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In This
Issue

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A Digest of Current Social Information

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- THANK YOU
- LANDMARK DEBATE ON WELFARE REFORM
- PUBLIC LIBRARY PROVISION
- FROM PETER SALTER
- FAREWELL TO THE OFT
- FROM THE DWP
- ROUND UP
- WE HATE NO. 74: INSTITUTIONAL MINDSETS

THANK YOU

I want to take the opportunity to thank all those who have supported me in my recent bereavement. I am glad that I decided on a memorial event, for it brought together so many of those who have known Ann from her childhood, as a mother, through her working life, as neighbours, and in friendship. I am glad that I decided on a Humanist celebration, and for the help of Trevor Moore as celebrant. Trevor was so committed that he waived his fee. I am glad, of course, to have had the support of our families, though limited by their living away. The usual charities, I'm sorry to say, were not conspicuously helpful: except St. Christopher's who were brought in near the end. Had Ann lived on, they would have arranged a more sensitive care package, funded by the NHS. But most thanks are due to my many wonderful neighbours who have been with me emotionally and in practical ways both before and after Ann's death. I have lost a dear wife, but gained a lot of new friends. I have to grit my teeth to say so, but it has been a perfect example of a big society.

LANDMARK DEBATE ON WELFARE REFORM

On 26 February *The Guardian* ran a long article on the success of the War on Welfare campaign, led by Francesca Martinez, in securing over 100,000 signatures to a petition calling for an assessment of the cumulative impact of the government's welfare reforms on sick and disabled people, and demanding an immediate end to the work capability assessment.

The petition triggered a dedicated debate in the House of Commons on the following day, but this appears to have attracted scant media attention. The full text, which can be read on the Parliament website, records a vigorous and substantial debate, which aired many of the deep-seated grievances felt about the government's disability policies. I can do no more than quote from a few of the speeches that give a flavour of the occasion. John McDonnell, who moved the substantive motion, declared "We are making history today". Much that followed was frank and abrasive, particularly towards Atos Healthcare's preliminary role in determining fitness for work.

"It really is a scandal," said Dennis Skinner (I will not repeat his description of Atos, which may be defamatory outside the House.)

Jim Sheridan thought Mike Denning, Minister for Disabled People, "quite a decent man", and guessed that he would not mind being shifted to another portfolio. "Those on benefits," he said, "are demonised, and no consideration is given to the circumstances behind which they are claiming." There was an "obsession" with people receiving welfare benefits,



while “for those with money – the tax avoiders and evaders – life goes on as normal...Even under Mrs Thatcher we did not treat people like this.”

Ian Lavery told members that people were dying as a result of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Disabled people were being evicted from their homes and people were being forced into the arms of unscrupulous lenders. “Is this,” he asked, “really the sort of country we want to leave to the next generation?”

Caroline Lucas was no less outspoken: “ministers cannot ignore the strong likelihood that significant numbers of people are being assessed as fit for work by the government when, in reality, they are very close to death. This has to change.”

Madeleine Moon was equally direct: “We are living in a cruel and callous world if we cannot support people’s lives when they have been destroyed by sickness and disability.”

After a little over three hours of passionate debate, the question was put and agreed to. I understand that the resolution (as set out in the opening motion) has no force. The government does not have to do anything. But I will quote it in full, for to ignore it will tell its own story:

“That this House calls on the Government to commission an independent cumulative assessment of the impact of changes in the welfare system on sick and disabled people, their families and carers, drawing upon the expertise of the Work and Pensions Select Committee; requests that this impact assessment examine care home admissions, access to day care centres, access to education for people with learning difficulties, provision of universal mental health treatments, closures of Remploy factories, the Government’s contract with Atos Healthcare, IT implementation of universal credit, human rights abuses against disabled people, excess deaths of welfare claimants and the disregard of medical evidence in decision-making by Atos, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Tribunals Service; urges the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretary of State for Education jointly to launch a consultation on improving support into work for sick and disabled people; and further calls on the Government to end with immediate effect the work capability assessment, as voted for by the British Medical Association, to discontinue forced work under the threat of sanctions for people on disability benefits and to bring forward legislative proposals to allow a free vote on repeal of the Welfare Reform Act 2012.”

PUBLIC LIBRARY PROVISION IN ENGLAND

CILIP (The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) has submitted its evidence to the independent Sieghart Panel reviewing the state of the public library service in England. Representing the voice of more than 3,000 public library practitioners, the professional body has confirmed its view that the current service in England is becoming a ‘postcode lottery’, so that a patchwork of provision is evolving depending on where you live.

CILIP’s evidence reinforced the core values of the public service and the profession’s firm belief that freedom of access to reading, information and learning are still essential in a digital world. Libraries potentially have an even more important role in learning and in access to digital technology.

FROM PETER SALTER

12 March: I sent an enquiry to London Councils, who run the Freedom Pass system in London, about unused passes. The main paragraph of the reply consisted of three lines. In it were three spelling mistakes, two punctuation mistakes in that after a comma the next word was capitalised and another grammatical error. Whatever happened to Tony Blair’s “Education, education and education”?

Bah!

26 February: Some of yesterday’s coverage of Doreen Lawrence was shocking. The Mail website had comments such as: “She should move on”, “time to shut up, fed up with hearing this woman” and “what has she done to warrant becoming a baroness”. Even a caller to LBC adopted the “move on” attitude. No sympathy for her as a bereaved parent, or criticism of poor police investigation at the time. But the death of Stephen Lawrence would affect his parents for ever, just like I see with road death. You do not “get over” losing a child. Losing an aged parent is a more natural order of things.

Then a black woman called to say she was a trainer and went with her white woman colleague to do a course in a women’s prison. Afterwards, when there had been a change of shift of the prison officers, the one in charge did not want to let the black woman trainer leave. She thought she was an inmate trying it on.

Did not adopt the same approach for the white woman! Quickly sorted, but very revealing.

[See my 'We Hate' piece. Ed]

FAREWELL TO THE OFT

As a consequence of government reforms the Office of Fair Trading will close on 31 March, its work and responsibilities passing to a raft of different bodies. I don't know the background to this, but I regard it as a sad day. The OFT has been a bastion of fairness, integrity and consumer protection, effectively combining many functions under an impartial administration. See the OFT website for details.

FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF WORK AND PENSIONS (DWP)

The recent National Audit Office 'PIP Early Findings' report acknowledges that DWP has introduced the core parts of the new benefit on time and within budget. The report also highlights delays some claimants have experienced in receiving a decision on their claim.

Claims for PIP are currently taking longer than expected. This is because the time to get a decision depends on individual circumstances and in some cases is taking 21-26 weeks.

DWP is taking steps to speed up the process and has already seen strong improvements to clearance times, which they hope to bring down further.

People won't miss out because payments are back-dated. DWP is making the automated parts of the process work better, such as letting claimants know their claim forms have been received, as well as staff guidance. They are also reviewing the parts of the process that are administered by the assessment providers – Atos Healthcare and Capita Health and Wellbeing.

Working with stakeholders, such as Macmillan Cancer Support and assessment providers, DWP has improved the process for claims made under the special rules for terminal illness. To access this service, phone the usual PIP claim number: 0800 917 2222. Select option 1 to make a new claim, and then option 3. A dedicated team will take the call and complete the claim process.

Visit GOV.UK for more information about PIP for support organisations, including tailored guidance for the health professions. And visit gov.uk/pip for claimant information.

[Nothing wrong then!]

A ROUND UP OF MAGAZINES AND OTHER MEDIA

Able, Jan/Feb 2014, has a three page article on London's public transport, praising its provision for disabled people. It also looks at ways to find extra energy; focusing on exercise, diet, working out, physiotherapy and sleep. **Able** is seldom controversial, but it does report on criticism of the BBC's use of actors without disabilities in TV shows portraying disabled people; and on a census of people with learning disabilities in hospital as in-patients, which found that more than one in five were being treated more than 60 miles away from home, and that significant numbers had been in hospital for five or more years. A supplementary guide has information on accessible travel. More at www.ablemagazine.co.uk.

All Together Now!, Feb/March 2014, is, as usual, crammed with news. It notices a government paper *Closing the Gap: Priorities for Essential Change in Mental Health*, outlining 25 areas for health and care services to take action to improve the lives of people with mental health conditions. These include the fact that hospital patients with learning disabilities face longer waits and mismanaged treatment due to nursing staff failing to understand them; this from a new report. It then moves on to say that Britain's outdated high streets are frequently off-limits to young disabled people because of staff attitudes, broken equipment, blocked shopping aisles and inaccessible entrances. Next it goes on to report a new £5 million, lottery-funded programme to research the state of independent living and come up with improvements. And a £30 million fund to recruit and train 1,800 'champions' to help the families of children with special educational needs through the new arrangements.

In one respect this admirable newspaper is not quite up to the mark. It faithfully tells us that the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, having interviewed 15,000 adults, found that "even in their 70s" people are still interested in sexual activity. For the first time the survey focused on the sex lives of people up to the age of 74. Well I can tell them that the human libido can go on much longer than that!

Sir Bert Massie, in his regular column, sounds off about the importance of information, and the vagaries of insurance for people with disabilities. I can only echo his praise for *All Together Now!*: "This is

more than just a newspaper – it is the key that opens a thousand doors”. But, above all, I am grateful for the tributes to Ann, first by Sir Bert, then by the editor, Tom Dowling

the bulletin, British Polio Fellowship, March/April 2014, celebrates its 75th anniversary year, publicising a range of special events. It also notices the efforts of the European Disability Forum to urge all candidates for the EU elections to avoid financial consolidation impacting on fundamental rights and social cohesion such as to increase the exclusion of disabled people. Here in the UK the Fellowship is urging MPs to sign up to Early Day Motion 573, which calls upon the Department of Health to bring forward a strategy to address the needs of those suffering from Post Polio Syndrome, and to publicise those needs within the medical profession. A reasonable call, surely.

Page 27 has a simple guide to benefit and pension rates for 2014/15.

Forward (Spinal Injuries Association, February 2014): This 40th anniversary issue features a message from Baroness Masham of Ilton, herself with a spinal cord injury, who remembers the circumstances that prompted the setting up of SIA: the consignment of SCI people to general hospitals where they got into disastrous situations with pressure sores and depression. She commends the philosophy of self determination which has endured over 40 years and has become a model for other organisations for disabled people, while thanking the many pioneers, including non-disabled people, who saw the rightness of SIA's course and gave their strong support. [Ann Darnbrough was one of those, and held the vigour of the charity in particularly high esteem.] Over the years, SIA's campaigns have shown, again and again, that disabled people, as a user-led organisation, can exercise power and give effective voice to their concerns at the highest levels of government.

The Guardian

1 March: In a letter sent in April 1976, discovered in NCCL archives, Patricia Hewitt wrote that the organisation's view that the age of consent be reduced was “based on the belief that neither the police nor the criminal courts should have the power to intervene in a consenting sexual activity between two young people.” She further remarked that it was clear that a number of young people are capable of consenting sexual activity and already do so. Previously an NCCL press release had proposed cutting the age of consent to 14 and in some circumstances to 10.

On this day the death of Mark Wood is first reported. He is said to have starved to death four months after his benefits were cut. It is unclear whether a letter from Wood's doctor indicating that in his opinion he was clearly unfit for work was taken into account.

In a response to concern about the care.data project, health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, plans to assure patients that confidential health information will not be sold for commercial insurance purposes.

Nationwide reports that average house prices in Britain in February 2014 were 9.4 per cent up from a year earlier.

2 March: Policy Exchange, described as a right-of-centre thinktank, says that almost a third of those in breach of their job search conditions for the first time have their benefits taken away by mistake and face unnecessary hardship as a result. The author of the report said: “It is clear that there are a significant number of people who have their benefits taken away from them unfairly”, something that is driving them to desperate measures.

4 March: A number of letters focus on Mark Wood, whose death followed an Atos Healthcare assessment finding him ‘fit for work’: a grim toll of the government's fitness tests.

6 March: Age UK reports that increasing numbers of vulnerable older people are not getting the support they need; this as a result of cuts in social care budgets. Analysis from the Health and Social Care Information Centre confirms this. There are doubts as to whether the Care Act will resolve such difficulties.

7 March: A leader focuses on the shaming of the Metropolitan Police revealed by emerging details of malpractice in its handling of the Stephen Lawrence case.

Conservatives regularly demean Labour Wales, but Polly Toynbee commends its Jobs Growth scheme,

“hugely more successful” than Iain Duncan Smith’s Work Programme.

Counter arguments are presented as to whether Muslim and Jewish methods of animal slaughter are cruel or considerate. [I find it difficult to see any kind of butchery humane.]

8 March: This day saw a demonstration by barristers and solicitors against cuts in criminal legal aid, the first-ever full-day walkout. A leader heading describes “The quiet death of English justice”.

The LibDems propose a bill of rights to cover digital communication, so that there will be “no surveillance without suspicion. And that digital communication and behaviour will be treated with the same respect and legal due process that we expect for our offline activities.

The International Women’s Day focuses on a continuing “litany of abuse”.

10 March: A report by researchers from Georgetown University, published in the journal *Nature Medicine*, gives details of a study involving 525 healthy over-70s which found that blood analysis could be used to predict who will go on to develop mild cognitive impairment or Alzheimer’s, with at least 90 per cent accuracy.

Official ONS figures reveal that the number of employees on zero-hour contracts (nearly 583,000) is almost double the government’s 2013 estimate, and three times higher than in 2010.

Norman Lamb, the care minister, has said that he will support moves to legalise assisted dying.

The LibDem conference votes for a bill of rights to protect the bulk collection of data from digital communications.

11 March: A leaked DWP internal review argues that welfare reform strategy is at risk because of the speed and depth of ‘efficiency savings’ imposed on the department.

Alexandra Topping believes that self-harm sites and cyber bullying are endangering vulnerable children.

12 March: The threatened rebellion on clause 119 of the Care Bill was defused by reassurances that the powers to force changes in a successful hospital to sort out another failing hospital would be used only in extreme circumstances.

The Co-op’s CEO, Euam Sutherland, quits. He is said to have resigned by e.mail, saying that the organisation was “ungovernable”.

Analysis shows that the Conservative “blame game” against Labour’s economic record has paid off.

Damien Green, Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice, says that images of child abuse are becoming more extreme, more sadistic and more violent, and that the number of children so depicted, and therefore in need of protection, is estimated to run into tens of thousands.

Six leading mental health organisations say that NHS England’s decision to cut the sector’s funding will badly affect an area of care already “straining at the seams”.

The Society section focuses on public services in Scotland.

13 March: NHS England’s outgoing chief, Sir David Nicholson, says that huge extra spending will be needed to sustain and improve services.

The Appeal Court rules that suppressing the release of Prince Charles’s letters to government ministers was unlawful. But the Attorney General will appeal to the Supreme Court.

Moneylenders are proliferating on our high streets.

An inquiry chaired by Sir George Bain says that the government should aim for a minimum wage of £6.94 an hour.

A House of Lords investigation finds that tens of thousands of the most vulnerable patients are effectively imprisoned in care homes and hospitals through misuse of mental health legislation.

14 March: The Public Accounts Committee calls for government contracts to be subject to Freedom of Information disclosure. It finds the DWP particularly bad in respect of public services provided by private contractors. Margaret Hodge MP, in a briefing, said that all of its programmes “are on the verge of meltdown”. The Guardian adds that the government’s welfare strategy is at risk because of the speed and depth of cuts imposed on the department, and notices that a recent NAO report found that the new Personal

Independence Payment will cost almost three and a half times more to administer than the scheme it replaces.[See the message from the DWP above.]

15 March: Lord Myners, who was brought in to overhaul management of the Co-op, speaks of reckless deals, shocking levels of debt and deteriorating governance.

17 March: An Oxfam report, *A Tale of Two Britains*, reveals that the poorest 20 per cent of the UK's population has a cumulative wealth less than the combined wealth of our five richest families, an indication of growing inequality.

18 March: This issue has figures from the Institute for Fiscal Studies showing how much various individuals were worse off in 2013 compared to 2010, categorised by their take-home pay. Also ONS figures for price rises on selected household expenditure.

James Meikle focuses on the controversial level of rehiring NHS staff following their redundancy.

19 March: My nearest supermarket is a Lidl. I was interested to see it described (by its CEO) as one that offers "high quality products at low prices". But, sadly, this does not yet extend to quality newspapers.

Felicity Lawrence reports that half of the meat samples tested by one local authority last year contained species of animals not identified on their labels.

The all-party parliamentary group on vascular disease has found that there are big differences in treatment of the condition across the NHS in England. For example, amputations for adults with diabetes are twice as likely in the south-west than in London.

20 March: Yesterday's budget is assessed. Though there is to be no end to austerity, George Osborne's strategy is heavily directed to appeal to older voters through savings and pension reforms. As *The Guardian* puts it: "fluffy little delights unleashed to soften up the over-65s" and "no bung for the young". [And, I would add, more pain for people on benefits with a cap on total spending. Some of us over 65s' may actually deplore this social engineering.]

21 March: Steve Webb, Pensions Minister, reckons that pensioners should be free to choose how they spend the pot of money accrued for their retirement as they see fit., even if this means they end up wholly reliant on the state pension.

Recent statistics give rise to concern over the increase in tuition fees. The level of default in repayment is now so high as to nearly offset the gain from higher fees.

Polly Toynbee reckons that the reason that the budget was so heavily generous to affluent pensioners (or, as a leader put it, is "packed with goodies for the old") is down to the fact that older people are more likely to use their votes.

22 March: In a major, though controversial, article it is suggested that the public is being made "unjustifiably suspicious" of statins, widely prescribed to reduce cholesterol levels.

According to the ONS, the number of people living beyond the age of 100 has increased fivefold in 30 years, and is up by 73 per cent in the decade to 2012.

DWP figures show that the government's Work programme has procured only 48,000 lasting jobs in almost three years.

Amelia Gentleman reports on life-threatening cuts in mental health services, while demand for them increases.

There is growing concern that freedom to draw down pension pots, announced in the budget, could quickly exhaust people's resources precisely when they are living longer.

24 March: GPs are said to be so pressurised that many are seeking early retirement.

A leader reprises the record of Atos Healthcare and the DWP under interrogation by the Public Accounts Committee, and wonders if the fact that Iain Duncan Smith doesn't care what people think or say about him is perhaps the core of the problem.

25 March: Data from Eurofound shows that, across Europe, increasing numbers of young adults are still living with their parents: some 48 per cent of 18-30 year-olds, some 36.7 million individuals.

Numerous writers condemn Ministry of Justice rules introduced last November that have the effect of banning families sending books to prisoners.

26 March: A report from the Nuffield Trust and the Health Foundation finds that austerity cuts have left thousands of older people without social care at a time of rising need. A further analysis by an alliance of 70 charities claims that thousands more vulnerable people could lose social care as a result of new eligibility regulations expected under the Care Act.

27 March: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary condemns the police service for treating domestic abuse as "a poor relation" to other police activity. [Which, of course, has been the case for many years.]

A leader questions whether the overwhelmingly agreed cap on benefit spending will result in even more people falling through the welfare 'safety net'. It sees the reality as one of seeking to reinforce the narrative of giving 'welfare' a bad name. [While some claimants are facing penury, even death, a Stradivari viola is expected to fetch £27 million.]

28 March: Jeremy Hunt, Health Secretary, stands accused of micromanaging the NHS and being at odds with its leaders.

The HMIC report (yesterday) reveals that more than 50,000 women and children in England and Wales are deemed to be at high risk of serious domestic abuse.

Gay marriage will be legalised from midnight tonight. [I had my say on same-sex marriage in issue no.53 (January 2013). I still have reservations about the precariousness of marriage as an institution (as evidenced by the huge level of marital breakdown), but continue to be confounded by the narrowness and irrationality of those religious people who see marriage only in the light of prevalent sexual norms, and even then only as a mechanism for procreation. I see offspring as a frequent by-product of marriage, something that many couples desire, but believe that the essence and purpose of marital union is that of mutual support and affection.]

Energy pricing, the highest claim on many household budgets, is to be the subject of an Ofgem review, expected to take two years. [Hopefully not the 'long grass'.]

Owen Jones reports on the funeral of Tony Benn.

Obstetricians and gynaecologists join criticism of the intended prosecution of a doctor for female genital mutilation, pointing out "the world of difference between FGM and repairing cuts that are necessary to allow a delivery" (their frank letter is on page 41). [But why haven't there yet been any prosecutions for well-defined, barbarous FGM?]

Government announces that the contract with Atos Healthcare to administer work capability assessments will end early in 2015, rather than in August as planned. Atos, moreover, has made a "substantial" financial settlement to the DWP. [Does this suggest that Atos paid to extricate itself? And will it continue to enjoy other government work. Such as collecting health data?!!!!]

Much more to trouble the mind in this issue.

29 March: Famous writers protest outside Pentonville Prison against the ban on prisoners receiving books. The poet laureate, Carol Ann Duffy, declares that the government's decision threatens the soul of the country. "These values which distinguish our country – imagination, sympathy and tolerance and compassion – are in danger of being lost...those with nothing are now being told by this government that they now have less than nothing." Joanna Trollope, interviewed by Decca Aitkenhead, described the ban as "too crackers to really be true. It seems to me utterly, utterly bonkers."

31 March: 83 English local authorities (of 326) have said they are cutting council tax reductions for poor households. It has been estimated that those affected will face, on average, an increase of £120 a year.

Labour has produced figures that the government has achieved only 0.3 per cent of its target of getting one million people on Universal Credit by April 2014.

Liberty announces its 2014 conference and AGM, which will take place on Saturday, 26 April at Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU, between 10am – 5pm. This is, of course, for members, but you can both join and book on the Liberty website at www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk

NB (RNIB, March/April 2014): This magazine concentrates, understandably, on matters of interest to people with sight loss. In a slightly wider context, however, it reports that the Welsh Assembly has produced new standards to ensure that the communication and information needs of people with a sensory loss are met when accessing healthcare services. Also relevant to my focus on the general decline in public services is a report on “the bottleneck queue for cataract surgery”. Radhika Holmström comments: “It has become increasingly apparent that commissioners across England have been ‘rationing’ access to cataract surgery”.

The Pensioner (Civil Service Pensioners’ Alliance, Spring 2014): This informative periodical is particularly strong on its parliamentary synopsis, covering not only Westminster, but also the Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh bodies. Conspicuously, much of the action doesn’t take anything forward, but some of the detail can be quite revealing. Did you know, for example, that in “the past year” 1,083 lay magistrates had retired and 329 had been appointed? Or that as at 31 March 2013 arrears of Council Tax in England stood at £24 billion, with the worst arrears being in Liverpool? Particularly interesting, I thought, was a question in the Northern Ireland Assembly: whereas pensioners are commonly portrayed in the media as having concessions heaped upon their affluence, the Minister for Social Development revealed that a 2011 survey found that fuel poverty affects 42 per cent of households in the province. It recorded 135,170 households where the householder was 60 or over as being in fuel poverty, some 46 per cent of all fuel-poor households. It was also clear that as people get older, there is a higher level of fuel poverty.

Full marks too for a sensitive article on dementia, a condition that is now estimated to affect 820,000 people in the UK. Some 25 million of us are thought to have a close family member or friend living with dementia. The article focuses on the work of Dementia UK and a recent pilot initiative in Surrey.

The Week (22 March) carries a digest of widely divergent media views on the passing of Tony Benn and Bob Crow, asking if they should be seen as the last of the old socialists? Tony Benn, however, is also afforded a more measured obituary, reflecting that this “rebellious outsider” was eventually seen as “a national treasure”, and providing a sketch of a politician who made an art of dissent and championed principle over pragmatism.

WE HATE NO. 74: INSTITUTIONAL MINDSETS

“If a system injures the intelligence it is bad. If it injures the character it is vicious, if it injures the conscience it is criminal.”

Henri Frédéric Amiel, Journal, 17 June 1852 (tr. Mrs Humphry Ward)

I have touched on this subject before: in no.5 on dogma; in no.65 on anti-Semitism; in no.67 on faith schools. I am persuaded to return to this melancholy tendency by the allegations being renewed against our Metropolitan Police. Indeed, that force provides a prime example of what is at issue in that it was accused of institutional racism in the Macpherson Report of 1999. Sir William defined it as “the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin”. Plainly he did not mean that every police person was racist; rather that racism was built into the institution itself. But why should this have been so? I turned to one of my favourite texts rather than the report itself: William Lecky’s *History of European Morals* (1911). This is what I found (page 56):

“If our benevolent feelings are thus the slaves of our imaginations, if an act of realisation is a necessary antecedent and condition of compassion, it is obvious that any influence that augments the range and power of this realising faculty is favourable to the amiable virtues, and it is equally evident that education has in the highest degree this effect. To an uneducated man all classes, nations, modes of thought and existence foreign to his own are unrealised, while every increase of knowledge brings with it an increase of insight, and therefore of sympathy. But the addition to his knowledge is the smallest part of this change. The realising faculty is itself intensified. Every book he reads, every intellectual exercise in which he engages, accustoms him to rise above the objects immediately present to his senses, to extend his realisations into new spheres, and reproduce in his imagination

the thoughts, feelings and characters of others, with a vividness inconceivable to the savage. Hence in a great degree, the tact with which a refined mind learns to discriminate and adapt itself to the most delicate shades of feeling, and hence, too, the sensitive humanity with which, in proportion to their civilisation, men realise and recoil from cruelty ...

The chief cause of sectarian animosity is the incapacity of most men to conceive hostile systems in the light in which they appear to their adherents, and to enter into the enthusiasm they inspire. The acquisition of this power of intellectual sympathy is a common accompaniment of a large and cultivated mind, and wherever it exists, it assuages the rancour of controversy.”

So dare I ask if racism in the collective thinking of the police may simply be attributable to a deficiency of refinement and sensitivity? Is it just possible that the primitive idea that black equals bad is an inevitable corollary of uneducated and misplaced preconceptions?

Of course, the classic example of institutional hostility could be found in Nazi Germany, and with it a recognition that wholly debased and abhorrent ideas can nevertheless gain popular acceptance. Although this was an exceptional case, we do well to remain on our guard against political extremism. If political parties can be seen as institutions, they may well espouse unpleasant ideologies, adhering to policies, programmes and pronouncements that are neither humane nor proportionate. For even within a democratic state it is possible for oppressive, antisocial tendencies to take root. Either that or a cloying benevolence in which strategies are shaped not by the greater national interest, but by whether they will maximise electoral support from the party's more faithful supporters. And in such tactics party members will be whipped to be institutionally compliant to a party line. Thus, as we frequently experience, intelligent politicians come across as predictable automatons.

Then there is the larger institution of nationalism, ever defensive of its peculiarities and achievements. Here is a curious series of collective dispositions in which the geographical location of births determine fierce rival loyalties. Nationalism, of course, inspires patriotism, and this is not wholly without merit. For having been born into a particular nationality, one may come to be proud of its traditions, and be moved by and become part of its culture. But institutional patriotism may lack discernment; one may buy into the concept of 'my country right or wrong', and foster insularity and hostility. A letter appeared in *The Spectator* of 16 July 1712 which sums up the dilemma:

“Man is a sociable creature, and a lover of glory; whence it is, that when several persons are united in the same society, they are studious to lessen the reputation of others, in order to raise their own...It is a matter of wonder to reflect how far men of weak understanding, and strong fancy, are hurried by their prejudices, even to the believing that the whole body of the adverse party are a band of villains and demons. Foreigners complain that the English are the proudest nation under heaven. Perhaps they too have their share: but be that as it will, general charges against bodies of men is the fault I am writing against. It must be owned to our shame, that our common people, and most who have not travelled, have an irrational contempt for the language, dress, customs, and even the shape and minds, of other nations. Some men, otherwise of sense, have wondered that a great genius should spring out of Ireland; and think you mad in affirming, that fine odes have been written in Lapland. “This spirit of rivalship, which heretofore reigned in the two universities, is extinct, and almost over between college and college. In parishes and schools the thirst for glory still obtains. At the seasons of football [NB] and cock-fighting, these little republics reassume their national hatred to each other.”

Finally I must come to the churches: institutions which, in reckoning their cherished beliefs sacred, are utterly opposed to revision. Thus their adherents always lag behind in matters of social and scientific progress. I referred to this in no.42 on sectarianism, and will not dwell further on that case, beyond noticing that across religious divides there are many different belief systems, each claiming to be true. Such sectarian diversity, while generally harmless, has been and sometimes can still be a rich breeding ground for extremism and conflict. Each sect or institution is locked into their particular persuasion and resolute in its defence. So much so, in some places, that it has covered up misconduct among its priests rather than bring its church into disrepute. It is a strange world in which we live.