

## Editor's comment

# MORE THAN YOUR JOB'S WORTH?

**A** FEW months ago the media was bemoaning the economic 'crisis'. Now pundits are queueing up to spot 'green shoots'. Unemployment, however, is expected to go on rising until well after the recovery takes hold. The construction industry – a key indicator of the nation's economic health – has been badly affected and is in the doldrums, along with the flooring sector.

The recession has been global, hitting every industrialised country, not the fault of any one government. Its causes will doubtless be debated by experts for years. The UK along with other governments has resorted to a spending drive to revive the economy. Although attacked by the Conservatives, this policy's success or failure can only be judged with the benefit of historical hindsight. But during difficult times it's easy for the opposition to simply blame the government for all our woes. Mindful of these claims voters may be tempted to boot out the party in power at the first opportunity. And that could be within the next 12 months, because the next general election must legally be held on or before June 3, 2010.

Most commentators seem convinced that the result is a foregone conclusion. The hapless Gordon Brown, once feted when he took over from Tony Blair, now seems destined for the chop. So the question we should all be asking is whether the new lot will really be better for Britain than Brown.

For example, will flooring contractors and manufacturers prosper under the Conservatives? The reality is that we probably won't know until they take over. Opposition parties make grandiose promises, but don't have to give specifics on policies. However, the man who could be the chancellor of

the exchequer after the election, has given a couple of clues.

'We will not raise taxes,' he said recently. That's hardly a surprise from a Tory whose party has, in the past, based its appeal on cutting taxes! But, significantly, he also undertook to implement drastic reductions in public expenditure.

Now that's where the alarm bells should start ringing in the construction industry which has already been forced to shed thousands of jobs. That is notwithstanding the strong focus of the present government on job creation, including skills training and apprenticeships. Many flooring contractors have indeed done very well out of Labour's massive investment programmes, particularly in health and education.

Slashing state spending will mean more job losses on a devastating scale, especially as the private sector has so far done little to boost employment. So the Conservatives must come clean and tell us how they propose to stimulate growth while bludgeoning budgets for government building projects, which are the lifeblood of the construction industry.

I recall a former Conservative chancellor (Norman Lamont) saying that unemployment is 'a price worth paying' (to curb inflation). Anyone who has just lost their job will beg to differ!



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### For starters:

## Bonk account

The construction industry had a very rare mention in *The News of the World* recently. It reported that a former construction minister, Nigel Griffiths, who is married, allegedly had a 'secret liaison' with a 'mystery brunette' in what the newspaper described as a 'sex romp'.

During his brief tenure in the construction job, Mr Griffiths was famously nick-named the 'seven-minute minister' – the time he allocated to attend an important industry meeting. The number of minutes he spent bonking (allegedly) was not recorded by *The News of the World*.



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