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A Digest of Current Social Information

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BLACK HISTORY

This month there is a national focus on the heritage and history of black people in our communities. In my neck of the woods, the history may be grim, but the present and future seem particularly cohesive. Andrea Stuart, author of *Sugar in the Blood*, sums up my feelings when she says that her goal is to make Black History Month obsolete. "In most cases," she writes, "the topics we describe as black history are an intrinsic part of British history and we need to integrate them into the wider educational and cultural framework."

Nevertheless, as a special cultural treat, I want to offer you a little piece of history from Southwark's Gloria Brown. She calls it *Soup Night*.

"It's Saturday and it's a cold winter day. This was the day when my mother would make her winter soup. It was a meal in itself, with dumplings made of cornmeal and plain flour, yam, carrots, herbs and, the most important ingredient, marrow bone and brisket.

We children would be sent to the local butcher and pick up 'free of charge' bones – as much as possible. It was two shops near Mr Harry's who was the only shopkeeper for miles who sold West Indian food. The Caribbean population came from all over – and Mr Harry always had a permanent smile on his face; I guess for all the money he was making. Anyhow, the butcher shop was quite unique. There was sawdust on the floor – and it was spotlessly clean. The butcher worked by himself and I never did get his name. He was intrigued why we wanted bags of bones. "Is it for your dog," he always inquired. We would admit falsely that it was for our dog. But we didn't have a dog. He didn't know we had no pets. The bones were for us. They would always be cooked the same way, every week, in a large soup pot for hours – which resulted in the most amazing meal.

As stated, we as kids never knew the butcher's name. We were not permitted to ask such questions in those 1960s days. It would be deemed impertinent. However, I recall that he was dressed in a long white jacket, with white trousers and the most amazing butcher hat. I remember that he had one finger missing – the story goes he was chopping meat and missed, chopping off his finger instead. He didn't seem bothered and he still chopped meat as if it was an urgency to get it over with.

The soup would be served with buttered bread on the side, always at around the same time – 6pm.

My father would suck on the bone and break it with his teeth. He would remove the yam and hard food, and eat it separately on another plate. He would always ask the kids "do you want some". I would always



say yes. So he would always just say “help yourself”.

We all loved that meal, and it was served during the winter months, for obvious reasons. My elder brother in particular would always show up with a friend – particularly a number of white boys he played sports with, and they would take delight in having such an exotic meal with our family. In fact they would make a habit of coming round as they often remarked that they would only have baked beans on toast or bread and butter for their tea.

Those were the days. Those were the days.

FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

The Department of Health has published a new report setting out the government’s plans to improve access to mental health care services.

It introduces an intention to roll out national waiting time standards for the first time by April 2015. New waiting times standards for mental health treatment are to be introduced.

The report also takes a forward look, establishing its vision for better access to mental health services over the next five years, a vision which seeks to place mental and physical health services on an equal footing – for those receiving and providing them.

Indeed, this is the aspiration of our Care and Support Minister, Norman Lamb:

“I want to build a fairer society and that means mental health has got to be a priority for everyone... I am absolutely determined to make sure anyone with a mental health condition can expect the same standards of care as they would for a physical health problem.”

We invite you to take a look at the report and, whether a service user or provider, to share your thoughts with us.

FROM PETER SALTER <petersalter12@btinternet.com>

Subject: Heart attacks in London and differing survival rates - important information

Date: 14 October 2014 08:11:23 BST

BBC1 London Inside/Out programme last week reported a London Ambulance Service report into survival rates for heart attack cases.

In London there are a number of A&Es, but also 8 specialist cardiac units that take 999 patients.

On average, the survival rate for the specialist cardiac units is 60%. For the A&Es, it is about 25%.

However, some A&E units had survival rates as low as 0% (The Whittington) and two others as low as 2%. The Whittington claimed that the patients with the worst prognosis were taken to A&Es, hence their poorer recovery rates.

The item highlighted one case of a man who had a heart attack and despite the family pointing out prior heart problems, the paramedics insisted that patient was to go to A&E at Whipps Cross Hospital. They did not treat him and he was taken to the Royal London; waited three hours and was then taken to Barts. His wife was not allowed to be by his side. He died. The inquest was told he would probably have survived if he had gone direct to a specialist unit.

The link below, which LAS gave me, gives the names of the eight specialist centres; in the event of a heart attack occurring in your family/work etc, it could be beneficial for the survival of the patient, if the paramedic crew are persuaded to go to one of the eight centres, even if this means passing an A&E on the way.

http://www.londonambulance.nhs.uk/calling_999/emergency_heart_care/heart_attack/heart_attack_treatment.aspx

ACCESS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE TO ACADEMIC LITERATURE

CILIPUPDATE, June 2014 [noticed belatedly] reports that European law [so despised by some politicians,

but not by me] requires all works collated by academic libraries to be equally accessible to all users. A company, 123Library, has designed new e-book reading tools to help visually impaired people access content more easily, and thereby to help academic libraries to comply with the new guidelines and laws.

EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

The ABLE magazine, relentlessly positive [not a criticism], has produced a guide towards helping disabled people into employment and education. In an introductory letter, the editor, Tom Jamison, stresses that these twin opportunities are vital tools towards reaching the goal of independent living, and that they can be fulfilling and make life more enjoyable. An introduction notices a distinction between disability rights and the notion of inclusion, and that the interpretation and spirit of disability law is moving from obeying rules and regulations to doing the right thing and not leaving anyone behind.

The guide goes on to discuss the meaning of discrimination, is somewhat critical of the migration from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment [which according to Citizens Advice has resulted in 600,000 fewer disabled people getting support], before setting out a number of opportunities for volunteering, employment and self-employment, and exploring some of the avenues to educational achievement. If you are keen to move on, you will want to subscribe to this magazine.

THE TWO TICKS SYMBOL

In my previous issue I drew upon *All Together Now!* as follows:

A study led by Professor Kim Hoque of Warwick Business School has found that only 15% of businesses awarded the government's 'two ticks' equality symbol were adhering to all five of the qualifying commitments. Thousands of firms boasting the symbol were found no better than companies without it.

I wrote seeking a government response and have received the following interesting letter from the DWP's Ministerial Correspondence Team:

"The Government has read and considered the findings of the Hoque study, and have met Professor Hoque and his colleagues to discuss the issues he presents. While the study is very interesting and useful and deals with some key issues, it is important to bear in mind that the sample size of the study was fairly small (a total of 116 responses were used) and the demographic was specific: the survey was distributed amongst Disability Champions who attended the Trade |Union Congress-sponsored Disability Champion Training Course. These two points are significant when considering how representative the study is of employers across the country.

"The Government has known for some time about concerns around the operation of the Disability Symbol, and it conducted its own review of the Disability Symbol last year, the outcomes of which were published in DWP's *The disability and health employment strategy: the discussion so far*'. The review highlighted that although the Symbol plays an important role in recognising employers' commitment to supporting disabled people, the current approach is thought to be outdated, not administered robustly and not offering enough employer support. The Government has since committed to reforming the Disability Symbol, and is currently exploring options about how best to do this.

"In the meantime, in July 2103 the Government launched the Disability Confident campaign, which aims to help employers build their knowledge and confidence to recruit, retain and support disabled people with health conditions. We are working with businesses to make employers more aware of the business benefits of employing disabled people, and help to improve their knowledge of the support that is available to them."

Which seems fair enough.

FROM THE SPINAL INJURIES ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE 'FORWARD' (August)

A report from Scope suggests that a lack of everyday interaction between disabled and non-disabled people results in limited awareness and understanding about disability and the needs of disabled people. 43% of respondents claimed not to know a disabled person, and some two thirds of the population admitted to feeling uncomfortable talking to disabled people. Despite the success of the Paralympic Games, Scope finds that there is still a long way to go in changing attitudes. The report, based on two years research, suggests a range of strategies to abolish stigmas associated with disability. Full report at www.scope.org.ok.

John Pring reviews another new report, critical of the Government's Work Programme, arguing that back-to-work support provided to disabled people is actually pushing them further away from the job

market.

[I think this emanates from comments by the Centre for Mental Health and other organisations on the provisions in Clause 54 of the Welfare Reform Bill concerning the impact of mandatory work experience and work placements on ESA claimants in the so-called Work Related Activity Group. It also expresses a general concern about the effectiveness of conditionality on disabled people or people with long-term health related benefits. It quotes an American report of 2006 that “Rather than creating behavioural change, sanctions imposed on unresponsive groups are punitive”. (www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/pdfs/work_experience_ESA_claimants_pdf.)]

POLITICIANS

It is widely said that many people are disaffected from the political class. Watching PMQs today (15 October) I wondered if this is because:

- It grates to have well-paid people on generous expenses preaching austerity
- They mostly lack vision, basing policies on what they hope will keep them in power
- Rather than expressing personal opinions they rigidly adhere to the party line.

You may have other thoughts.

LORD FREUD

I have often been critical of Lord Freud's policies, even when he was advising the Labour Party on welfare reform. I find it somewhat strange, therefore, to be tempted to defend him when the knives are out. His choice of words was inept, but wasn't he simply trying to say that there are a small group of disabled people (not *all* disabled people) who are just not capable of doing a fair day's work for a fair day's pay? And yet who may be glad to work for a nominal amount, simply to have the satisfaction of working, with the shortfall made up by state benefits, or better still (to preserve the sanctity of the minimum wage) a system which compensates employers prepared to take on people who cannot perform to basic standards. Freud has gone back on what he said, but was it so very wrong? I recall visiting a factory in Hamburg about 30 years ago. Its disabled employees could come into work if and when they liked, but received no more, but no less, than their normal welfare benefits. But then I too seem to be developing a rebellious disposition.

The above comments were written immediately after the news broke. I realise, a day or two later, that I am not alone. Lord Freud's remarks, and the political ding-dong that has resulted, have provoked a constructive debate and brought the issue of the non-employment of disabled people to the fore. There are, as usual, some doctrinaire views, but something good may come out of this. Quite apart from the minimum wage issue, the fact that disabled people who are well-able to hold down a job cannot persuade employers to take them on, and that the unemployment rate among disabled people of working age remains stubbornly high have come to the fore. But politicians, as ever, seem to be on the wrong side of the argument.

SELECTIONS FROM 'ALL TOGETHER NOW' (October/November 2014)

“more than just a newspaper – it is the key that opens a thousand doors”

Sir Bert Massie

Dave Webber, CEO of the charity Livability, is quoted as saying “Disabled people have a great deal to contribute to society – not just in economic terms. But the reality is that too often they face real barriers when they try to fully participate in public life and they are still some of the most vulnerable and marginalised members of our society. Recent Government policies, especially reforms to disability benefits, have made it more difficult for disabled people and have had a negative effect on their independence.”

Simon Shaw, from the National Autistic Society, is quoted as saying that reforms introduced in the new Children and Families Act do not go far enough, and that 50 per cent of parents have had to wait over a year to get the right support for their child. He looks for a system in which parents are equal partners in decisions about their child's education and the planning of local services. This view is reinforced by Amanda Batten, CEO of Contact a Family who welcomes the new changes but worries that not all children with special educational needs will be eligible for an Education Health and Care Plan, and may therefore continue to struggle to get the support they need in school – particularly where resources are tight. But Amanda Hampson from the Together Trust, feels that the reforms can go a long way to improving support if brought in properly by local authorities.

Page 7 is given over to the Newlife Foundation for Disabled Children which gives necessary support, particularly through the provision of essential equipment, making up for cuts in local authority assistance. The Morgan Foundation, which helps charities across North Wales, Merseyside, West Cheshire and North Shropshire is also featured.

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) is aiming to combat the ill-founded perception that falls are an inevitable part of the ageing process. They say that being physically active is central to reducing the chances of falls, which currently cost the NHS £1.7 billion annually. Falls are the leading cause of accident-related deaths in older people. One third of people who suffer hip fractures die within a year. A CSP leaflet, *Your Generation*, offers relevant advice.

A survey by the road safety charity Brake shows 90 per cent public support for a law to require drivers to prove they have had a recent eye test when applying for a provisional licence, and at least every 10 years thereafter.

Sir Bert Massie sounds off about the persistent level of unemployment – around 50% - among UK disabled people of working age; but goes on to cite an example of an American employer, owner of Boots Chemists, who has adopted policies to address this problem. He hopes that Boots will introduce the same policies into the UK.

Annabel Kay, a specialist lawyer, offers advice to dispel myths about liability for care costs. She points out not only that the Care Act 2014 puts a cap on how much money anyone has to pay towards the cost of their care, but that people with health needs who meet certain criteria for nursing care are entitled to have NHS Continuing Healthcare funding to meet their health care costs met in full, including the cost of being in a care home. Only if you are not eligible for such funding does the question of whether your assets exceed £23,500 come into play. [Speaking for myself, should I become unable to fend for myself, I would prefer, regardless of cost, not to be compelled into the care system.]

A report from the Health and Social Care Information Centre finds that the level of written complaints against hospitals and community health services in England has risen significantly. The biggest increase relates to the service provided by ambulance crews and paramedics. Details at www.hscic.gov.uk/pubs/nhsc.

And much more, including a controversial claim that too little exercise is chiefly responsible for obesity, not junk food. The consumption of unhealthy food is actually falling.

SELECTIONS FROM THE GUARDIAN

2 October: Dr Maureen Baker, Chair of the Royal College of GPs, warns that up to 600 GP surgeries could close over the next year. She cites a lack of replacements for family doctors due to retire.

3 October: Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund, reported as warning that the global economy may face mediocre growth for some time to come. She urged action, including an easing of austerity [see *We Hate*, no.80] and job creation programmes, and recommended more spending on infrastructure.

Simon Jenkins sees the ‘mansion tax’ as proposed by Labour and the Liberal Democrats, as “rubbish” and argues that a better solution: to add new higher bands to council tax, along with a narrowing of the bands.

4 October: Susan Sarandon argues that long-term marriages are sustainable only if better management systems are in place. People and their relationships change, but most of us aren’t set up to accommodate either. She believes that marriage contracts should be renewed every five years, with a no-guilt release clause (Weekend). [But what would the children think?]

George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer [if you haven’t noticed], is quoted as telling business leaders that they need to put their heads above the parapet and win the argument for an enterprising, business, low-tax economy that will deliver prosperity for the people and generations to come, because “there are plenty of pressure groups, plenty of trade unions and plenty of charities and the like, that will put the counter view”. [You bet; perhaps he hasn’t noticed that, so far, prosperity is distinctly unequal and very thin on the ground. But then I come into the “and the like” category.]

Alan Henning mourned. Which is worse: Isis or Ebola?

Chris Grayling, Justice Secretary, has unveiled proposals to prevent judgments of the European Court of Human Rights being enforced in the UK. A spokesperson for the Council of Europe responded that the plans were inconsistent with remaining a member, and there was, according to the headline, “a torrent of criticism”, not least from Kenneth Clarke, the former justice secretary, who said that he was astonished by

his party's threat to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights if its reforms were rejected. [cf. *We Hate*, no. 36.]

Unite, the UK's largest trade union, claims that 24 Conservative MPs and peers who voted for the government's health reforms have links to 15 private companies that have won the contracts since 2012. A party spokesman denied any wrongdoing: "Any suggestion of impropriety is malicious and defamatory and will be treated as such."

Jenni Murray contends that the word sex should be removed from the school curriculum and replaced with 'gender education'. And the practicalities of reproduction taught in biology lessons.

6 October: A survey of 88 English local authorities (of 150) carried out by the Local Government Association found that almost three in every four of them will have to abandon or scale back emergency welfare schemes from next April if the government cancels £175 million local welfare grants.

Britain's financial services sector is growing at the fastest rate since before the financial crisis, but there are worries about the possibility of new capital requirements and a new financial transaction tax.

Dr Aldo Faisal, a neuroscientist, has created an inexpensive device that can control a computer by tracking eye movements, a development that could help many disabled people.

8 October: Randeep Ramesh reports on a proposal to reintroduce a modified database of medical records housed in a network of regional centres. A previous 'care-data' scheme provoked opposition concerned over privacy concerns.

A *Guardian* survey reveals massive discontent over NHS pay.

Martin Bright comments that this is no time to be young, arguing that political targeting of unemployed young people "looks very much like bullying".

9 October: Larry Elliot reports that the IMF has said that a "prolonged period of ultra-low interest rates poses the threat of a fresh financial crisis by encouraging excessive risk taking on global markets". The thinking appears to be that instead of encouraging responsible investment the policy is leading to dangerous speculation.

A correspondent, Phil Taylor, contends that there is a substantive criticism that charities are now run too much like businesses, from the inflated salaries and bonuses of many executives to distasteful and counterproductive "chugging" and cold-calling.

Tina Beattie, Professor of Catholic Studies at Roehampton University, is having difficulty reconciling her feminist values with the male-domination of the Catholic church. But she ends up by thinking that there is "a narrative of hope and redemption" that is surely worth struggling for. [I wonder].

10 October: Research by the Nuffield Trust and the Health Foundation finds a worrying decline in NHS services, particularly delay in accessing treatment.

A conference in London organised by "an international front of secularism" seeks to counter the rise of extreme right political movements, working under the cover of religion. The organisers have issued a secularist manifesto, calling, among other things, for the freedom to criticise religions.

13 October: The first strike by NHS staff in England over pay for 32 years. They say their earnings have fallen by 15% under the coalition. [Now which party was in power then?]

A report from the Care Quality Commission found more good than bad care in 129 care homes and 20 acute hospitals assessed. But in nine out of every ten assessments they found aspects of care for people with dementia variable or poor, and deemed the situation as unacceptable. The Alzheimer's Society described the findings as "staggering". It estimates that there will be 850,000 people with dementia by next year, and rising. [I heard Caroline Flint MP on Question Time say that we are all living longer and that this is a good thing. Well, Caroline, it aint necessarily so. For details go to www.cqc.org.uk and search for 'Cracks in the Pathway']

According to Independent Age more than 700 thousand older men in England report feeling a high degree of loneliness, and the numbers are on course to rise. The charity's CEO, Janet Morrison, sees this as a health risk. [See also *We Hate*, no.79.]

Edward Snowden quoted as saying that there were "really no limits" to the GCHQ's surveillance capabilities.

Professor Nigel Pitts and Dr Chris Longbottom, from King's College London, have devised a technique which allows teeth to repair themselves, provided the decay has not gone too far. This is set to be available three years hence. [Wow!]

A leading article notices that past fiscal consolidations have mixed higher taxes and spending

reductions in roughly equal proportion. [Again see *We Hate*, no.80.]

14 October: The day after the NHS strike. I'm sorry Mr Cameron, everything in the NHS is not rosy. Polly Toynbee describes it as "in intensive care".

Schoolgirl Fahma Mohamed has won Good Housekeeping's outstanding young campaigner of the year award for her commitment in seeking to prevent female genital mutilation in the UK

Police chiefs across England and Wales have faced questions about their apparent failure to pursue allegations of child abuse.

The fall in unemployment is welcome, but Robert Chote, head of the Office for Budget Responsibility, that suggests that many new jobs are low-paid, and therefore thinks that income tax receipts will be lower than expected.

A leader talks of "the deepest slump since the 1930s and a weak recovery unaccompanied by rising living standards". It notices that IMF economists are now encouraging member governments to take advantage of historically low borrowing costs to boost spending on public investment.

George Monbiot contributes an article on loneliness, something that is reaching epidemic levels. He reckons that social collapse threatens our personal well-being.

15 October: Allegations have been made to the Home Office inquiry into institutional sexual abuse that in 1995 the Department of Education failed to intervene when it was informed of widespread abuse at Knowl View School, a children's home. The same paperwork has also been referred to Greater Manchester police. The Guardian notices that the home was frequently visited by the late MP Cyril Smith, who has been alleged to have assaulted several children there.

Jill Treanor and Sean Farrell report in detail that Britain is the only country in the G7 group of leading economies where inequality has increased, according to the annual Credit Suisse global wealth report. It is said that the amount of the country's wealth controlled by the richest 10% rose to 54.1% this year. Concurrently, low and middle-income households have been squeezed by falling real incomes and rising costs.

The Prime Minister, David Cameron, has voiced support for raising the threshold at which inheritance tax is payable.

Research of NHS datasets by Alcohol Concern is said to show that problem drinking is now costing the NHS £2.8 billion annually. Meanwhile the London Health Commission is urging Boris Johnson to ban smoking in Trafalgar Square, Parliament Square and to persuade the Royal Parks to do the same in its ten green spaces.

16 October: Simon Bailey, Chief Constable in Norfolk, warns that the scale of child sexual abuse is far larger than previously thought, with possibly tens of thousands of victims a year. He points out that the latest research estimates that as many as 600 thousand children have suffered sexual abuse at some point in their lives, but that the media was in danger of being fixated on one model of exploitation which involved Asian gangs, whereas 90% of such abuse takes place in the home. [Which is what Ann Darnbrough said in 1988, when she devoted a whole chapter to sexual abuse in our *'Sex Directory'*. I quote: "Child sexual abuse is overwhelmingly a family crime, predominantly carried out by fathers against daughters."]

UK unemployment has fallen below two million for the first time since the financial crash. Critics argued, however, that the fall masked other signs of a weakening jobs market and that wage growth was generally lagging behind inflation. A leading article accepts that the coalition "has a strong story to tell on the quantity of jobs", but that "It's the quality that's the problem". [I stand by what I wrote in *We Hate* no. 80.]

17 October: In addition to the report *'Cracks in the Pathway'* (above), the annual CQC assessment of NHS and social care services finds that while much care is excellent, "the variation in the quality and safety of care in England is too wide and is unacceptable. Some A&E departments and maternity units are so short of doctors and nurses that they pose a danger to patients. [For the full report, again go to www.cqc.org.uk.]

Official figures, published for the first time, show that more than 1,700 women and girls who have undergone female genital mutilation have been treated by the NHS since April.

Office of National Statistics figures show that the price of gas and electricity has outstripped inflation since 2003-4. The consumer organisation, Which?, argues that a massive rise in energy bills over the last ten years indicates that significant reforms are needed to restore confidence and guarantee fair prices.

The Office for Budget Responsibility has said that an overhaul of incapacity benefit has failed to deliver the steep reductions in the overall welfare budget previously forecast, while a switch from public to private

rented housing has pushed up the cost of housing benefit.

Gaby Hinsliff points out that one in six Britons is now self-employed, the highest rate in 40 years, and that on average self-employed earnings have fallen by nearly a quarter since the financial crash, partly because too many self-employed people aren't there by choice.

On a lighter note, please notice that Victoria Yarovaya was "terrific" as Rossini's Cenerentola in the Theatre Royal, Glasgow, "with a velvet low register and dazzling coloratura" "Worth sitting through this production," said Kate Molleson, "for her final scene alone." [I don't often comment on opera, but we may hear much more of this artist.]

18 October: A lengthy report focuses on suicides in prisons in England and Wales, described by Nigel Newcomen, the Prison Service Ombudsman, as "utterly unacceptable" in a modern age. Figures obtained by The Guardian show suicide in prison to be at its highest rate for nine years.

A report on a study by Scope, 'Priced Out', which found that disabled people face huge extra costs, and are twice as likely as non-disabled people to live in poverty. Scope's website [www.scope.org.uk/] offers advice on cutting back on spending. [But what if you're too poor to have a home computer?]

20 October: A report from the London School of Economics and the Centre for Mental Health looks at the consequences of poor mental health care for pregnant women and new mothers: maternal depression, anxiety and other illnesses estimated to give rise to costs of £8 billion a year.

A government commission on social mobility, chaired by Alan Milburn MP, will today say that all three of the main political parties should admit that they have no chance of meeting the target of halving child poverty by 2020.

A study by Public Health England has revealed that deaths from liver disease have risen by 42% over the past 12 years, with a direct link to higher alcohol consumption, assisted by more relaxed pub opening hours. The mortality rates are greater among men, and significantly higher in northern towns such as Blackpool.

Jean Davies, who had vigorously campaigned for assisted dying to be legalised, died on 1 October aged 86, five weeks after stopping eating and a fortnight after deciding to stop drinking water. Four weeks into her fast, she told the Sunday Times that the experience was "hell", but that the government's failure to reform the law on assisted dying left her no other way to exercise her right to die.

Durham County Council, which needs to reduce its budget by a quarter is asking residents what cuts they feel would be least damaging to cut.

21 October: Dr David Bennett, CEO of the health regulator Monitor, warns that large above-inflation annual budget increases are needed if the NHS is to withstand a "perfect storm" of pressures.

Keith Bristow, Director of the National Crime Agency, admits that the police cannot pursue all of those who regularly access indecent images of children, perhaps numbering as many as 50,000. It is only practicable to focus on the highest risk offenders: those who sexually abuse children.

Aditya Chakraborty asserts that the lives of Britain's most vulnerable people have been hit far harder than any other group by austerity, and that the present government has treated disabled people with a scarcely believable callousness. "Contempt for disabled people," he argues, "runs right through coalition policy".

22 October: The annual report of Nick Hardwick, Chief Inspector of Prisons, includes a warning that rising violence and overcrowding in the jails of England and Wales marked a rapid deterioration in safety. In particular, the rate of self-inflicted deaths was at its highest for a decade, having risen by 69% during 2013-14. [Extended coverage on pages 12-13].

A National Audit Office report, [released on 20 October], revealed that one in six foreign offenders living in the community, including 58 dangerous individuals who had been missing since 2010, had absconded, and that the number of foreign prisoners being deported had fallen, despite repeated pledges by the government. It also found that the police are not conducting overseas record checks on more than two-thirds of arrested foreign nationals (Rajeev Syal).

Lady (Jenny) Jones, Green Party chair of London Assembly Economy Committee and Deputy Chair of its Police and Crime Committee, arrested for "obstructing police" during a demonstration in Parliament Square. [Whatever next? Memories of Emmeline Pankhurst.]

Denis Campbell reports that NHS England is offering to pay GPs £55 every time they diagnose dementia in a patient in the six months to March 2015. Jeremy Hunt, Health Secretary [I need hardly say, given his profile], has condemned current diagnosis rates as a "national shame", but the initiative has had a hostile reception.

Sir Iain Lobban, outgoing director of GCHQ, after 31 years in the intelligence services, praised his staff as “ordinary people doing an extraordinary job” and that the agency’s mission was “the protection of liberty, not the erosion of it”. [Views welcome.]

Sharp fall in sales of major supermarkets, contrasting with big increases in those of Lidl and Aldi. [A sign of the times?]

Another increase in government borrowing in September increased the famous deficit by 10% in the first half of the financial year. The size of the national debt stood at £1.45 trillion, almost £100 billion higher than at the same time last year, and amounting to 80% of GDP. [So that although the government makes much of the fact that the deficit has been reduced by one third since 2010, it is now rising.]

Much on the respective merits of political parties. {Having watched their conference speeches, I wonder, sadly, if voting will largely be determined on the personalities of their leaders.}

23 October (a particularly full issue, of which much of importance is missing here, not least remarks on the passing of a great editor, Ben Bradlee):

Balotelli swaps shirts at half-time. [cf. the defections to UKIP].

Jon Henley asks whether cash incentives for doctors diagnosing dementia will work (G2).

NHS England’s CEO, Simon Stevens, unveils a well-publicised five-year blueprint for a radical overhaul of services needing significant extra money, adding to the already huge funding gap expected by the end of the next parliament.

Home Secretary, Theresa May, is to order a review of the use of force by police, in the light of evidence of the level of physical restraint and Taser-ing of emotionally or mentally distressed people. 50% of those Tasered by the Metropolitan Police are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Prime Minister David Cameron quoted as saying that the NAO report on Home Office failures found that there were “too many obstacles in the way” of deportation, including human rights legislation.

The Ministry of Justice has launched an initiative to provide a network of in-court advice centres for litigants without legal representation in civil and family law cases. This is aimed at those no longer entitled to legal aid in such cases.

A report will today say that more than a million workers over 50 have been pushed out of their jobs, losing financially and socially. This follows research by PRIME, an initiative of Prince Charles, and the International Longevity Centre.

25 October: The calculation on which a controversial EU surcharge of £1.7 billion is based includes large estimated income from our ‘black economy’ including the sex trade and the sale of drugs.

26 October: The Resolution Foundation finds that the number of people in low-paid (less than £7.69 an hour) work reached 5.2 million last year, an increase of 250,000. [but they all count in the employment figures].

27 October: Ewen MacAskill reports the ceremony marking the end of British combat in Afghanistan, and considers the timeline of the conflict. [Meanwhile thousands are questioning whether it was worth it. Perhaps, this time, it really is too early to say.]

28 October: Aditya Chakraborty contributes a trenchant article which inveighs against a justice system which cracks down on people deliberately impoverished by government policy.

29 October: The Commons Public Accounts Committee reports that 50,000 rejected asylum seekers cannot be found, 11,000 asylum seekers have been waiting for at least seven years to hear whether they can stay, and in all 29,000 asylum applications have yet to be resolved, dating back to at least 2007. Failed IT systems are to cost up to £1 billion.

There is increasing concern over some payday loan businesses which are imposing unexpected fees on clients, and taking them from clients’ bank accounts.

Concern too about the hidden costs of sending children to state schools. These are said to amount on average to £800 a year per pupil. Uniforms, school meals, books and equipment can be unaffordable for poor families.

A survey carried out by YouGov on behalf of the Centre for Labour and Social Studies has found that 47% of respondents think that Britain has become less fair under the coalition.

The Society section raises a number of pertinent issues:

- Why, post-Winterbourne, have so few learning disabled people been moved out of long-stay residential homes?
- Every month unemployment numbers are surprisingly good, but they come with new reservations:

depressed pay, zero-hour contracts, part-timers hungry for more hours, and a vast growth in questionable self-employment.

- Reporting rape in a culture that devalues female experiences of violence remains extremely difficult.
- GPs should encourage more people to have smaller families.
- The charity Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse is pioneering more effective ways to help victims, and reduce the extent of the crime.

SEX TOY STORIES

All sorts of subjects find their way onto these pages, but I found this one, broadcast on TV's Channel 4 on 27 October, one of the most remarkable. It was confidently asserted that over half of women in the UK (some 24,000 adults) have used a vibrator. That it is big business. Sales have rocketed since the Rampant Rabbit ("the Ferrari of sex toys") was launched by Ann Summers a decade ago. Interesting that the women featured were quite open about this route to orgasm. Where have I been living, and what does this say about men?

WE HATE NO.82: FALLING

Truth to tell, this month's hate was prompted by an article in *All Together Now!*, mentioned above, in which Professor Karen Middleton, CEO of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, was quoted as saying: "We need to get past the idea that as people get older they should slow down and take it easy, because being physically active is central to reducing the chances of a fall". This had a particular resonance for me, because my partner, Ann, fell while getting into bed, on 24 September 2013, breaking a hip. She never regained mobility and died on 17 December, only a little short of three months later, though it seemed much longer. But, that said, I was lost for words. I certainly hated her fate, but apart from discussing osteoporosis there wasn't a lot to add. Until, that is, I began to contemplate a different kind of falling: that of falling from grace. There is a much deeper well of vipers.

I am talking about reputation. That is something hard won, but easily lost: in a twinkling, especially in the electronic age. It differs from fame in that even nonentities in the performing arts can become famous. This is merely celebrity, a product of notoriety. Nor need it equate to status. People of every class and standing may find themselves in the records of credit reference agencies, and their credit may be lost through sheer misfortune. No, reputation has more to do with the "flowery plains" of character, respect, honesty, trust, avoidance of licentious indiscretions (however tempted), all won, according to Benjamin Franklin, through good deeds. In his *Tragedy of King Richard the Second*, Shakespeare had the Duke of Norfolk say: "The purest treasure mortal times afford is spotless reputation; that away, men are but gilded loam or painted clay".

Tacitus, however, regarded the desire for reputation as "the last infirmity of noble minds". By contrast, Richard Steele (*Spectator*, 9 November, 1711) saw reputation as "the portion of every man who would live with the elegant and knowing part of mankind". But he noticed that society "is thought concerned when we hear of a man of good behaviour calumniated". Then, as he tartly observed, "reproach is soon checked, put out of countenance, and overtaken by disgrace". Thus the 14th century proverb that pride goes before a fall is sometimes evidenced historically, and remains true to our own day.

Alternatively, one may start with a bad reputation, a reputation for failing to answer questions, for breaking promises, for missing targets, for blaming others for one's own derelictions. Even then there can be a fall: at the next election. But obviously I am more concerned about the loss of good reputations. Matthew Parris famously wrote a compendium of *Great Parliamentary Scandals* (1995). My copy is annotated in red ink by an insider, which sharpens the flaws. More recently, I also have Robert Winnett and Gordon Rayner's *No Expenses Spared* (2009). This was an episode in which, thanks to the *Daily Telegraph*, reputations tumbled, and a whole class thought honourable was perceived as having feet of clay. So that politicians, often unjustly, have come to be viewed with suspicion, driven by self-interest, party mantras and generally not to be trusted.

Though there is ample scope for Parris to bring out a new edition of *Scandals*, falls from grace have not been confined to parliamentarians. I have, like W.S.Gilbert, drawn up a list of sorry life-changing misdemeanours. Wikipedia identifies 36 notables stripped of an honour, mostly but not always following a conviction. Prominent, and well-known, cases have involved perverting the course of justice; others include tax fraud, indecent assault, misconduct in office, a road traffic offence causing serious injury, and nearly

bringing a bank to its knees. And this is not to mention shooting one's girl friend through a bathroom door (hero to zero) and phone hacking. The task of filling up the list and putting names to the offences I'd rather leave to you. But I'm unclear as to whether none of them would be missed. Human frailty is what it is, and on the whole I hope that disgrace is sufficient and that the usually talented renegades can move on and make the most of the rest of their lives. I'm not going to hate forgiveness. I may hate the deviations, but if an atheist can quote *The Apostles' Creed*, I believe in the forgiveness of sins.

Yet on the whole it might be preferable to avoid honour. I have it on Biblical authority that one exceptionally good man "made himself of no reputation" (Philippians 2/5).

Unusually I have left the quotations to the end:

"The bigger they are, the harder they fall."

20th century proverb.

Cassio: *"Reputation, reputation, reputation! O! I have lost my reputation. I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation!"*

Iago: *"As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound; there is more sense in that than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most false imposition; most got without merit, and lost without deserving."*

William Shakespeare: Othello, Act 2, sc.3.

Signing off.

Derek Kinrade