



MICKELODEON

Under fire from Fair Trade AK47s

MIR & MRSA

There are few things more annoying at the moment than people insisting that Bird Flu isn't terrifying. 'Aaaah, it's just like SARS isn't it?', or 'it can't even be transmitted between humans yet'.

Have you never seen *28 Days Later*? This is how these things always start. I've already filled my bath with water and will destroy the staircase as soon as my housemates join my Campaign for Common Sense. You may say that I'm being panicky. Of course I am: any old lady standing between Mickel and the Tamiflu come the flying apocalypse is in for a nasty trampling underfoot. But that doesn't mean that you too shouldn't stock up on Spam and Evian.

Still, dealing with the here and now, there are some infection issues that are more worrying. A report released by the Royal College of Nursing last week called for nurses to be given access to laundering facilities to try and prevent the spread of MRSA. Despite all of the political pressure that has built up for higher standards of hygiene and more cleaners, rates of infection are still on the rise.

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Odds are that you know someone who has had a hospital-acquired infection. At worst, you may know someone who has died from it. But while the headline figures show that few people die from it directly, the figures released for the number who have died don't factor in the number of cases where it has led to complications and was a contributing factor. The number of people dying from the superbug in that case is potentially up to 5000 a year, instead of the few hundred that have died of it directly.

The problem is a classic example of a story that only drifts back into the news on the few occasions that some shocking new statistic is released. The government will declare that the problem is under control, the opposition will mutter something about matrons and then everyone will go about their business for the next nine months, until a new report is released and the same cycle picks up again. And whilst the Tories did use the topic for the General Election, it reeked of opportunism so much that it had no lasting impact.

But the effects to people happen

everyday. In the past fortnight both a relative and a neighbour have picked up infections in hospitals that, in one case, is turning out to be life-threatening. And the problem is one that happens to tens of thousands of people all over the country.

The problem is quite simply one of high-end bureaucracy. It's become normal to blame any problems in public services on some vague notion of 'administration'. You're never going to get an exciting TV drama set in the gritty finance department of Chicago County General. Instead they glorify frontline staff, and portray office staff in schools and hospitals as row upon row of deskbound Scrooges, frustrating teachers' and nurses' ability to work at every opportunity. For many workers this couldn't be further from the truth, but there is still a valid distinction to make between any kind of worker and NHS management. And if they are taking up all of the Health Service's budget, then there's not enough to pay everyone else, be they a cleaner or a coder.

There's the well-known case of the NHS managers in the 1990s that were told to fire management in a politically cynical move. As they obviously weren't going to fire themselves or their friends, many reclassified senior nurses as managers and then fired them.

But the problem is exactly the same in today's cash-rich NHS. I used to work at a Patients' Record Library who have just made the decision to stop using temporary staff, even though without them the whole library will be massively understaffed. The reason cited was budgetary restrictions, and unsurprisingly, coincided with restructuring that has created more managers. It is rapidly getting to the stage that if I ever went back to work there, I wouldn't be overly surprised if I had my own personal NHS manager.

So now the chances of doctors not receiving accurate notes for treating patients grows higher, consequently swallowing up even more money in other parts of the NHS. The unglamorous worlds of selfish managers and controlling infection may seem like wholly disparate topics. But when they are both funded from the same source, then like everything else in any given hospital, the fate of both are tied together.

MRSA and other hospital infections aren't going to kill off all life as we know it, but the things that need to be done to stop any type of infection is the same: find a way to pierce the self-protective NHS management, and start funding cleaners properly.



INFECTION: This man is infected. This very man. Dirty, filthy, bleurgh.

I am not a sound

Every week we here at *gairrhydd* towers receive masses of e-mails from all political parties, but no-one ever competes in terms of sheer volume with Plaid Cymru, which translates into English as 'completely barking'.

The party seems to have a press release for every occasion. From backing Maggot in *Celebrity Big Brother* to their AM's favourite colours, nothing has ever been left out. Apart from anything to do with, well, policy of any kind.

But that's all in the past because now the party has rebranded as Plaid!. Actually, I added the exclamation mark myself but I think it represents the new, dynamic party all the better.

Plaid!'s relaunch is much more than just a new name. Hey, they even have a new logo (which looks like a half-witted version of the BP flower - I'm not printing it here for reasons of tedium. Look at Taf-od if you care).

More interestingly, if you drop the 'Cymru' from the name 'Party of Wales', then doesn't that mean they are now just called Party?

They are also the first party to adopt a sonic logo, which is fancy talk for a jingle. It's kind of hard to sum up so please try downloading it, it is guaranteed to be the ringtone hit of the summer. It's part 1970s sitcom doorbell, part sound they play before making departure announcements at Stansted. Drawing inspiration from the Crazy Frog? They really are the party of the future.

I think we're all sometimes guilty of overlooking Plaid!, but we really shouldn't. Everyone has loved talking

about Robert Kilroy-Silk in the past few years because he was a harmlessly barking part of the political landscape, but we seem to be overlooking the nutjobs on our doorstep.

Down at the Assembly whenever a Plaid! member stands up to speak, everyone knows they are going to be in for a good laugh. We should learn a lesson from our political elders.

So next time someone asks you to join the Party, I thoroughly recommend signing up. After all, Cardiff is worryingly devoid of great comedy.



PLAID: ahahahahahahaha

IN PRAISE OF HEROD

I'm fully aware that this side column appears to be turning into *Alienated Misanthrope Weekly* (or *AMW* when the readership starts to fall) but this week I'm living in actual bodily fear. There's a silent killer in society today, in our town centres, parks and playgrounds. Yup, that's right. Children.

Children have always scared me. I'm terrified I'm going to start screaming 'fuck' in their tiny faces like that Tourette's boy they make Channel 4 documentaries about; or they'll cry, I'll try and comfort them, and be labelled a nonce for the rest of my life. Last time someone gave me a baby to hold, it turned purple. And no, I don't remember anything from my own childhood before the age of 12, so for all intensive purposes I was never one of 'them'.

There's a whole new generation of terror-kids who are slowly taking over. Just turn on an ad break and within seconds you'll need new undercrackers. Once upon a time road safety was taught to us by Tufty the Squirrel and singing hedgehogs; now it's an invinci-child who reconstitutes itself after being run over (presumably by a fleeing victim), before going on TO KILL AGAIN. Help! She's trying to



CHILD: It will kill again

climb out the screen! Well, no, strictly speaking that was *The Ring*. But don't tell me that you haven't got ready to run out the room in case the 'dead' child ever makes it up to the telly screen.

The Velvet bog-roll factory, meanwhile, used to be a haven for tired arse wipe manufacturers to bounce off their products. Now it's run by an autocratic three year old in a suit that clearly has designs on taking over the world. Plus it looks unnervingly like David Cameron. And have you seen that look in the eyes of Oscar Scully in *Neighbours* lately? At least we now know who planted the Lassiter's plane bomb.

I fear that society simply isn't ready to tackle the menace within and deal with 'children', purely on the basis that they are, well, children. Quite a neat little paradox that, isn't it? Why, it's political correctness gone mad. When you wake up and find the little bastards rubbing infected chicken breasts in your face, don't say I didn't warn you.

Next week in AMW: the best cricket bats to go mad at bus stops with