



# COCK & BULL

## CUTTING THE FAT

Chancellor George Osborne has taken the axe to Britain's bloated public sector.

### Miners getting shafted and savage spending cuts; it's Thatcher all over again, eh?

Well, the miners were in Chile. And they were saved by the government, so it's not an exact facsimile of the miners strike in 1984. But you're right about Chancellor George Osborne's comprehensive spending review. As Sandi Toksvig said on BBC Radio 4's News Quiz, the Tories are "putting the 'n' into cuts". Who knows, perhaps Spitting Image will revive and Ben Elton will start being funny again.

### More important, does it affect me?

From 2020 you won't be able to start collecting your state pension until you're 66, and the retirement age will probably go higher than that during the years that follow.

### Will I live that long?

Bean-counters at the Office for National Statistics reckon that today's average 65-year-old man can expect to live another 17 or 18 years, and a baby boy born today will live to be 78. Girls will live about four years more.

### I really ought to start saving.

Ach, it's hardly worth it. In the long run, stocks only pay you a few measly percent after the millionaire chief executives have taken their inflated salaries and paid monopoly-money fees to their college pals on Wall Street. Buy yourself a nicely appointed hovel and acquire a taste for tinned sardines — you'll be fine.

### Let the good times roll...

In an austere way. Remember, Osborne's £81 billion cuts are expected to help Britain balance its books within four years. But you're going to lose some more of your comforts along the way.

### What else is on the block?

Public services of all kinds. There'll be fewer bobbies to wage our highly successful War on Drugs, your kids will literally be taught by monkeys and science will be funded by making the BBC Symphony Orchestra busk outside Leicester Square tube station.

### Will Strictly Come Dancing still be on?

Probably, but big cuts in BBC funding could see top talent jumping ship with even more frequency. Dross like Graham Norton will

probably hang around though, so your gran will be happy.

### How will we cope?

You could just switch the channel...

### How will we cope with the spending cuts, I mean.

That's a different question.

### I know.

Just saying. Anyway, the Tories say there's no need to worry. Big Society will fill the gaps in public spending and everything will work out for the best.

### Big Society? Aren't these the same people who were banging on about Broken Britain?

That was under Labour. We don't need the police now that David Cameron is at the helm (with Nick Clegg on his lap). The half a million people who are going to lose their jobs will mean there are plenty of extra pairs of eyes watching out for ne'er-do-wells and so on. And all those accountants in the NHS are just counting things. What's the worst that can happen if we get shot of them all?

### Fair point. But what if these unemployed people become ne'er-do-wells themselves?

Yes, that would be unfortunate. But you won't hear people complaining about the nanny state when they're sat at home with a shotgun pointed at the front door, terrified for their lives.

### I wish the state would've given me a nanny. Is that a bad thing?

'Fraid so. There'll be no more hard-earned tax money wasted on the middle classes. Benefits are only going to be given to the needy in future, and the beauty of this plan is that the NHS's unemployed accountants could simply switch to other parts of government to make sure that "sharp-elbowed" middle-class-types don't get a chance to steal services from the poor, at the same time as solving the problem of hooded CPAs roaming the streets.

### It's a win-win.

Exactly. Just like the coalition.

