**[John Bird MBE](http://www.parliamentspeakers.com/Speaker/John%2BBird%2BMBE)**

**Founder of The Big Issue**

John Bird is an inspirational business leader who has an outstanding record of using business as a tool for social change.

A publishing phenomenon, *the Big Issue* has been delivering both commercial profits and a social return on investment for over 10 years. During this time the magazine has sold over 50 million copies and employed over 15,000 homeless people in the UK alone, generating over £25m in payments to vendors and saving the taxpayer millions in benefits and other costs. The Issue is now a worldwide success and inspiration for a new generation of social entrepreneurs. Bird's journey from poverty, rejection, and struggle to eventual redemption is an inspirational story. At a time when Corporate Social Responsibility is preoccupying business leaders, investors and consumers alike, the Big Issue vision and practice of social enterprise as an engine of change is more relevant than ever.

John was awarded his MBE in 1995 for service to the homeless.

The publication of his new book, *Some Luck* coincided with the launch of an array of media and business initiatives. These new media and financial projects are aimed at driving forward the social mission of *the Big Issue*.

* Some of his other business and media initiatives include:
Blueprints4change.com, a DTI funded initiative aimed at providing blueprints and incubation services for social business projects. BP4C will identify the most successful social enterprise ventures in the UK, blueprint them and extend them to other communities in need.
* ABCtales.com is an award winning storytelling web site providing a free platform for aspiring writers from all backgrounds to get their work read. ABCtales has been a phenomenal success and is currently the focus of interest among government, media companies and charities looking to promote “social literacy".
* Social Brokers, a new financial venture aimed at supporting social business in the UK. Social Brokers encompasses The Big Deal, a major new ethical venture capital fund, a community finance wholesaler, and a foundation for financing small ventures. Social Brokers is supported by Catalyst, Bank of Scotland, the DTI, and Investors in Society.
* Dr Checkoff, a checklist web site and book publishing programme aimed at helping people organise their lives more effectively. Yellow Pages/Yell.com are going to feature the lists in their web and print products which are currently delivered to 27 million households in the UK.

John is able to offer a unique point of view at any speaking event, given his extraordinary life story;

"I was born just after the Second World War. My parents lived in the slums of Paddington. My father, Alfred, was a milkman and my mother was a barmaid and a Woolworths till girl. The family broke up when I was 7 and I was sent to an orphanage run by Catholic nuns. Trouble soon followed. I was shoplifting, house breaking, vandalising and getting nicked. At 15 I left school and after eight jobs in six months, I was sent down for three years for receiving money under false pretences.

I ran away and ended up in Ashford Boys Prison, where I started to draw and got educated. I left and at 18 got into Chelsea School of Art. Still thieving and getting into trouble, I became a father at 19, drifted in and out of trouble, lived in Paris and got involved in revolutionary politics. Back in England, I worked in car factories and tried to overthrow capitalism as a member of the Workers Revolutionary Party. I met Gordon Roddick (co-founder of The Body Shop) in 1967 and began a friendship that has lasted ever since.

I became self-employed because it enabled me to be creative. I started magazines, but all the time what nagged at me was that I was not doing useful things. In 1990 Gordon Roddick suggested I start a street paper. I began to construct The Big Issue, and it worked. My total energy was utilized to do something useful. It has been a phenomenal success."

**[To book John Bird for your event, please contact Parliament on](http://www.parliamentspeakers.com)**

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