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## If your bank won't change, change your bank

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When the financial crisis caused some of Britain's banks to seek a government bailout, taxpayers may have expected the industry to change its habit of rewarding staff with excessive salaries and bonuses.

**Ken Burnett**, founder of the [Change Your Bank](#) campaign, urges people to pressure their bank to change, or take their custom elsewhere

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It's an unfair world, as everyone knows. It's always been so. But you don't have to rub people's noses in it.

Last year, along it seemed with most British people, that's what Marie, my wife, and I felt when we read about [Fred Goodwin](#) and the excessive rewards for failure shelled out by Royal Bank of Scotland. Our bank for more than 35 years. The pride of Scotland, one of the most successful companies in the world.

Fred and his colleagues had all but destroyed it. So, why would RBS pay him off so generously? Only because they were about to pay themselves even more. In a world with so many wrongs, the scandal of fat cats helping themselves just because they can, because they sit upon piles of our money ... well, it just seemed to us a wrong too far.

Especially since the public had been obliged to put in its tax money to save RBS and others. Why would they expect not to have to change their ways totally, to repay this supreme demonstration of our good faith? Why would the government let them continue to cream off fat payouts, as if nothing had happened?

It's hard for ordinary people to effectively protest at an outrage of this scale. We wrote to our day-to-day contacts at RBS – people we like and respect – and told them enough is enough. We were going to change our bank.

Marie and I used to be big customers for RBS, with a £10m-plus company with my name on it, but that was sold in 1999 and later broken up. We now have seven accounts; a small publishing business, a foundation, our personal accounts. But small beer, all. Why would RBS care, were we to leave?

Yet they appeared to, for they sent round two people called directors to our flat, to see us. One of them seemed a nice young man. He sat nervously on the edge of his seat, embarrassed by his bank's behaviour and eager to convince us of their sincerity for change. He gave us a long press release from RBS chief executive officer [Stephen Hester](#), overflowing with promises and protestations of good intentions.

It sounded great. Though we weren't entirely convinced.

But the benefit of doubt is an easy thing to give. So we said, 'OK, you have one year: show us. If you mend your ways, we'll say so, publicly. But if you don't we'll change our bank, equally publicly.'

So the [Change Your Bank](#) campaign was born. The idea is that we gather other like-minded folk and together put pressure on all banks to mend their ways. If they can't convince us, then we change our bank. You can too. Change Your Bank will show you how, and where to do it.

It's not a movement though. It hasn't taken off – yet. It's waiting, for you.

Recently I re-contacted the bright young regional director who a few months earlier had seemed so determined that we should want to stick with his bank. He told me his PR colleagues had concluded that CYB posed no threat. The Bank can do what it likes, invulnerable.

Unfair? We don't know the half of it.

Once Royal Mail was your friend. Not any more. Once the railways were owned by all of us. Now they cost us more than twice as much, but are owned privately and taxpayer funds are enriching a few already very rich managers.

That's the way we're run now. In America the [CEO of JP Morgan is getting a \\$17.6m](#) for the bailout year. [The CEO of Goldman Sachs gets \\$9m](#). President Obama seems paralysed. Who really controls their country? Is it the same here?

We know it is. And it's insanity, whichever way you look at it, beyond comprehension and justification. How would anyone explain it to an 11-year-old child with a social conscience? He or she could only conclude that it's unrestrained corruption, allowed to run free by complicit leaders. While the evidence is irrefutable that unfairness on this scale destroys the fabric of our society.

So, in the coming election, we should elect no one who won't, on the lives of their children, promise to change this.

The bankers say that if we restrict their extortions they'll leave. But what about the surgeons, the architects and planners, the air traffic controllers? What about the teachers, doctors and nurses? Surely some of them too are worth a £1m-plus salary, if more than 10,000 bankers are?

Of course they aren't. It's smoke and mirrors. Institutionalised theft by the powerful, from the acquiescent. Let them go, we say. Good riddance. They can't go soon enough. This country will be very much better, without them.

It's always been an unfair world. The paradigm of the rich getting richer as the poor get poorer has been with us at least since Reagan and Thatcher. After 12 years of Blair and Brown, it's more unfair now, not less. This will continue unless we, the public, stop it.

The Daily Mail of 13 February 2010 ran on its front page the indignant story of 10,000 bankers about to scoop up salaries of more than £1m each. The City minister [Lord Myners](#) called it 'Grotesque'. People say, 'They just don't get it, these bankers'.

But the trouble is, they do. They really do.

In other countries excessive plundering by a powerful, uncaring elite creates conditions ripe for revolution or military coup. In Britain we shake our heads, have a cuppa, proclaim it a jolly bad show and bang off a letter to The Guardian. The people who control these things have seen and recognised our impotence. They think there's absolutely nothing that we can do about it, except whinge.

But you can Change Your Bank. We all can. For all they've promised, RBS haven't changed. So we will now change our bank, for sure.

Please join us, to show these smug, self-serving money-manipulators just how wrong they are.

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