

Famous, rich and useless

Sarah Vine
Last Night's TV



Famous, Rich and Jobless

BBC One

★☆☆☆

Jobless

BBC One

★★★★☆

Watching last night's two offerings

on unemployment was a bit like trying to compare the admittedly unpleasant but nevertheless by no means life-threatening trials of Katie Price in the last series of *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* with the story of poor Rachel and Paul Chandler, the British couple kidnapped by Somali pirates. **Famous, Rich and Jobless** was essentially a pointless and unedifying exercise in low-grade voyeurism;

- **Jobless**, on the other hand, was a deeply moving and thought-provoking exploration of how recession, misfortune and unemployment affect ordinary families.

The four celebrities on *Famous Rich and Jobless* were the former *EastEnders* actor Larry Lamb, Noel Gallagher's ex-wife Meg Mathews, the gardener Diarmuid Gavin and the Duchess of Cornwall's niece Emma Parker Bowles, above. Guiding them into the hell of joblessness were the employment experts Emma and Craig. These two could barely contain their excitement as, in a suitably dank basement at a pointlessly "secret location", they stripped this hapless four of their so-called trappings of success and handed them a bin bag each of spectacularly unpleasant clothes, along with £39, to last them for four days.

The grandly stated aim of this programme was to illustrate the hardships of long-term unemployment. In fact, it was merely an exercise in seeing how celebrities cope with having all their treats taken away. At the end of it was always the knowledge that, after four days living in nasty flats, drinking instant coffee and being followed about by a camera crew, they would each return to their respective lives, and no doubt a hearty supper at the Ivy.

While Parker Bowles and Gavin shed a few tears and looked suitably contrite (much to the delight and approval of the insufferable Emma and Craig), Mathews just got on with things, landing herself several jobs and undertaking them all with good-natured determination. Lamb was the only one who really hit the nail on the head, refusing to leave his sofa and declaring the entire exercise "patronising bullshit." I couldn't have put it better myself, Larry.

Those genuinely wanting to experience the hardships of unemployment would have been much better off watching *Jobless*. This was a beautifully structured, well-executed documentary, following the fortunes of several families hit by the wrecking ball of redundancy. Jackie and Andy had both lost their jobs after working for 20 years for the same company; Paul and Elma were struggling to extract a pay-off — not to mention years of pension contributions — from their former employers; and Gary and Michelle were fending off menacing calls from the bank after his building work had dried up. In Scotland, the *Daily Record* journalist Derek had gone to work one morning at 10am, only to leave three quarters of an hour later, fired.

All had small children, mortgages, standards. They were by no means scroungers. None of them wanted to live off handouts; all were desperate to get back on their feet. They were just ordinary people, having their ordinary lives squashed by other people's incompetence, a process that this programme explored with respectful professionalism. It was genuinely sobering stuff, both effective and affecting — and so much more edifying that watching famous people snivelling.