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A Digest of Current Social Information

News Briefing No. 61. September 2013

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ZERO HOURS CONTRACTS

Peter Salter

Listening to LBC this morning: a discussion about these contracts. Employees are told about a week in advance of their shifts, if any. Most given no sick pay; no mention made about pensions. One caller suggested these contracts were self-employment contracts - but I wonder if HMRC would agree. It is not up to an employer to simply put staff onto self-employment, if the hallmarks are of employment.

Link this in with the new fees to bring certain cases at tribunal, up to £1,200. How on earth can this be funded by workers who might well have to contact Wonga for even £100? Sports Direct was mentioned.

One caller, with a permanent disability, said that his employer used the tactic of denying that he was disabled. It seems there is a different definition medically, compared with the employment definition. He says he either has to drop his case, or go to tribunal.

Another caller, in the betting industry, was when government owned on a zero-hours contract; now, in private ownership, all terms and conditions have been shaved down. I think she was referring to The Tote, owned since 2011 by Betfred.

Oh, and some Tory MPs have stated they want minimum wage abolished so that workers can "price themselves into work" or similar sentiments. See the views of Christopher Chope MP and a supporter Peter Bone MP:

See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/may/13/minimum-wage-tory-bill>. But also, something a bit better re Peter Bone MP!: <http://wellingboroughconservatives.org/blindfolded/>

Truly alarming, shocking, disgusting. It will only get worse.

Peter does well to comment so promptly on this issue. Employment terms are increasingly subject to zero hours contracts, involving perhaps as many as one million individuals, thus exaggerating the national employment statistics. The employer calls on (and remunerates) the employee only as and when required. The Guardian gave the practice extensive coverage on 31 July, and there is further information on the Resolution Foundation website. In some cases (I suspect few) such flexibility may suit employees, but in general the contracts are dictated by and benefit employers.

The arrangements remind me of childhood scenes in Liverpool when, early in the morning, desperate dockers would turn up at the dock gate hoping – often in vain - to be chosen for a day's work. Though I



doubt if they even had a contract. DK

EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNAL FEES

Following the dismissal of a legal challenge by the trade union UNISON, from 29 July 2013 fees will be charged for bringing a claim to an employment tribunal or an appeal to an employment appeal tribunal. A Ministry of Justice spokesperson said that it was “not fair to the taxpayer” to have to foot the entire bill when people “escalated” workplace disputes to a tribunal.

In future, parties will have to pay an upfront fee to raise a claim, with a further hearing fee if the case is referred to a tribunal. The initial fee for ‘level 2’ unfair dismissal claims will be £250, with an additional hearing fee of £950. A full hearing for an administratively simple ‘level 1’ claim will be £390.

The current remission system to exempt people on low incomes will be extended to apply to employment tribunals.

FEEDBACK

From John Vincent: Thank you for another thought-provoking issue ... I think the item which made most impact was Norman Lamb’s proposal that Neighbourhood Watch should take on the care of older people!! I feel sometimes that I’m living in a country that I don’t know anything about.

From Peter Salter: A Met officer on LBC recently, in discussion about stop and search, especially young or black people said: “... human rights rubbish.” That’s what the officers on the ground think. I blame Blair for this.

Green Party MP arrested at anti-fracking protest today. Been some time since a non-expenses arrest of an MP made!

DEATH RATES AMONG ELDERLY PEOPLE CAUSING CONCERN

26 July 2013: *The Guardian* reported that Labour is calling on Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt urgently to investigate “a sustained rise in deaths of older people over the past 18 months”. Such deaths exceeded normal expectation by 23,400, an increase of 5 per cent. There have been 600 deaths a month above expectation throughout the last year, dropping back only this month. The excess is said to have been mostly of women over the age of 85, predominantly in the poorest parts of the country, prompting concern that there may be a link to the government’s austerity programme.

Public Health England said that it was looking at the rise in mortality rates during the earlier months of this year and the causes behind this.

WELFARE REFORM UNWINDING

On the same day, *The Guardian* published a full-page analysis contending that the coalition’s ‘welfare revolution’ was beginning to unwind. It focused on the “unacceptably poor” standards of Atos, dismal progress in introducing Universal Credit, low achievement in the youth unemployment contract scheme, the work programme’s failure to help the most disadvantaged people into work, and the manifest errors in work capability assessments.

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES

30 July: A friend visited us today, bringing her two-year-old daughter and six-year-old son. A small squabble between the children was defused by the boy saying that his sister could not win: “because I am bigger; and stronger”. He paused: “and more aggressive”. That boy will go far!

I JUST DON’T GET IT

Robert Colover, a prosecuting barrister in a case involving the sexual abuse of a 13 year- old girl, has been taken to task for remarks he made in addressing the judge as to the victim being “predatory in all her actions” and “sexually experienced”. As I understand it, there could be no legal question as to guilt: the remarks were made only in the context of sentencing. What then is the objection? Is it argued that 13 year-old girls cannot be predatory or sexually experienced? If they can be, then is not such mitigation appropriate in considering the level of misdemeanour? Or is there a politically correct wish to limit freedom of speech in our courts?

Widely reported, generally against such language

BEDROOM TAX

30 July 2013: An action brought by 10 families against the so-called 'bedroom tax' has failed. The plaintiffs argued that the restriction of housing benefit was highly discriminatory and contrary to Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The High Court ruled that courts should not micro-manage government policy decisions and observed that funding was available for discretionary payments in exceptional circumstances. But lawyers for the plaintiffs indicated that the decision would be appealed.

Widely reported

NHS PRIVATISATION

31 July 2013: It is argued that government criticism of hospital care is linked to a drive for greater privatisation, seen by coalition ministers as more cost-effective and to "reinvigorate" provision through competition.

Guardian

THE WORK CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT CONTROVERSY

31 July 2013: The Guardian carried a full-page interview with Dr. Greg Wood, explaining the concerns which prompted him to "articulate" his concerns about practices within Atos which he regarded as unfair and skewed against claimants.

A ROUND-UP FROM MAGAZINES (AND MESSAGES) RECEIVED

All Together Now! The August/September issue features an article about "a new and exciting" website that helps people to find and buy the right equipment to retain their independence: "a marketplace to make life easier". The site (www.reallyusefulstuff.co.uk) is led by Kay Allen OBE, whose CV includes the launch of a retail range for B&Q called 'Daily Living Made Easier'. She says: "the website strives to create an online community where people can share tips and product reviews. It's about finding products that are well designed and look great."

This brilliant free newspaper for everyone with an interest in disability also has a reminder of a link to its Liverpool roots. 'All Together Now' is the title of a sixties' classic which was sung by Sir Paul McCartney in a Brazilian concert that recently 'went viral' on YouTube.

And the welcome news that Bert Massie has received an honorary doctorate of laws from the University of Liverpool. It follows an OBE in 1984, a CBE in 2000, and a knighthood in 2007.

Sir Bert is to lead a task-force, backed by the Labour Party, looking at ways to break the link between disability and poverty. His view is that: "Even in an age of limited resources there are more humane and better ways of supporting disabled people than this government's unprecedented assault which has left millions of disabled people facing greater poverty." Exactly!

Other subjects covered include the substance of an appeal by the Prime Minister urging British employers to take on more disabled workers (alongside new research illuminating the present problem), a report saying that millions of unsupported carers don't know where to go for help, and Bert Massie's usual 'Sounding Off' column, this time lambasting a new rule for the Personal Independence Payment and the decision not to retain the Disability Committee within the Equality and Human Rights Commission. "If the ERHC cannot serve disabled people," asks Sir Bert, who of course previously headed the Disability Rights Commission, "has the time come to abolish it so that we can drop the pretence that disabled people are supported by a commission?"

Liberty: 21 August by e.mail: You may have seen Liberty's Director of Policy on Newsnight last night, highlighting the danger of powers to stop, search and detain without suspicion.

The focus on this issue follows the detention of David Miranda at Heathrow airport on Sunday under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000. Chilling and alarming as it is, we're not surprised.

For many in Britain, Schedule 7 has become a byword for racial profiling, provocative and derogatory questioning and routine hassle when entering or leaving the country. The power allows for people to be detained for 9 hours, fingerprinted, strip searched and asked questions without a right of access to a lawyer. Refusing to comply is a criminal offence. Schedule 7 contravenes our basic rights to liberty and respect for

private life.

That's why Liberty is already fighting the abuse of this power in the courts.

Our client was detained in November 2010 after he had flown back to Heathrow via Bahrain. He was detained for more than four hours. He was asked about his salary, his voting habits and the costs of his Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. They went through his possessions with a fine tooth comb; they made copies of his credit cards; they kept his mobile phone and SIM cards which were only returned eight days later (at his own expense). This man had never in his life been arrested or detained by the police.

Our client's story is not unique. Actor Adeel Skhtar is one of the thousands of people who has been held under this offensive legislation. He has started a petition asking the Government to rethink its position.

The repeal of this power is long overdue. It has long alienated and humiliated sections of our community and has now seemingly been used to bully and intimidate a journalist's partner. With your help, Liberty will continue to challenge this legislation in Parliament and through the courts. Keep an eye on our website for further developments, and you can also follow us on twitter @libertyhq.

Personally, I prefer to wait until more information is available.

The Bulletin, July/August 2013, from the British Polio Fellowship, has a basic one-page guide on 'How to lobby your MP', which also announces the appointment of a Parliamentary Officer, Anderona Cole. I hope she gets to see my briefing. It also has a medical alert card for all members living with polio and post polio syndrome, to be carried in your purse or wallet. It provides vital information for healthcare professionals. The magazine has much important information, and I appreciate being sent a regular copy, but I do wish it had more dissent. No use pretending that everything in the garden is lovely.

Able, July/August 2013, is good value. The editor tackles the difficult question of whether discrimination can ever be positive. His answer, really, is never. But *Able* is, first and foremost, enthusiastically supportive of independent living. This is a magazine that is expansive and which focuses on information rarely found in other disability literature. There is an unusual and compelling piece on the growing case for regulations to safeguard vulnerable children by controlling the widespread and unacceptable use of chill-out rooms in schools. And a guide to practical changes that can be made in your home to allow you to continue to live independently, comfortably and safely. There is also a thoughtful article arguing that Michael Gove needs to change his thinking on education if children are to learn anything, followed by guidance for disabled students and about graduate recruitment. The tone is set by a small mantra: "Focus on what you can do, not what you can't". But, conspicuously, whereas *All Together Now!* has Sir Bert Massie sounding off about government failings, *Able* features a column from Esther McVey. The different approaches to the Equality Act 2010 are instructive. But I do *Able* an injustice by selecting material from a fascinating and wide ranging information store. Perhaps you should get both.

Forward, August 2013, published by the Spinal Injuries Association, naturally concentrates on information and news for people with spinal cord injury, and in that context its coverage is remarkable. Where else could you read about a campaign for the right for soldiers to donate sperm pre-deployment and for the Ministry of Defence to supply protective underwear to minimise damage to the genital area in a blast? Corporal Ric Clement is the first soldier to 'go public' about his very personal injuries, including the loss of his genitals, and the impact of this on his ability to ever father a child.

But SIA also has a wider vision. It has signed up to the 'Britain Cares' campaign: a website set up to get as many people as possible to say how important social care is for disabled people. People are asked to "upload" a picture of themselves holding up a card saying 'I care', while those receiving social care are encouraged to post testimonies and videos saying how they use social care and what it means to them. The aim is to build up a groundswell of opinion so big that the government will find it hard to ignore.

And don't miss the interview with Madam Becky Adams on para-doxies (www.para-doxies.co.uk for more).

CILIPUpdate, August 2013: This is a specialist journal for library and information professionals, which often carries articles of general interest. It is alarmed by cutbacks that threaten our library and information services (e.g. "Spending review misery continues"). This issue has the news (otherwise hard to find) that the World Intellectual Property Organisation has drafted a statement that calls on more than 150 countries to

create a treaty to help print-disabled people access a wealth of material currently unavailable to them. There are also details of a free conference for people working with older people in an arts and culture setting to be held in Manchester, this November. Along with news of a report published for the National Literacy Trust which says that the government is ignoring the role of literacy in tackling poverty. And, of course, I retain a personal interest in developments in the £50 million facelift of Liverpool Central Library, where I spent many happy hours of my youth. Now, living in Peckham, where Peter Collinson had his famous garden, I was delighted by a thrilling article on the Linnaeus Link. Carl Linnaeus, a controversial figure, came to look at Collinson's garden in 1736, but local historians have never been able to pinpoint the location of this famous place. This is altogether a splendid compilation.

The Week, August 2013: This weekly digest is so vast and wide ranging that I find it impossible to select representative material; added to which is the fact that it is so much better and less partial than anything I can do. But I did find a special interest in an article headed 'The disease that doctors dread' (issue 932, 10 August), especially as it has a connection close to home: the Maudsley Hospital. It concerns "the bewildering world" of myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), "initials that strike fear into the hearts of doctors". The story, briefly but expertly told by Michael Hanlon, investigates a 'war' between most scientists and doctors, who believe that ME is "a real and ghastly disease that is often associated with psychological problems", and those who do not. The latter, Hanlon explains, though relatively few in number, can be extremely militant, radical and active. Professor Sir Simon Wessely, who is at the heart of the controversy, is quoted as saying: "I spend a quarter of my time dealing with complaints and harassment, rather than treating patients". This is journalism of the highest order.

(A longer version of the article first appeared in *The Sunday Times*)

ASSISTED DYING

1 August 2013: The appeal of Paul Lamb to allow doctors to help him die was rejected by the Court of Appeal. His argument was based on Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which holds that everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence, and provides that there shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right. But this latter provision is subject to a number of exceptions, including "such as in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others." The judges found that a blanket ban on assisted suicide is a "proportionate interference" to the Article 8 provisions. But it would be interesting to have expert comment on this.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT: THE UNCERTAINTY CONTINUES

3 August 2013: An internal survey of DWP employees has revealed grave concerns about the Universal Credit project, with particular dismay around a lack of leadership and confidence in the department's ability to deliver. Stephen Timms, shadow employment minister, is quoted as saying: "These testimonies from the heart of the Universal Credit programme are utterly damning. No strategic leadership, no plan, no idea. The scheme is in chaos."

Guardian

THE BERWICK REVIEW

6 August 2013: Don Berwick, a renowned US healthcare expert, has reported to the Prime Minister, David Cameron, recommending strategies for the improvement of patient safety in English hospitals. Its tone is upbeat: that we should step back from the blame game and adopt a new culture of openness and a willingness to admit and learn from mistakes. He reasons that systems and constraints rather than the performance of staff threaten patient safety. Critics regret the lack of a recipe for action - notably adequately funding and rationalising regulation - to yield effective change.

Go to: www.gov.uk/government/publications/berwick-review-into-patient-safety

CHARITY PAY

8 August 2013: *The Telegraph* reported that an examination of the accounts of some of our biggest and best-known charities between 2010 and 2012 revealed that the number of executives being paid over

£100,000 a year had risen by 72 per cent. Those cited were the National Trust, RSCPA, NSPCC, Guide Dogs, WWF-UK, RSPB, Shelter and Barnardo's. The number of staff earning more than £60,000 had increased by 26 per cent, at a time when "millions of others were accepting pay freezes".

The MailOnline was more explicit, claiming that over 30 executives at the country's 14 leading international development charities now earn more than £100,000 a year, 11 of them topping the Prime Minister's £142,500. William Shawcross, chair of the Charity Commission, was quoted as warning charities to control boardroom pay or risk doing harm to their reputations. *The Mail* went on to reveal the salaries of 15 top charity earners last year, along with their percentage increases since 2010. In 2012, top of the list was Sir Nick Young of the British Red Cross at £184,000 (up 12 %), closely followed by Justin Forsyth of Save the Children at £163,000 (up 22%), Kevin Cahill CBE of Comic Relief at £130,823 (up 9%), Loretta Minghella of Christian Aid at £123,729 (up 15% on the pay of her predecessor), and Barbara Stocking of Oxfam at £119,560 (up 19% - she has recently stepped down). Go to www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2385754/fury-charity-boss-says-donors-dont-mind-paying-figure-salaries.html.

Back in 2007, Ann Darnbrough wrote "Not even charities are exempt from this financial spiral. The respected magazine *Third Sector* (June 2006) reported that more than 80% of the public thought that paying charity chief executives an annual salary of £60,000 a year or more was a waste of money. And, I would add, it's very off-putting to potential donors – what's their fiver worth to a cause that has such a skewed understanding of values?"

INQUIRY INTO PREMATURE DEATHS OF PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

"Far more need to be done across health and care services to improve the treatment that people with learning disabilities receive."

This was the response of the Department of Health (DH), published on 12 July, to the results of a confidential inquiry into premature deaths of people with learning disabilities. This found that while some improvements have been made, people with learning disabilities are still experiencing poor care, and face unacceptable inequalities in health and social care.

DH has therefore asked the National Clinical Director for Learning Disability to look at the feasibility of developing best practice guidelines for the treatment of people with learning disabilities. The inquiry's recommendations include:

- making improvements in the way DH identifies people with learning disabilities;
- aiming to have a known contact for people with multiple long-term conditions, to coordinate their care, communicate with different professionals and be involved in care planning with the individual;
- looking at introducing patient-held records for all people with learning disabilities who have several health conditions.

Care and Support Minister, Norman Lamb is fully behind a drive for improvements, and accepts that it is not good enough that people with learning disabilities are at a greater risk of dying earlier due to poor healthcare. He is quoted as saying:

"Good, high quality care should be expected for everyone. We wouldn't accept this kind of poor care for cancer patients, so there is no reason why it is acceptable for people with learning disabilities."

The DH has also set out progress on improving healthcare in the second *Six Lives Progress Report* to the Ombudsmen. This shows that more people with learning disabilities than ever before have taken up an annual health check which will help improve health, and prevent adverse issues before they become a crisis. This report also sets out priority areas for further progress including:

- giving greater voice and power to people with learning disabilities and their local communities to develop services for everyone, including those in vulnerable or marginalised groups;
- supporting the spread of personal health budgets for people with a learning disability with greater integration across health and social care;
- ensuring that Health and Wellbeing Boards have information to help them understand the complex needs of people with learning disabilities;
- working with NHS England to make sure that the system continues to monitor and improve the health and care results of people with learning disabilities.

The Department has worked together with Mencap and the British Institute of Learning Disabilities to listen to people with learning disabilities and their family carers to see how best to make improvements.

Based on a DH press release.

THE PRINCE AND POLITICS

Longstanding readers may recall that I have dwelt in some detail on the exemption of royal correspondence from the normal provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (*Briefings* no.16 , December 2009 and no. 20, April 2010). My thinking on this was unequivocal: “At a time when there are clarion calls for greater transparency in public affairs we think it extraordinary that information relating to communications with senior royals should be cloaked in secrecy.”

I found opinion sharply divided on this issue. Some good people thought that the Prince of Wales was brimming over with ideas and that it was a good thing that he should be free to make his views known ‘behind the scenes’. Others felt that the prince’s penchant for writing to and meeting ministers was at odds with the supposed political neutrality of the monarchy. *The Guardian* took the latter view, having taken its objections to court to seek open publication of a set of 27 letters written by the prince to ministers over a nine-month period. The case against such publication, as I understand it, is that it could damage the public perception of the prince’s political neutrality: a circular argument that seems to reinforce the essence of that which it seeks to deny. The attorney general, Dominic Grieve, had argued that disclosure of the letters, said to be “particularly frank,” would have seriously damaged his future role as king. Be that as it may, *The Guardian’s* action failed, albeit that the case will go to the Court of Appeal later this year.

On 13 August, however, it was reported that it had emerged that Charles had held 36 meetings with ministers since the coalition took power in 2010, and that the royal veto on bills that may affect the prince’s private interests is to be considered by the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee. This may seem arcane constitutional stuff, but the fundamental question is whether we have a politically neutral monarchy – or not.

THE ‘GO HOME’ DISPUTE

In an impressive challenge to the Home Office vans with their ‘Go Home’ message for illegal immigrants, Liberty constructed a similar van of its own, carrying a message that read “Stirring up tension and division in the UK illegally? HOME OFFICE THINK AGAIN.” Here is the full text of its press release:

“Our van started the day by circling the Home Office, offering them a taste of their own medicine. Driving a National Front-style slogan around ethnically diverse areas – and ignoring their legal duty to counter discrimination and foster good relations – is as un-British as it is unlawful.

“The response to our van was overwhelming. Special thanks has to go to all those who engaged with it on Twitter and Facebook – if you hadn’t spread the word it would never have reached so many. As it was, it generated thousands of tweets and re-tweets, helping to make sure the government doesn’t get the last word.

“The Liberty van made it into the national and international press - both in print and on television. The story was featured in *The Guardian*, ITV News, The Today Programme and Huffington Post to name but a few.

“Yesterday it emerged that the Home Office have finally recognised the need to consult the public before wider implementation – a step notably absent from the ill-fated pilot, rolled out without any attempt to communicate with affected communities. But there has been no apology whatsoever, nor any acceptance that they badly let down the public with this divisive stunt.

“We couldn’t have had this fantastic reach without the support of our members. Our supporters, on social media and beyond, made for an incredibly positive and inspiring day for all involved – thank you!”

On 13 August, Rowena Mason, *The Guardian’s* political correspondent, reported that the Home Office had backed down in its legal battle over the ‘Go Home’ strategy. But it was said to be “still considering whether to roll out the campaign.”

NHS WAITING LISTS

16 August 2013: Hospital waiting lists in England have reached 2.9 million, a five-year high, having increased by nearly a quarter of a million in a year.

NHS England

UK TO HOST G8 DEMENTIA SUMMIT

The UK is to host the first G8 dementia summit to lead international action on tackling the condition. The summit will be dedicated to seeking an ambitious level of international coordination and an effective

response to tackling the condition.

Prime Minister David Cameron and Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt will use the UK's 2013 presidency of the G8 to lead coordinated global action against what is fast becoming one of the greatest pressures on families, carers and health systems around the world.

In the UK alone, there are likely to be nearly a million people with the condition by the end of 2020. The government has already begun a national programme of action through the Prime Minister's *Challenge on Dementia*, launched in 2011.

Now the UK is looking to spark a world-wide effort by inviting health ministers from G8 countries to a high-level summit in London on 11 December to discuss how they can coordinate efforts and shape an effective international solution to dementia. This includes looking for effective therapies and responses to slow dementia's impact.

The summit will aim to identify and agree a new international approach to dementia research, to help break down barriers within and between companies, researchers and clinicians and secure a new level of cooperation needed to reach shared goals faster than nations acting alone.

They will draw on the expertise and experience of the OECD, World Health Organisation (WHO), industry, national research organisations, key opinion leaders, researchers and physicians.

Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt, said:

"Globally there is a new case of dementia every four seconds, and by 2020 we will see nearly 70 million people living with the condition.

"Dementia requires long-term health and social care support that can be hugely expensive. Currently 70 per cent of the global cost is incurred in medically advanced nations like Western Europe and North America. But nearly 60 per cent of people with the condition live in developing countries. As their populations grow and age, the pressure on their services and budgets will inevitably increase.

"This is a global challenge and one which is set to intensify. While we continue to pursue tomorrow's cures, it is critical now more than ever to pay serious attention to what we can do to reduce the average number of years living with the condition. The G8 today have a unique chance to come together to help people manage dementia better, lead healthier lives and deliver real improvements in care and substantial economic savings.

"The UK launched a wide-ranging dementia plan on research, care and awareness in 2012 under the Prime Minister's Dementia Challenge. Most G8 countries also have similarly targeted plans. But the majority of this work and research investment has been led at a national level. Experts believe if countries, biopharmaceutical companies and businesses collaborate more effectively and share information, research and knowledge it could see significant advances and better support for people living with dementia today."

Scale of the problem

Current estimates indicate 35.6 million people worldwide are living with dementia but with the world's populations ageing, the WHO estimates that number will nearly double every 20 years, to an estimated 65.7 million in 2030, and 115.4 million in 2050.

Much of the increase will be in developing countries. Already 58 per cent of people with dementia live in developing countries, but by 2050 this will rise to 71 per cent. The fastest growth in the elderly population is taking place in India, and their south Asian and western Pacific neighbours. In China, the burden of dementia seems to be increasing faster than is generally assumed by the international health community.

If dementia care were a country, it would be the world's 18th largest economy, ranking between Turkey and Indonesia.

If it were a company, it would be the world's largest by annual revenue exceeding Wal-Mart (US\$414 billion) and Exxon Mobil (US\$311 billion).

The total estimated worldwide costs of dementia were US\$604 billion in 2010. About 70 per cent of the costs occur in Western Europe and North America.

Funding

The UK annual funding on dementia research will increase to around £66 million by 2015, while President Obama has committed the US to spending around £360million (\$550 million) in dementia research each year. At the same time, the pharmaceutical industry is also investing heavily.

Dementia

Dementia is a syndrome and refers to the impairment of cognitive brain functions of memory,

language, perception and thought. There are many diseases that cause dementia such as Alzheimer's disease, dementia with Lewy bodies and Parkinson's Disease-associated dementia. The majority are degenerative but not all, for example, vascular dementia. Dementia is not a single disease.

Dementia progresses from mild cognitive impairment, difficulties organising daily life, to the breakdown of personality, followed by loss self and identity, incontinence, unsteadiness, then confinement to bed and finally death. Knowing this is very distressing for people in the early stages of dementia, as well as for caregivers at the end of their loved ones' life.

Department of Health press release, 19 August 2013-08-21

FUNDING

Care and Support Minister Norman Lamb has announced the latest round of funding to help voluntary organisations working to improve people's health and well-being. The Innovation, Excellence and Strategic Development (IESD) Fund is awarded to voluntary groups across England.

WE HATE NO.69: THE DAMNATION OF THE IMPOVERISHED

"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."

St. Matthew 13.12

My latest lament has been prompted by Owen Jones's much praised *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (Verso, 2012), though the analysis I offer differs in some respects. I have frequently commented on the subject over the years, but I now want to approach it full on. My perspective is rooted in the fact that I was born, brought up and educated in a thoroughly working-class environment in the Toxteth district of Liverpool, which so far as I can recall had no wealthy areas. And all within the period from the Wall Street Crash to the introduction of the Welfare State.

Classism has a long history in Britain. In medieval times, at its simplest level, the most obvious division was that between the wealthy elite and the common people. High society – the upper class – was dominated by the monarch, and gifted to Lords of the Manor, sustained by the drudgery of their serfs. At the lower end, terms such as plebs, hoi polloi and riffraff conveyed (and convey) a sense of worthlessness. Sir John Froissart summed it up neatly when commenting on the disastrous rebellion of the peasants in 1381:

"It is customary in England, as well as in several other countries, for the nobility to have great privileges over the commonality; that is to say, the lower orders are bound by law to plough the lands of the gentry, to harvest their grain, to carry it home to the barn, to thrash and winnow it; they are also bound to harvest and carry home the hay. All these services the prelates and gentlemen exact of their inferiors."

From Jon E. Lewis: *London, the Autobiography* (reprint, 2010)

The broad distinction of aristocratic and working classes persists, but sub-divisions now intrude, principally to recognise the importance of a professional class: administrators, teachers, lawyers, judges and so on. Thus the emergence of a 'middle' class (upper and lower). A major survey, undertaken by BBC Lab UK with Professors Savage and Devine, has recently defined seven social classes, with a 'precariat', poor, precarious and proletarian, at the bottom end. It is the latter class that concerns me here.

In Jones's preface and introduction there are imported references to a one-time respectable, diligent and aspirational working-class, qualities seen as long gone. Well, perhaps. But in my Saint Silas Street primary school, only one pupil a year succeeded in winning a grammar school place. Our names were inscribed in gold letters on a board in the assembly hall, like batsmen who had taken five wickets in an innings. The rest had to fend for themselves in the distinctly hostile environment of an industrial society. Leaving aside criminality, I think the prime working-class characteristic of those days was, of necessity, self-reliance. I need not explain the uncertain lives of those at the bottom of the heap, living in slum properties and dogged, until war intervened, by unemployment, abject poverty and diseases brought on by social deprivation and industrial pollution. My daily walk to school took me past squalid, overcrowded Victorian dwellings, outside which ragged children played in bare feet, while their mothers sat on the doorsteps breast feeding the latest additions to their families. And all without healthcare provision. Though I may have to some extent (never entirely) made my way to the middle-class, my sympathies are with those who were not so lucky.

The great changer, over time, was the welfare state. Though never providing a king's ransom, once we had shaken off the effects of the second world war, welfare benefits and the NHS served to alleviate the worst of deprivation among those who, for a variety of reasons, needed help to support themselves, and to combat illness. This reform was perhaps the supreme achievement of post-war governments. But Beveridge's plans were based on the expectation that there would continue to be a prospect of working for a living; that social security would be there to alleviate breaks in normal employment. Sadly, however, opportunities for unskilled labour have receded, so that in many places the spectre of long-term unemployment has fallen upon much of the working-class. And with that recession we have seen a decline in the old tradition for self-reliance: the loss of an ethic of comradeship and honour in the face of adversity. Instead, the 'safety net' has created in some people a culture of dependency: an expectation of a right to be sustained by state and local governments. Jones makes the point that benefit fraud represents less than one per cent of total welfare spending. But this is not the whole story. Far more is expended on people who, though technically fit for work, no longer have any realistic prospect of employment and have become locked into a pattern of a jobless lethargy.

Nor, to my mind, is the concept of a feral underclass wholly without foundation. In my own time, disaffected youths have been called mods, rockers, skinheads, yobs, hoodies and, most recently, chavs. All are pejorative terms used to describe, not without reason, a subculture of irresponsibility, vulgarity and disrespect for authority, now exacerbated by drugs. And the regrettable truth is that those who suffer most from the havoc they create are largely within the communities where the delinquents live. Many working-class communities lost their industrial core during the Thatcher years, and since then housing policy has helped to create ghettos and estates wherein anti-social behaviour is endemic. A remnant of people – a large remnant – has been left with neither the wherewithal to move out, nor the opportunity to work. In such circumstances a repugnant gang culture has flourished, more dangerous than the 'peanut' gang of my teens, begetting a senseless blood-letting between rival groups. Jones argues that "only" 13 per cent of those arrested in the summer riots of 2011 were members of gangs. But that, to my mind, is nevertheless a substantial figure. And I find it difficult to see the riots other than as an explosion of sociopathic disorder; provoked certainly, but utterly deplorable and indicative of a cauldron of angry dissent that remains with us. Such rebels, mostly young adult males, may be a minority but I don't think their impact should be minimised.

That much I will concede. What I cannot accept is the suggestion that all people in poverty or of a particular class are 'tarded with the same brush'; that they are stereotypically scroungers and shirkers, complicit in a spineless, shameless culture of seeking 'something for nothing'. Nor even that many of those who have become reliant on state benefits are to blame for their misfortune. Nor that their failure to find employment is necessarily an evasion of their own making. Rather I believe that life has dealt them a poor hand and they need help. I see them as victims rather than parasites.

To denigrate a whole class is similar to deducing that because there are a number of Islamic jihadists bent on our destruction, all Muslim believers are threatening. Or that because a few hospitals have been found to have lamentable standards of care, all must be tarnished. Or that because some parliamentarians have falsified expense claims, all are dishonoured. Or that because some youths exhibit loathsome tendencies, all young people share the characteristics of a primeval class.

Jones devotes a whole chapter to the abduction of Shannon Matthews in 2008, a diabolical offence contrived by her mother, Karen, and Michael Donovan, the uncle of her partner, Craig Meehan. Shannon was found nearly a month after her 'disappearance', after a great hue and cry, drugged and restrained by a strap tied to a roof beam in Donovan's home. Matthews and Donovan were found guilty of kidnapping, false imprisonment and perverting the course of justice. Their bizarre plan had been for Donovan to release Shannon and then 'find' her. He would then claim a reward of £50,000.

But much of the fascination of the case lay, and continues to resonate, in the media response. As Jones points out, the Shannon Matthews abduction came less than nine months after the disappearance of Madeleine McCann, but was portrayed in a very different light. For while Madeleine's disappearance prompted national anguish and attracted "middle-class solidarity", that of Shannon largely exhibited a journalistic detachment from the alien territory of northern working-class life. The fact was that while Dewsbury certainly had its social problems, the local community had initially acted with genuine concern, many people joining a search for the missing girl. But when she was found, and the sordid facts of the case emerged, much of the press coverage concentrated on a view that presented the kidnapping as a microcosm

of what was seen as the degenerate social environment of the area. Middle-class journalists fixated on their perception of a form of lower, even subhuman, life totally removed from their own experience and conventions.

Such distaste was echoed in political circles, and was by no means confined to the Tories. 'New' Labour leaders had been distancing themselves from the working-class for some time. What was new about the Labour party was that its MPs, by and large, no longer came from the labouring classes. Indeed, it was under New Labour, with advice from David Freud (now a minister in the coalition government), that the 'welfare to work' campaign began, with tough back-to-work regimes, even though it was clear that insufficient jobs were available and that the people needing most help were inevitably unattractive to employers. As Polly Toynbee said (*Guardian*, 22 July 2008): "extra toughness is an odd response to thousands of jobs cascading out of the building industry." At the time, I commented that the proposals "appear to come more from the right than the left of the political divide" (*Briefing no 3*, August 2008).

It was James Purnell, as New Labour's Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, who first pushed the idea that benefits should somehow be earned. At the heart of the system for people deemed capable of work, proposed in a Green Paper, was a principle of 'conditionality', ending the idea that "there was a choice between claiming and working". David Lund, from Winscombe, asked: "As the depression deepens, how soon will it be before Purnell reintroduces the workhouse?" (*Briefing, no.7*, January 2009). Indeed it was New Labour that began the process of welfare reform, with the threat of sanctions for claimants who refused to engage in programmes to support them into work.

Some of those under threat labelled the legislation 'welfare to destitution', conscious that the only jobs likely to be on offer would be precarious, poorly paid, temporary, or part-time with uncertain hours. The Centre for Social Justice nevertheless brought out a report that concurred with the New Labour view that "work must be supported as the primary sustainable route out of poverty." And right-wing politicians, from their Elysian heights, though as yet in the waiting room of opposition, were also assiduous in seizing an opportunity to disparage perceived working-class values. In particular, the Shannon Matthews case suited their eagerness to attack the 'benefits culture'. Iain Duncan Smith observed that it was "as though a door on to another world had opened slightly and the rest of Britain can peer in", and David Cameron was quick to present the convictions as a verdict on Britain's 'broken society'. Jones concludes that "the pitifully dysfunctional lives of a tiny minority of individuals have been presented as a case study of modern life outside so-called Middle England."

And so it has continued. The underlying theme of Britain's "broken society", a concept originally introduced by Tony Blair in 1995, was later assiduously taken up by *The Sun* and by right-wing politicians. I think, however, that the word 'broken' was always a misnomer: that the reality is that British society was and remains merely flawed and damaged, as it always has been, and the question is rather one of degree. I remarked (*Briefing no 38*, October 2011) that "society is not so much broken as cast down". More recent events such as the torture, starvation and murder of Daniel Pelka, though horrific, are no basis on which to demonise the whole of working-class society.

The idea that Britain is broken, shattered like a potter's vessel, not only allows the portrayal of an image of total destruction, but can be enhanced by an accompanying dialogue attributing the blame to the victims. As David Cameron put it in the wake of the riots: to "irresponsibility, selfishness, behaving as if your choices have no consequences, children without fathers, schools without discipline, reward without effort, crime without punishment, rights without responsibilities." The right-wing attack on our so-called 'something for nothing' culture (which conveniently ignores the fact that many of those in affluent families enjoy a great deal of such largesse) has intensified: an unmitigated evil to be rooted out so that everyone of working age who can remotely be said to be fit must be directed into some form of work, however unrealistic their prospects.

A more detached Commons Library briefing paper, contributed at the start of the 2010 Parliament, noticed that "perceptions of some problems are increasingly wide of the mark", and concluded that "referring to a 'broken society' may therefore be of little help when drawing up an effective agenda to tackle diverse and complex social issues."

But such briefing papers are not widely read. More colourful and more influential is the popular, right-wing press with its regular supply of lurid stories seen as evidencing a freeloading culture. One such was triggered by the conviction of Mick Philpott in December 2012. The circumstances will be familiar. Previously well-known to have been heavily reliant on state benefits, Philpott, along with his wife Mairead, and a friend

Paul Mosley, were found guilty of the manslaughter of six children (five of whom Philpott had fathered) having set fire to the family home. The nation was appropriately disgusted, not only by the facts of the case but by the background details of Philpott's lifestyle. The *Daily Mail* saw it as the "vile product of Welfare UK", and commented: "Michael Philpott is a perfect parable for our age: his story shows the pervasiveness of evil born of welfare dependency. The trial spoke volumes about the sheer nastiness of the individuals involved. But it also lifted the lid on the bleak and often grotesque world of the welfare benefit scroungers – of whom there are not dozens, not hundreds, but tens of thousands in our country."

A few months later, Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, was to add a political dimension. He took the argument back to one about lifestyles: "Philpott and his accomplices alone are responsible for committing these crimes, which have shocked a community and a nation... But I think there is a question for government and for society about the welfare state - and the taxpayers who pay for the welfare state - subsidising lifestyles like that, and I think that a debate needs to be had." It has become a familiar theme as the government has pressed on with welfare reforms that bear down heavily on those already poor.

On 1 March 2013, a few weeks before the introduction of the infamous 'bedroom tax', the Joint Public Issues Team, a coalition of Christian churches, published a report, *The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty*, accusing the government of perpetuating myths to justify its welfare cuts. The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church, the Church of Scotland and the United Reform Church said that the "systematic misrepresentation of the poorest in society" was a matter of injustice that all Christians should challenge. They charged politicians and the media of promoting six myths about poor people: that they are lazy and don't want to work; are addicted to drink and drugs; are not really poor – just don't manage their money properly; are 'on the fiddle'; have an easy life on benefits; and had caused the deficit.

This broadside was followed by a letter to *The Sunday Telegraph* on 10 March from 43 Anglican bishops which focused on the bill to restrict certain benefit increases to one per cent over the next three years, and called for action to protect children from a change that they believed would have a deeply disproportionate impact on families with children, pushing 200,000 children into poverty. It would, they argued, hit the poorest the hardest. About 60 per cent of the savings from the cap would come from the poorest third of households. Only three per cent would come from the wealthiest third.

The letter was backed by Dr John Sentamu, the Archbishop of York, and Justin Welby, soon to be enthroned as Archbishop of Canterbury. In a statement released from Lambeth Palace, Welby added a personal view: "As a civilised society, we have a duty to support those among us who are vulnerable and in need. When times are hard, that duty should be felt more than ever, not disappear or diminish. It is essential that we have a welfare system that responds to need and recognises the rising costs of food, fuel and housing. The current benefits system does that, by ensuring that the support struggling receive rises with inflation. These changes will mean it is children and families who will pay the price for high inflation, rather than the government."

Then on 28 March 2013 more than fifty social policy professors joined in an open letter to the Prime Minister. It called for a reconsideration of cutbacks, and for an end to public spending cuts targeted on the poorest in our society. It pointed out that previous welfare reforms had already meant the equivalent to a loss of 38 per cent of net income for the poorest tenth of households. They called the welfare state "one of the hallmarks of a civilised society", dependent on a fair collection and redistribution of resources. And emphasised that misleading rhetoric about those seeking support risked undermining the trust between different sections of society and across generations, one of the key foundations of modern Britain.

This mighty divergence brought professors, churches and the Archbishop into direct conflict with Iain Duncan Smith. But not even the Archbishop of Canterbury could dent the confidence, belief and resolve of the Secretary of State. He countered that there was nothing moral or fair about the system that he inherited that trapped people in welfare dependency. "Some one in every five households has no work," he said, "that's not the way to end child poverty."

Nothing daunted, IDS pressed on, contributing an article to *The Guardian*, published on 29 July, and headed: "I don't apologise for trying to make the welfare state fair – it's something only this government can do." His explanation began in a way that exemplified his thinking: "This government has embarked on one of the most aggressive programmes of welfare reform Britain has ever seen." It had already, in his assessment, "a proud record of achievement". The reforms would put an end to people being left on sickness benefits year after year; eradicate the trap that has left so many better off on benefits than in work; and ensure the benefits bill is sustainable over the longer term. And so on in a catalogue of specific accomplishment.

What, I think, was missing was any acknowledgment that the reforms targeted those most in need. Or any recognition that while some cuts might be justified to attack exploitation, the aggression of the programme could also cut too deep and inappropriately. Or an acceptance that any marginal financial advantage in working was being achieved by reducing benefits rather than moving towards a living wage. Or an admission that a large slice of the benefits bill is attributable to state pensions and the tax credits that subsidise employers' low pay. Or, apparently, any awareness that, at the other end of the social scale, the better-off are having a bonanza. Selective rhetoric cannot disguise the fact that inequality is rampant and that more and more people at the lower end of the social scale are in deep financial difficulty, open to loan sharks, reliant on food banks and fearful of the coming winter. And that present policies, while popular with some sections of the public, are stoking the fires of social discontent.

I would like to return to that part of the President Obama's inauguration speech which I quoted in March 2013 (*Briefing no.55*), rooted in the creed of America's founding fathers: that all of us are created equal, endowed with certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And that "a great nation must care for the vulnerable, and protect its people from life's worst hazards and misfortune." Today, he asserted, America's people still believe that "every citizen deserves a basic measure of security and dignity" and that "no matter how responsibly we live our lives, any one of us, at any time, may face a job loss, or a sudden illness, or a home swept away in a terrible storm." Therefore, the commitments we make to each other, through healthcare and social security, "do not sap our initiative; they strengthen us. They do not make us a nation of takers; they free us to take the risks that make this country great."

I believe that the coalition has lost its way. That faced with an economic downturn, it has strayed from these cherished ideals, more concerned to reduce the welfare budget than to raise living standards and relieve suffering. That the first function of social security is to guarantee that those in want get the help they need.

To bring matters right up to date, may I close by referring to a letter to *The Guardian* (13 August) in which Professor Greg Philo of the Glasgow University Media Group, argues that the £4.5 trillion owned by the top 10 per cent could pay off the national debt four times. Essentially, therefore, the policy of reducing the spend on poor people is a political choice. A pity, perhaps, that the protected characteristics of chapter one of the Equality Act do not include class.

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