

Family security essential for economic recovery

AS the impact of the financial crisis grows on the real economy, CPAG is campaigning for the urgent actions needed to protect family security and stimulate the economy. With the Pre-Budget Report focussing on a general fiscal stimulus, support targeted directly to the poorest families will be essential in the Budget in March 2009.

At the heart of CPAG's call for action are two key needs. Firstly, the Government must ensure the poorest families have adequate incomes and can keep spending in their communities. Secondly, the Government must scrap the elements of the welfare reform agenda that were rooted in the assumption of a growing economy. The new resources promised to deliver high quality employment, support and skills investment must remain. But in a contracting jobs market, plans for harsh new sanctions are senseless, unfair and a tremendous bureaucratic burden on overstretched Jobcentre Plus staff.

A growing number of experts, including new Nobel laureate economist, Paul Krugman, are stressing the importance of increasing incomes for the poorest to help stimulate the economy. This in-

creases the urgency of the £3 billion needed to keep the promise to halve child poverty by 2010. Waiting until 2010 will not do – the economy needs this action now.

In a letter to the chancellor, CPAG said: 'We urge you to make clear in your actions that the financial crisis faced by those at the bottom is central to the Government's package of investment for economic security.'

the richest get special treatment, such as the higher rate pension tax relief to be looked at. CPAG believes cash is needed in those parts of the economy where it works hardest before being siphoned out of circulation through the spending and saving habits of the wealthiest.

CPAG's Chief Executive, Kate Green, said: 'The pre-budget proposals were barely slanted towards poor families and will do more to cut the price of a skiing holiday than a grocery basket. There is an urgent need now to finish the job for the 2010 child poverty target and get to work on the measures needed to eradicate child poverty by 2020. The lesson this crisis is telling us is that an economy based on a culture of inequality, where those at the bottom are forgotten and anything goes for those at the top, is a threat to the economic security of us all. The sooner we start changing this unfair culture, the better off we will all be.'

CPAG has also written to MPs asking for them to lobby the Government on measures that will support their constituents as many more of them see their working hours cut, or join those already unable to work who require an adequate level of state support for their family.



The letter also highlighted the importance of economic stimulus through the poorest families being supported by those who can afford it and who benefitted most from the boom. It called for proposals made a year ago to give the richest estates even higher inheritance tax breaks to be immediately suspended and for other areas of the tax system where

PHOTO: END CHILD POVERTY/CAROLINE IRBY

CPAG, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF

Tel 020 7837 7979

www.cpag.org.uk

Editor
Tim Nichols

Production Editor
Nicola Johnston

Contributors
John Dickie

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Boldface
020 7833 8868

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In The House

The final shortlisted candidate for CPAG's **MP of the Year** is **Jenny Willott** (right). In committee, Jenny completely took apart the Government case for slashing the length eligible period for **backdating housing benefit, council tax benefit and pension credit** where there is reasonable cause.



Almost no one who might be adversely affected was left out of her detailed critique, including poor families. She said: *'The loss of the backdating period for working-age families with children is equally worrying. Surely that will have an effect on child poverty. I asked a parliamentary question about the impact on child poverty and was referred again to the equality impact assessment, which does not have an assessment of the effect on child poverty. Will the Minister clarify for us today what the impact will be on child poverty?'*

The Minister, **Rosie Winterton MP**, didn't. The Government claims it is simplifying the benefits system, but this can only be if less entitlement for vulnerable claimants is what it means by simpler. It certainly is not fairer!

This means the full CPAG MP of the Year shortlist is Simon Hughes, Kerry McCarthy, John Penrose, Dai Davies, Roger Berry and Jenny Willott. The winner will be decided by a panel of CPAG staff and trustees and announced in the next issue.

Martin Caton MP secured from **Disability Minister, Tony McNulty**, a commitment to a **review of the lower age limit for the mobility component of disability living allowance**. If you have come across any good examples of cases where the lower age limit of three-years-old is a problem, now is the time to write to the Minister.

Philip Hollobone MP and **Robert Goodwill MP** both pressed the Government on its commitment to **halve child poverty by 2010** from the Conservative benches. Mr Goodwill made a particularly excellent point about the **dangers of benefit sanctions** forcing parents from out-of-work poverty to in-work-poverty.

A Government debate on 5 November on **Work and Welfare** had a disappointing lack of incendiary moments. No doubt there will be more to come once MPs postbags fill up with casework from this autumn's welfare reforms for disabled people and lone parents.

Legal update

CPAG had a busy summer with two test cases in the House of Lords. In *RJM v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions* our client was a disabled homeless man who had been refused the disability premium in his income support (IS). We argued this discriminated against him in the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights.

Although we lost the case overall, we won on two important points. Firstly, the House of Lords accepted that non-contributory benefits like IS can count as possessions under human rights law. You can only bring discrimination cases under the human rights convention when another convention right – in this case the right to peacefully enjoy possessions – is engaged. So if benefits are legally recognised to be possessions, it will now be much easier for benefit claimants to challenge discrimination within the benefit system.

Secondly, Article 14 sets out grounds on which discrimination is prohibited, such as race, sex or religion, 'or other status'. The House of Lords accepted that homelessness could be an 'other status' under Article 14 – a decision that supports a broader interpretation than was previously the case, which should increase protection against discrimination for homeless people and other groups.

In *Zalewska v Department for Social Development*, the appellant was represented by Northern Ireland Law Centre. CPAG and the Public Law Project had both unsuccessfully appealed similar cases to the social security commissioner, so we submitted a joint intervention.

Nationals of the Accession States, such as Poland, do not have full rights to claim benefits as EU workers until they have done registered work in the UK for 12 months. A Polish national was refused benefit after she had worked in the UK for over 12 months, but not all of the work she did was registered. Her case was about whether the workers registration scheme worked in a lawful way, and in particular whether the requirement that all the work had to be registered was proportionate.

The House of Lords decided the scheme was lawful by a majority of 3-2. But Baroness Hale and Baroness Neuberger gave powerful dissenting judgments. We will continue pressing for better rights for migrant workers and their children.

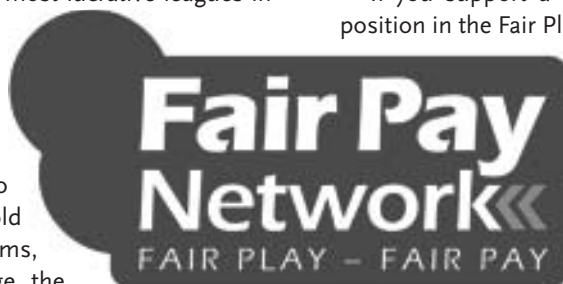
Show poverty pay the red card

The Fair Pay Network, of which CPAG is a member, is calling on Premiership football clubs not just to play fair, but to pay fair. The Premiership is one of the most lucrative leagues in the world, with combined revenues of nearly £2 billion a year for the 20 clubs. Yet poverty pay is still endemic, both for directly employed and agency staff.

The clubs are being called on to pledge themselves to a 'Hattrick Gold Standard' of fair employment terms, including the right to a living wage, the

right to 25 days paid holiday and equal treatment for all staff whether directly employed or on an agency contract.

If you support a Premiership club, you can check their position in the Fair Play League table at the fair pay network's website, www.fairpaynetwork.org. You can also find out what you can do as a fan to demand that you club treats all its employees fairly with decent pay. Make sure your team is a title contender for Premiership Champion Fair Pay Employer!



Fuel poverty appeal

Friends of the Earth and Help the Aged have been awarded the right to appeal the judgment of the judicial review verdict that the Government has not acted unlawfully on its fuel poverty targets.

The judicial review came about because the Government is legally committed by the Warm Homes Act to eradicate fuel poverty for vulnerable households by 2010. However, the number of fuel poor households has increased in recent years and the target now looks unlikely to be met.

CPAG is jointly campaigning with other organisations on the Fuel Poverty Charter and calling for the Government to revise its strategy. You can read the charter and keep up to date on the campaigns section of the CPAG website: www.cpag.org.uk/campaigns.

The coalition of organisations behind the charter is now discussing campaigning activities for 2009, including ideas for parliamentary campaigns and new legislation to require the Government to improve the fuel efficiency of existing housing within the deadlines for eradicating fuel poverty that were set by the Warm Homes Act.

Home Heat Helpline

As the cold weather sets in, the Energy Retail Association has relaunched the Home Heat Helpline, funded by the six major energy companies.

The helpline is a free, central phone number offering practical energy advice for people concerned about paying their energy bills. It also provides access to grants for free home insulation and social tariffs where these are provided.

The helpline number is: **0800 33 66 99**.

Advice on help with energy bills and access to support for energy costs and energy efficiency services and grants can also be found in CPAG's *Fuel Rights Handbook*.

New Debt Handbook

In the foreword to the last edition of CPAG's *Debt Advice Handbook*, the Chief Executive of Citizens Advice, David Harker, warned that the credit bubble may be about to burst. As the new edition of the handbook arrives, the fallout from the 'credit crunch' is leaving many families with debt accumulated in better times, but without the means to service it or begin paying back.

The handbook will help advise anyone from those under pressure from their credit card company to those facing court action or insolvency. While problem debt is never easy, debtors do have rights and for many people a great deal can be done to make their debt repayments manageable. You can order a the 8th edition of the *Debt Advice Handbook* from: www.cpag.org.uk/publications.

Children ask MPs to Keep the Promise

After the tremendous success of the Keep the Promise rally, Ministers, Shadow Ministers and backbench MPs attended a special event in Parliament to see film of the rally and meet children who were involved.

The chair of the All Party Group on Poverty, John Battle MP, hosted the event and congratulated the thousands of campaigners on making the case for ending child poverty so visibly and powerfully. Senior spokespeople from all parties fed their views on the rally back to Campaign members and Ministers Beverley Hughes and Tony McNulty were invited to respond on behalf of the Government.

The Director of the Campaign to End Child Poverty, Hilary Fisher, said: 'Politicians keep telling us what a tremendous impression the rally made on them. Concern in Parliament about UK child poverty has never been so strong. It is clear that we have a greater chance than ever of keeping the Government to its promise of halving child poverty by 2010, but we cannot afford to let the pressure drop.'

The Campaign will continue parliamentary activity on the Keep the Promise campaign focused on the Budget in 2009 and the start that needs to be made on the longer term measures that will permanently eradicate child poverty by 2020.

You can help by being part of an online rally. A virtual Trafalgar Square has been created, so whether or not you were able to make the journey to the rally in October, the square is now no more than a mouse click away. When you choose your own balloon to help fill the square, you can leave a message for the Chancellor, which the Campaign will deliver. Go to: www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/promise.

Help us make a difference

CPAG is the leading charity campaigning for the abolition of child poverty in the UK and for a better deal for low-income families and children. We aim to:

- raise awareness of the causes, extent, nature and impact of poverty, and strategies for its eradication and prevention;
- bring about positive policy changes for families with children in poverty; *and*
- enable those eligible for income maintenance to have access to their full entitlement.

Your donation will help us to fight the injustice of poverty.

Please make a donation

- Send us a **cheque**, **postal order** or **Charities Aid Foundation** voucher made payable to 'Child Poverty Action Group'.
- By **credit card** online at www.cpag.org.uk.
- Set up a **standing order** through your bank to make a regular gift.
- Make a will and leave us a **legacy**.
- Set up **Give As You Earn** (payroll giving) with your employer.

Add value. Gift Aid It!

Donations to CPAG qualify for tax relief – fill out a Gift Aid declaration form.

For more information visit www.cpag.org.uk/support email staff@cpag.org.uk or write to:
CPAG
94 White Lion Street
London N1 9PF



Free school meal roll out a step closer

The Scottish Parliament has voted to approve legislation enabling local authorities to roll out free school meals to all P1 to P3 pupils as announced by the Scottish Government. CPAG gave evidence to Parliament highlighting the 'extraordinary success' of the pilot programmes in massively boosting the number of children getting a healthy meal at school, relieving financial burdens on hard pressed families and leading to reported improvements in attitudes to healthy eating at home.

Meanwhile, CPAG in Scotland's John Dickie, chaired the Scottish Free School Meals Campaign fringe meeting at the SNP conference where Children's Minister, Adam Ingram, restated the Government's support for a universal approach to free school meals in the early years of primary.



Fuel poverty assistance extended to families

The announcement that families on low incomes will be eligible for the full range of fuel poverty programmes for the first time has followed an ongoing campaign by the Scottish Children's Fuel Poverty Coalition, in which CPAG plays a leading role.

A new Energy Assistance Package will replace the Warm Deal and Central Heating Programmes. It will include energy efficiency checks, benefits and tax credit advice and tariff checks, plus measures to enhance energy efficiency for low-income households in the most energy inefficient homes. Families on income support with children under five or with disabled children under 16 and who are in the most energy inefficient private sector homes will, for the first time, be eligible for the full package of support.

Speaking on behalf of the Coalition John Dickie, Head of CPAG in Scotland said: 'The commitment to the Energy Assistance Package is very welcome. It will benefit some of our most vulnerable children by ensuring many more family homes get the energy efficiency improvements they need, as well as advice on energy tariffs and benefit and tax credit entitlement. But a step change in investment is still needed so that no family has to make impossible choices between paying energy bills, buying food or getting into debt.'

Welfare reforms 'punitive and undignified' say Scottish campaigners

The Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform (SCoWR) has urged the UK Government to rethink controversial welfare proposals that would make claiming out of work benefits even more difficult. As part of the 40 strong coalition of charities, CPAG in Scotland wrote to the Work and Pensions Secretary raising concerns that the proposed welfare reforms were 'punitive and undignified'.

With a looming recession leaving more Scottish households claiming benefits to support their family, the Coalition believes new punitive conditions for benefit entitlement are wrong. Ministers must now prioritise making benefits levels adequate to protect families unable to work from poverty.

John Dickie, Head of CPAG in Scotland said: 'More families are falling towards a hopelessly inadequate benefit and tax credit safety net. Welfare reform is needed, but must treat people with dignity, keeping them from poverty with adequately resourced employment and skills support. With fewer jobs and more jobseekers, harsh new sanctions are irrational, unfair and a threat to family security. The endless new threats and conditions for disabled people and lone parents are an expensive, bureaucratic burden that could not come at a worse time. They must be suspended.'