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Scottish Unemployed Workers' Network

Welfare 'reform' – begun by New Labour and intensified by the Tories – is biting harder than ever. UK benefit levels have been condemned as manifestly inadequate. On top of this, each month around 5% of people who are receiving jobseekers' allowance face sanctions and the total loss of benefits. The tests to check disabled people's ability to work, administered by IT international, Atos, continue to produce brutally wrong decisions that deprive people of benefits and hope. The number of food banks keeps growing, but still there are not enough to meet people's needs; and, despite the winter weather, many families are unable to afford to heat their homes. People who can't find work or are unable to work continue to be treated as parasites, to be punished for their misfortune with humiliating treatment, and to be deprived of benefits on the flimsiest of excuses and without even being informed how to appeal sanction decisions and apply for hardship funds.

But, in another world, UK government ministers claim that everything is getting better and the economy is booming, and Atos is welcomed to promote itself through Glasgow's Commonwealth Games. In this issue of our newsletter, we take apart the ConDems' economic claims, and we call on everyone with a conscience to say no to Atos as a sponsor for the Commonwealth Games.



Please find us on

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Sarah Glynn looks at

THE TRUTH BEHIND THE CONDEM GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC CLAIMS

George Osborne is looking smug again. Actually he never stops looking smug - which might be something to do with having inherited such a huge amount of money - but this time he is looking especially pleased with himself because he thinks he can persuade us that the UK economy is improving and everyone is better off: in short, that austerity is working - for everyone.

But what is actually happening to the economy?

In economics, what goes down does eventually come up again, and even recessions never last for ever. The ConDem Government is crowing because the economy is growing, and growing more quickly than in some other countries; BUT, it had bumped along the bottom for so long, that more than 5 years after the crash it is still below pre-crash levels. To put this in context, Canada, the US and Germany had all exceeded their pre-crash GDP by 2011, and the French GDP is only just below this level.

What's more, UK manufacturing and construction are both substantially reduced, economic activity is even further concentrated in London and the South East than it was before, and this much-vaunted growth has been built on the same combination of property speculation and debt-fuelled consumption that created the crash in the first place. Even the Assistant Editor of the *Telegraph* has described this (still incomplete) recovery as 'unbalanced and unsustainable', complaining that 'The

economy has been juiced to give Coalition partners a boost ahead of the election... but we are still a million miles away from economic salvation.' In his words, 'Britain is becoming a low productivity low wage economy which fails to save adequately for its future.'



'And for my next trick I'm going to make you all think that you're better off.'

Which leads us on to pay and employment. The Westminster Government's astonishing claims that take home pay is going up are a lesson on how to manipulate statistics: include the raising of the tax threshold but not the cuts in benefits and tax credits, and use an inflation index that doesn't include housing costs or begin to reflect the disproportionate rise in the price of basic foods and energy.

The number of unemployed may indeed be going down, but, as has been pointed out many times, the jobs people are going into are often part time and insecure. Hundreds of thousands have become officially self-employed, which can mean surviving on even less than jobseekers' allowance. (The TUC found that between early 2010 and January 2013, 40% of new jobs were actually self-employment.) Many other people prefer to withdraw from the system rather than face the humiliation doled out by the jobcentre.

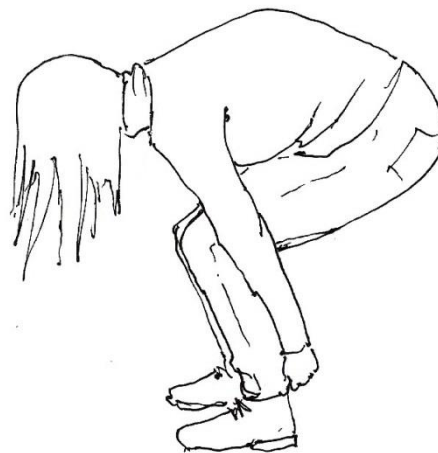
With so many people on low or no incomes, and with rents rising in tune with the property speculation, it should not be surprising that the welfare bill remains high, even though UK levels of jobseekers' allowance, pension and incapacity benefit have all been declared so 'manifestly inadequate' as to be in breach of the European Social Charter. The benefit bill would be

quickly reduced if rents were capped – but this idea is not on the table. The cost of JSA would be reduced if more people were able to find real work – but government investment to generate local jobs will not be considered. Money earned by those on lower incomes tends to be spent locally and go back into the local economy – but government policies have diverted an even greater proportion of UK wealth to a small coterie of the super-rich who stash it away in tax havens.

For anyone who really cares about the UK economy there is not much here to be smug about. But, if, despite all this, people might still be tempted to believe the propaganda that the Tories are the natural and responsible custodians of our economy, they need only look at how easily - last time they were in power - they managed to make billions of pounds of oil revenue disappear into elite bank accounts through the sleight of hand of top-rate tax cuts.

Bootstraps

How often are the poor and unemployed told to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps - or help themselves without help from others or the state? This phrase has been the subject of extended web-discussion by the American Dialect Society, and it seems that 'the original sense was not simply "to raise or better oneself by one's own unaided efforts", but to try to do so in a ludicrously far-fetched or quixotic manner.' In fact the whole point of the metaphor was that the task is impossible - a bit like looking for work when there are no jobs.



Sean Clerkin of Glasgow Against Atos asks us all to say

NO TO ATOS AS A SPONSOR FOR THE COMMONWEALTH GAMES

Many people have been campaigning over the past year to have Atos dropped as a sponsor for the 2014 Commonwealth Games. Atos will spend more than £1 million to get access to a potential games audience of 1.2 billion people.

Atos has helped the Westminster Government take tens of thousands of sick and disabled people off social security benefits, driving them into greater extremes of poverty. The Atos-administered assessments have been shown time and again to bear little relation to peoples actual capabilities and limitations, and more than 2,200 people have died before the end of their humiliating assessment process. After the death of one of his constituents, Labour MP, Dennis Skinner, branded Atos 'a monster' in parliamentary debate.

Atos also failed to pay a penny in corporation tax last year.

It is shameful that the SNP-led Scottish Government, the Labour-led Glasgow City Council, and the Organising Committee of the 2014 Games continue to associate this prestigious event with a toxic brand. Atos is involved in an immoral process, driving people off benefits, which is completely at odds with Scottish social-democratic values of caring for the poor and vulnerable.

It is time that all decent people in Scotland called 'time' on Atos being a Games sponsor. We must be the moral compass when our politicians have failed us. To this end, we have started an on-line petition calling for Atos to be dropped as a sponsor for the 2014 Commonwealth Games. You can find the petition on the Glasgow Games Monitor website, so please sign it and register your opposition to Atos. Go to <http://gamesmonitor2014.org>

*Protesters
against ATOS
sponsorship
staging an
occupation of
the Chris Hoy
Velodrome*

