), and, obviously, no keypad to dial numbers.

OwnFone is 7 mm (0.2 inches) thick and weighs 40g (almost 1.5 oz), which is around a third of the weight of an iPhone 4 and significantly thinner. The battery is good for around three days, or if you prefer to keep it switched off, a recharged battery should last about a year. It also supports call-forwarding,

Customers can personalize the phone's colour and design. A monthly plan can be chosen at various price points, starting at £7.50 per month for 50 minutes of calls. Numbers can be changed without charge by ringing the OwnFone helpline, while new contact buttons can be purchased for £5.

The device's simplicity makes it particularly suitable for children, older people, and those with learning difficulties. With no numbers, but only names to press, it makes communicating via cellphone very easy, and an upcoming braille version will enhance its accessibility. At present, OwnFone is only available in the UK at a price of £55.

### **UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

It is too early to attempt to evaluate Iain Duncan Smith's pet welfare reform project. But one MP, Frank Field, has already decided that it will be a disaster. In a *Guardian* article (11 September) he says that apart from the fact that it is intended to rely on an online claim form, with payments at monthly intervals, he is against the scheme in principle. He believes that it will "rot the soul" of low-paid workers by encouraging dependency. He also fears that IT problems will delay the programme, and that it is "practically unachievable" within the projected timescale. He has asked the National Audit Office to carry out an inquiry

to see if the known risks can be overcome or are likely to overwhelm the entire project.

A motion moved by Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Liam Byrne, was debated in the House of Commons on 11 September. In opening he said “this House notes that the Universal Credit is late and over budget; recognises that there is widespread unease surrounding the implementation of the £2 billion scheme’s IT system...” This assertion was rejected by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, who said that its phased introduction was on target.

The full text of the debate, to which Frank Field contributed, can be read on the Parliamentary website. Inevitably, the motion was defeated on a division (ayes 230; noes 297).

## HEALTH ISSUES

According to research conducted by the independent think-tank 2020Health only one per cent of NHS practices are providing patients with online access to their health records. John Cruickshank, the author of the report (released on 18 September) comments that “in order for such a system to work, a major change in culture and attitude is required. Patients need to move from being passive recipients of care to being much more involved in its planning and management. The evidence increasingly suggests that patients who engage in this way enjoy far better health outcomes.”

2020Health has also drawn attention to the problem of wasted hospital appointments. In a BBC Radio Kent interview, Gail Beer, the organisation’s Consultant Director, said that new technologies had not resulted in a reduction of non attendance. Despite giving patients the opportunity to book their own appointments through ‘Choose and Book’, many people still fail to turn up. Overall, some five and a half million appointments are wasted every year. The technologies are useful but do not solve the problem. We need to understand why people do not attend. Over medicalising and over referral could be issues, but we need a better grasp of why, even when reminded, patients don’t appear.

## LEGAL CHANGES

Among other things, the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012:

- abolishes the Legal Services Commission (section 38)
- creates a new offence of threatening with a weapon in public or on school premises (section 142)
- creates a new offence of causing serious injury by dangerous driving (section 143)
- creates a new offence in relation to squatting in a residential building (section 144)

These measures apply only in England and Wales, and will come into force by order of the Lord Chancellor or Secretary of State.

## A NEW CHAIR AT THE CHARITY COMMISSION

William Shawcross CVO, who is to head the Charity Commission, is well known as an outspoken journalist and writer, as a former board member of the Disaster Emergency Commission and the International Crisis Group, and as chairman of Article 19, a charity named after that article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, working for freedom of expression.

His father will be remembered by older readers as the chief British prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials after World War II.

## THE HIPPOCRATIC HIATUS

Hippocrates lived from 460 to 377 BC. His famous Oath, though subsequently subject to many reinterpretations, still has a significant place in medical ethics: for some with almost the authority ascribed to religious creeds. It limits treatment to that which the doctor, according to his/her ability and judgment, considers for the benefit of the patient. Among its original principles was a specific pledge not to administer a lethal drug even if asked, nor to advise any such course: which may fairly be taken as a rejection of involvement in euthanasia, even in response to a voluntary request.

But that was 24 centuries ago, at a time when, aside from accident, disease and injuries sustained in combat, life and death took a natural course. Today’s doctors face a different predicament in that life can be prolonged beyond its natural span. And the Hippocratic principle, if strictly observed, can take people well past the point at which living has any meaningful quality. Hannah Betts (*Guardian*, 23 August) believes that “medicine’s obsession with keeping alive people who are ready to die is inhumane and inhuman”. She cites the case of her own grandmother to back her argument. At the age of 92, Joan’s condition is such

that Hannah would like her to die. She is ready, but the medical services are not, and “are engaged in an aggressive battle to resurrect her”.

At the heart of this issue is the question of whether the end of life is always something to be dreaded and avoided. Hannah’s article is headed “Death is not the enemy”. Does she have a point, or do you think these things should be left to your God?

### **ASSISTED DYING: IS THE TIDE TURNING?**

Two health ministers, Anna Soubry and Norman Lamb, have weighed into the argument as to the need for a change in the law on assisted dying. Soubry, a former barrister, told *The Times* (8 September) that it was ridiculous and appalling that terminally ill people had to travel abroad to end their lives. Lamb was quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* (10 September) as expressing his strictly personal view that, where there is someone who is facing a terminal illness, there is a case for reform.

The Autumn issue of Dignity in Dying’s *Campaign* is an important one. It includes an announcement by Sarah Wootton, Chief Executive, that next year an Assisted Dying Bill will be taken to Parliament by Lord Falconer QC. And it reports that at a well attended AGM, Sir Terry Pratchett made a powerful argument that terminally ill people “should be allowed to die peacefully at a time of their choosing, rather than be a plaything for the disease”. He made biting criticisms of politicians, accusing MPs of being “silent and afraid of any change...while every public opinion poll shows that the vast majority of the population is in favour of assisted dying”. His speech concluded with the observation that “Britons and others go to Dignitas to die with dignity to the embarrassment of Switzerland and the shame of Britain”.

There is also comment on Tony Nicklinson’s unsuccessful attempt to persuade the High Court that he was unfairly being denied the right to call time on his life because he was physically handicapped (Briefing no.49, September). This was a decision, of course, that exposed the inhumanity of current law, but one that was swiftly and remarkably mitigated when fate stepped in to end his suffering. As Sarah Wootton carefully points out, however, the case was one that fell outside Dignity in Dying’s remit. The campaign is strictly limited to changing the law only as it affects terminally ill people.

In the last couple of months the organisation has welcomed more than 500 new members. That could be 25,000 if every existing member recruited one new member. So for my part I put it to readers directly. Will you sign up? Contact 020 7479 7730 or e.mail: [info@dignityindying.org.uk](mailto:info@dignityindying.org.uk). UK membership costs £25 a year for an individual, £35 for two people at the same address (£5 off if paid by direct debit)

### **LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN**

Every year more than 90,000 children are involved in the care system across England. Around 73 per cent of them are in foster care, with 10 per cent in children’s homes. Most of the remainder are cared for by extended family or friends, or live in residential schools.

A group of eight children’s charities has launched an inquiry into how best to provide stable homes for children who cannot live with their birth parents.

For more go to the Children and Young People Now website ([www.cypnow.co.uk](http://www.cypnow.co.uk)) and click on News.

### **ACCESS TO SHOPS**

Vivien King, writing in the Spring issue of the Centre for Accessible Environment’s journal, *Access by Design*, notices that stores are gradually becoming more accessible, whether newly built or based on old building stock. She quotes, by way of example, Nat Wakely, Director of Selling Operations at John Lewis:

“All floors of all John Lewis shops are fully accessible by customers with mobility difficulties, including those in wheelchairs. Each of our shops has at least one accessible toilet and all of our shops also have induction loops for customers who use hearing aids.”

**Note: The same issue has a useful guide to Vienna’s accessible underground system: a model of good practice; and a fascinating article on the refurbishment and extension of Blackpool’s Central Library.**

### **MENTAL ILLNESS**

In a letter to *The Times* Dr Rich Braithwaite, consultant psychiatrist at St. Mary’s Hospital, Isle of Wight, points out that anxiety and depression, otherwise known as worry and sadness, are normal human emotions and do not excuse the commission of imprisonable crimes, nor failing to make the effort to work to support oneself. True depressive illness, he says, affects only perhaps one per cent of the population.

**Mind you, that's around 600,000 people.**

### **BOOKS WITHOUT BORDERS (an aspiration rather than a fact)**

The September issue of the RNIB's magazine *NB* asks whether the availability of books in accessible formats is being limited by a legal row over copyright issues. The suggestion is that the USA and European Union are blocking a treaty that would give the world's blind and visually impaired people – 90 per cent of whom live in the developing world - easier access to published works in formats they can use. The harsh reality is that as things stand 9 out of 10 of all published materials cannot be accessed by blind or partially sighted people, and only five per cent of books are currently accessible to blind people in richer countries.

### **TAKE CARE WHEN BUYING MOBILITY AIDS**

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has secured court orders against Optimum Care Mobility Ltd, a business that sold mobility aids such as stairlifts, scooters and specialist chairs. The orders prevent the company and its former directors from using unfair and misleading sales practices again.

More details at [www.offt.gov.uk/news-and-updates/press/2012/61-12](http://www.offt.gov.uk/news-and-updates/press/2012/61-12), but it is worth noting that the OFT is encouraging people to shop around and understand their rights when buying mobility aids from doorstep traders, and to consider the following advice when buying items in their homes:

- think twice before you buy and, if you are made to feel under pressure to make a purchase, have the confidence to say no
- be wary of time-limited or exclusive offers that need to be signed on the spot
- if you feel you've entered into something you wish you hadn't, you usually have seven days to cancel: so talk to someone you trust as soon as possible for a second opinion
- double-check the facts. Have the full costs been explained clearly to your satisfaction so you understand all the hidden extras like installation, on-going service charges or warranties?

### **LEGACY**

It is a remarkable paradox that while millions of people have shown unprecedented support for our disabled athletes, the Coalition, through its hired agents, gives the appearance of being determined to diminish the lives of the rest of the disabled community. Tory MPs, or at least a goodly number of them, have drifted further to the right.

The strategy of identifying those considered 'fit to work' is intended to save money by cutting the benefits of those thought to be exploiting the system. While it is undeniable that there are claimants who cheat, and some who are locked into a false perception of their own impotence, the danger of a financially-driven crackdown is that of going too far, denying help to people who really need it: hitching a political wagon to the prejudices of those who see people on benefits only as scroungers and parasites. Alongside the euphoria over the achievements of our disabled athletes, polls indicate a widespread media cynicism about disabled people living on benefits. More cuts in welfare support are in the pipeline. A recent freedom of information request has revealed that 1,100 disabled people died last year after being found 'fit for work'. A phone-in on Radio 5 Live explored some harrowing cases, including one where parents specifically linked an adverse decision with their son's decline and death.

It would be unfortunate if this government, with the acquiescence of its Liberal partners, comes to be seen as hostile to the poor, while blind to the indulgences of the rich.

### **PUBLIC MISINFORMATION**

Peter Salter writes:

I was out for drinks with two other gamesmakers on Monday. One, a magistrate, lives in Marlow. The other lives in Camberley and works in healthcare.

We got talking about the tube, and mention was made of Jean Charles de Menezes. My magistrate friend said: "He shouldn't have vaulted the barrier and refused to stop when shouted at by the police". The other gamesmaker agreed.

They were stunned when I told them that everything Ian Blair had said was wrong. The video at the inquest clearly showed that JCdM used his Oyster, went down the escalator and sat on the train; the police did not shout until they boarded the train and promptly shot him. But did they even shout? There were 19 witnesses on the train and not one of them said they heard any form of warning. All the officers said that

they shouted.

The Hillsborough report is out today. Initial coverage is that officers changed statements and were coached in the words to be used. When authorities give out wrong information, even if it is corrected later many people do not hear.

## HILLSBOROUGH

Peter reminds us of an earlier case of misinformation. I don't want to add to the wealth of media comment on Hillsborough, but having watched the Prime Minister's statement in the Commons and the independent panel's press conference I feel I must say, as a Liverpool supporter, how much I appreciated both broadcasts. I have often criticised the Coalition, and by implication David Cameron, but here he rose splendidly to the occasion. The panel's analysis was even more deeply impressive. A pity only that it has taken so long to get to the truth.

## ROYAL PRIVACY

It is a striking co-incidence that while the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall are taking legal action to protect their right to privacy, it has been reported that a freedom of information tribunal has ruled that the contents of a series of letters sent to government ministers by William's father should be disclosed. The three judges are said to have explained: "The essential reason is that it will generally be in the overall public interest for there to be transparency as to how and when Prince Charles seeks to influence government".

I have previously inveighed against the royals' exemption from freedom of information legislation. It has been said that this is needed to avoid undermining the constitutional position of the monarchy (News Briefings nos.16 (December 2009) and 20 (April 2010). **I think, on the contrary, that the secrecy of this royal influence threatens the constitutional impartiality of the monarchy.**

I am, of course, at one with the tribunal's ruling, but must caution that it is open to appeal. Already the Cabinet Office is resisting the Information Commissioner's order to publish guidance on the process that requires Prince Charles and the Queen to be consulted on new laws that may impact on royal interests.

Equally, I am emphatically convinced that the royals or anyone else, topless or not, are entitled not to have their privacy in private places intruded upon by surreptitious photographers,

## NEWS FROM LIBERTY

The Autumn issue of Liberty's quarterly magazine points out that aside from the horrific abuse meted out to patients at the former care home Winterbourne View, there are wider failings to be followed up. Not only does its management bear responsibility for what happened but there is evidence that attempts by whistleblowers to alert the authorities to what was going on were ignored. The Care Quality Commission has since admitted that it made an "unforgivable error of judgement" in failing to intervene. Liberty will now investigate the wider institutional failings which led to the large scale abuse.

In the same issue, Liberty draws attention to its successful campaign, through 2008/9, for a modern anti-slavery law. It was the resultant new offence that made possible the prosecution in July of a family of four, found guilty of keeping workers in a state of servitude, keeping them in deplorable conditions, and forcing them to undertake unpaid work.

Liberty also looks at recent parliamentary process, including the Justice and Security Bill, the Draft Communications Data Bill, the Defamation Bill, the Crime and Courts Bill and changes to our immigration rules. There are articles on "the scandal of blacklisting in the construction industry", the "creep of privatisation" into our policing, and an innovative approach to providing information about the correct procedures under 'stop and search' powers and about individual rights.

Standard membership of Liberty costs £30 a year (reduced to £12 for students, pensioners and unwaged people), and can be conferred as a gift. Contact 020 7378 3663 or e.mail: [membership@liberty-human-rights.org.uk](mailto:membership@liberty-human-rights.org.uk).

## OVERREACTION?

Am I free to say that I regard the reaction to the recent Islamophobic video *Innocence of Muslims* (which I don't want to see and haven't seen) as completely over the top and misdirected? Their anger is understandable. Muslim brothers (and sisters) are particularly aggrieved by claims that the prophet Muhammed was a paedophile. It is not so long ago that blasphemy laws held sway in this country, with a

similar aversion to mockery of Jesus. But a lust for retribution is surely not a desirable religious principle.

I have similar doubts about the response to the linguistic improprieties of footballers Luis Suárez and John Terry. Undoubtedly they (and everyone else) should mind their language. But neither player is a racist, and the insulting language they were alleged to have used in the heat of footballing combat does not seem to me among the most heinous of offences, nor deserving of the heavy disciplinary penalties handed down by the Football Association. We all want to eliminate racial abuse, but I think there is a danger that draconian chastisement on this scale may actually intensify racial animosity. And that the victims of the insults may come to be seen as to blame for the consequences. The Kick it Out campaign strikes me as having some affinity with the Red Scare of the 1950s and the excesses of McCarthyism.

According to the *Daily Mail*, following the action taken against Terry, black footballers are reportedly set to boycott Kick it Out. But there I go pontificating again.

## **WE HATE NO. 58: DOMESTIC ABUSE**

*“Even within the most beautiful landscape, in the trees, under the leaves the insects are eating each other; violence is a part of life.”*

Francis Bacon

Abuse, in its many aspects, is relatively easy to define, but difficult to handle. We may deplore it, yet turn a blind eye. Victims may hide their distress, from shame or a fear of not being believed, or, within families, to protect the abuser. Those guilty of abuse can sometimes be seen as beyond reproach. Police and social workers have been known to blame the abused rather than their abusers, and reporting abuse may require considerable courage.

Bacon correctly observed that violence is inherent in nature, but let us be clear that along with other forms of abuse it deserves no proper place in the civilised conduct of humankind. The conundrum is rather how we should deal with it. For many years it has often been a subject kept under wraps, whether in respect of priests abusing young children, husbands beating up or dominating their wives (and *vice versa*), so-called carers assaulting those in their care, pimps grooming vulnerable young girls for the sex trade, lustful men raping women, celebrities taking advantage of their fans, ignorant brutes exploiting people with learning disabilities, or predators manipulating vulnerable older people. All such depravity (which by the way can cross class divisions) has common roots: those of disrespect and the exercise of power. As well as physical violence, it finds expression in various levels of verbal and psychological ill treatment, threatening behaviour, coercion, intimidation and harassment. It may be that some people have a genetic disposition to cruelty, and/or are conditioned by external factors. As kindness prompts generosity, so anger can quickly turn to abuse. Alcohol can be a stimulant to aggression. So can poverty, unemployment and other engines of stress within families.

What has been called ‘domestic’ abuse is a special case. Certainly I was aware, years ago, that police often tended to shun taking action in cases where they would normally make an arrest for common assault. “It’s only domestic,” was often the mantra, as though it was only to be expected in the home, behind closed doors, in families. It can happen between couples, parents and children, siblings, indeed any people living together. Recently, in an episode of the BBC’s daytime soap ‘Doctors’ there was a graphic depiction of a typical scenario, revealing the woolly thinking around one aspect of the issue: a wife enduring prolonged physical abuse, but ashamed to reveal it; her husband – in this case a policeman – accepted as a pillar of propriety, especially by his colleagues. A friend of the victim, discovering the situation, initially ridiculed. What is deeply regrettable about such cases in the real world is that the relationships presumably began with some sort of affection. Love (or perhaps simply an urge for sexual gratification) can turn over time to alienation and hatred.

In 2004, the Government brought in a single, albeit non-statutory, definition of domestic violence as “any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender sexuality”. This year it has announced two new stalking offences, and the criminalisation of forced marriage. And this month, after I began this essay, the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, announced that from March 2013 the definition of domestic violence will extend to “coercive control”. Whereas the current definition has regard to a single act or incident, the new definition will recognise that patterns of behaviour and separate instances of control can add up to abuse. This will include instances of intimidation, isolation, depriving victims of their financial independence or material possessions and regulating their everyday

behaviour. The new definition will also extend to young people aged 16 and 17.

It isn't easy to get a grip on the scale of the problem. Statistics are hard to come by, and are anyway diminished by massive underreporting. The Police Service of Northern Ireland publishes quarterly updates of domestic abuse incidents and crimes recorded by the police. These show that in the 12 months to June 2012 there were 25,888 domestic abuse 'incidents' and (presumably including) 10,387 domestic abuse 'crimes'. Similarly, in Scotland statistics of domestic abuse 'incidents' are published. There were 51,926 incidents in 2009/10, 62 per cent of which led to the recording of a crime or offence (32,066).

The crime statistics for England and Wales have no offence of 'domestic violence'; this information is subsumed within the wider context of violent offences. So far as I can see, the only specific data is contained in Home Office Research study 276, published in 2004 and based on a sample survey in 2001 that relied on responses to questionnaires. The study estimated that in the survey year there had been 12.9 million incidents (non-sexual threats or force) against women, and 2.5 million against men (surely an over-estimate). It concluded that inter-personal violence was widespread, affecting around one third of the population at some time in their lives. Of respondents, one in 20 women had experienced serious sexual assault, while one in five women and one in 10 men had been victims of domestic violence.

Another source of information is based on the 24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline run by Women's Aid and Refuge, though obviously this is limited to those driven to seek help and clued-up enough to do so. The website ([www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)) reveals that just over a quarter of a million calls were received during its first twelve months. In 2006/7 it answered an average of 387 calls a day (which equates to 141,255 in the year). The types of violence are broken down on the site.

So, by any measure, the problem is vast and surely a great deal more worrying than footballers hurling racial insults at each other. It will not go away. Whatever the cause, it is clear that abuse needs to be taken seriously and calls for a firm and resolute response. Victims should be able to feel confident that they can report their situation and will be respected and encouraged to seek help. They can take their concerns to any of the following helplines, as appropriate:

National Domestic Violence Helpline: 0808 2000 247

Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327

Broken Rainbow: 0300 999 5428

National Stalking Helpline: 0808 802 0300

Childline: 0800 1111

England 24-hour Helpline: 0808 200 0247

Wales 24-hour Helpline: 08457 023 468

Scotland 24-hour Helpline: 0800 027 1234

Northern Ireland 24-hour Freephone Helpline: 0800 917 1414

Republic of Ireland Helpline: 1800 34 1900

### **ALF MORRIS: A LAST WORD**

On September 24, by way of a dedication, I was privileged to say something about the life of the late Lord Morris at an event held by the charity 'Coming Home' at the House of Lords. I think the following edited version will be of interest to long-standing supporters of the Forum, particularly as the present coalition government seems bent on a radically different approach to the needs of disabled people:

"This event was originally conceived to celebrate the achievements of Lord Morris of Manchester and, in particular, his Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. His recent death adds poignancy to the occasion, for it gives us an opportunity to reflect more fully on a life that was remarkable in so many ways. I have that privilege and it is an honour to do so in the presence of Lady Morris, Irene, his greatest support, sustainer, and guide.

"There is absolutely no point in me repeating my previous brief summary of his achievements, which have also been set out in many tributes to him following his death on 12 August. But I make one exception, because it is crucial to our understanding of his life's work. And that is to emphasise that the genesis of his relentless endeavour was rooted in his childhood. It was the deprivation that surrounded him in Manchester and in his own family that charted his course and inspired his consistent sense of political direction. His greatest political achievement was to raise the status of disabled people; to lift what has been called the

cloud of limitation, convincing Parliament that disabled people were being treated as second-class citizens, that they deserved respect, that they should be enabled to live life to their fullest potential, and that positive action was needed to achieve this. He did so by making the case across the political divide. Though he was Labour to the core he was able to engage with allies from other parties. That was his distinctive skill. He set in motion a shift in parliamentary and public attitudes which has progressed to the recent amazing demonstrations of public support at the Paralympics. I am aware, of course, that there remains some negativity around disability, even some disturbing hate crime, but that is now surely a minority and aberrant view.

“What I want to do today is to try to illuminate those facets of Alf’s character which came out of our meetings over the three years we spent in preparing his biography. For he was unsparing in revealing his abiding convictions. It is his voice that comes out through its pages. My part was to give his reminiscences order and shape.

“That we met in the first place was fortuitous. In 1974, Ann Darnbrough, then unknown to me, was working for the Multiple Sclerosis Society. She realised that many of its members were often unaware of the benefits, services and opportunities available to them, and were losing out in many ways. She introduced a monthly information bulletin, focusing on a different subject each time. After two years she was approached by a publisher, Martin Woodhead, who said: “I think there’s a book in this”. Ann and I had just married, and together we decided that we would create a directory of information for disabled people. It was the first of what would be eight editions, and to lend our efforts some weight we asked Alf Morris MP, then Minister for Disabled People, if he would contribute a foreword to the first edition.

“This was right up his street. The provision of information was at the very beginning of the measures brought in through his Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act. In the foreword, Alf referred to the widening range of help for disabled people, but observed that the complex network of providers could leave disabled people confused, or simply unaware of who to approach to meet their needs. He went on to say that not knowing what help is available and where to get it could be a major barrier to full integration. “So far as I know,” he wrote, “[this Directory] is the first attempt to bring within a single volume the activities of bodies in both the statutory and voluntary sectors.” Significantly, it included a chapter on sports and leisure activities, written by Ann. It listed The British Sports Association for the Disabled, based at Stoke Mandeville. Among its aims it sought ‘to encourage, promote and develop sport and recreation among the disabled and so enable them to compete with each other and with the able-bodied; and to endeavour to secure the provision and improvement of facilities for sport and recreation for the disabled by the government and local authorities’. That was 35 years ago. What a success story! Ann went on to found the National Information Forum. Alf was one of its first patrons and remained its most steadfast supporter and a good friend.

“As day follows night, there was a *quid pro quo*, and in 2003 Alf invited me to write his biography. I readily agreed, and so began a series of weekly meetings in which Alf, still brimming with energy, recalled his past life and present campaigns, laced throughout with irrepressible humorous anecdotes. I recorded everything and the tapes now make up an important oral history. The biography itself, printed pro-bono through the good offices of Bob Hodgson, Chairman and Chief Executive of the Ormolu Group, stands as a faithful tribute to a great parliamentarian.

“It was a happy time. We were well matched. We were close in age, both Lancastrians, both born into poor homes – Liverpool’s Toxteth in my case, Alf in Manchester’s Ancoats – both dependent on free school dinners but both able to progress through a free educational system. We both had fathers wounded in the First World War, we shared values, and I was able to understand the more vulnerable aspects of Alf’s personality. I got to know him rather well.

“One outstanding characteristic was his integrity, a quality not always to be taken for granted among parliamentarians. Perhaps the most striking example of this rock-solid honesty goes back to his support for Sidney Silverman’s bill finally to abolish the death penalty. It was, in the sixties, a highly contentious issue, no more so than in Alf’s constituency of Wythenshawe, home to the parents of Leslie Ann Downey, one of the victims of the Moors murderers. Many local people openly declared that Alf’s support for the bill signalled the end of his parliamentary career. Nevertheless Alf remained steadfast in his opposition to hanging. And when Wythenshawe voted in the 1966 election Alf nearly doubled his majority. He reflected that most voters are more concerned about trust and a readiness to stand by firmly held views. This principle dominated Alf’s whole time in Parliament and earned him respect in both Houses.

“Another abiding trait was his dogged determination in the face of opposition. Most of his career

was spent against the grain, pursuing campaigns for social justice which governments, both Labour and Conservative, were reluctant to concede. He had, I think, a Churchillian stance of never being prepared to surrender. He knew right from wrong and was prepared to fight for it in the face of pragmatic rebuttal. He did so quietly, but with extraordinary persistence.

“Then there was a negative virtue: his lack of pretension. I want to be precise here. Anyone who has risen up from the bottom rung of the ladder tends to be jealous of their position. It has not come lightly. Alf became The Rt. Hon the Lord Morris of Manchester AO QSO and I think he was rightly proud of it. But he was not standoffish or self-important. The fact that he was just Alf to his wide circle of friends is testimony to that. It was also symbolic that he carried his papers to and fro in an unostentatious cloth bag. He ate his lunch in the staff canteen and was famous and well-liked among those who served Parliament in humble ways. There was one thing he disliked about my biography of him and that was the sub-title ‘People’s Parliamentarian’. That, he said, was true of every Member of Parliament. Perhaps so, but I would award Alf the gold medal.

“Withal he remained a humanitarian, a loving man devoted to his family, but also to his constituents and the hundreds of charities that saw him as their champion and turned to him for help. Our sessions at the House of Lords were punctuated by phone calls seeking his support and he always had shed loads of correspondence to deal with. He was a generous man, not only with his time but also with his compassion. His single-minded, relentless drive to improve the lives of disabled people was the living proof that one does not have to be disabled to be on-side with their cause. I scarcely ever heard him denigrate a colleague on either side of the political divide; even then his criticisms were surprisingly gentle.

“Alf’s first job was in a brewery office, despite being sickened by the overpowering smell of spent hops; then, when he gained his MA, as a teacher, and later, while making his way in politics, as secretary of one of the Joint Advisory Councils of the Central Electricity Authority under Lord Citrine. It was there that he honed his great skills in managing industrial relations and, even more importantly, in drafting agreements on pay and conditions of employment. I stress this because so many of today’s politicians unfortunately lack such hands-on experience of the working world. Alf translated hard-won business acumen into his legendary expertise in the complex arts of parliamentary procedure.

“Alf’s command of the English language was outstanding and he was a brilliant editor. He was the great amender, so much so that Irene frequently had to beseech him to leave things alone. My last meeting with him, a month or so before his death, was to ask him to check over the paper that accompanied your invitation. He was visibly ill, but carefully went over the text. One of the amendments he wanted to make was to change “Alf did well at school” to “Alf did exemplarily well at school” (though I notice that somehow it did not get through to the final document). Nevertheless Alf was exemplary. We are unlikely ever to see his like again.

“He took a keen interest in the well-being of service personnel, particularly through his long campaign to secure the rights of soldiers damaged in mind and body during the first Gulf War. His next great campaign was to have been devoted to throwing his weight behind the work of Coming Home. It was a natural extension of his empathy with people whose lives had been challenged by disability. He saw that severely wounded soldiers needed encouragement and support beyond purely medical rehabilitation. He was at one with the drive to find suitable homes fit for those disabled in the course of duty. Death has snatched him away, but the example he set by his single-minded dedication remains to inspire this just cause.”

Derek Kinrade