

The new

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*Beneath the rule of men entirely great  
The pen is mightier than the sword*



## SWINE FLU EPIDEMIC

It is such tragedy for the families concerned, that so many lives have been lost over the Swine Flu (influenza A H1N1) epidemic during this winter's outbreak.

The percentage may, in all reality, be just a fraction of 1% of the total UK population, but that is of little consolation to grieving relatives.

The UK Government, whilst pointing out that the vaccine available has not been fully 'taken up' by a considerable number of people who are eligible to be immunised, are at the same time milking the situation publicity wise, laying a false claim that they are a caring and considerate Parliament.



Nicola Sturgeon

As far as I am aware the vaccine was, and is, available from major chemists, retailing below £10 per 'shot' for those who do not qualify for a free jab.

As an OAP my real concern (although I am sincerely sympathetic with the grieving relatives of the H1N1 victims) is, whilst our Government are happy to jump onto the publicity cart over recent possible preventable deaths, they turn a blind eye to a much greater sin.

Last winter over a four month period no less than 28,160 people in the whole of the UK died from cold and hunger related illnesses. This figure equates at one person dying every 9 minutes. Yet the UK Government hardly raised a whisper over these deaths, many of which were preventable.

Two reasons spring to mind, firstly publicity from these largely preventable deaths would not enhance

the UK Government's profile and secondly, there appears to be far too many of us living far too long and costing the country far too much money.

Earlier this month Professor Phil Hanlon, a former advisor to the Scottish Government, suggested that elderly and frail patients should have their treatments withdraw as they near death to stave off an NHS funding crisis in Scotland.

However a Scottish Government spokesman said; 'Under this administration, NHS Scotland will continue to give all patients the best possible treatment regardless of their age or condition.'

Cabinet Secretary for Health & Wellbeing, Nicola Sturgeon, expressed her concerns as a Minister, both in the press and on

the TV, over the number of Swine Flu related deaths and illnesses that were occurring in Scotland, mostly preventable. Possibly that was the Minister wearing her Health hat and 'going with the flow' as nearly all MSPs were heard to comment on the Swine Flu outbreak.

The wellbeing part of her brief seems to be somewhat sidelined, for had she employed as much effort highlighting, and bemoaning the number of OAPs who died in Scotland during last winter's chill (some 2,760) then perhaps these mostly preventable deaths would have a greater impact and greater meaning on the population of our Hame Land, Scotland.

Surviving on a State Pension for two is extremely difficult but surviving on a State Pension for one is nigh impossible, hence the huge number of mostly preventable deaths occurring amongst the elderly and vulnerable people living on their own. Admittedly the Scottish Government's hands are tied, but it should make its voice heard, much more often on this vexed



## GRABBING A HIGHLAND OPPORTUNITY?

.Global Energy Chairman Roy MacGregor, an Invergordon chiel, claimed in an announcement in the local press a few days ago, that his company had been declared the 'preferred bidder' (how many other companies have had the same doubtful designation bestowed on them over the last years? Ed) for the Nigg Ferry facility. Setting the scene for what chairman Roy MacGregor described as "a real step-change in the Highland and Scottish economies".

Global is aiming to purchase the parts of the site owned by US company KBR and secure a long-term lease of the section owned by the Wakelyn Trust by April. It's understood several international companies have already expressed an interest in the use of the site as a multi-user, multi-sector, energy industry manufacturing and servicing centre.

Global predicts redeveloping the yard could create in excess of 1,500 skilled jobs on the 238-acre site and deliver a huge, sustainable boost for the supply chain and local businesses. A Highland Council masterplan for the site has previously reckoned it could be worth £65 million a year to the economy.

Lets not forget that the same man (Mr MacGregor) had promised Invergordon Town Council, and others, that the town would have the benefit of some 500/700 employees when his new 'Big Shed', to be based on the C.F.P.A. land, was completed. That was nigh on a year ago.

Such was the enthusiasm expressed by the developers for the need to relocate from the Nigg Ferry Yard due to the lease running out and that a 'Big Shed' was a priority, that at least one gullible Highland Councillor threw her weight behind it, at the expense of alienating herself from the local voters. Alas for her, no 500/700 employees descended on the town, and to all intents and purposes the High Street is still in the doldrums. So will public feelings be reflected come the next Highland Council elections? I certainly hope so as the residents of the town have been subjected to a complete lack of consultation.

Redevelopment of the yard's 238 acre site could create in excess of 1,500 skilled jobs and deliver a huge, sustainable boost for and local businesses and service industries. A Highland Council masterplan for the site has previously reckoned it could be worth £65 million a year to the Highland economy. But is 'Global' the vehicle that can provide the catalyst for such a massive development?

"There is a real opportunity for this development. The Cromarty Firth's important role in the oil and gas industry is well-established and now the renewable energy sector is predicted to expand hugely in the years ahead. Nigg Ferry is perfectly positioned. The ideal location, with deep-water berths, a workforce, with the necessary range of expertise and experience makes for the regeneration of the Nigg Ferry yard a must in the near future.

Global has completed a range of important oil and gas, renewables fabrication and engineering projects at the Nigg yard, where it has been a tenant for a number of years. And despite Mr MacGregor's claim that they were to be evicted, hence the urgency for the erection of the 'Big Shed' last year, Global is still at the Nigg ferry location.

Global, whose companies include Isleburn, says it is working closely with the current owners during a period of due diligence with the aim of purchasing the parts of the site owned by US company KBR and securing a long-term lease of the section owned by the Wakelyn Trust by April. If successful in taking the site over, the group "will intensify its efforts to secure partners and investors for the project". A spokesperson for KBR said they would be commenting on the latest development in due course.

The Independent Highlander is in touch with H.I.E over their £650,000, hurriedly approved grant of public money to Global, re the 'Big Shed' and will seek clarification over whether or not if the 'BS' is not used for what it was intended, will Mr MacGregor have to repay that grant of public money forthwith?

# PENNY PER POUND PENSION POT

Apparently we, the OAPs, are a costly and ever increasing burden on society. The present and previous Prime Ministers and their Chancellors all have expressed concern over just how the UK can support the ever increasing number of OAPs and their ability to survive for longer, over the decades ahead, especially as the country is in the grip of recession of unprecedented proportions.

One of the proposals is to extend the working age of the population before retirement. A noble but unattractive idea to many, and of course let us remember there are millions of folk of employable age in the UK at present but they cannot find work to do.

According to the present Chancellor, George Osborne, an increase in income tax to make provision for future State Pension payments is just 'not on'. So is there an alternative, one can ask?

Certainly it not the solution to the problem, that Professor Phil Hanlon, a former advisor to the Scottish Government, tentatively suggested in the national press last week. Perhaps if he is lucky the good professor may one day attain the status of what is described as 'old age'.

Some seventy years ago when I was a boy the country was in another crisis but at that time people in the street, as well as leaders cum politicians, were united and of good spirit. Despite privations and the grief that was felt, or experienced then, on a daily basis throughout the land, it did provide for a *Esprit de corps* feeling. Which is described in a leading copy of the Thesaurus as: 'Feelings of pride and loyalty that are shared by members of a group'. It could be even more appropriate if 'group' was transposed into 'population'.

Yes I write about the devastating Second World War, when want and poverty, as well as grief and pain, were an every day occurrence in Great Britain. Yet the spirit and courage of the population eventually turned the ebb tide of possible defeat in that of a flow for victory.

The *Dunkirk Spirit* has been bandied about over the decades and sometimes misplaced by enthused, though well meaning leaders, as an example of just what the human spirit can accomplish when faced with adversity or necessity.

Well as a nation we are facing severe crisis again and

that kept running around in ever decreasing circles until at last it disappeared up its own rear end.

The differential in wealth between the 'bus drivers and waitresses' (quoted by Lord Lang, as being people of no importance) and people like His Lordship, can lead to a potential dangerous situation throughout the UK. Let us not forget what happened in France and Russia those many decades ago. The common people (those of no importance, such as bus drivers and waitresses) will only stand for so much for so long. Just what we are experiencing in modern day in Egypt at this very time.

So if Chancellor George Osborne does not have a solution perhaps he will not object too much for a tentative suggestion from one OAP 'of no importance'?

## P.P.P.P.P.

The Dunkirk Spirit is dormant but not dead and National Pride could be rekindled without the use of brute force.

My P.P.P.P.P. plan is that in the very near future the Government introduce a compulsory penny in the pound State Pension plan, applicable for the first year to all earners and their income, thereafter the same compulsory saving plan be applied to ALL pensioners, people on benefit or unemployment would also have to pay the same levy as it will be beneficial for all in years to come. Plus the levy would apply to all transient or part time migrant workers, although it would not necessarily directly benefit such retired workers.

Doubtless initially there could be resistance especially from the 'well heeled' members of our society, although such a scheme would not really be of advantage to pensioners of an advanced age, those who follow would have a certain degree of assurance that retirement State Pensions (by then) would provide for a more sustainable lifestyle in the future.

The P.P.P.P.P. plan would not be classed as a tax and as so chancellors would not be entitled to get their tacky fingers into the pot, to fight wars or build sports stadiums or even bridges to inflate Party egos.

However it would be unfair to levy the P.P.P.P.P. on interest from savings or sale of property. We know Governments have their grasping hands already on

# YOU PAY FOR H<sub>2</sub>O

In your bacon and meat products...from your local supermarket!

Have you ever wondered when grilling or frying bacon just what that horrid looking white splotches in your pan was all about? And did you wonder just how 500 grams of 'choice' rashers were reduced in size leaving you with about half the original weight?

And lets not stop just at bacon, what about the prepacked plastic wrapped so called pieces of steak for roasting? How many times have you wondered just why your Sunday joint shrunk to about half its weight and tastes of nothing, and is tough and unappetising?

Have you experienced buying a prepacked joint and see what appears to be watery red dye oozing out of it, before you get it into the roasting dish?

Wonder no more, for now the consumer's champion *Which* have published figures which show just how untrustworthy national supermarkets tend to be. Not that that news came as a surprise to me, as I have been challenging Morrisons supermarket for nearly two years. Their (Morrisons) Chairman, Sir Ian Gibson CBE, quite openly admits that the supermarket does mislead the buying public when it comes to marketing 'choice' meat cuts, in particular rolled Thick Runner mislabelled as Brisket.

Lately I have questioned their Alness branch manager Mr Hugh Urquhart, on whether the so called smoked fish on sale in the store ever saw the inside of a smoke house, or were fillets treated chemically? Mr Urquhart failed to even respond to my polite question. So much for Morrisons *customer care*. Not to be denied I sent a similar letter to the chairman, he said that he had passed it to another department, but up to now no further response.

*Which* names Waitrose, Sainsbury, Tesco and Morrisons

in their survey as there has been mounting concern that food giants are duping customers by pumping up meat — including bacon, sausages, ham and chicken, with huge quantities of water. Surprise, surprise.

Which said that the water content across all brands varied widely with Morrison coming out on top with 13% added water to their Sizzlers rindless unsmoked back bacon. To be fair Morrisons Value rindless back showed the least added water content with just 3%.

Apparently water is held inside the meat using a chemical cocktail of phosphates, salts and other additives, to such an extent that the flavours are washed out of the meats. Still not to be undone the providers provide the consumer with artificial flavourings which can include sugar! It's a wonder that supermarkets have any customers at their meat counters, after reading all that goes on.



In addition some supermarkets were less than honest when it came to the 'country of origin', by confusing info on some packs.

According to the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (Defra) water content in meat products over a minimum level must be declared to consumers on the label, failure to do so may result in enforcement action. (Pigs will fly!)

The advantage of living, as we do, in the country is that we are able to cure and smoke our own bacon and fish when the mood takes us. Doing so in small quantities is uneconomical in some ways, so Morag and I end up sharing our produce with family and friends, or during clement weather, having a 'gathering' out of doors.

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