

# E-LUMINATIONS

## WELCOME TO THE BRAVE NEW WORLD

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To comment on  
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(or anything else  
about the Branch)  
write to:

mail@pcs-southend.org.uk

### **Welcome to the first edition of e-Luminations.**

And welcome to YOUR new look PCS Branch. Things are changing, and hopefully it is something YOU will all support and be involved in.

YOU will find that YOUR Branch Representatives will be much more visible. As I write this introduction, noticeboards across Alexander House are being updated with new Union posters. These shall be adorned with photos and contact details of, not only the Branch Officers, but YOUR local reps.

YOUR business negotiators (or Sector Leaders as we call them) will be advising YOU of when they met YOUR local management, giving YOU the opportunity to get them to raise the issues that affect YOU. YOU will also be copied the minutes of those meetings and what the local branch intend to do about outstanding issues.

E-Luminations will be published on-line on the first working day of each month. It is YOUR newsletter. I know from experience that the Branch Officers tend to write most of it. But this is YOUR union, YOUR newsletter, so please, let us have YOUR contributions.

A few other things have changed. As you can imagine, YOUR Branch Officers are very busy dealing with the daily problems that HMRC throw at us. Before contacting the Branch Office you should approach YOUR local rep first. That is what they are there for. They will try to solve YOUR problem for YOU, but if they cannot they will arrange for a meeting with a Branch Officer.

All Branch Reps will be undertaking various training courses in the coming year.

This will allow US to give YOU a better level of representation.

In return, all we ask of YOU is for to take an interest in what we do, support our campaigns, partake in elections and attend meetings. This is YOUR union.

*In the coming weeks and months we face serious challenges to our jobs, and possibly even our long-term future. I give YOU the undertaking that I will do my level best to make sure this Branch is in a position to fight for our very survival. To do this I need YOUR support.*

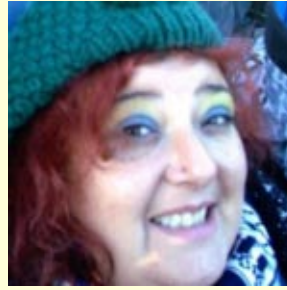
**Kerry Fairless, Branch President**

## *To bend over or not to bend over: that is the question*

*Fiona Staff*

Consider: you own a lovely little bistro in a small town. You have a good menu with reasonable prices and the service is excellent. You pay all your bills on time and even make enough to put by for emergencies.

The mayor of the town comes in for a meal one evening. He chooses carefully and tucks into his meal with relish. He uses the cloakroom facilities,



Consider: you are a turkey. You live in a nice barn with access to the yard. You get fed corn and you have fun with all the other turkeys. The senior turkey wrangler comes and tells you that you can volunteer to be eaten at Christmas.

Would you accept?

*You are quite within your rights to drop your trousers, grab your ankles and say “please sir may I have another”*

Consider: the Government has decided that your pay is too high, they’ve decided that your compensation scheme is too expensive and they want you to vote to accept the reductions. The result could well be that you end up being made redun-

asks for extra bread and butter and is a bit off with the waiter.

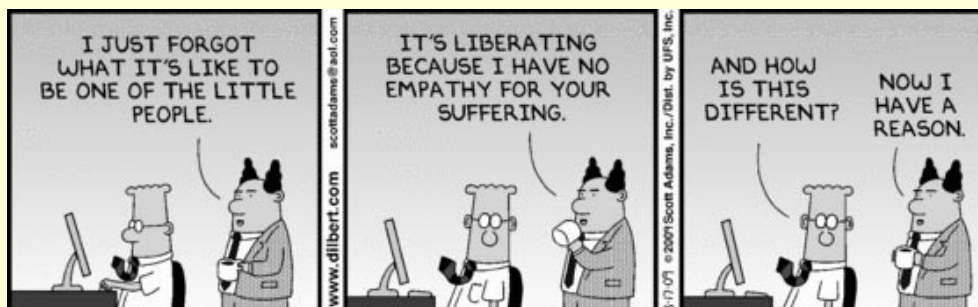
dant in the future on the cheap.

You take his bill for £22 over to the table, when he asks for it, along with the obligatory complimentary mint. The mayor then tells you that he’s decided the meal wasn’t worth the price and he’s only going to give you £17. He also mentions that you’re lucky he’s allowing your bistro to stay open and that you should just accept things and move on.

Would you accept the shoddy treatment, the reductions to what you’re owed and roll over to be kicked in the process or would you stand up for yourself and say no?

Would you take the £17 and keep your head down or would you firmly reiterate that he owes you the listed price?

Think hard about your answers. You are quite within your rights to drop your trousers, grab your ankles and say “please sir may I have another” but the consequence of that is more bad treatment. If you choose that option, you need to be clear that you are responsible for what happens, not ‘the Union’. YOU are the Union and it will only ever be as strong as YOU make it..



# INDUSTRIAL ACTION BALLOT RESULTS

Up to 270,000 civil and public servants from across the UK are set to launch a month of industrial action with a 48 hour strike on 8 and 9 March in a dispute over unilateral changes to redundancy terms, PCS announced today.

Strike action could hit civil and public services every week of next month from Monday 8 March following strong support in a ballot which saw 63.4% of those voting backing strike action and 81.4% supporting an overtime ban.

The strikes, which will involve Jobcentre staff, tax workers, coastguards, border agency officials, courts staff and driving test examiners, are a result of the government and Cabinet Office making unilateral changes to the civil service compensation scheme.

The changes will see staff robbed of up to a third of their entitlements and see loyal civil and public servants lose tens of thousands of pounds if they are forced out of a job. The government is looking to save £500 million through the changes, based on the number of jobs it has axed over the last three years.

With all the main political parties planning deep spending cuts, the union fears that the cuts to the scheme will lead to tens of thousands of job losses on the cheap.

The union's national executive committee will be meeting next week on 2, 3 and 4 March to finalise further strike dates, which could include national walkouts and targeted strike action.

Commenting, Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary, said: "These cuts, which will see loyal civil and public servants lose tens of thousands of pounds if they are forced out of a job, are more about crude politicking than making savings. We have suggested ways in which the government can make these savings whilst protecting the rights of existing members, yet it seems intent on penalising the people who keep this country running. With civil and public service jobs increasingly at risk, this is a cynical attempt to cut jobs on the cheap which will ultimately damage the services we all rely on. The government needs to recognise the depth of anger which has been demonstrated by this ballot result and find the political will to negotiate a settlement that avoids a sustained campaign of industrial action."



*Assistant Branch Secretaries Stuart Holttum and Martyn Mellis were just two of the Branch Committee members who stood leafletting outside Alex House in the cold February weather, urging members to vote "Yes" to action on the Compensation Scheme. And it worked!*

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## **Strathie admits: "New CSCS terms are less favourable."**

In an Intranet announcement on 18th February, Leslie Strathie admitted that "on the whole the new CSCS terms are less favourable than the current terms."

Her admission was quickly retracted, with some replacement text appearing later that same day - but not before a number of eagle-eyed members had taken screen shots of the original.

Assistant Branch Secretary Stuart Holttum said "When even the Chief Executive of HMRC admits that the proposed new terms are worse, you know they must be bad!"

"Members of staff are not stupid - they know this is the first steps towards making large numbers of HMRC staff redundant, and they are not prepared to accept such massive cuts to the compensation scheme terms."

# DARRELL BINDING, UNION LEARNING CO-ORDINATOR, ON CROMWELL, COUNTRY, AND CLEANLINESS...

*In the "Meet the Rep" feature, each PCS Rep draws questions at random from the "tin of terror"....and has to answer them honestly!*

*e-Luminations: What has the Union ever done for us?*

**Darrell Binding:** I think its done an awful lot for us actually - if it wasn't for Unions in general we wouldn't have the terms and conditions, the working time...there's a whole lot of things we could spend hours talking about, but without Unions we would be in a lot worse state than we are today. That's not to say that things can't be improved...I'm still looking forward to the 35 hour week that Mervyn Howell used to bash on about (laughs) - that would be a great thing to achieve. One of the main things the Union does as far as I'm concerned is supporting people in Learning, helping people taking on courses and progressing their career.

It's difficult to separate what the Union has done locally from nationally...there was the campaign on pensions that we had some time ago where the Government backed down when we threatened strike action, and I think that's a good example of the Union standing up for its members and getting what the members want - and long may it continue.

*Who should play you in the movie of your life?*

(Laughs) Groucho Marx is probably a good one..."I never forget a face, but in your case I'll make an exception!" Or if I had a wide choice, Harrison Ford is one of my favourite actors, but also it would be a toss-up between the late John Mills and the late Alec Guinness, because they were both marvelous actors....so any one of the above really! *Well, we'll see what we can do.* Thank you very much (laughs)...  
"Ready when you are Mr. de Mille!"



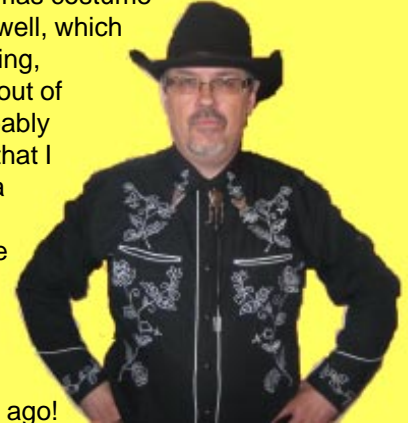
*Union Rep Darrell Binding*



*Comic Actor Groucho Marx*

*What is the single most embarrassing item in your wardrobe?*

Blimey.....difficult to know what to.....probably, probably my cowboy shirt when I do my Country Music could be quite embarrassing 'cos I couldn't wear it anywhere else - if you saw it you'd understand why! I used to have a Father Christmas costume (in the wardrobe) as well, which was quite embarrassing, especially if I wore it out of season! There's probably other things in there that I never wear...there's a particularly garish waistcoat somewhere that I would never wear again. *Was that your idea to buy it, or a present?* It was a good idea 25 years ago!



*For one million pounds, would you go without washing, brushing your teeth, and deodorant for a month?*

What's deodorant? (laughs) I think...I think I probably would actually! (laughs) *You'd need to clear it with the others in the office!* I think I'd need to take a month's leave.... if it was a straight choice I think most people would! I'd just go and stay with my son for a month...(laughs)...he wouldn't notice the difference anyway!

*Why should someone join the Union?*

I think there are lots of reasons why someone should join the Union, I think you should join the Union because you want to, because they understand its a good thing to do. Clearly a lot of people join the Union because, you know, they find they're in trouble and they need help, and I think they then appreciate why its good to be in the Union. I can speak from my own experience, when I needed help I went to my Rep, and thought that I could perhaps have got a little bit more help than I got...but more recently when my wife had a problem, and she needed advice and assistance, and it persuaded her that what I do, and my colleagues do as Reps, is important - and the first thing she did then when she joined the Civil Service, and there was a Union, was join the Union!

### *What was the most ferocious argument you ever had?*

What, with my wife? *Anybody!* Oh God.....difficult .....ferocious argument.....(long pause).....I must have them...I remember really hacking off my manager when I worked in Romford, because I was being ultra-positive and he didn't like it. I don't know if that counts, in the end I just gave in because I thought he was going to have a heart attack because I was completely contradicting him. *I don't really see you as a ferocious arguer.* I'm not, I'm a reasoned arguer, I think, rather than someone who thumps the table...I suppose in my youth I might have been, but I can't think of anything off the top of my head.

### *When have you been most scared?*

It was when I thought I was going to lose my job, and it preyed on my mind quite a lot, and that was scary. That's why I can understand where people come from, when they come (to the Union), and they're desperate....because I've been there. I know how it made me feel, and how I got ill because of it....it was preying on my mind like a tape that's never ending.....(pause). As a child I was scared of things, because I was never very confident, I was nervous, scared about making friends and meeting new people....sounds ridiculous now....but that's probably the single worst time, when I thought I was going to lose my job, because my life was falling apart....in the end I was off sick for three months, and that probably helped, with the support of my wife, my family, my doctor....but eventually I came back, and I came back stronger as a result of it. Sometimes these things can make you stronger - you either go under or you get stronger. But it's something I wouldn't want to repeat.

### *What would you do if you won the lottery?*

Definitely give money to our church hall, which we're raising money for...I don't know what I'd do if I won £56 million like that chap, I don't know what people do with that sort of money. I would like to think I would actually help a lot of people, as well as myself and my family, we could get things we've always wanted. I feel good about helping people, and I feel good about helping the community, so helping the homeless, helping charities, the church....I wouldn't have any problems spending it!

### *Which historical character would you most like to have been?*

Oooh, oooh, that is a good one! I love history, and there's lots of historical characters I would probably have liked to have been...When I was very younger, I

always had sympathy for the cavaliers and Charles the First, but as I grew older, actually, and got to understand the way history gets painted, I came to realise that Oliver Cromwell was actually, for all his faults, warts and all, was quite an important character in English history. For a good Parliament - though his idea of democracy was not the same as ours! One of my favourite films is "Cromwell", with Richard Harris playing Cromwell as a heroic character... He was very principled, I like the principles of the man.



The other person that I would like to have been was Sir Thomas Moore, and again I like the film "A Man For All Seasons". I think a lot of these historic characters, when you read about them, you find that they're not all perfect. In the past I would have said Winston Churchill, a great wartime leader, who certainly wasn't a perfect man. I'll leave it at that, Sir Thomas Moore and Oliver Cromwell, because of their principles.

### *Did you have a childhood hero?*

Erm....you're asking me to think back into the mists of time! When we used to play football, around the age of 9 or 10, in the 60s, and my favourite position, I was always a defender, never an attacker or a midfielder, so I always modeled myself on the Manchester United player, Tony Dunne. So in footballing terms, he was my hero.

In my family though it was my uncle who was my hero, my Uncle Harry, because he was such a man of presence, a great influence on me - my life changed direction because of him coming back into my life, and my Aunt Barbara - the two of them were a great influence. *In what way?* It was strange because we were working class - not saying we were poor, in rags or anything like that, but we didn't have a lot of money - it makes it sound really bad, doesn't it? But we were ordinary people, and he was someone who had actually achieved something, and he did things out of the ordinary, a man of confidence. A very self-confident man, and I think that helped me. because I wasn't very self-confident, and having someone as a role-model in the family...he was a great help to me, my parents, it was noticeable our lives were different once they came back into my life in the '60s...so I would say Harry and Barbara, if I can have two (heroes).

*Darell Blinding, working class man of principle, thank you very much sir!* (laughs) A pleasure!

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

*Kerry Fairless*

So here we are, I have the Big Chair. I've a hard act to follow. Mervyn was a man of the people, with many years of experience and an ability to hold an audience in his pocket. However, I've never been a traditionalist, and I think we need a new direction to make us more capable of dealing with some of the, frankly, crack pot ideas that our management come up with on a seemingly daily basis.



The AGM was a very moving experience. Mervyn's departure was known to many, but the method of his leaving came as a surprise to us all and he wasn't the only one with a tear in his eye. Taking the Chair after that was very difficult. I was heartened that we had the best turnout for years, and heartened to see motions being moved from the floor, an excellent level of debate and an interest in what we are seeking to do. My aim is to get as many of you interested in our work as I can. That is not for my benefit, but because we are here to serve the members, ie you.

Obviously we have two days of strike action coming up. I know for some of you striking is a difficult thing to do for so many reasons, but I implore you to support this action. If the Compensation Scheme proposals do come in, it will allow HMRC to make many of us redundant at vastly reduced rates. If you don't believe that job cuts will happen to you take a look at the empty buildings along Victoria Avenue that we used to work in, take a look at the 150 or more pre-surplus staff in Southend (and it is rising and will continue to rise) and take a look at the empty desks your colleagues used to sit in.

No doubt there will be the usual propaganda (or lies in some cases) being fed to you in an effort to get you to break the strike. I will get my retaliation in first.

□ The current Government was elected with 39% of the vote from a turnout of 65%. Our mandate is stronger. You do not see us arguing for a different Government because of the turn out.

□ All members had a chance to vote. If you did not, that was your decision.

□ If you did not vote or voted "no" then you are still expected to follow our democratic lead. We did NOT vote to strike over pay, but you did not see those of us who did vote to strike standing outside Alexander House on a picket line.

□ HMRC will make people redundant if these proposals are not over turned. They have proven over the last few years that they have no HR plans to deal with workforce change and we know they are going to be subjected to more budgetary cuts in the coming years.

□ It is cheaper to make someone redundant than it is to give someone AER. So do not be assuming you will be leaving that way.

□ Those who tell us not to take strike action have never worried about how to pay their mortgage or their rent, have never fretted how to pay the bills, have not struggled to put food on the table, and earn ten times as much as we do. They are not members of a trade union and have little concept what it is really like to work in this place.

**All of you should support the strike. Not only do I not want to see any of you cross the picket line, but I would like to see as many of you as possible support the picket line and attend the rally that will take place in Southend Town Centre at midday on Monday 8<sup>th</sup>.**

# Strike Action Q&A

by Andy Lord (Branch Secretary)

Now that the ballot result is in and the decision to take strike action has been made here are some answers to the more common questions you may have

## 1. *Is Strike Action Legal?*

There is no outright legal right to strike in the UK but for Lawful Industrial Action there are immunities which will allow for you and the union to take actions that might otherwise be illegal. In particular this allows you to withdraw your Labour, which might otherwise be a breach of your contract of employment

## 2. *Can I be sacked for taking strike action?*

You have the legal right not to be dismissed for not taking Strike Action during the first 12 weeks of any action. In many cases this period of protection will extend beyond 12 weeks.

## 3. *What is the position of non members?*

Non-union members may take part in industrial action and have the same protection as union members during industrial action. However we would always advise non members to join PCS if they intend to join the action

## 4. *Can I join on the day?*

PCS Activists on the Picket Line will have application forms – as soon as you have signed up you will be a full member of PCS and eligible for all the benefits and assistance that PCS can provide.

## 5. *What will happen to my pay?*

For each day you are on strike you will lose one days pay. This will be pro-rated for Part Time workers. If you are in receipt of allowances and extra payments they may also be stopped for the period you take action.

## 6. *Will there be Picket Lines?*

There will be Picket Lines at most HMRC locations. Picket numbers will be limited and pickets will seek to peacefully obtain or communicate information or peacefully persuading a person to work or not to work

## 7. *What should I do if my manager asks me if I am a member of PCS or if I will be taking strike action?*

There is no obligation on you to answer this question.

## 8. *What should I do if my manager asks me to undertake duties that are designed to reduce the effectiveness of Industrial Action?*

This is a difficult one to answer. If you are asked to do things that you might normally do – even if infrequently such as updating instructions or local guidance then that is probably acceptable.

If you are asked to do things that don't normally fall within the normal scope of your duties or are asking you to do duties outside of your grade then this may be a problem.

The safest response would be to speak to a Union rep urgently for advice.

## 9. *What happens when I return to work?*

You would not be expected to work other than normally even if there is a backlog to clear. Please bear in mind that there is an Overtime ban in force in HMRC and PCS nationally may well be looking to use overtime ban as part of the ongoing campaign.

## 10. *What will happen next?*

These 2 days of strike action are only the beginning of the campaign. An overtime ban has been in force for some time in HMRC in response to job cuts. The needed to maintain this will be reinforced as the campaign develops. Other forms of action short of strike action are also likely as part of the campaign.



# Andy Lord, Branch Secretary, on Cricket, Fairy Cakes, and the pressures of being a zoo-keeper....

**When was the last time you had a taste in your mouth you couldn't identify?**

Actually, it was this morning! It was a...it *said* it was a fairy cake, but it was outside its "best before" date. It didn't taste horrible, but it didn't taste like a fairy cake - it tasted like it had collapsed in on itself. **Are fairy cakes a standard breakfast in the Lord household?** No, there's no standard breakfast, I just get all the leftovers to take to work.

**What's the single most embarrassing item in your wardrobe?**

I have, I'm ashamed to admit, a pair of red braces, which I bought in the 1980s, obviously pretending to be a yuppie. It does go with the red waistcoat, but that makes me look like a waiter. I have been mistaken for a waiter in a restaurant, and that was quite embarrassing. There's also this green t-shirt, which I always seem to wear when we go to Colchester Zoo (which we do quite a lot), and unfortunately it makes me look like one of the zookeepers. People keep asking me "where is....?", and I have to say "I have no idea, I don't work here!"

**What makes you cross?**

Makes me cross.....(long pause). I think I've actually gone beyond the stage of being cross most of the time.

I've seen most stupidity, and I've got beyond the stage of being cross, certainly at work - I let it wash over me more now, Work makes me upset more than cross, there's a bit of a difference.

I think what makes me really upset is to look down Victoria Avenue at all the buildings....when I first came here, 23 years ago, there were Civil Servants in almost every building, instead of all being crammed into one. We're not doing any less work, there's no less requirement for the services...that makes me upset, it's all gone, for reasons that aren't quite clear.

**Why did you become a Union Rep?**

It's a long time since I started this lark...18 years ago I started on the BEC. At that time, I just wanted to get involved and do something worthwhile, and the Union certainly seemed a place where things got done. I wanted to get involved, and do things, and the Union seemed a way that that could be done at lower level, without having to crawl the greasy pole and forget your real beliefs, because if you go that way you don't actually achieve the things you set out to achieve.

The Union was a way for staff at the lower grade to make a difference. **Do you feel you've made a difference?** I certainly think I have. I could name the individuals where I've made a difference, a demonstrable difference. I'm not going to overstate that we've achieved everything, but I can point at things that have been changed, instances where we have done things, where we have made a difference. Varies

over time and the mood I'm in as to how bullish I am, but even in the bleakest moments I can go through a list of people who I know that I've helped and made a significant difference for the better.

**What makes you happy?**

Peace at home, that's always a good one! A nice quiet life...when I can sit in the office and not dread every knock on the door or every phone call, if they were few and far between I'd be happy because I'd know that things were going okay. Despite what I say, I do actually enjoy what I do - even as the work comes piling on and I construct the "to-do" list that grows by the minute, and every time I turn my back four emails turn up....being kept busy keeps me happy!

Outside work, it's the kids, to see them do well. And sport, mainly cricket and rugby... I'm getting a bit too old to play rugby any more. I used to. I've never really played a great deal of cricket...I have particularly poor eyesight so a cricket ball travelling towards you at ninety miles an hour is a bit difficult! Rugby's easier... Then did some coaching, my kids, other people's kids, and that was good...but mainly spectating these days. Not so much football, I'm a Derby County supporter by birth rather than upbringing...when we

lived there it was the heydeys of the 70s when they were one of the leading teams...I shall now go off into a reverie about Brian Clough and why he should never have been allowed to resign - they should have sacked the board instead. Talk to football fans, that's their answer to most things - sack the board! Actually, that's the answer to things here - sack the Board! (laughs)

**What's the best thing about being a Union Rep?**

There are two - one is you're actually helping people, and the other is related to that insofar as you can actually say, most of the time, "I did that" - I got them compensation, I got them best terms, I got them moved when they needed a move...it's a result, a resolution, and you know that if you hadn't got involved that result wouldn't have happened. That's a great thing, to be able to say "I did that", to point to something that had an immediate effect on somebody's life.

**Do you find it frustrating that we can't trump our results?**

It IS a little bit frustrating, because there are too many people out there who say "well, what can the union do?", and you'd like to say "well, look at this list of people we've helped". It's frustrating, and I don't think there's any real way round it because lots of people know lots of people, so if you talk about a case with characteristics A, B, and C, people are quite capable of working out "oh, they must mean....", and then your confidentiality is gone, and you don't want that.

**If you had three wishes, what would they be?**

The first thing would be to remove the ridiculous constraints that we operate under...time, finance, whatever. Just to not



to have to worry about it, I'm fed up always having to make do. I spent this morning working out my personal possible requirements for (PCS-related) travel and subsistence, and then I've got this concern about Facility Time, the time available (from the Department) for Reps to do the job...there's enough work out there to keep people busy, but you can't have the people to do it - or they could do it but wouldn't get paid for it - so how do we continue to do the best we can, and I'm ever so, ever so tired of having to go through that loop... I'd wish away some of these artificial constraints that we have to work under.

The next one is that a lot of what goes wrong is because managers are pressured to make decisions on the basis of inadequate knowledge and expertise, and there is no safety net for them. Most of what we come across I think is managers getting it wrong because they're told to do something, and they do it as they think is best....generally, managers aren't, I believe, out to be b\*\*\*\*\*s - they're put in a position where they don't have the tools to get it right, so my second wish is that managers were given the tools to do the job properly.

The third one, a personal one, I'd just like to alter my sleep patterns so I slept slightly longer...I've coped for years on five or six hours sleep a night, but I'd just like slightly more extended sleep... the ridiculous thing is that I've got so used to that amount of sleep that at the weekends I still wake up at...once its got light, anyway. I just sleep for six hours...I'd like to sleep for more. Other than that, life's not too bad!

#### Who or what has been your greatest inspiration?

I don't really hero worship people, because as you learn more about them you realise they have feet of clay....but there's a couple of people. One relates to my cricket, I'm a big fan of Geoffrey Boycott, because he wasn't the most talented cricketer in the world. But he made tremendous use of what talent he'd got. Okay, he's turned into a professional Yorkshireman...but he's someone who made the best of what they'd got.

The second is one who is sadly no longer with us, Ken Buckland. I knew Ken for a very long time - he retired from Customs just as I joined, so I met him through the good offices of John Walkinshaw and Mike Humphrey. <What was it about him?> I think it was his passion for doing the right thing - he just inspired me to think "well, if I didn't know what to do, what would Ken do?", or if I made a decision, how would I justify it to Ken? Because he lived and breathed Trade Unionism in Southend for ten, fifteen years, always had members interests at heart...he had humanity, he had an independence of thought, wasn't a blinkered ideologue, wasn't "if its management they must be wrong", happy to work with management, but with those who he felt were wrong he wasn't backwards in coming forward. It was Ken's inspiration, and his humanity, and his passion for doing the right thing, that

struck me. And also he was the only person I'd ever met down here that knew where my parents lived, had heard of it, and that impressed me! He knew where I came from, and that was great!

#### Have you ever woken up, and not known where you were?

From the time that I first started here, until wife, family, kids came along, I wasn't averse to a drink. I'm still not averse to a drink or two, but these days it is a drink or two, those days it was a few more ! I have no problems saying no to a drink, my problem was saying no to the second one! (laughs) So there probably were a number of occasions where I've woken up and thought "where the hell am I?", due to the previous evening! I remember going to someone's stag do, and having to go to London the next day, to Dorset House of all places, for a meeting about CHIEF....walking across Southend at five o'clock in the morning, sitting on the train feeling like death warmed up....so yeah, I've done that, but I don't normally get that disorientated!

#### What is your favourite game?

Interesting one that....I was never a big game player, Monopoly or that sort of thing....I went through a phase at school - 14, 15 - where we started to play wargames. We did some naval, World War Two and World War One, I preferred World War One as it was easier as there's no aircraft - carrier battles are a nightmare. I did reflight Jutland once, that was good. It's still all up in the loft, painted, camouflaged... And then we went into Dungeons and Dragons, because that's what teenagers did, particularly as a friend of mine, he brewed his own beer, so it was round to his for some home brew and to play Dungeons and Dragons!

My favourite game is an odd one, which really does date me, a game called Escape From Colditz... you had to get your Escape Kit, Wirecutters, Civilian Clothes, etc, etc,

various colour pieces for various nationalities. We got it when I was about ten or eleven because Colditz had been on the telly...we used to play that, my dad, my mum and I. So that was my favourite game - we didn't play it that often as it takes forever! We used to play Monopoly, my sister and I, with our own house rules to make sure the game didn't last for three days... but Escape From Colditz, that was my game!



# The Faceless Ones

*Ian Chesterton*



To my mind, there are two kinds of relationship. First of all, there is the emotional kind, where you forge a bond with someone. Such a bond means that you will put yourself out for the other person, you'll go that little bit further than you would for anyone else. The bond may not be with a specific person of course, it may be with a company ("Brand Loyalty) or you may feel a special attachment to a particular sports team. You forgive them their weaknesses, support them through thick and thin. Basically, you give freely of your time and energy because you feel the other party is worth going the extra mile for. They are a person or group of value.

On the other hand, there is the emotionless relationship - the marriage of convenience. You deal with the other side in an emotionless manner - they mean nothing to you other than as a means to an end. The company you choose for a loan may fit in this category. The supermarket you buy your food from on holiday. The company that supplies your water and sewage services. In each case, it's something or someone that you need to deal with, but it is irrelevant to you exactly which service you use.

Mankind is, on the whole, a gregarious and social creature. We interact, we empathise, we form bonds. And so usually, where another human being is involved, we have an emotional relationship. The other human being in a situation is one that we will think about, will give some consideration to their feelings. If something we do is going to have a severe and damaging effect on them, we think twice.

Of course, this doesn't apply in every case. The career criminal, for example, makes a point of NOT considering his victims. To him, it is far better not to think of the human beings that will

be affected by his actions. No, far better to treat them as numbers, as faceless zombies, where this person is no more a human being than that one. To completely depersonalise the people his decisions and actions affect until they are no different to a piece of furniture. Nothing more than inanimate objects that sometimes inconveniently move or speak when you'd rather they wouldn't. It's the way the con artist operates, the way the mugger sees his victim, the way the generals in the Great War viewed their troops. Faceless cannon fodder, to be ordered around like so many little lead soldiers.

Recently in Southend we have seen an awful lot of people made pre-surplus. All were advised by email. Not one senior manager came down to speak to the people in person. Not one had the guts, or the human feeling, to come down and break the news face-to-face to the people whose lives they are crushing.

Resources. Headcount. Cannon fodder. Numbers on a balance sheet.

**To the Department, you are not a human being.**

Next time you hear the upper reaches of Excom bleating on about how much they "value" their staff, remember how they are actually treating people. The Department's relationship to you is, quite clearly, an emotionless one of convenience, where you are valued not for yourself and for your human qualities, but purely as a faceless drone who can be pushed around and kicked out the door without a second thought. To the Department, you are not a human being.

Remember that, when next the Department asks you to put yourself out for it - when they ask you to stay a bit late, when they ask you to do a bit of overtime, when they ask you to cancel leave to cover sickness. The Department has made it quite, quite clear it wants no human relationship with you.

Why should you continue to have one with it?