

1 **The dark days of winter**

2 original at:

3 http://www.economist.com/blogs/blighty/2010/12/britains_gloomy_outlook

4 A midwinter gloom has descended over Britain. According to the
5 December Ipsos MORI Issues Index, worries about the economy, which
6 had been falling steadily since the general election held in May, have
7 suddenly heightened.

8 Some 61% of the population now think the economy is one of the most
9 important issues facing Britain — up six percentage points on last month.
10 For 41% of the people it is now the most important issue. This means that
11 the level of concern has returned to that experienced during the election
12 campaign.

13 As if on cue the Office of National Statistics announced on December 14th
14 that inflation had increased. The reason behind the increase had been
15 sharp rises in the price of food, clothes and furniture.

16 The December index also shows that anxieties about unemployment
17 remain high, with 27% of people worried about it.

18 These concerns have also since proven well-founded: on December 15th
19 official statistics showed that 35,000 had joined dole queues in the
20 previous three months, swelling unemployment to 2.5m or 7.9% of the
21 labour force.

22 As the nation withdraws to the warmth of the family fire for the
23 forthcoming festivities, it does so apprehensive that many on this small
24 isle will soon have to face a frosty financial future.

Questions

- 1) What was the opinion of the British public right before and following the last general election compared to its opinion now? Scan the text for phrases that give you clues for the answer.
- 2) Have these worries turned out to be founded or not? Why?
- 3) What about the worries about losing one's job – are people more worried now than they were before (in the poll directly preceding the one reported on in the article)?
- 4) The word 'queue' (line 19) is one of the many words that are almost exclusively used in British English only. What is the American equivalent (and the obvious synonym) of this word?
- 5) How have British unemployment figures changed since last September?
- 6) What are the general public expectations about what the future brings?
- 7) What are your expectations for the next year? Do you think that, economically, things will improve? Would you say that the Czechs are particularly sceptical as regards expectations for the future?

Vocabulary

(right) on cue (line 13) – as if planned to happen exactly at that moment

dole (line 19) – a slang term for unemployment benefits

swelling (line 20) – growing, increasing or rising

apprehensive (line 23) – uneasy or fearful about something that might happen

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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