

## [The gift that keeps on giving](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Sunday 2 November 2008



I've pointed out before that I read Polly Toynbee so as to have something to sneer at. As with Saturday's [offering](#) [3]:

The British Chambers of Commerce still flaunts its absurd Burdens Barometer, claiming that this year Labour's extra regulations have cost business £65bn since 1997. The "burdens" include such frivolities as maternity leave, stakeholder pensions and the control of pesticides and asbestos.

That sarcastic "" around burdens is clearly to underline the "absurd". That these figures are figments of capitalist oppressors' fevered imaginations perhaps. But that isn't [strictly true](#) [4]:

The figures in the Burdens Barometer are compiled from the Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) produced by government departments and now downloaded into the British Chambers of Commerce RIA Database.

All government departments are required to complete RIAs that evaluate the risks, costs and benefits of any new regulatory proposal that has an impact on business.

The figures show the Government's own estimates of the compliance costs of a series of regulations affecting business....

So the numbers actually come from the government's own estimations of the burdens the regulations place upon business. Still could be the product of fevered imaginations of course, indeed, given that source more likely than not.

It's also possibly true that some of these regulations are worthwhile (or none or all of them) but to evaluate that we have to admit to the costs they impose as well as the benefits they bring and then measure one against the other.

Which brings us to that great truism, that there are no solutions, there are only tradeoffs: that free lunch is as elusive as ever.

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