

1 **The cruelty of compassion**

2 *(original at*

3 *http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=15393964)*

4 Social cohesion is one of the values all decent Europeans can sign up to.
5 Everyone on the continent wants less social conflict and less inequality.
6 Some countries really do manage to marry social harmony and economic
7 reform. Elsewhere, though, social cohesion, which European politicians
8 from left and right talk about so much, has become an excuse for avoiding
9 reform. And, what is more, it is a self-defeating one.

10 The pretext of social cohesion is used to justify the protection of those in
11 permanent jobs. The newest form of this "protectionism" across Europe is
12 the way most governments, even Britain's, have been reluctant to cut
13 wages in the public sector, despite the fact that pay and other benefits
14 have been slashed or frozen in the private sector due to the recession. All
15 this comes at the expense of the unemployed and those in temporary
16 work, especially young people and immigrants. Statistics shows that
17 finding a job is becoming increasingly difficult for them.

18 Such policies increase the social tension between those in permanent jobs
19 and those who lack them. As a result, they undermine the very social
20 cohesion that they are meant to preserve.

Questions

- 1) How does the title 'The cruelty of compassion' relate to the content of the article?
- 2) What is 'social cohesion' (lines 4, 10 and 19–20)? Can you find a spot in the text where the term 'social cohesion' is (more or less) explained?
- 3) Why has 'social cohesion' become an 'excuse for avoiding reform' (line 10) and why does the article consider this excuse self-defeating (that is contradictory or nonsensical)?
- 4) Why do you think 'Britain' is specifically mentioned in line 12?
- 5) What does "protectionism" (line 11) referred to in the article consist of?
- 6) Who are the victims of this "protectionism" and why?
- 7) Does the article regard the non-existence of pay reductions in the public sector as something desirable?
- 8) 'Such policies increase the social tension between those in permanent jobs and those who lack them' (lines 18 and 19). What do the *pronouns* 'those' (2x) and 'them' stand for in this sentence?
- 9) Do you agree with the article? Why / why not.

Vocabulary

sign up to (line 4,) – to subscribe to or endorse; approve

elsewhere (line 7) – somewhere else, in or to another place

be reluctant to do something (lines 12) – unwilling, disinclined

at the expense of somebody (15) – at the sacrifice of; to the detriment of

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/>, or <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

Přejeme Vám mnoho studijních úspěchů.

Tým jazykové skupiny Spěváček: