



# THE NEW BLUE

Conservative candidates on new UK policy challenges

Edited by Natalie Tarry

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policy challenges

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Louise Bagshawe, the Conservative parliamentary candidate for Corby, is an accomplished fiction novelist, having published a string of bestsellers since signing her first book deal on her 22nd birthday. She studied English at Oxford, where she was Secretary of the Oxford Union, and won Young Poet of the Year aged 18. She has served as an Association Officer and a primary school Governor, as well as being involved with a number of charities.

### ANGIE BRAY

Angie Bray is the Conservative parliamentary candidate for Ealing Central and Acton. She was leader of the Conservative Group on the London Assembly between 2006 and late 2007, serving as member for West Central. A former radio broadcaster for British Forces Broadcasting and LBC Radio, she has also served as Chairman of the Conservative Political Forum for the Kensington and Chelsea Conservative Association and is a Vice President of the Hammersmith and Fulham Conservative Association.

### DAMIAN COLLINS

Damian Collins read Modern History at St Benet's Hall, Oxford, before moving into a career in advertising and communications. He is currently at Lexington Communications, and was previously a Director at M&C Saatchi. He has also worked at the Conservative Campaign Headquarters, both in the research department and as media officer for the Foreign Affairs and Agriculture shadow cabinet teams. He is the Conservative parliamentary candidate for Folkestone and Hythe.

### WILFRED EMMANUEL-JONES

Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones was born in Jamaica and raised in inner city Birmingham. After working as a director and producer for the BBC, he founded his own food and drink marketing company, and four years

ago launched his hugely successful food brand, The Black Farmer. He is particularly concerned about rural affairs, justice for small producers and opportunities for ethnic minorities. He is the Conservatives' parliamentary candidate for Chippenham.

### ZAC GOLDSMITH

Zac Goldsmith was Director of the *Ecologist* for 9 years. He stepped down last year after being selected as the Conservative Party parliamentary candidate for Richmond Park and North Kingston. In 2005 he was asked to oversee a wide-ranging review of environmental policy for the Conservative Party. *The Quality of Life Policy Review* was delivered to David Cameron in September 2007. Many of the recommendations have become party policy. In 2003 Zac was the recipient of the Beacon Prize for 'Young Philanthropist of the Year'. In 2004, he received the Global green Award for 'International Environmental Leadership.'

### ROBERT HALFON

Robert Halfon is the current Political Director of Conservative Friends of Israel, a board member of Iain Duncan Smith's Centre for Social Justice and a former Chief of Staff to Oliver Letwin. He has written books and articles on subjects ranging from Russia to Social Justice. The Conservative parliamentary candidate for Harlow, he has taken the constituency from a Labour majority of 10,500 in 1997 to being the third most marginal seat after the 2005 election.

### CHARLOTTE LESLIE

A graduate in classics from Balliol College, Oxford, Charlotte Leslie has worked with a number of think-tanks, including Policy Exchange, the Bow Group and the Social Market Foundation, and has written numerous papers and reports on education policy. She works as educational advisor to the Young Foundation's 'Learning Launchpad', an educational think-tank, and was special advisor to David Willetts MP as Shadow Education Secretary. She is the parliamentary candidate for Bristol North West.

### JESSE NORMAN

Jesse Norman is the Conservative parliamentary candidate for Hereford and South Herefordshire. He holds an honorary research fellowship in philosophy from University College London and is a former Executive Director (now Senior Research Fellow) of the think-tank Policy Exchange. A former director of Barclays, he currently serves on the advisory board of Roundhouse, an urban regeneration project for young people in London. He has also served as a policy advisor to George Osborne MP, the Shadow Chancellor, and to the Shadow Work and Pensions team. Among his many publications are *Compassionate Conservatism* (2006) and the forthcoming *Compassionate Economics* (2008).

### CHRIS SKIDMORE

A former Chairman of the Bow Group, Chris Skidmore is an author and historian. His first book, *Edward VI: The Lost King*, received critical acclaim, and a second, on Elizabeth I, will be published in 2009. He is Special Adviser to Michael Gove MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, and was formerly Director of the Public Services Improvement Group. He is the Conservative parliamentary candidate for Kingswood.

### PHILIPPA STROUD

Since 1989, Philippa Stroud has established five residential support housing units, helping people trapped in poverty and addiction. She is the parliamentary candidate for Sutton and Cheam and Executive Director of the Centre for Social Justice, whose report *Breakdown Britain* and ensuing policy proposals have been submitted to the Conservative Party as part of the Policy Review. She has worked alongside The Rt. Hon. Iain Duncan Smith MP in the running of the Centre's policy work, awards programme, alliance of charitable partners and seminar programme.

### NATALIE TARRY

Natalie Tarry is Acting Director and Director of Research at the SMF. Before joining the SMF in 2006 Natalie spent four years working for



the New Local Government Network, an independent local government think-tank, where she worked on various projects and published on user choice, city regions, PPPs, regeneration and governance. Prior to that Natalie worked at the European Parliament in Brussels and for a research institute/consultancy in Frankfurt. Natalie studied history and politics at Queen Mary, University of London and has a Masters from the London School of Economics.

## INTRODUCTION

In October 2005, the Social Market Foundation published *What's Right Now? Conservative essays on the role of civil society, markets and the state*. Three years later, much has changed – two of the contributors are now Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Chancellor respectively. The Conservative Party has undergone a number of policy reviews and is finding itself with a lead ahead of the government in the polls that is in double figures.

But what do we know about Cameron's Conservative Party now? What has changed in policy terms and what are the new ideas? In the absence of a definitive policy programme ahead of the next general election, much is still left to be decided, but what is clear from the contributors to this collection is that the new wave of young and bright Conservatives has much to contribute to this programme.

In *The New Blue*, ten leading Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) are having a go at trying to solve a number of Britain's most pressing problems and long-term challenges, including the decline in political interest and public engagement, falling aspiration, the rise in knife and gun crime, Britain's transport crisis and more.

In the first chapter, Zac Goldsmith addresses the failures of our current democratic system and in the vein of recommendations previously made by the Power Inquiry calls for a power sharing between politicians and people through regular referenda. He compellingly argues that the growing gulf between promise and reality is destroying people's faith in the political system and politicians and that only if the British public is given a voice will it engage again with the political process.

Damian Collins continues these arguments and addresses the important question of why overall aspiration and social mobility in



Britain have been in such steep decline. He points to a vital role for a future Tory government to remove the barriers for people's aspirations to foster homeownership, sustainable employment, enterprise and a decent education.

Charlotte Leslie argues in a similar vein that only through increased public engagement can the aspiration challenge be addressed and Britain's public be lifted out of a "fog of depression". She is particularly concerned about an increasingly disaffected youth and proposes a programme of identity-building and a greater role for vocational education to capture a generation's talents otherwise lost.

Chris Skidmore emphasises the importance of place and locality in explaining the widening social mobility gap across the UK. Starting by putting a greater focus on better deprivation measures, he moves on to explore the twin challenges and relationship between education and social housing and advocates a reform of housing benefits to overcome the decline of Britain's communities.

Jesse Norman, who contributed to *What's Right Now*, addresses another fundamental issue, and expands on work begun in his earlier book, 'Compassionate Conservatism', by attacking the dominance of classical models of economics – right across the political spectrum - with their parsimonious view of humans as *Homo Economicus*. He argues for a pluralistic approach, in which economics is just one way of looking at the world, and not one that should be privileged above others. He calls for a 'compassionate economics'.

Louise Bagshawe's chapter makes an impassioned call for Conservative feminism. She attacks the record of the current government in their treatment of women and praises the work of the Conservative's report, *Women in the World Today*. However, she argues, Conservatives need to go further, calling for greater action on rape, domestic violence, forced marriage, trafficking and prostitution.

Following on from Louise, the Centre for Social Justice's Philippa Stroud, looks at one of the UK's most pressing policy challenges – the rise of gun and knife crime and the prevalence of a gang culture in many of Britain's cities. Family breakdown, poverty, missing role models and an ineffective criminal justice system might all be explanations for the proliferation in gang criminality. Her first-hand experience of working with disaffected and criminal youths gives her recommendations for better sentencing, peer- to-peer mentoring, greater voluntary sector involvement and political leadership particular credibility.

In chapter eight, Angie Bray draws up a plan to get London traffic moving again. By recommending a balanced approach that allows a place for all, she makes a compelling argument why some of the recent London transport policies were short-sighted and have had unintended consequences for the overall travel experience across London. Balance is what is needed so that pedestrians, cyclists and car and bus users can share the roads of London to the best possible effect. Even the Thames regains its former historical transport importance under her plans.

An important issue is not left forgotten in this collection – rural Britain. In chapter nine Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones explores the forgotten British country-side and his challenging recommendations including the decommissioning of *The Archers*, post offices as digital hubs and the use of supermarkets for farmer's markets on designated days certainly give food for thought.

And last but not least Robert Halfon sees many of the aforementioned challenges of disaffection, declining aspiration and crime solved in the heart of our communities: our schools. He argues for the centrality of schools in our communities and stresses their role in pulling communities together. Drawing on local examples, he argues that family breakdown, community atomisation, barriers to social mobility and a loss of common values, mean that schools have a greater role than ever to play in pulling communities together.



There are many new and old ideas in this collection that are worth bearing in mind when it is time to put together the Party's Manifesto. One thing is clear; much has changed and the 'new blue' might indeed have their chance at making Britain a better place in the years to come.

We would like to thank the ten contributors who have generously given their time and thoughts to this collection. Any views expressed are of course entirely the authors' own. Thanks also go to Tom Richmond and Simon Griffiths from the SMF for their help in putting the collection together.

Natalie Tarry  
*Acting Director*  
*Social Market Foundation*  
*September 2008*

## CHAPTER 1: POLITICIANS MUST SHARE POWER – OR LOSE IT

ZAC GOLDSMITH

### IS BRITAIN DEMOCRATIC?

In the sense that we, the people, still have the right to remove our government once every few years, Britain is a democracy. But I believe that the time has come to acknowledge that our current form of democracy is too crude and inadequate to serve properly a sophisticated 21st century society.

Let's be honest: once elected, our MPs, councillors and other holders of public office habitually ignore the wishes of those who voted for them – and there is nothing anyone can do about it. The public will does not prevail in any meaningful sense. There is no on-going 'rule of the people', to take the commonly accepted definition of the word 'democracy'.

This gulf – between promise and reality – angers people far more than it did in the past, and no amount of highfaluting talk from politicians about Britain's long-established traditions of representative democracy can conceal the fact that there is growing friction between people and power.

No one would dispute that there are some matters that should never be subject to collective decision-making. Certain individual rights are sacrosanct. The residents of a town cannot vote to evict their neighbours, *à la* Big Brother, for example. But there is broad agreement that many other decisions are made best through a genuinely democratic process.

### A CRISIS IN THE MAKING

Something very significant, and potentially dangerous, is happening to British politics. It is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes but its essence is this: people are losing faith in politicians and the political

system as a whole. This is not a transitory or superficial development; it runs very deep, and it is getting observably worse.

Evidence for this profound disillusionment is now so overwhelming that few commentators even try to dispute it. The hard facts were brought together two years ago by the Power Inquiry and its groundbreaking report, *Power to the People*.<sup>1</sup> This was the largest and most comprehensive investigation into the state of British democracy for a generation. It was conducted by high-profile and heavyweight public figures and took evidence from around Britain. The report made grim reading, even for those inclined to take a complacent view of the public mood. It is worth quoting:

“Power’s own research and experience over the last eighteen months has established that the level of alienation felt towards politicians, the main political parties and the key institutions of the political system is extremely high and widespread.”<sup>2</sup>

People are switching off from democratic politics in unprecedented numbers. Not out of apathy, but from a conviction that their voice is not being listened to. From 1945 until 1997, the average turnout at General Elections was over 76%, peaking at 83% in 1950.<sup>3</sup> At the last two General Elections, just 60% of the electorate voted. At the 2005 election, only 37% of those aged 18-24 bothered to take part. Compared to the recent past, far fewer people identify with, let alone join, the main political parties.

Confidence in politicians and our system of government is shockingly low. A MORI poll in 2005 found that only 20% of people trust politicians

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1 Isobel White, *Power to the People: The report of Power, an Independent Inquiry into Britain's Democracy* (London: Parliament and Constitution Centre, 2006).

2 *Ibid.*

3 The Electoral Commission, *Election 2005: turnout. How many, who and why?* (London: The Electoral Commission, 2005).

to tell the truth.<sup>4</sup> A Hansard Society poll found that only a third of people believe the “present system of governing works well”<sup>5</sup>

The anecdotal evidence is equally depressing: radio phone-ins fizzle with rage and contempt for the political classes; election canvassers report weary cynicism on the doorsteps; ‘politician’ stands alongside ‘traffic warden’ and ‘estate agent’ as a profession it is almost mandatory to despise.

People, in their grim determination to find a way of circumventing the presumed Establishment cartel at Westminster – “They’re all the same”, is a commonly heard lament – are increasingly resorting to voting for fringe parties with policies and agendas that would be disastrous for Britain. In the last decade we have seen extremists elected to office in unprecedented numbers from dubious organisations like the BNP. How many more votes will the likes of Nick Griffin have to receive before we wake up and accept the need for radical action?

## **SOCIETY HAS CHANGED BUT POLITICS REMAINS STUCK IN THE PAST**

Britain’s Parliamentary democracy was already well-established two hundred years ago and remains more or less intact today. The franchise was gradually extended until it became universal with the granting of women’s suffrage in the earlier part of the last century, but since then, reform has been comparatively minor, with the arguable exception of devolution.

But society has changed. In the 19th and early 20th century most adults were uneducated, uninformed and had little experience of the world beyond their locality. That world no longer exists. The talent gap between ruler and ruled has shrunk.

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4 Ipsos MORI, “Doctors Top Public Opinion Poll On Trustworthy Professions,” 2005.

5 Ipsos MORI, “Audit of Political Engagement 5,” 2008.

The public today has unprecedented access to information. Most school leavers go into further education. Almost every aspect of our lives has been transformed by social, economic and technological change, but the way we make collective decisions remains stuck in the past, hopelessly outdated. We are still expected to hand over political choices to an exclusive group of professional politicians who cannot meaningfully be held to account, except for one day twice a decade.

And what is the result? Literally thousands of political decisions have been made in recent years that defied the clearly expressed wishes of the majority. Anyone who wants to understand why politics is broken should look no further: the crisis of legitimacy we see today is the cumulative effect of a million expressions of outrage and perceptions of injustice on the part of decent, law-abiding people who have watched their elected MPs and councillors voting the 'wrong' way and asked "Why should they decide this for us, when we could do it ourselves?"

## DIRECT DEMOCRACY – AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

There is a solution: a simple mechanism that, if made an integral part of the democratic process in Britain, could both improve the quality of decision-making at national and local levels and restore the public's faith in politics. That mechanism is the referendum.

The use of referendums (or referenda) is something that fills many politicians with unease and even dread. Some MPs deploy Burkean dictums about owing the public their judgement, not obedience to their opinion but the truth is rather more straightforward: they like being in charge and don't want to be second-guessed by those they regard as amateurs. It is a battle that politicians are destined to lose. The only question is how much damage will be done before they realise it.

One of the growing number of campaigns backing the greater use of referendums – also known as direct democracy or citizens' initiatives – has set out how it could work in practice:

- Each year, on Referendum Day, people would be able to vote on issues of concern, both national and local. To trigger a referendum on a particular topic, 2.5% of the electorate would need to sign a petition. This would mean that, for national issues, a million signatures would be required to trigger a ballot. For local issues affecting, say, a district council, this would require around 4,000 people to back the proposition. Referendum Day would be held on the same day as the local elections.
- The Electoral Commission would need to agree the wording of the question on the ballot paper to ensure that the question was fair and balanced. The Commission would also be given new powers to check the validity of the petition and the number of signatures.
- People would need to sign petitions in person and the signatures to trigger a vote would need to be collected in a one-year period.
- There would be strict limits on the amount of money that could be spent on referendum campaigns and these would be the same for those supporting and opposing the question on the ballot paper.
- Balance in TV and radio coverage of the issues under discussion would be a legal requirement, as well as fair access to other media coverage for each side.

This programme, set out by pressure group, Our Say, would radically improve British politics. One of the most significant benefits would be

the greater legitimacy given to controversial decisions. Under the current system, many people believe that their view on a particular issue is a majority one but they have been effectively swindled by votes in Parliament or the council chamber conducted by politicians who refuse to listen. Under direct democracy the losers at least have the important consolation of knowing that they were given the opportunity to make their case to their fellow citizens on a level playing field.

There is a basic question that determines our level of satisfaction with the democratic process: who owns the political system; the citizens or the politicians? If most people believe that the answer is the latter then we are in trouble. My support for direct democracy is rooted in principle but reinforced by a highly pragmatic insight: a real sense of ownership over the decision-making process is crucial to a achieving and maintaining a stable society.

Contrast that with the situation in Ireland, where the electorate recently defied the political establishment by voting against the Lisbon Treaty on reform of the European Union. Whatever view one takes on matters relating to the EU there is little doubt that the fact that a referendum was held in the first place will have reinforced the perception in the Republic that the Irish people enjoy real control over their national affairs. That is surely healthy – and something all countries that wish to be regarded as democratic should aspire to.

## THE CASE AGAINST DIRECT DEMOCRACY DOESN'T ADD UP

There are several arguments put forward against the use of referendums. Some opponents argue that the public is too fickle and irresponsible to be trusted with important decisions. Others warn that allowing referendums would give too much power to the media, especially the tabloid press. A related contention is that powerful interest groups will use their influence and financial muscle to win any referendum. Yet another claim is that the complexity of legislation

means that only Parliament is competent to adjudicate on its merits. On closer inspection, none of these arguments against direct democracy stands up to serious scrutiny.

To say that people cannot be trusted to reach intelligent decisions is, in reality, an argument against democracy itself. Indeed, it was used by Parliamentarians in days gone by to oppose every extension of the franchise, including votes for women. This patronising elitist disdain can be found both in the golf clubs of Henley and the organic cafés of Islington, united in fear of swarms of gum-chewing, shell-suited “chavs” voting to make Kylie president-for-life, or for the return of hanging.

The related ‘rule by tabloid’ canard is equally fallacious. In reality, newspapers have far more influence over 650 MPs than they ever could over a notional audience of 60 million. In recent years every government has quailed before the baleful gaze of Rupert Murdoch and squirmed beneath the unforgiving knife of Paul Dacre. Most MPs are only too keen to court influential journalists. The penalty for falling foul of a newspaper can be severe. Some editors will not limit themselves to criticising an MP who has crossed them for the offence alone. They regard it as legitimate to attack every aspect of their prey’s behaviour and character. Direct democracy would actually reduce the power of newspaper proprietors and editors to impose their agendas on fearful governments and MPs. With an unblackmailable electorate of millions calling the shots, the tabloids would be confined to their proper role: shouting from the sidelines.

The same is true of special interest groups. The more opaque the decision-making process, the better they tend to like it. Ask any lobbyist whether he would rather persuade a government minister, over an expensive lunch, to insert a clause into a bill, or instead seek to win support – in the face of intense public scrutiny – for a proposal in a referendum. The answer will invariably be lunch with the government minister.

As for the idea that the complexity of legislation is a bar to decision by referendum, it is wrong in two key respects. The House of Commons already subcontracts detailed scrutiny of a bill that comes before it to a committee stage where a smaller group of MPs examines it in depth. Eventually there is a final vote on the bill in each house of Parliament. Obviously, the bulk of legislation would never be subject to direct democracy but if the matter was of sufficient public interest there is no reason why a referendum could not be held after these final votes but before the Royal Assent.

This leads onto a further point: a referendum, even one dealing with a complicated subject, would prompt precisely the kind of public engagement that politicians are desperate to encourage. Knowing that their vote would have an impact on the future would bring out the best in people and raise the quality of debate, often with surprising results.

The greatest fear, that irresponsible opinions would always win the day – is not borne out by practical experience. Many states in the US have direct democracy – so-called propositions – and what is clear is that the results betray no overall ideological direction. For example, voters have backed the medical use of marijuana and opposed relaxation of restrictions on gambling. And the efforts of special interest groups in America to cajole voters into backing their preferred ballot measures has, more often than not, met with failure.

But perhaps the most telling recent example of the ideological unpredictability of referendum results happened outside the United States. In June, a nation with a reputation for insularity, xenophobia even, was asked to tighten its citizenship laws, making it harder for foreigners to gain naturalisation. Much to the surprise of international commentators, the proposal was rejected by a margin of almost two to one. This country can justly claim to be the most democratic on earth: Switzerland.

## THE SWISS MODEL

It is no coincidence that Switzerland has one of the highest scores on the so-called Happiness Index, used to measure how content people are in different countries. One of the key determinants of happiness is a sense of control and ownership over one's own life. The Swiss model of government, which is over 150 years old, gives citizens the final say over important decisions. At town, cantonal and national levels, democracy is king – and it works. Not only is Switzerland one of the most prosperous nations on earth, it is also one of the most stable.

Central to Swiss democracy is the *Initiative*. Citizens vote not only on issues that the government chooses to place before them (the British model) but, by gathering enough signatures, on the issues that they deem appropriate. In Britain, a voter in a referendum (or a by-election) is allowed briefly into the citadel of power. In Switzerland, voters have a profound sense of ownership of their nation. Even though Switzerland has a greater natural division between its citizens (the linguistic and geographical boundary between the French-speaking west and German-speaking east) than anything in the UK, civic and national harmony is maintained and enhanced by common ownership of the democratic system.

## WHEN WILL OUR POLITICIANS SEE SENSE?

There are clear signs that our politicians are waking up to the scale of discontent caused by Britain's democratic deficit. There are even indications that they are ready to look at direct democracy as a possible way of restabilising the system but, as always, the devil is in the detail.

David Cameron, in a wide-ranging speech at the launch of the Power Report, accepted many of its proposals.<sup>6</sup> The Conservative Party's Quality of Life Commission (on which I served) specifically embraced

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<sup>6</sup> David Cameron, Speech at the Power Inquiry Conference, "It's time to share power with the people", 6 May 2006.

direct democracy, particularly at a local level on issues such as planning and proposed new supermarkets. A growing number of younger Tories are attracted by the idea but there has, as yet, been no bankable commitment that a future Conservative government would introduce such a system.

Labour too has made some encouraging noises, but the picture is distinctly mixed. Shortly after becoming Prime Minister, Gordon Brown made a wide-ranging speech in the House of Commons setting out his vision for constitutional reform.<sup>7</sup> It included the idea of introducing the power of citizens' initiative at a local level. More recently, the Ministry of Justice published a paper by a minister, Michael Wills, entitled *A national framework for greater citizen engagement*, which appeared to row back from this, preferring to focus on essentially bogus exercises like citizens' juries and citizens' summits.<sup>8</sup> Worst of all, Communities Secretary Hazel Blears floated the ludicrous notion that people could be enticed to the polling stations by the prospect of free cakes and iPods.<sup>9</sup>

As for the Liberal Democrats, one might have expected them to be passionate in their support for direct democracy but they have been strangely quiet on the issue.

## CONCLUSION

A million people marched in London against the war in Iraq. Half a million people took to the streets in opposition to the ban on hunting. Legions are involved in community and charity work, and in single-issue pressure groups. The truth is that the public longs for a greater role in decision-making but has very little expectation that this can be

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7 Gordon Brown, Speech to the House of Commons, 3 July 2007, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 54th Ser., vol. 462 (2006-7), cols. 815-20.

8 Ministry of Justice, *A national framework for greater citizen engagement*, by Michael Wills (London: HMSO, 2008).

9 Communities and Local Government, *Communities in control: Real people, real power* (London: HMSO, 2008), 70.

achieved. Instead, we are, as a nation, becoming ever more sullen and mutinous, losing no chance to register our discontent, often in inarticulate and inappropriate ways.

Politicians know this and are concerned. In the run up to the next election, expect to hear speeches telling us about the vital importance of encouraging popular involvement in decision-making. But warm words count for nothing if they are not followed up by serious legislative proposals. The political class in Britain has had much of its former arrogance knocked out of it but is still reluctant to understand why it attracts such contempt. It may not happen tomorrow but eventually MPs and councillors will come to understand that only by sharing power with their fellow citizens through a proper system of direct democracy will they recover the goodwill and respect that was once theirs by right.

## CHAPTER 2: THE ASPIRATION REVOLUTION

DAMIAN COLLINS

Bill Clinton dedicated his 1992 Presidential election campaign to “all the people who do the work, pay the taxes, raise the kids and play by the rules...the hard-working Americans who make up our forgotten middle class.”<sup>10</sup> He recognised that it is often those who work hardest to be independent and create a decent quality of life for themselves and their families, who feel most taken for granted by the government – particularly when times are tough.

When an economy goes into recession it is the working family struggling with a large mortgage and the low paid in work, who often suffer most. Today, the aspirations of the hard working people of Britain have been largely forgotten by the government, and many of the poorest members of our society have been failed completely. There can be no hope for the future of our country when we are prepared to see millions of working-age people condemned to a life on benefits; when the potential of young people remains wasted and untapped – particularly those from poorer backgrounds, who are most reliant on a good education to give them a better chance in life; and when low paid people in work receive the toughest deal from the tax system.

It is easy to take for granted that many have a natural desire to get on in life, and believe that the only requirement of the government is to help those with the toughest start to reach for the stars. But it is equally essential to show them that there are stars to reach for. Yet we have lost sight of the fact that the current system of taxes and regulations, in many cases, works to undermine some of the rewards that many people should expect from their labour – to be incentivised to work, afford a home of their own, save to enjoy retirement and pass something on to their children.

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<sup>10</sup> Governor Bill Clinton, nomination acceptance speech to the Democratic Party convention, 16th July 1992.

If the current system supported aspiration, talented young people, whatever their social background, would have an equal chance to succeed. Yet the gap between the performance of students from poor backgrounds and the least deprived backgrounds is widening.<sup>11</sup> If the current system supported aspiration, it would give extra incentives to make work pay. Yet the poorest fifth of households now pay a higher proportion of their income in tax than any other group in society<sup>12</sup> and we have the highest proportion of children living in workless households of any other European Union country.<sup>13</sup> And if the current system supported aspiration, people would be incentivised to save and build up assets of their own. Yet taxes on pensions introduced in 1997 have wiped £100 billion off of the value of people's savings,<sup>14</sup> and the number of new homes being built in 2008 is at its lowest level for nearly 30 years (as is the number of first time buyers entering the housing market).<sup>15</sup>

Is it any wonder, in this case, that some people question the immediate value of working to achieve their goals, while those who do increasingly ask in despair – ‘What’s the point?’ Can we equally be surprised if, in our most deprived communities, some people believe that the traditional values of hard work and self reliance will not give them a better standard of living, and so seek alternative solutions? In how many of our poorest communities are there positive neighbourhood role models for the aspirational society?

We have become a country where it is getting harder for people to get on in life, and where the government takes an increasing amount in taxes off those even on modest incomes who do. Our concern

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11 George Osborne, foreword to *Unfair Britain: Why Labour Have Failed On Fairness* (London: Conservative Party, 2008).

12 Office of National Statistics, *The Effects of Tax and Benefits on Household Income 2006-7*, by Francis Jones (London: HMSO, 2008).

13 Eurostat, ‘Jobless Households – Children: share of persons aged 0-17 who are living in households where no-one works’, [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?\\_pageid=199639140985&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL&screen=detailef&language=en&product=REF\\_SI\\_SC&root=REF\\_SI\\_SC/si\\_sc/tsisc080](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=199639140985&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&screen=detailef&language=en&product=REF_SI_SC&root=REF_SI_SC/si_sc/tsisc080).

14 Osborne, *Unfair Britain*.

15 HBOS plc, ‘Halifax Press Release: Lowest number of first time buyers since 1980’, Halifax First Time Buyer Review 2007.

about this should not just be based on the economic wellbeing of our country but also its general wellbeing – to allow everyone to stand tall and hold up their head in their community. Governments cannot create aspirations - they are often a personal thing - but governments can foster a culture of aspiration and reward, provide opportunities for people and work to ensure that talent and ability is not left unfulfilled.

That is the aspiration revolution that we need from the next government.

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Tony Blair famously defined the aspirations and values of many people in Britain in his 1996 party conference speech – his last as Leader of the Opposition: 'I can vividly recall the exact moment that I knew the last election was lost. I was canvassing in the Midlands on an ordinary, suburban estate. I met a man polishing his Ford Sierra. He was a self-employed electrician. His Dad always voted Labour, he said. He used to vote Labour too. But he'd bought his own house now. He'd set up his own business. He was doing quite nicely. "So I've become a Tory," he said. People judge us on their instincts about what they believe our instincts to be. And that man polishing his car was clear. His instincts were to get on in life. And he thought our instincts were to stop him.'<sup>16</sup>

This instinct to 'get on' in life has been the engine of the aspirational society, and one supported by a series of life goals similar to those expressed by the Ford Sierra-driving man in Tony Blair's speech. These have often been seen as economic – buying a home, starting a business and saving for retirement and old age. There is good reason for economic success to be linked to people's aspiration to get on in life: economic success for an individual or family often allows them to build up assets, which help provide security and to give them more independence and choice. However, aspiration is not limited to

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<sup>16</sup> Tony Blair, Leader's address to the Labour Party conference, 1 October 1996.

financial gain. A decent education is often the greatest determining factor in whether someone will enjoy a good quality of life and, if they were born into poverty, whether they will stay in poverty.

When we look at the success of the British Olympic team in Beijing, in bringing home the greatest haul of medals for 100 years, the conclusion that has been drawn by most sports' commentators is not just that we are fortunate to live at a time when we can enjoy such a concentration of natural talent. Rather, we have appreciated that the additional resources to fund superior coaching and training over a number of years (for sports like cycling, rowing, athletics and swimming) are now paying dividends. This means that we are more effective at maximising the sporting potential of our athletes. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of our education system, where students from poorer backgrounds may fail to succeed not because of lack of ability but because the system failed to help them develop their talents.

The Sutton Trust has published research showing that 60,000 pupils, who, at the age of 11, 14 or 16, are among the top fifth of academic performers in English state schools, do not subsequently enter higher education by the age of 18.<sup>17</sup> To put this number in context, if all these pupils had fulfilled their potential to go into higher education, then the number of young entrants entering UK universities would increase by 25%. So whilst it may be the case that the education system is failing to unlock the potential of some students and they leave without qualifications for work, it is also failing many thousands who have the ability.

The Shadow Education Secretary, Michael Gove, pointed out in his speech to the IPPR in August 2008 that, 'schools should be engines of social mobility,' where opportunity exists for all regardless of wealth or

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17 The Sutton Trust, *Wasted Talent? Attrition rates of high-achieving pupils between school and university* (London: Sutton Trust, 2008).

background.<sup>18</sup> Yet children from poorer backgrounds are far more likely to fail. Nearly half of all pupils who qualify for free school meals fail to achieve a single GCSE pass at grade C or above, and fewer than 1% will go on to get 3 grade A passes at A level – the current standard for entry for the top places at our leading universities. What's more, the attainment of children from poorer backgrounds is getting worse. In 2002 the gap between the performance of free school meal pupils and non-free school meal pupils in maths at Key Stage 2 was 10 percentage points – it's now 15. In science the gap was 16 points – it is now 20.

Gordon Brown asked in his first party conference speech as Prime Minister, 'How much talent that could flourish is lost through a poverty of aspiration: wasted not because young talents fail to reach the stars but because they grow up with no stars to reach for?'<sup>19</sup> Considerable research has been conducted into why children from poorer backgrounds do less well at school. Indications are that it is the early years that are the most important, and in particular the pre-school years. In Dr Jo Blanden's essay in the Social Market Foundation's 2007 book *The Politics of Aspiration*, she refers to research showing that one of the biggest determining factors in whether a child does well at school is whether their parents read to them in their pre-school years. As a child goes through school, the next biggest indicator of likely success is whether parents attend parent-teacher evenings at their child's school. Both of these actions indicate the level of interest and importance the parent attaches to their child's education.

The Labour Government's response to this has been to try to address the symptoms rather than the root cause of the problem. So, for example, children from poorer backgrounds do less well at school because their parents do not read to them - so we will give them books to read to their children. Now that it is feared that the parents

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18 Michael Gove, 'Why Conservative social policy delivers progressive ends', speech to IPPR, 4 August 2008.

19 Gordon Brown, Labour Party Conference address, 25 September 2007.

still are not reading the free books they have been given, Gordon Brown's new idea is that parents should basically be paid to read to their children by receiving 'Child Development Grants' as an incentive.<sup>20</sup> No doubt if this fails, the next step will be for the Secretary of State for Schools, Ed Balls, to come round to your house and read to your children for you.

Politicians of all parties have rightly taken a strong interest in research, published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which showed that children born in 1958 enjoyed greater social mobility than those born in 1970. This means that more children born into poor households in 1958 escaped poverty than those born in 1970 did.<sup>21</sup> As I was born in 1974, this was a piece of research I also took a strong personal interest in. Politicians of the left have attributed this decline to the social disruption caused by the collapse of old industries and the social policies of the Conservative governments at the time. But whatever the reason for the start of the decline in social mobility, and whenever it started, what has become clear is that Labour's top down, state-led solutions, which tend to rely on throwing money at problems, are not providing the answers we need. The question to consider is whether the incentives for people in Britain's poorer communities to follow their aspirations are as apparent as some people might believe.

The experience of many young people will be to leave school without qualifications, and then pass through a series of training schemes that will not lead to full time employment. Despite Gordon Brown's boasts about the success of the 'New Deal' for young people, the unemployment rate for 16 to 24 year olds in Britain is now above the OECD average, having been well below it in 1997. This is despite the British economy having grown in every year between 1997 and

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20 Gordon Brown, speech to Specialist Schools and Academies Trusts, 27 June 2008.

21 Dr Jo Blanden, 'Poverty as an intergenerational phenomenon: bucking the trend' in *The Politics of Aspiration*, ed. Simon Griffiths (London: Social Market Foundation, 2007).

2007. As George Osborne pointed out in his speech to the Centre for Policy Studies in July 2008, 'know that one fact and you know why Labour has failed.'<sup>22</sup>

The government likes to reassure people that there have never been as many people in work in Britain as there are today, but this is largely a consequence of the number of economic migrants who have entered the UK in recent years.<sup>23</sup> The figures hide the fact that, despite years of continuous economic growth, the number of working age people in Britain who are not working is rising. This problem of growing worklessness includes the rising number of people who now live on Incapacity Benefits and who are signed onto the long-term sick registers. There are nearly 5 million people of working age in Britain living on benefits, over half of whom are on Incapacity Benefits, and over 1.5 million of those have been so for more than 5 years.

I was shocked to discover that even in a constituency like Folkestone and Hythe, in the South East of England, the number of working age people who are out of work had risen by 74% between 1997 and 2007 and, in one ward in the centre of Folkestone, 40% of working age people do not work. If you question the official data on this, consider the growing representation of this problem in popular culture. It has become accepted that abuse of the welfare system and a lack of respect for work and aspiration are a subject of humour. We see this in programmes like 'Little Britain' and 'The Catherine Tate Show'. It is incredible, in a way, to think that the nation's favourite comic sketch is taken from the characters Lou and Andy in Little Britain, where the big joke is that Andy is actually smart and able bodied and just pretending to be the opposite in order to string along his carer, Lou. The tragedy for many young people from poorer backgrounds is that, regardless of their own abilities, they may be brought up in

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<sup>22</sup> George Osborne, 'We have to mend our broken society', CPS Annual Lecture, 15th July 2008.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, James Purnell, speech to 'Progress', 19th June 2008.

communities where there is little value placed on education or work as the means of fulfilling your aspirations. Instead, they face the very real prospect of a quiet life living on state benefits, which, in the case of incapacity benefit, actually incentivise you to stay on them.

But for people who do break from this cycle and leave school with the qualifications for work or higher education, it is not clear that the tax and benefits system is working to support them. The debate over Gordon Brown's decision to scrap the 10p income tax rate was a good indication of how it does not - this tax change affected the low paid in work most, and left them worse off. After 10 years of increases in personal taxation from Labour, what can be the incentive for someone earning just £100 a week, when for every additional pound they earn they will take home just 6p?<sup>24</sup> For people who are making ends meet and working for a better future, to what extent is the system indicating that its purpose is to give them a hand, rather than stand in their way?

Government research shows that home ownership is declining for the first time ever, and, as discussed above, the level of first-time buyers is at a 30 year low. When house prices were rising, Labour increased stamp duty, which now costs potential first time buyers thousands of pounds and provides a disincentive for people further up the housing ladder to move. For people who, like the Ford Sierra-driving man in Tony Blair's famous conference speech, would like to start their own businesses, life is harder as a result of the cost of increases in the level of business taxes and regulations, which disproportionately affect small businesses. The Confederation of British Industry has calculated that Labour has increased business taxes by £10 billion. On average, over fourteen new business regulations have been introduced every working day under the current Labour Government, and the British Chambers of Commerce have estimated that this has cost business an additional £65 billion in compliance. And as if this wasn't enough of a

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24 Osborne, *Unfair Britain*.

headache, the Treasury intends to increase the corporate tax rate on small business from 19 per cent to 22 per cent in 2009, bringing them an extra £1.5 billion in revenue. For people who have been fortunate enough to be able to put some money aside, to invest in a pension for their retirement, the hammer of the Treasury falls again. One of Gordon Brown's biggest tax grabs has been on private pension funds – worth up to £100 billion. Civil servants at the Treasury warned that this decision could cut the income provided by private pension schemes by up to 10%. In addition to this, pensioner poverty is increasing, and Britain is now the fourth worst country in the European Union in terms of the number of pensioners at risk of poverty.

The dilemma facing many people in Britain was summed up by a man I met in August 2008, whilst campaigning in my constituency, in St Mary's Bay. He was in his early 30s, and married with two young children. He had a full time job at a respected local firm with good prospects. To help make ends meet his wife worked over 30 hours at the weekend, meaning they had very little family time together. Yet despite this work, they were living in rented accommodation and unable to afford to buy their own home within the area where they live. His expectation was not for the government to come to his aid, but at least to show that it supported his aspirations. He was angry that, under the current tax and benefits system, he and his wife would probably be better off if they separated, and that whilst they worked, others are allowed to live comfortably on benefits.

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In his first speech as Party leader to the Conservative Party Spring Forum, in April 2006, David Cameron said that, 'We must become the Party of aspiration once again.'<sup>25</sup> Since that time a series of policy announcements have been made that would seek to correct some of the problems set out above, which cumulatively form an attack on the

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25 David Cameron, 'Changing our party – changing our country', speech to the Conservative Party Spring Forum 2006, 8 April 2006.

aspirational instincts of the British people. George Osborne's speech to the 2007 party conference, entitled 'It's time for aspiration', committed a Conservative government to scrapping stamp duty for 90% of first-time buyers, and abolishing inheritance tax on estates worth less than £1 million.<sup>26</sup> The Conservative Party has also committed to scrap the increase in corporate tax for small business and to look at simplifying the whole regime. In welfare, we have promised radical reform to break the cycle of welfare dependency and to get people who are fit enough to work, even if only for part of the week, back into the work place. In education, we want to give parents more choice over where they send their children to school, and for the schools themselves to have more of a say in how they educate them. Policies, as advocated by some local authorities, where children should just be allocated places at schools randomly, by ballot, can do nothing to create an incentive for parents to take a more active interest in where their children go to school and what they do when they are there.

However, more than any individual policy, we need to re-establish guiding principles at the heart of government which set the direction of policy to make it easier for people to achieve their aspirations, and work to actively prevent the talents of many people in Britain going to waste. Underlying this should be three key principles.

First, that economic aspiration should be encouraged and the direction of travel for government policy should be to incentivise work, promote saving and make it easier for people to build up assets through, for example, buying a home or starting a business.

Second, that the government should not make it harder for people to take more control over their lives. This should mean, for example, that parents feel encouraged to take an active interest in the education

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26 George Osborne, 'It's time for aspiration', speech to Conservative Party Conference, 1 October 2007.



of their children because they believe that this interest gives them more power to influence the type of schooling they receive.

And third, that government policy should be directed towards extending opportunity for people, particularly those who, because of their circumstances, may be least well-equipped to take advantage of opportunities, or even be aware that they are available to them.

The belief in, and support of, the aspirational society has been the hallmark of successful Conservative governments in the past, and its renewed expression by David Cameron has helped to define the successful modernisation process for the Conservative Party under his leadership. The challenge for any future Conservative Government must always be to consider how the decisions it makes impact on the lives of aspirational working people across the country - whether it enhances the opportunities available to them and helps give them more power over their own lives.

George Bernard Shaw famously wrote, 'you see things as they are and ask, "Why?" I dream things as they never were and ask, "Why not?"' The ambition for the Conservative Party should be to launch a new aspiration revolution and to free the people to dream again and live that dream.

## CHAPTER 3: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT – THE KEY TO RAISING ASPIRATION?

CHARLOTTE LESLIE

### INTRODUCTION

If aspiration has an opposite, it is probably depression. As recession becomes more and more likely, the concept of an economic depression is increasingly real. But I argue that many Britons are suffering from another sort of depression – one that will never be contemplated in the pink pages of the FT – a social depression; a fog that descends and obliterates from view goals worth aspiring to, and rusts the equipment that could be used to attain them.

What are the marks of this social depression? And who is most likely to suffer from it? In this essay I will try to outline some of the causes, some of the symptoms and the main sufferers. I am not a psychiatrist. I won't be prescribing society's Prozac. But I will try to suggest what types of measures can be taken to ensure that individuals and society feel less need to turn to the fridge or hit the pub for a Prozac equivalent, and are more likely to feel empowered to grasp opportunity and fulfil their own, and this country's, immense potential.

### WHAT DO YOU MEAN, 'DEPRESSION' – WE'VE NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD, SURELY?

In the last few years, most Conservative candidates will probably have knocked on a door where they are dismissed by someone who waves at their two large cars in the drive, their satellite TV dish, tells you about the several holidays they have been on this year and says, "I tell you what, I've never had it so good. Why on earth should I vote for you lot?" You can try to tell them how they are living off Thatcher's economic bravery, about the smoke and mirrors of Brown's economic illusions and how he has robbed the pensions fund until you are as blue as your

rosette, but they have a point. Over the last 8-10 years, real wages have grown consistently.<sup>27</sup> (Even if increasingly slowly over the last five years in real terms). But that has all started to change. Tough times are not just on the horizon but increasingly here, thanks to Gordon spending through the sunny days. But already, even underneath a substantial gain in material wealth, a form of depression has been spreading.

Let us pretend society is an individual: we have started eating more – and of the wrong stuff – obesity in 2006 was up nine percentage points on 1993 levels.<sup>28</sup> We are hitting the bottle – hospital admissions for alcohol-related diagnoses in 2005/06 were double those in 1995/96<sup>29</sup> and our ability of exerting self-control seems to be eroding – household savings are at a historically low level.<sup>30</sup> This is not the behaviour of someone with high self-esteem and self-confidence. In fact, with upward trends like that, the doctor might well diagnose depression. The mental wellbeing of our society is not an isolated cause for concern limited to the medical profession. Possibly even more than material means, it is closely linked with aspiration.

I am not suggesting that we are all doomed victims of a pandemic of depression. Many people have been becoming wealthier, gained jobs their parents would not have expected to attain, and, thanks to wealth and other factors, have the confidence to aspire further. But in other areas, it is a very different story. While many people have become richer, the gap between the rich and the poor is as wide as ever. In fact, the richest fifth of the population still earns over five times as much as the poorest fifth according to recently published official figures from the ONS<sup>31</sup> In this essay I am going to look at three different groups who I suggest are quietly suffering a drain of aspiration and risk falling

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27 National Statistics, '2007 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings'; <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=285>.

28 NHS Information Centre, 'Statistics on obesity, physical activity and diet'; <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/opadjan08>.

29 NHS Information Centre, 'Statistics on Alcohol: England 2007' <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/health-and-lifestyles/alcohol/statistics-on-alcohol-england-2007-%5Bn%5D>.

30 Office of National Statistics, *Economic and Labour Market Review* (London: HMSO, 2008), 55.

31 The effect of taxes and benefits on household income 2006-07 (ONS).

into varying levels of societal depression: the young, the least well-off and the average politically concerned citizen.

### A NOTE ON 'ASPIRATION'

Why are we getting depressed? Why as a nation are we finding it increasingly necessary to say "what the heck", hit the bottle and head to the fridge for comfort? Why are we taking to self-destructive binge-drinking instead of getting out there and improving our lot? Put simply, why are we lacking aspiration?

Aspiration can easily become one of those blanket words that politicians deploy to inspire a vague feeling of optimism: it is a particular favourite of Government White Papers. But to answer the questions above, it is worth taking a second to have a look at what aspiration actually is. And it is a particularly Conservative concept.

Aspiration involves identifying and setting ambitious - but not cloud-cuckoo-land - goals, then setting about finding the mechanisms to achieve them. The aspiring individual does not say, "The world owes me a living. I am a victim and 'at risk' of my life happening to me." They never say, "I am a failure." Rather, they say, "I am in control of my life. There are things I can do and I am in a position to do them, and I want to."

I also suggest the following pre-conditions for aspiration:

- 1 *A strong sense of identity:*  
You can't change anything if you're nobody. So you need to have a strong sense of who you are and what you can achieve.
- 2 *Belief that your own identity has intrinsic value or worth:*  
You can't feel motivated to do something if you are convinced your existence is superfluous to requirements.

3 *A sense that you are autonomous – you can affect things around you from your own will:*

If you know your actions will have no affect, aspiration becomes meaningless.

4 *A desire to achieve:*

All the above can be in place but yet the final spark of wanting to strive to achieve can still be missing.

I suggest it is beyond policymakers and this paper to find what that intangible spark of desire to act is. But since aspiration cannot exist without the first three, which are conducive to the fourth and within the realms of practical policy, I am going to concentrate in this essay on what policy makers can affect: identity and autonomy.

Policymakers can affirm identity, and suggest that group and individual identity has value by taking it for what it is, not what policy makers would like it to be, and making policies accordingly. The best way to do this is by listening to people and understanding their gripes, desires, and aspirations.

Politicians can affirm societal and individual autonomy - confirming to people that they do exist and count for something in the political realm - by granting them the power to act to change things.

There is one over-arching political term for this: *engagement*. Genuine engagement with voters and citizens - not the type that treats people simply as passive 'voters' and accordingly dishes out consultation exercises in the hope that people will turn out to the ballot box, but genuine public engagement - is the key to really raising aspiration. A genuine two-way street. Politicians should be engaged with their public whether they are eligible to vote or not.

## THREE ASPIRATION BLACK SPOTS

### Youth

The government risks criminalising the symptoms of youth disengagement by the way it is extending the school leaving age to 18. At the same time, it risks trying to simply pump 'aspiration' through the 'enterprise agenda' into children through yet more curriculum targets, without beginning to tackle the root causes as to why children are becoming disengaged and depressed in the first place. Why they lack aspiration and that sense of 'enterprise' that government and employers so want, and which, most importantly, is an indication of a happy, fulfilled, appropriately-educated child.

So why is the aspiration of so many young people being depressed?

1 *Parental upbringing:*

For many young people, particularly those 23,000 or so who leave school with no qualifications, aspiration to achieve anything at all has become obscured. For some, their family background is largely to blame: their parents may not work, but living off benefits the money comes in all the same. Therefore, any connection between hard work and reward is removed from their up-bringing. They see no reason to work, because they do not see how their actions can affect their lives.

2 *Inappropriate education:*

For others, the main problem may be that school seems to disregard their interests and offer nothing for them. They may be interested in practical learning, but do not connect with academic lessons or with their teachers. In the words of one young offender I interviewed, "I wanted to be an electrician. I wanted to learn about plugs. But every time I thought I was going to learn how to wire a plug or do something, they just

gave me more paper.” These kinds of students can feel dismissed by a system that does not value their talents and the way they are able to learn. Their sense of self-worth is undermined.

Dave Jeal, the chaplain at Ashfield Young Offenders Institute near Bristol, who sees the hard end of educational failures, put it more bluntly: “You have to be an academic to do manual work now. That’s just daft. If you’re not academic, you just get excluded. These kids (the young offenders) are clever kids. They make things, with bits of paper and what have you, with joints and rivets, to pass in-between the cells. They would do extremely well in engineering.”

### 3 *Dreams not goals:*

Often, young people confuse aspiration for dreams. A pilot scheme called “Arrival Education”, which works to engage and inspire school children, encourages children who are slipping from the education net to make collages of their life goals from magazine cuttings. They are very ambitious – desert islands with beer, fast cars, being a professional footballer and attractive women featured for the boys; haute-couture, a model-beautiful body, large houses and very expensive meals featured for the girls. Daniel Snell described how, when he started the programme, the children saw these as realistic goals they thought they might achieve – but the mechanisms were hazy, had nothing to do with hard graft, and even less to do with school. It had more to do with somehow getting into the Big Brother house and selling a story to magazines afterwards. Part of Daniel’s work is to break down these dreams into realisable aspirations, then point out the connection between those goals and focused hard work. For many children, he said, this was previously a completely alien concept.

#### 4 *Goals not aspirations:*

Another factor may be the opposite problem: with the amount of testing English schoolchildren are subjected to, the goals become not too distant, but too close: i.e. doing well enough in the next test. Working towards the next target becomes an end in itself and squeezes out any wider ambition, so that the young person forgets why they are doing all this work in the first place – to fulfil themselves.

Another factor could be the glowering cloud of the competitive world beyond the school gates which intimidates those who feel themselves moving nearer and nearer to the end of the education conveyor belt, and will soon be spilt off the end to fend for themselves:

Globalisation has made employment more competitive and getting a job is becoming harder. Qualifications for jobs are becoming ever more specific, so at the same time as competition for jobs increases, the options open to any young person narrow, because they have not taken the necessary modules or courses. But at the same time, a bewildering number of routes, courses and options are available for a child making life-altering decisions. And even if they manage to negotiate the qualifications and employment maze, young people have very little hope of clambering onto the housing ladder. Ways to make life better for school leavers in these respects is beyond the remit of this paper – but like those mornings when you just don't want to poke your head above the safety of the duvet because the day looming outside your bed seems just too brutal, it is likely that challenges like this can dampen aspiration at school of all but the supremely confident.

With the outside world getting more and more competitive and difficult to negotiate, it is all the more important that schools produce children who are ready to grab it by the scruff of the neck and go for it: children with aspiration. There are things we can do to engage our

youth and equip them to equip themselves for the future. I will come to those at the end of the essay.

### **Bringing aspiration to the least well-off**

As a candidate, the most anger I have ever come across was in a pub in an area that was not well off from voters who defined themselves as 'old Labour'. It emerged (after a bit of a barney about Thatcher) that their anger was not so much directed at me as a Conservative candidate, but at what they felt to be a current blindness to what they called 'the white working class', in favour of other minority groups, and a newly emerging 'not-working' class who live off benefits. That anger sadly tended to find expression in two directions – voting for the BNP in protest and/or in drink and drinking problems. They voted BNP because they felt that was the only action left to them that would attract any attention from the political elite. And I venture that, like many, those who developed drinking problems did so partially because they felt helpless and unable to control anything in their lives.

The aspiration in that pub was near zero because those who drank there felt unsure of their identity in a changing environment, found skills they had been proud of were no longer needed and found themselves helpless to do anything about it.

### **The politically disengaged**

Door-knocking tells you many things about the average electorate that are often too unremarkable or too intangible to make headlines. Any politician who canvasses is, in effect, performing an informal Mori or Yougov poll on how people are feeling about the world - not always in specifics (are they happy with their local school), but about life in general. Although usually location-limited, canvassing is a very powerful way of picking up on what you could call 'mood music'.

So it is based on nothing more scientific than the hundreds, if not thousands, of doors I have knocked on around the country as an activist or candidate that I suggest that average voters, particularly the would-be politically engaged, are feeling more politically powerless. I also suggest that this sense of powerlessness rubs off into other areas of their lives, and dampens aspiration. To aspire, you have to believe you are autonomous – that your will and your actions can change things. If you have no power to do anything, aspiration becomes an invalid concept.

So why should relatively affluent voters, who would be described by policy wonks as having ‘social capital’, have any reason to feel powerless? And, even if they do, given the much more obvious social evils of poverty, why should society or politicians care? I suggest that even though the loss of aspiration amongst the average voter may not have very obvious immediate effects, it has devastating long-term implications to national morale, which in turn underpins other more obvious issues like extreme poverty, the economy and crime.

Large swathes of Britain have improved their income and social status by taking decisions for themselves and acting upon them: whether it was to buy their own council house and decorate it as they wished, or to set up their own business and run it as they wanted. But anecdotal evidence suggests that this group of people are now finding that they are being cut adrift politically and can take fewer decisions for themselves. There is a strong perception that the consultations and listening exercises local councils and central government undertake are a sham, and simply an excuse to go ahead with pre-determined decisions with the label of being democratically involved. The result is that fewer people respond to consultations,<sup>32</sup> seeing them as a waste of time.

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32 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Public Participation in Local Government: A survey of local authorities* (London: HMSO, 2002), 5.

Reduced participation is also likely to be down to more decisions being made by non-democratically accountable bodies. In my seat of Bristol North West, I have been involved in two campaigns in which quangos have played the decisive role in an issue concerning the area. One is where the Learning And Skills Council seem to have clinched the decision on where a local school was built – a decision that was highly contentious and should have been decided by a locally accountable body. The other is where unreasonable demands from the Highways Agency have dominated a local community's plans to reopen a sports centre. A recent report from the TaxPayers' Alliance found that the cost of unelected bodies, like the Highways Agency, has risen by 50% since Labour came to power,<sup>33</sup> and, far from providing the bonfire of quangos that Gordon Brown promised, under Labour's watch their numbers have swelled.

The reason why this is so damaging, and the reason why community engagement is so vital to aspiration, is that political impotence undermines the very basic rule of the link between action and effect. For many, the basic action and effect rule, which translates to the work and reward ethic, is further undermined by the knowledge that thanks to a flourishing benefits culture, hard work is not necessary to gain the reward of an income. If unspoken social rules like work and reward are broken for one section of society, it removes the onus or incentive for other sections of society to live by them, and such social rules become invalid or empty. That is why the benefits culture is so damaging: it not only breeds a cycle of dependence amongst those on benefits which is hard to break, but it is a counter-action to the example of hard work being rewarded - what my swimming coach would have called "no pain, no gain." That has a profoundly negative effect on the motivation of otherwise hard workers to put in the hard work to aspire further.

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33 The TaxPayers' Alliance, *Structure of Government No.1: The Unseen Government of the UK* (London: TaxPayers' Alliance, 2008), 2.

## DON'T BE DEPRESSED – THERE ARE SOLUTIONS

Thankfully, policymakers are far from helpless. Meaningful engagement is possible.

### ENGAGING YOUTH, IMPROVING ASPIRATION

Although lack of aspiration in our youth is perhaps the greatest challenge, it is also the area where most can immediately be done. Give young people a sense of identity and convince them that their identity is worth having. That means taking the talents of young people for what they are, not what we would like them to be. In practical terms, that means:

1 *Transforming technical training:*

We need to change the way we think and even the way we talk about technical education. In the current terminology 'vocational' is euphemistic. A vocation is a motivation for taking on a particular job, which could be anything from being a vicar to a nurse to a computer engineer. It has nothing to do with the type of work involved. The euphemistic term 'vocational' is an indication of reluctance of policymakers to acknowledge that practical, technical skills are every bit as important as academic or written ones. Therefore, the content of so-called 'vocational' or technical courses must be practice-based, not theory-of-practice based. Diplomas point in the right direction, but given that in the hair and beauty diploma, students will not be allowed to actually cut hair, there is a danger that they will be another missed opportunity. The bottom line is that students need proper on the job training and to acquire skills that are needed by an employer - not some theory-based exercise which may, or may not include the skills an employer actually needs. Real work-based learning should be introduced wherever possible. David Willetts MP's announcement in July 2008 that employers would be incentivised by £2,000 bonus to take on apprentices is a large step in the right direction.

2 *Bring careers advice to young people, not the other way around:*

However effective measures put in place in school are, there will probably be at least a minority of children for whom the school environment of lessons and sitting at a desk is simply hostile, and for whom lessons and activities offered in a school will be tainted by the environment in which they are offered. Providing work-based learning is important here: young people will be prepared to learn something on a shop floor from an employer which they may not be prepared to learn from their teacher in a classroom. Local sports clubs, like boxing or martial arts clubs, often boast a captive audience of young people who do not find school very inspiring and would rather be elsewhere. Not only should schools be encouraged to link to their local amateur clubs to supplement after-school sports activities, but sports clubs should also be centres where careers advice evenings are arranged once a month after training. We should look at a scheme that links local sports clubs to local employers, who can give after-training talks, arrange trips to the business, help with work-experience options at school and eventually smooth a path to employment for club members. Young people are far more likely to be inspired by a career talk given in their local gym, or in the back room of their local football club, with their friends and their coach, than by the same talk given in a classroom presided over by teachers.

3 *Early identification of learning difficulties:*

It is hard for even the brightest child to feel confident and aspire to great things if they find that they seem to be the only one in the class not able to do dictation, or read properly. The effects of the less obvious learning difficulties that can easily go undiagnosed are acute: chronic loss of self-esteem at an early age seriously undermines efforts to instil a positive attitude in pupils and make them employable.

#### 4 *Reduce the number of tests:*

It is hard for a child to form a wider picture of what they want to do, and what they want to be, when they are faced with a series of pressing short-term goals that present an ongoing stress. Less but more targeted classroom testing might be the right way forward.

## A BRITAIN EVERYBODY CAN BE PART OF

There are less clear-cut solutions for restoring a sense of identity and mission to the post-industrial badly-off. There is no way to bring back the manufacturing jobs and industry, but we can engage sufficiently to ensure that, down the generations, children from this background, as from all other backgrounds have the best of chances in life. If they are academic, we must help them get to university. If their gifts are more practically inclined, we must help them with training in technical skills to compete in the international job market. And we must stop this idea that being academic is somehow "better" - everyone knows that plumbers, electricians and other skilled trades often have much higher incomes at the end of the day - and good on them. It is not that all the skilled trades have gone, it is that Britain is lagging behind on training its youth to fill them. So we must change this as a priority.

Reforming the benefits system is crucial to returning aspiration and dignity to those in today's Britain who feel they have lost work and dignity in the tidal surge of globalisation. In an identity-vacuum, created by the demise of industry and manufacturing, an overly accessible and indiscriminating benefits system has reduced the incentive to strike out and find a new identity and job.

## THE AVERAGE VOTER AND IMPROVING VOTER ENGAGEMENT

We must restore the faith of average voters in their power to change the world around them. That means that consultations from local council to government should be made more transparent. If valid

comments made by the public have not been taken into account, we should perhaps look at ways in which the decision can be withheld until sufficient reasons have been given, or at least have the onus placed on the decisionmaker to demonstrate, in detail, how they have included submissions seriously in their final decision.

In the long term, the number and remit of QUANGOs needs analysis, their cost and powers require a reduction. Above all, there must be a backstop of democratic accountability, so people feel there is someone they can go to who will listen to and act upon their concerns.

Reforming the benefits system to re-establish the universal rule that work means reward would act as a boost to the morale of hard working families with only the genuinely disabled and unwell receiving incapacity benefit. Requiring jobseekers to work to earn their allowance re-establishes that rule, and also provides jobseekers with a sense of achievement and worth they would not gain otherwise.

## CONCLUSIONS

There may be more obvious candidates for immediate action than the groups I have described – for example, those who have fallen below the poverty line. But this paper suggests that judging from the behaviour patterns of large sections of society, there is something wrong. Something is eating away at a great number of us that cannot be detected and is not sufficiently sensational to attract direct political action. So we get a collective impression of a deep anger, or in turned anger, whose causes are hard to pin down. This essay suggests that despite the inspirational and emotion-laden language adorning every new white paper, this unremarkable ailment results in a gradual erosion of aspiration, a slow creeping fog of depression. If allowed to continue, it could be debilitating for this country, and will be a barrier to efforts to help the more obviously needy sections of our society.

My ideas to revitalise society are based on measures that would also help an individual: affirming their identity; affirming the worth of that identity and confirming the ability to act and achieve. The assumption I make is that with all these things in place, people will actually want to achieve and aspire. Of course, you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink. No number of satisfied conditions can actually create aspiration itself – that is beyond politicians. But since all these policy suggestions have wider benefits beyond those of encouraging aspiration, I venture that they are not a bad place to start if we want to release aspiration so this country and its citizens can achieve their full, and great potential

## CHAPTER 4: THE POLITICS OF PLACE

CHRIS SKIDMORE

“It is actually getting harder for people to escape poverty and leave the income group, professional banding or social circle of their parents. In fact, it’s harder to escape the shackles of a poor upbringing in Britain than anywhere else in Europe.”

Rt. Hon. Alan Johnson MP<sup>34</sup>

“The honest and probably shameful answer is that we can’t. And I think that is a huge matter of regret.”

Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn MP, when asked if someone today could be born in a council estate and reach cabinet rank.<sup>35</sup>

The Glasgow East by-election may prove to be a historic turning point in the history of British politics. What fate it has dealt the government has yet to be decided. But what is certain is the horrific confrontation with reality when the spotlight was briefly turned upon the ordinary lives of people living there. Glasgow East presented to us the undeniable truth about our nation, or rather an invisible nation that we might choose to forget. Yet the statistics cannot hide. In the constituency’s Calton Ward, life expectancy stands at just 53.9 years, below that of Ghana, the Sudan, Cambodia. It is here that deprivation breathes in every corner: 44% of people are on incapacity benefit, 37% live in a workless household and 30% of homes are occupied by a lone parent.<sup>36</sup>

What Glasgow East demonstrates so powerfully is that we live in a nation that has perhaps never been more unequal, divided across the fractures of poverty and social inequality. Health inequalities between different areas of the country remain as stark as they were

<sup>34</sup> Rt. Alan Johnson, Speech to the Social Market Foundation, 13 September 2006.

<sup>35</sup> As quoted in John Humphreys, “Why is social mobility declining in ‘affluent’ Britain?”, *Daily Mail* (22 June 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Audrey Gillan, “In Iraq, life expectancy is 67. Minutes from Glasgow city centre, it’s 54”, *The Guardian* (21 January 2006).

over a century ago. If anything, the gap between the most affluent neighbourhoods and the poorest has grown wider.<sup>37</sup> Financially, the poorest in society are falling behind the wealthiest as the income divide grows further. The incomes of the poorest 20 per cent of people are falling - last year alone by almost 2% - while the incomes of the richest 20% have continued to rise ever faster. And under Labour, there has been an increased collapse into dependency, with the most vulnerable in society remaining trapped in a cycle of deprivation that they have been placed in. Almost 1.5 million people have been on Incapacity Benefit for over five years, and of those around 800,000 have been on the benefit for ten years or longer.<sup>38</sup>

What is most tragic, however, is that despite billions spent in public investment in education, the chains of inequality still bind our young people most tightly. Futures are decided by virtue of where children live or grow up. In 2007, 25.3% of pupils in the most deprived 10% of areas gained five good GCSEs including English and maths, compared to 68.4% in the least deprived 10% of areas.<sup>39</sup> According to the latest figures, only 25% of pupils whose parents are employed in the unskilled jobs will be in full time education by the time they are 19, compared with 61% of those born to parents in higher-level professional occupations. And only nine per cent of children of parents who are in the poorest fifth of the population graduate from university by the age of 23 compared with 46% of children in the richest fifth.<sup>40</sup> Incapacity Benefit claims for the under-25s are up 52% since 1997, and there are now 783,000 16-24 year-old not in education, employment

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37 In 1841, life expectancy at birth for men in Surrey was 44 years, compared to 25 years for men in Liverpool - a 19-year gap in life expectancy (*Fifth Annual Report of the Registrar General*, 1843. London: HMSO). In comparison, the Office for National Statistics recently announced that men in Manchester had a 52% chance of reaching the age of 75, compared with 78% for men in east Dorset [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_health/H5Q38\\_final\\_WEB\\_file.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/H5Q38_final_WEB_file.pdf); See also, BMJ, *Health inequalities and New Labour: how the promises compare with real progress*, Mary Shaw, George Davey Smith, Danny Dorling (April 2005).

38 DWP, *Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study* (May 2008).

39 [http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000759/SFR38\\_2007\\_Additional\\_Tables.xls](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000759/SFR38_2007_Additional_Tables.xls).

40 Jo Blanden and Stephen Machin, *Recent Changes in Intergenerational Mobility in Britain* (London: Sutton Trust, 2007).

or training – a rise of 22% among 16-18 year-olds, and 16% amongst 19-24 year-olds since 1997.<sup>41</sup> It is hardly surprising that a Sutton Trust study has shown that intergenerational mobility in the UK is substantially lower than in Norway, Sweden, Canada, Denmark and Germany.<sup>42</sup>

## BETTER MEASURES TO UNDERSTAND DEPRIVATION

It is the politics of place that determine educational advantage; and as in Calton Ward in Glasgow, these places are all too easily tucked away, into parts of cities and towns that few will ever choose to venture, to witness for first-hand the stark contrast between the lives of those living there and their own. Ward-based data provides a useful in-depth picture of what is going on, hidden away at this local level. In education, an analysis conducted last year showed that between 1997 and 2006, the percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs of any grade has fallen backwards in 695 wards, including deprived wards such as Avonmouth in Bristol, where in 2007 the percentage of pupils achieving five good GCSEs slipped back from 30.2% in 1997 to 28.3%, and five GCSEs of any grade from 92.7% to 80%. Analysing what has taken place in our cities, between 1997 and 2005 the percentage of pupils gaining five GCSEs of any grade slipped back in 11 wards in Liverpool, 12 wards in Sunderland and 15 wards in Manchester.<sup>43</sup>

But we can dig far further than this to reveal the spots where deprivation bites hardest. Fortunately for policymakers, the recent Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 gives us more detailed figures on locality than ever before, based on the small area geography known as Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs). LSOAs have between 1000 and

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41 Hansard, 9 June 2008, Col. 39WA.

42 Jo Blanden, Paul Gregg and Stephen Machin, *Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America - A Report Supported by the Sutton Trust* (London: CEP, 2005).

43 Chris Skidmore, Nick Cuff, Charlotte Leslie, *Invisible Children* (London: Bow Group, 2007), 4. For most recent ward GCSE data for England, see [http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/inyourarea/statics/wards\\_nat\\_064\\_4.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/inyourarea/statics/wards_nat_064_4.shtml).

3000 people living in them with an average population of 1500 people. In total, there are 32,482 LSOAs, compared with 8500 wards, allowing for a finer-grained analysis of the current state of location-based inequalities in England.

Interestingly, it is possible to compare mobility between LSOAs, by analysing the 2007 indices with the previous 2004 data, categorised into deprivation by decile. These two sets of data reveal that there are significant shifts in mobility taking place across the country: in total, 2,374 of England's 32,482 LSOAs saw a change in rank of more than or equal to a 10% shift in their IMD category (i.e. moved up or down more than 3,248 places). Yet this mobility barely touches those LSOAs in the bottom 10% of the country. Only 17 LSOAs among the most deprived 10% in 2004 experienced an improvement to move them out of the bottom 10% between 2004 and 2007.

But it is in education that an analysis of LSOAs provides a gripping reminder of how unequal the most affluent and deprived neighbourhoods have become. At this level, the poverty of educational attainment is shocking. In 631 LSOAs, 10% or fewer go onto higher education; in 362 LSOAs, that figure is actually 1% or below. In contrast, at the other end of the scale, there are 1401 LSOAs in which 90% or more pupils go onto university. When it comes to staying on post-16, there are 3,084 LSOAs where no pupil stays on beyond 16, and 15,319 where 25% or fewer decide to stay on. In contrast, there are 116 LSOAs where more than 75% of pupils stay on. The majority of the most deprived LSOAs are in our inner-city areas, where they are falling even further behind. In Bristol, for example, 39 LSOAs are in the most deprived 10% nationally for multiple deprivation, compared to 35 for 2004. The lesson that an analysis of LSOAs teaches us is above all place matters, and solving the problems that place brings must be one of the chief concerns of our public services if we are to strive to create a society more equal, with equal access to opportunity.

## ACADEMIES ARE THE FUTURE

In education, academies are already trailblazing a path towards success in some of our most disadvantaged areas. Located primarily in some of the toughest inner-city areas which have previously been stubbornly resistant to educational improvement, they are already generating results beyond expectation. Based on their achievements at 11, an average of 29.5% of academy pupils were expected to pass at least five GCSEs at at least grade C. But 35.5% reached this standard, giving academies a “value-added” score of six percentage points. Compare this to students at 1,090 comprehensives, without specialist status, who achieved results that were worse than expected, given the abilities of the children on entry. Here an average of 49.7% of pupils were predicted to gain five good GCSEs, but only 46.7% did. And there is no greater ambassador for the academies programme than its flagship Mossbourne Academy in Hackney, which despite taking a higher proportion of Free School Meal (FSM) pupils than its predecessor Hackney Downs School, has been rated outstanding by OFSTED in every single area, achieved the third best value-added Key Stage 3 results in the country and is on course to achieve 80% of its pupils gaining five good GCSEs including English and maths.<sup>44</sup>

Conservatives have already committed themselves to expanding the academies programme without limit (unlike the current government who have placed a cap of 400), creating a generation of ‘New Academies’, to be run by independent educational providers and charities, along the same lines as ‘Free Schools’ in Sweden.<sup>45</sup> This will spark an education revolution that will redefine the role the state will play in education, moving ever further towards a commissioning role. On the other hand, Labour’s commitment to greater freedom and independence for schools reached its apogee in Blair’s White Paper,

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.mossbourne.hackney.sch.uk/folders/home/>.

<sup>45</sup> For details, see *Raising the Bar, Closing the Gap* (November 2007) [http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj\\_id=140513](http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=140513).

*Higher Standards, Better Schools For All.*<sup>46</sup> Here, Blair originally stated that academies and specialist schools would be free of Local Authority control, with a wholly new, independent governance structure which comes from the relationship with an external sponsor outside the state control system. These proposals were watered down, to the extent that now Ed Balls has placed Local Authorities at the centre of the academies programme, urging many to act as co-sponsors. And yet, in our most deprived areas and where the politics of the left is equally entrenched, there has been an ideological commitment to undermine the value that academies would bring to raising education standards in the local area. In June 2007, Tower Hamlets local education authority refused an application from Goldman Sachs to establish an academy, together with £4 million worth of funding, despite being the fourth most deprived borough in the country.<sup>47</sup>

In contrast, Conservatives have already pledged extra funding for new academies in the most deprived areas with the introduction of a pupil-premium weighted per capita upon the poorest pupils. This funding should be engineered to take notice of the LSOA level data, and should be formulated by postcode (using MOSAIC) so as to ensure no child is ignored, something which the Lib Dem idea of a weighted premium on FSM pupils (an inaccurate measure) would likely result in. Further dilution of the academies programme has taken place since Gordon Brown came to power, with academy freedoms from the national curriculum being reduced, despite independent evaluation placing emphasis upon its success.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, Conservatives have pledged to restore curriculum freedoms, together with freedoms over building design and staffing that have gradually been eroded by the government. If academies are to succeed where previous schools have failed, if they are to tackle the persistent educational failure that place often bequeaths, then they must be given ever greater freedoms from state control to do so.

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46 DFES, *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All – More Choice for Parents and Pupils* (London: HMSO, 2005).

47 Richard Garner, "Tower Hamlets rejects Goldman Sachs' offer to sponsor academy", *The Independent* (21 June 2007).

48 <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/pdf/ThirdAnnualPWCReport.pdf?version=1>

## BETTER EDUCATION AND BETTER SOCIAL HOUSING GO HAND IN HAND

This focus upon the needs of the most disadvantaged pupils in the most deprived communities across Britain will dramatically and decisively raise the educational opportunities and life chances of those who need it most. But educational reform alone cannot break the cycle of deprivation that many of those living in the poorest communities find themselves. Government must recognise the pervasive link between educational success and place - that education does not end at the school gate. Without a stable community environment and strong neighbourhoods in which a child can grow up in, educational reform will only be half the package of revitalising our most deprived communities.

The link between educational achievement and place is well known; as has been seen, not only do the local streets where you live determine your educational achievement, what kind of home a child lives in affects their chances in life. In particular for policymakers, when discussing the politics of place it is social housing that must be the focus of greatest concern. Studying the 1970 cohort, those men and women growing up in social housing were twice as likely to end up with no qualifications by the age of 30 than those growing up in owner-occupied homes.<sup>49</sup> Since social housing is overwhelmingly concentrated in the most deprived areas, and taken up by those in cases of extreme need, such concentration can have a significant effect upon nearby schools. It has been demonstrated that in 12 LEAs, containing 337 schools, school quality as determined by OFSTED was adversely affected in proportion to the extent of social housing in the surrounding area.<sup>50</sup> In addition to education reform, the nettle of social

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49 Wendy Sigle-Rushton, *Intergenerational and Life-Course Transmission of Social Exclusion in the 1970 British Cohort Study*, CASE Paper 78 (2004), Table 10.

50 Ruth Lupton, 'Social justice and school improvement: Improving the quality of schooling in the poorest neighbourhoods', *British Educational Research Journal* 35 (5) (2005).

housing reform will also need to be grasped if we are to break up the current deep pockets of deprivation that exist and create more mixed and equal communities.

The story of social housing over the past twenty years has been a story of a collapse into dependency, with the creation of ever deeper wells of deprivation in the areas in which large social housing estates have been built. Of those living in social housing in 2004, 82% had also been social housing tenants ten years before.<sup>51</sup> A third of people living in social housing have incomes in the poorest fifth, with 70% being in the poorest two-fifth income bracket. Crucially, the characteristics of inhabitants of social housing have shifted to even greater poverty, as poverty has become concentrated in these areas: in 1981, 47% of social tenants were in employment; this has now fallen to 32%. Full-time employment has fallen from 43% to 22%. The likelihood of someone living in social housing having both their neighbours on either side of them in full time work has fallen from just under 1 in 2 to 1 in 9.

And it is in large 'flatted' estate areas - where two-thirds of social housing is located - where the problem is most severe. 45% of residents in 'flatted' estates have incomes in the poorest fifth. 40% of all unemployment is concentrated in these areas. It is there, that Right to Buy (RTB) policies have failed, with only 12% of flats being sold under RTB, unsurprising since today 60% of social housing tenants live on housing benefits, with the rate far higher in our most deprived areas. The situation is a desperate one, and one which will only continue to deteriorate if multiple forms of deprivation are allowed to cluster and concentrate - it is concerning that of the new entrants to the social rented sector (SRS) in 2003/4, only 26% were in full-time work.<sup>52</sup>

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51 John Hills, *Ends and Means: The future roles of social housing in England* – CASE report 34, (London: CASE, 2007), 52.

52 Duncan MacLennan, *Better futures for social housing in England* (London: JRF, 2006), 19.

Above all, there needs to be a transformation in the way we view social housing. Social housing provision must be a hand up, rather than a hand down. And rather than being seen as a state of existence, with tenants remaining on the same rung of the housing ladder, social housing should be seen as a journey towards home ownership, placing greater independence in the hands of individuals.

The key to achieving this is to generate mobility within the social housing sector itself. Crucial to improving the life chances of individuals living in social housing is to increase turnover in these existing dwellings. By increasing turnover, we will create far more opportunities for regenerating the social housing market than by simply just building new social housing units alone. The Barker review established the need for an extra 17,000 social housing units per year<sup>53</sup>; the problem that we must also face however, is that out of our existing social housing stock of over 4 million units, 93% is over ten years old. There is a clear need to provide a sense of direction towards this existing stock: as the Hills Review observed, 'even if 40,000 units were added each year for the next decade, we would already have nine-tenths of the social rented stock that we have in 2016.'<sup>54</sup> Yet we are ignoring the value of this existing stock. Between 1992 and 1999, the rate of turnover rose markedly, allowing for an extra 100,000 social housing lettings - far in excess of what could be achieved by building new homes at the current rate in the next ten years.

In recent years, however, mobility throughout the social housing market has stagnated. Turnover has shrunk, reducing the number of new lettings by over 125,000 a year, while annual turnover rates in the social rented sector are now below 10%, with only 9% of social renters having a tenure of residence of less than a year, compared to 38% of private renters.<sup>55</sup> This form of social housing mobility is crucial for freeing up supply so that many families can access the housing they

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53 Kate Barker, *Review of Housing Supply: Delivering Stability, Securing our Future Housing Needs* (March 2004).

54 Hills, *Ends and Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing in England*.

55 DCLG *Survey of English Housing Figures: Table 802 Housing Characteristics, length of residence by tenure, 2005-06*.

desperately need. Already the number of people living in temporary accommodation, either in hostels or bedsits, has risen from 44,000 in 1997 to over 100,000 in 2005; nor is this situation 'temporary'- in London, 37% of households in temporary accommodation had spent two or more years there; four times the rate in 2000.<sup>56</sup>

Just as in education, there needs to be a revolution in the supply-side of social housing, in order for the current housing provision to be transformed. Getting families of rising waiting lists will only take place once we have unblocked the stagnation that has set in, and breaking down the cycle of deprivation that has stigmatised social housing.

There are a few efforts from the government to move towards changing the current situation. Choice-based lettings have opened up the sector to greater independence and freedom for tenants, helping to increase mobility within the market. But we need to go further. Moving towards a universal system of Assured Shorthold Tenure across both the private and social rented sector would also open up the market for new providers, creating greater mobility within social housing and reducing the dependency that Secure Tenancies can create. But just as the problem of worklessness lies in the structuring of benefits, the critical problem of social housing will remain while housing benefit remains unreformed. At present, housing benefit costs a staggering £13 billion - outstripping capital subsidy by nearly 7 to 1; just £1.5 billion of this would allow for the annual estimates for extra social homes in the Barker report to be met.<sup>57</sup>

## REFORMING HOUSING BENEFITS

Encouraging people to come off housing benefit should therefore be a priority within the framework of social housing. Yet currently, housing

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<sup>56</sup> DCLG, *Homelessness Statistics*, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Tim Dwelly (ed.) *Rethinking Social Housing* (London: Smith Institute, 2006), 29.

benefit encourages the 'poverty trap' with the withdrawal of benefit as other income rises. This eats away at any additional income received from employment, creating a disincentive to find work. In addition, since housing benefit is paid direct to landlords, this undermines the individual and personal responsibility of tenants to take control of their own lives. We need to move towards a system of individual payments for social housing tenants, much in line with housing benefit within the private sector. Incentives to work while on housing benefit might also be improved by reducing the rate of benefit withdrawal as income rises (the income taper) or increasing the earnings disregards (the amount someone can earn without benefits being reduced); these measures, however, would increase the cost of benefits. One idea worth investigating instead would be to link returning to work for those on housing benefits with the eventual granting of an equity stake in their property linked to hours worked, demonstrating that work does pay, whilst at the same time removing claimants out of the poverty trap and eventually out of social housing.

The success of these reforms must be judged on how many people are able to exit social housing and move into home ownership. To encourage this, the current restrictions that have been placed upon social tenants wishing to purchase their home should be removed. Since Maximum Regional Discounts (MRDs) were introduced into the RTB scheme in 1999, and local MRDs in 2003, the incentive to purchase has been significantly diminished, with RTB sales falling to just 26,555 in 2005/6. The entire system of MRDs needs to be reassessed if we are to strengthen Right To Buy and generate mobility within social housing.

Of course RTB will not benefit every social tenant. Shared home ownership schemes are finding increasingly innovative and flexible solutions to providing opportunities for struggling families and individuals to get onto the housing ladder, with equity shares in property now able to be purchased at 12.5%, with the option of stair-casing upwards and rents linked to equity purchase. Yet the median

income for those living in social housing is £7,800 a year, with 77% of SRS households with total incomes of less than £15,000. Accepting this reality must mean that an alternative solution must be found. This might take the form of granting an equity stake in their property that social tenants might take with them once they move out of social housing, dependent upon provisos such as good behaviour and conduct, using incentivisation to deliver cultural change, something that has been witnessed in the Irwell Valley Housing Association's 'gold service' scheme.<sup>58</sup> Such an equity stake would then allow tenants the chance to participate in schemes currently out of reach.

In our most deprived estates, however, more serious action may need to be taken if they are to be transformed. In recent years, there has been a significant shift towards housing associations as the custodians of social housing. In 1979, for instance, councils owned 15 homes for every one let by an association; today, associations own two homes for every three let by councils. It is clear that the impetus and drive towards enabling individuals to not only meet their social housing needs but also empower themselves into greater home ownership must also come from the associations themselves. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has already argued that housing associations must become more dynamic if they are to meet the needs of local communities. And although many tenants feel that services have improved under stock transfer, the majority of housing association remains within the traditional landlord-tenant relationship.<sup>59</sup>

This is slowly changing. The JRF's SAVE (Selling Alternative Vacancies on Estates) scheme has allowed for the creation of more mixed estates, reducing the levels of deprivation on estates such as New Earswick in York. The proceeds from sales are then used to build new social

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58 ODPM, *Incentives and Beyond? The Transferability of the Irwell Valley Gold Service to Other Landlords* (London: ODPM, 2003).

housing units elsewhere, diversifying without diminishing the social housing stock. Similar schemes have taken place in Sweden, not only rejuvenating social housing, but regenerating the surrounding neighbourhood.

All too often, however, there has been a disconnection between an understanding of housing provision and the concept of neighbourhood, of local provision. If we are to succeed in tackling the massive inequalities that exist upon our estates, and to tackle the politics of place, we need to radically reconsider how social housing is delivered on these estates. Here the wheel turns full circle, for the Conservatives' model of education reform, of returning schools to educational providers and charities, who understand the needs of pupils best, could enlighten how we provide social housing in the future. By either allowing housing associations to diversify, opening up the SRS to new providers, charities and co-ops or seeing a greater role for social entrepreneurship within these areas, areas of deprivation might be transformed. Recently the Joseph Rowntree Foundation conducted an evaluation of the United Estates of Wythenshawe group, which runs a community hall, gym and dance studio in a church refurbished with the help of local people and youngsters. They would like to do more for the local community, yet feel the officials are unwilling to listen to the knowledge and expertise that they have built up within the local community. "It is no good pointing the finger or blaming people when our estates are in such a poor condition," organiser Greg Davis stated. "The government are asking the right questions but they are asking the wrong people. They use consultants for an enormous variety of social issues. The only 'consultants' they haven't talked to are the people who live on our estates ... We have had first hand experience of gang culture either as perpetrators or victims."<sup>60</sup> The JRF report confirmed that "residents' groups in some of the worst affected areas have the knowledge, skills and entrepreneurial

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59 Survey of English Housing, 2005.

60 [http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/s/1016414\\_wythenshawe\\_in\\_gun\\_crime\\_plea](http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/s/1016414_wythenshawe_in_gun_crime_plea).

ability to have a significant impact on these problems. These groups therefore represent a valuable, even central, resource to be harnessed to the fight against street crime.” And yet, perhaps because of different culture or work styles, statutory bodies can be suspicious of such groups, and reluctant to fund them or accept them as partners.”<sup>61</sup>

Only the attitude that ‘the state knows best’ is holding back a radical overhaul of how we deal with the most deprived communities in Britain. Employers and businesses could even be encouraged to invest in local estate areas, acting not only as ‘landlords’ but also increasing employment in the area. To encourage this, enterprise zones could be created around estates, encouraging investment while at the same time offering incentives for businesses and charities to become involved with the local community.

With increased mobility and stronger neighbourhoods, giving more people the chance to lead independent lives, transforming social housing might have as deep an effect as education reform. In the end, the politics of place that increases the social divide and blights communities across the nation is also the politics of place that can help to solve some of the most deeply ingrained problems that the state has failed to tackle.

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61 Jenny Lynn, *Community leadership approaches to tackling street crime* (London: JRF, 2008).

## CHAPTER 5: COMPASSIONATE ECONOMICS – THE NEED FOR A NEW CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL ECONOMY

JESSE NORMAN

### NEEDED: A NEW ECONOMICS<sup>62</sup>

Since 2005 the Conservatives have correctly placed ideas of fraternity and social responsibility at the heart of British political debate. The often-repeated line has been that as Mrs Thatcher repaired our broken economy, so David Cameron's Conservatives must lead the process of repairing our fractured society.

This has not simply been a matter of generating new ideas or policies. At the deepest level, it has required the creation of a new political viewpoint: a rethinking of the basic categories of political debate, so as to be able to approach the whole spectrum of public issues and concerns anew, and in a fresh and intellectually authoritative way.

This process of rethinking is well under way. It has been conducted with great energy and engagement, and many people and institutions have played a part. My own earlier book *Compassionate Conservatism* (written with Janan Ganesh) looked at the historical traditions and philosophical ideas lying behind a British compassionate conservatism.<sup>63</sup> It described the idea of a "connected society", and argued that this required a shift in the basic categories developed in Anglo-American political theory since Hobbes - a reorientation away from a vertical preoccupation with the individual vs. the state, and towards a horizontal concern with society, institutions and human relationships. It then extended these ideas into an outline policy agenda.

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62 This essay has been written in an independent and personal capacity.

63 Jesse Norman and Janan Ganesh, *Compassionate Conservatism: What it is, why we need it* (London: Policy Exchange, 2006). Available free for download from [www.jessenorman.com](http://www.jessenorman.com). Jesse can be contacted through [jesse4hereford@gmail.com](mailto:jesse4hereford@gmail.com).

However, with a few notable exceptions, the centre-right as a whole has had little to say about the foundations of economics. Much excellent work has been done to develop new policy ideas and to build credibility with economic commentators, with the City, with business and above all with the general public. This has played an important role in highlighting the vastly overblown reputation of Gordon Brown as Chancellor, and in winning the balance of public trust for the Conservative party on economic issues for the first time in 15 years. But the basic categories and assumptions of conventional economics have been broadly unquestioned by the centre-right.

Yet the need to reassess our economic assumptions could hardly be greater. We are on the brink of a formal recession. Economic issues are at the top of the political agenda, with inflation set to go through 5%, huge rises in the cost of living, growth at a standstill, unemployment growing and personal debt at an all-time high. And there is also growing public suspicion and resentment at the effects of the global market economy on the lives of individual people, and at the restricted terms in which economic debate is conducted: resentment which can be seen in riots against globalisation, in anger at the spread of "clone-town Britain", in feelings of loss of local national identity and control, and in public concern at the spread of consumerism and a money culture. It seems to many people as though we are in the midst of a culturally unsustainable corporate capitalism, yet one to which there is no alternative.

And there is also a pressing political reason. Economic issues are regarded with some justification as a crucial litmus test for those who aspire to government. This is where fine words must yield to hard decisions, and competing political priorities find their place. Under Gordon Brown we have reached the limits of state control and top-down government. The Conservatives are well advanced on a transformation in policy, based on ideas of social responsibility and fraternity. But as a country, we need something bigger from the centre-right - we need a new political economy.

So where now for Compassionate Conservatism? Must it simply choose between Brown and Thatcher?

## AN UNACKNOWLEDGED CONSENSUS

The answer is No, of course; we can adopt a new and distinct way of thinking about economics. Of this the present essay is a brief sketch. Readers seeking further punishment may wish to consult my new book *Compassionate Economics*, to be published on November 15th, of which more details below.<sup>64</sup>

A new Conservative political economy must start with a critique of what exists. The British government and the British people have become far more knowledgeable about economics since the 1970s, and a very good thing too. But they have grown up with a schoolbook caricature of what economics is, and a caricature of economic man as perfectly rational and self-interested. Keynes's famous dictum that "practical men ... are usually the slaves of some defunct economist" has applied with a vengeance.<sup>65</sup> Except in this case it is not one economist as such but a whole standard economic model that has enslaved them.

The model is that of neoclassical economics, and its assumptions are the unquestioned heart of all mainstream politics in this country. Old Keynesian socialists, New Labour technocrats, Burkeian Tories and free-market ultras may differ on many things. But they almost always share a commitment to neoclassical economics, whether they know it or not.

This has had two disastrous effects. The first is political: it has massively reinforced a thirty-year trend to greater centralisation and micro-management within government. Under Labour large parts of

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64 *Compassionate Economics* by Jesse Norman and Oliver Marc Hartwich will be published by Policy Exchange and the University of Buckingham Press in November 2008.

65 John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936).

Whitehall, and in particular the Treasury, have fallen into a narrow and technocratic view of society. Typically, a particular group of people will be identified as in need of state “intervention”. The group will be specified mathematically and modelled financially in terms of its income or assets. The economic incentives it faces will then be tweaked by the Treasury through the tax and/or benefits systems, or through other public spending or regulatory decisions. Finally, the centre will prescribe both the design of the “delivery” organisation, with its call centres and back offices, and the mechanisms to be followed: procedures, targets, standards to be met, all topped off of course with endless amounts of allegedly optional “guidance”. Again and again the same pattern recurs: in tax credits, in pension credits, in savings policy, in education and healthcare, and throughout the benefits system.

The result has been an extension of the tax and benefits system to include nearly 70% of the adult population of this country; an obsession with setting and monitoring performance targets; endless fiddling with programmes in response to new initiatives or political wheezes; and a gigantic waste of human and financial resources. Within the public sector as a whole, it has helped to create a culture of low innovation and low productivity. It has systematically distorted our national understanding of risk. And it has created a huge semi-public client state of consultants, advisers and quangos.

This dismal economic gospel regards the human world as static, not dynamic: as a world of fixed social engineering, not one of creation, discovery and competition. It is inflicting serious damage on both our economy and our society. Yet it has its advocates. They can defend themselves by pointing at their mathematical models and asking, properly, for flaws in the reasoning. Until critics can explain what has gone wrong here, and why and how economics itself must be re-embedded within the wider social and cultural debate, they will lack the theoretical resources to implement an alternative political vision. This is the first task of Compassionate Economics.



Yet if the received understanding of economics within government is radically incomplete, how much more so is it within society as a whole. We have been brought up and are daily conditioned to think of human beings as “economic agents”: purely self-interested, endlessly calculating costs and benefits, and highly sensitised to marginal gains and losses. And part of the achievement of economists since Adam Smith is to explain to us why this is OK - how individual self-interest can become social well-being.

But a problem arises when this economic image feeds back into society: when it becomes our default picture of human motivation. For we secretly know this picture is wrong; and, paradoxically perhaps, many of our best economists know it is wrong too. We are aware that there are routine aspects of our daily lives, such as volunteering or philanthropy, which it cannot properly explain. We know that there are virtues, such as loyalty and long-term thinking, which seem to run directly counter to it. We fret about the atomisation of society, the commercialisation of human culture and the narrowing of our expectations of others. We over-invest in half-baked prescriptions for happiness. We yearn endlessly for the things money famously cannot buy: love, friendship, joy.

Yet without an alternative picture of what a human being is, we cannot free ourselves from our assumptions. This is the intellectual heart of the matter. Ministers have talked endlessly of personal empowerment, yet they have pushed through legislation which profoundly insults and patronises the ordinary citizen. They have spouted a rhetoric of devolution, to mask a reality of centralisation of power in Downing Street, marginalisation of competing institutions and self-entrenchment by the political class.

It is hardly surprising that trust within society is so low when British government has such a low opinion of the British people. We need a radically new approach, and a far richer conception of humanity in the public mind. This is the second task of Compassionate Economics.

## THE NEOCLASSICAL ILLUSION

These issues are enormous, far too large for a short essay: so let's focus the argument on neoclassical economics itself.

First, a disclaimer. In many ways the embedding of economics into public policy has had a huge positive impact. Indeed it would be impossible to imagine UK political discussion today without it. Compared to 30 years ago, there has been a transformation in the understanding of economics within government. Moreover, it is important to distinguish what is happening at the frontiers of economics from the standard understanding of economics that exists within government and the civil service. The standard model is a caricature, but an influential one. It is this that is the target here.

This essay is not, then, an argument against economics as such. But the standard model has many weaknesses. Much of its actual real-world value is illusory. Some of its consequences are positively dangerous. And its hold on the public mind is bunk. Economic theories are not religious monoliths but tools of explanation, prediction and policy. Neoclassical economics is not the only game in town. There are other theories, and other ways we should be thinking about people and their behaviour, yet to be considered.

As a formal theory, neoclassical economics makes three key assumptions. The first is that people have perfectly rational preferences among different outcomes: this means, for example, that if they prefer A to B and B to C, then they prefer A to C. The second is that individuals maximise their utility, or gain, or benefit; and firms maximise their profits. And the third is that they act independently of each other, on the basis of perfect information.

These assumptions, like those in the natural sciences, are idealised generalisations. They do not purport to describe what people are



actually like, only to be useful simplifications. The idea is that people's differences balance themselves out in the aggregate, so that the theory looks to generate rich explanations and predictive power by treating people as if they were perfectly rational utility-maximisers operating under perfect information.

Now you often hear people say about this picture, with a knowing smile: "Ah yes, but it's completely flawed, because no-one is really like that." It does appear that our default picture of human motivation is increasingly just that of greedy, selfish Homo Economicus. But this is no part of neoclassical economics as such. That is not a theory about how individual people actually are, only about how they behave overall. By analogy: for centuries after Newton, physics made the assumption that gravitational force was always exercised from a point at the centre of given body. It may or may not have been true, but it made for some stunningly accurate predictions.

Indeed arguably the greatest claim of the neoclassical theory lies at the level not of the individual or the market, but at that of an economy as a whole. For economists have been able to show in a formal, mathematical way that a market economy in competitive equilibrium is maximally efficient. Moreover, such an economy maximises the utility or benefit of the people in it, in the important sense that no-one can be made better off without someone else being made worse off. Adam Smith's invisible hand thus creates not merely the greatest aggregate efficiency, but the greatest overall utility.

This, then, is the neoclassical picture: the standard textbook model with which today's politicians and civil servants have largely grown up. It has been filled out over time with detail, and with specific tools such as discounted cash flow analysis and cost-benefit analysis. It has become our conventional economics. As a formal theory it is a work of great beauty and genius.

But it is deeply flawed. And one point in particular is worth noting. The standard model implies that any derogation from perfect competition in a market economy creates inefficiency and makes some people worse off. So socialism must fail. But so too must rational debate about different varieties of capitalism. For on this account there can only be one, hyper-libertarian, variety of capitalism.

In other words, just at the point when we need an intelligent debate about how the UK and other modern market economies should develop, the received understanding of our most basic economic theory seems to make that debate impossible. This is a crucial reason why discussion of these issues has been so muted in recent years.

## SOURCES OF DISQUIET

In fact, however, the core theory itself is nothing like as robust as its proponents like to believe. Indeed, it can even be seen as a discipline in crisis, for at its very core there are a number of major unsolved problems which call the whole edifice into question. Many academic research projects exist within economics to identify and address these problems.

These issues lie outside the present discussion. But take the analysis of markets, for instance. According to the standard model, markets produce efficient results - but only if they fulfil certain formal criteria. There must be myriads of buyers and sellers, whose identity is unknown, each of whom is omniscient about market information and each too small to have an influence on the market price. What is traded on the market must be homogeneous. The market supposedly reacts instantly to any change in supply and demand, so that there are no processes that take place over time. In an economy, there is deemed to be a complete set of perfectly competitive markets, for all goods, everywhere and always.

In other words, these markets have no people in them, and they occupy no time and no place. Moreover, for the same reason, there are no human accretions in this picture: no institutions, no practices, no rules or traditions, no moral or ethical standards, no emotion, no human relations, no altruism or fellow-feeling, no philanthropy, no rule of law, no history, no culture.

All this is far removed from modern market economies, of course, and the key assumptions of neoclassical economics are rarely even closely approximated. Indeed, the effect of this formalisation is to exclude from the theory roughly all of the things that give human life its point and meaning. A world without culture is a world without music and art. A world without moral standards is a world without personal obligation, regimental loyalty or human character. A world without institutions is a world without families, clubs and reunions. A world without emotion is a world without love or friendship or trust.

It is also a million miles away from Adam Smith. For Adam Smith, capitalism was not a form of desiccated economic atomism. It took place within a rich local cultural context which embraced individual moral standards, a person's own energy, flair and imagination, unstated background assumptions as to honesty and fair dealing, and a shared understanding of market conventions, institutions and traditions. In short, the Edinburgh of the 1770s.

Indeed, we can go further. Part of the beauty of market economies today is that they do NOT obey the assumptions of neoclassical economics, and yet in many ways they still function remarkably well. Thus, consumers do not need perfect information about goods traded in the market. On the contrary, they may know virtually nothing about them. But they can still rely on markets and the division of labour to meet their demand at a given price. Mrs Bloggs may not have tea plants or the steady sunshine of Darjeeling at her disposal. She may think tea is an oil by-product made by human slaves on the planet

Venus. But if she has the right cash she can buy a pack of PG Tips whenever she chooses.

Not only that: as many academic economists recognise, there is good reason to think markets actually require imperfect information in order to work properly. For if markets always contained perfect information, no-one would have an incentive to find out more. Similarly, if all technological insights were immediately available to others, no inventor would have an incentive to innovate, and innovation would cease. This is a major flaw in the neoclassical theory, because it strikes at the heart of a basic assumption about information. But its value does not cease there. For it also draws attention to the static, arrested nature of the theory as a whole. It suggests that there are no such things as equilibria in economics, as in nature; that everything is on the hop and in flux; and that markets in particular are dynamic, liquid movements that cannot be properly understood in static terms.

But all is not lost. There are other tools in the toolbox, other ideas we can look towards. In particular, imperfect information opens the door to new ideas. If markets not only can but must operate on imperfect information, as a large technical literature suggests, then we have no reason to think that the neoclassical model is perfectly efficient. But if that is true, then we have no reason to prefer only a hyper-libertarian economy. The way is clear for a more nuanced debate within politics as to what varieties of capitalism there are, and which of them we wish to move towards.

## COMPASSIONATE ECONOMICS

So what, then, is Compassionate Economics? Recall that compassionate conservatism stresses intermediate institutions and horizontal human ties, the conversation of many equal voices over the command of one voice, the wisdom of crowds over the fallibility of

individual control. Its compassion is one of fellow-feeling, not of pity; one of identification, concern and sympathy with others, not one of condescension to them.

Compassionate Economics reflects and extends these deeper commitments. In the first place, because it rejects any monopoly of ideas - it has no truck with the present monopoly of neoclassical economics within British government. It opens the doors to new ideas both within the discipline and outside, and it places a great responsibility on those in government to become wiser as to the limits of their thinking. We have seen some recent interest in behavioural economics, through discussion of *Nudge* and its brand of "libertarian paternalism".<sup>66</sup> It is now time to consolidate and extend this, and also to move on to other areas such as institutional economics and economic history - and in particular the "Austrian" economics of Menger, von Mises and Hayek.

Secondly, Compassionate Economics does not privilege economics as such, but recognises it as one language, one partial and limited way of representing the world, among many. It understands that often the greatest power of a mathematical model is rhetorical: as a means to recruit others to a predetermined view. It rejects the increasingly accepted hierarchy in which economics trumps politics - as though the ability to point to a detailed cost-benefit analysis or statistical regression automatically exhausts political debate. It detests jargon and unwarranted deference. It is sceptical of consultants and advisers who enjoy many of the privileges of power without its responsibilities. It prefers open debate, plain words and common sense.

Thirdly, Compassionate Economics is generous in its view of people. It sees people not merely as economic agents but as human beings: as fizzing bundles of possibility and potential. It rejects the idea of

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66 Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 4.

economics itself as a purely sterile and formal discipline. It seeks to break the loop in which government treats people like cattle and so reinforces social demoralisation - and is then surprised when people opt out or object. It is naturally predisposed to human freedom.

But all general ideas must be put to the test of policy. What, if anything, changes as a result of Compassionate Economics? In the words of the late J. L. Austin, roughly everything. Let me illustrate with two examples: one current and general, and one new and specific.

### Secondary Schools

The first example concerns secondary education, in which present government policy systematically insults the abilities of teachers, staff and students alike.

The national curriculum has expanded to fill the entire teaching time of most state schools. It specifies, on a lesson-by-lesson basis across a whole range of subjects, what the teacher is to teach, week-on-week, month-on-month over the year. There is little flexibility or scope for initiative in the classroom, and an endless testing regime that distorts teaching priorities and pedestrianises the classroom experience. Little account is taken of the difference between good and bad teachers - it is virtually impossible to remove a bad teacher from their position. Such is the preoccupation with academic outcomes that other activities are relegated to the sidelines. Meanwhile the head is endlessly bombarded with paperwork from the Department of Children, Schools and Families and "guidance" from ancillary quangos setting out new central priorities and initiatives. Running through the whole system is an ideology of government in which education is seen as a matter of skills provision for industry, and schools regarded simply as buildings.

Little wonder, then, that those involved are so preoccupied with levels of funding, as though funding differentials were all that

separated good schools from bad. Little wonder that so many good school heads only succeed by bucking the system, or that so many teachers suffer from poor morale. Little wonder that outcomes remain stubbornly low in so many schools - and worst of all, that so many pupils become disaffected with learning as such.

This dire state of affairs is the result of many hands. But it has been profoundly influenced by what I have termed the standard model. Every effort is made to control people from the centre. Vital but intangible values such as those of teaching morale, pride and public service are underplayed in favour of incentives designed to tweak behaviour. Trust is driven out of the system.

Compassionate Economics changes all this. It would see education not merely as skills training or as necessary to meet national manpower needs, but as a way into life in all its diversity: as a matter of learning to be human. This implies a different notion of what a school is: not a collection of buildings but an institution, and not standardized but each different in its own way. It implies a belief that a comprehensive education should not simply be about open access and needs-blind admission, but should be comprehensive in its sense of human possibility. It implies a drastic scaling-back of the national curriculum, and public encouragement for outside activities such as sports, art, drama, public speaking and, above all, music, which allow young people to stretch themselves in different directions. And it seeks to enable the creation of new schools - be they publicly or privately funded, and in corporate, trust or co-operative form.

The same sense of human possibility applies to its treatment of teachers and heads. It would drastically reduce paperwork and "guidance". It would give heads far more flexibility and freedom of action, so as to set school spending priorities in consultation with teachers and parents. Its emphasis would be on relative value added across many dimensions, so that schools which stretch and develop

young people even from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are recognised. It would end the present obsession with public examinations. But it would retain enough periodic exams to track progress, however imperfectly, and it would allow new exam alternatives to emerge that are deliberately and publicly tougher than at present.

This approach is a very demanding one. It is demanding on those who work in schools, a minority of whom now may well be happy within the current system of command and control, and will therefore be nervous about new freedoms and new responsibility. It is demanding on government, which must alienate a significant amount of power according to a clear multi-year plan, and then resist pressure from lobby groups or tabloid headlines to force it to meddle anew. It is demanding on pupils, since the inevitable result of this approach will be that they are encouraged to aspire and to achieve more. And it is demanding on the public, since it requires of them a degree of patience and tolerance during a process of change. But we cannot expect to improve our schools, or our society, without it.

But notice that all that has really changed is a viewpoint. No policy as such has been adopted. Nothing has been said about the “Swedish model”, about pupil premiums, about supply side reform. The new viewpoint has implications for all of these policy ideas, of course. But the point is that a huge amount of positive reform can be achieved on the basis of common sense and a new perspective, before making more ideological commitments.

### **Sovereign Wealth**

But Compassionate Economics is not just about allowing existing institutions to work better; it is also about creating specific new institutions. That is why the next Conservative Government should look hard at setting up a sovereign wealth fund.

Recall that in neoclassical economics income and wealth are treated as equivalent. A stream of annual payments can be discounted back to a given lump sum amount, and the standard theory implies that we should be indifferent between the two. But applied to policy, this idea embodies a crucial and highly convenient fallacy. For it can be true - and it is often in fact true - both that the stream of payments and the lump sum are mathematically equivalent, and that they are radically different in their political and policy implications. A government oriented to national wealth will seek to protect and enhance its capital, and invest it in capital assets. An expenditure-oriented government will feel freer to use its capital for current spending. It will also feel freer to take on capital obligations today in the belief that these are simply streams of future expenditure for others to wrestle with.

Governments like to spend without taxing, and they like to promise capital sums without the unpleasant necessity of having to pay for them immediately. Over the past 30 years they have regularly felt free to do both. Under the Thatcher government, the proceeds of North Sea oil and of privatisation were largely incorporated into current spending. The same has happened under Blair and Brown, and to these proceeds have memorably been added much of the country's gold reserves and the £22 billion-plus receipts from the auction of 3G mobile telephone licences in 2001.

On the other side of the public balance sheet, since 1997 there has been a huge build-up in public capital liabilities, notably for public pensions and PFI debt. It is not clear that the capital markets have noticed this, or are adequately penalising British public finances for this extra risk. But our young people have: it is surely no coincidence that there has also been a significant loss of interest in party politics among young people, who increasingly believe that the baby boomers have hijacked the Exchequer.

The Norwegians, however, have taken a different approach to their wealth. In 1997 they established the Government Pension Fund-Global, as a continuation of the Government Petroleum Fund set up in 1990. The initial capitalisation was Nkr 48 billion. In every year since then the national accounts have shown a capital surplus, of which between 60% and 99% has been transferred to the fund. The fund has also grown through its own active and diversified financial management.

As a result, the Norwegians now have a sovereign wealth fund with a value of Nkr 2.02 trillion, roughly equivalent to £200 billion today. It is controlled by the Norwegian Ministry of Finance, run by the national bank in four offices worldwide through independent money managers, and it is formally accountable to the Norwegian parliament. Its accounts are a model of jargon-free public explanation and transparency.

The fund has three functions. First, it manages the public oil and gas revenues of the country as a capital resource for the benefit of future generations. Secondly, it manages the national bank's foreign exchange reserves. Thirdly, it manages a petroleum insurance fund, as a reserve to cover losses and liability arising from Norway's investments in oil and gas.

Norway is thus a huge worldwide investor. Unlike some purely financial investors it takes its ownership rights extremely seriously, following guidelines mandated by the Norwegian parliament. As a result, it increasingly holds companies in which it is invested directly and hence accountable for their actions, and it publicly lists and will not invest in those that do not measure up.<sup>67</sup>

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67 Such companies currently include Raytheon, Thales and Lockheed Martin (cluster munitions), Serco (involvement in nuclear weapons), Wal-Mart (breaches of human rights) and Freeport McMoRan (environmental damage). The US firm Kerr-McGee has been listed but subsequently readmitted.

The Norwegian approach has much to recommend it. It is successful, long-term, transparent, ethical and democratic. It gives Norway huge clout in the global capital markets, which it can and does use to encourage best practice. And it gives the Norwegian people a clear understanding of their national wealth and of the endowment that this generation will pass on to its successors, and so on. Nor does the fund fetter the hands of parliament. Parliament can change the formal purposes of the fund, or even dissolve it. The Ministry of Finance can transfer as much capital surplus as it chooses, when it chooses. The government can ultimately spend the capital assets just as it wishes, or has been democratically mandated to.

So the real issue here is not economic but political and moral. It is a matter of what constraints government should be under to account for its actions. Current spending of capital receipts is a free ride for politicians, in which they can costlessly mortgage the prospects of the next generation to satisfy the present one. It should not be. One function of a UK sovereign wealth fund would be to build proper transparency and debate into a crucial aspect of UK economic policy.

A sovereign wealth fund of this kind does not fetter government. But it makes it more accountable. A finance minister who wishes to sell the country's gold reserves cannot simply act alone, but must (quickly and discreetly) make the argument and be judged publicly on the consequences. A prime minister who wishes to contract new public sector pension liabilities must explain how these stack up against the assets held in the fund, whether or not these have been pledged to public pensions. After a huge windfall such as that from 3G mobile licence sales, there will be immediate pressure to add the new funds to the national asset fund.

Over the years we have learned to be nervous about political interference in monetary policy. We have learned the value of new institutions such as the Lottery, which manage resources semi-

independently of government. So also with national capital. And there is always the economic benefit to be considered. The accountants PwC have estimated that if the UK had invested its North Sea oil receipts in a sovereign wealth fund, the fund would now be worth £450 billion.<sup>68</sup> That is the same as total UK tax revenues for 2007-8. Add in the £70 billion or so of UK privatisation proceeds, plus 3G mobile receipts and accumulated interest, and you would have well over £600 billion. Even outside the fund, the British economy would be stronger, since it would not have been artificially sustained by this enormous 30 year unearned capital flow.

We have net debt at present, so setting up a sovereign wealth fund might seem premature, even at current oil prices. It should not. The value of such a fund lies not merely in the pool of wealth which it creates, but in the institution, and in the example of disciplined and accountable economic management, which it establishes.

And it would show the power of Compassionate Economics in action. By challenging the present neoclassical consensus in our public administration, Compassionate Economics clears the way for new ideas, new energy and new creativity. Government is constrained and held properly accountable. New institutions and new voices are made possible. The people are empowered, they know more, and they prosper.

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68 Larry Elliott, "UK missed chance to build up £450bn sovereign wealth fund", *The Guardian* (27 February 2008).

## CHAPTER 6: LABOUR'S FAILURE TO PROTECT WOMEN AND THE RESPONSE OF CONSERVATIVE FEMINISM

LOUISE BAGSHAWE

There can be no doubt as to which is the most progressive party on women's issues in Britain today. As with every other policy area, Conservatism is counter-intuitive; it is Conservative means that deliver liberal ends. Tougher rules on rights for workers in this country led, for example, to almost full employment post-Thatcher as manufacturers like Nissan relocated to take advantage of Britain's flexible working rules. Union-driven, statist countries like Germany, with their commercially punitive rights for workers, were languishing in double-digit unemployment. So which was the more compassionate policy: the ostensibly harsher settlement, opposed by the unions, or the more generous one that put men and women out of work?

The centre-left has enjoyed extraordinary success in persuading the media to accept, almost by default, that they are the part of the body politic that most cares about the weak, the helpless and the dispossessed. It is not true, and never has been true. In today's Britain, the parties that like to claim for themselves the titles of feminist, that prate the most about equal rights for women, are those that deliver the least for them.

In the case of the Liberal Democrats, it appears to be simply a failure of imagination and good-will. The LibDems share several areas of conviction with our Party. They applaud individual liberty and have joined with us in opposing the authoritarian statism of Labour's ID cards scheme, they share environmental concerns with us, and so forth. On the key understanding of David Cameron, that women voters deserve to see political parties that include them at the highest level, however, the LibDems have failed miserably. They have no programmes – at least no significant programmes – to encourage constituencies to select women and the leadership of the Party

remains an old boys' network. The Liberal Democrats, however, cannot concern us that much. Whatever their tepidity towards women and their issues, the LibDems are not yet a party of government. They are never in charge, and as such they are never accountable.

## LABOUR'S RECORD

The party that is accountable, the party that is responsible for the sheer, brutal misery of so many women in Britain today – citizens and immigrants – is the Labour Party. They are in government; the proverbial buck stops with them. Edmund Burke reportedly said “It is only necessary for the good man to do nothing for evil to triumph”. I certainly do not impute a hatred of women to Labour Party politicians. They entered politics, we assume, as progressives, determined to fight on behalf of the little guy. But somewhere along the road they got side-tracked. Ideology was permitted to stand and overshadow vulnerability. As a result, during the time that a party of the centre-left has been in power - a feminist party as it likes to think of itself, the party of compulsory all-women shortlists - the rights and standards of women have sunk into a pitiable mire. And whilst I do not wish to be too condemnatory, in that I recognize that there was no overt wish to harm some of society's most vulnerable members, nevertheless it is impossible to examine the question and let Labour off the hook. Good people they may be, but in power they have done nothing; sometimes worse than nothing, they have relaxed existing rules; and evil has triumphed.

It is a measure of the casual sexism of the media, the shoulder-shrugging at the suffering of women, that these issues go unremarked, barely reported upon. We go about our daily business and there is barely a shiver of outrage. But because of Labour's deeply culpable, wretched inaction, in Britain today domestic abusers are more likely to get away with it altogether or to be released early from prison; rape victims are blamed for their behaviour and their compensation cut

without reinstatement; rape convictions are at a risible low; young, frightened, desperate British girls are forced into sham marriages by their families and made to endure months and years of rape; and some of the poorest women of Eastern Europe are trafficked to this country, suffer violent beatings, and are made to participate, each and every day, in their gang rapes and sexual assaults.

There is not enough anger. There is not enough rage. The Conservative Party stands for social responsibility. We must assist women who are the victims of sexual torture. The shoulder-shrugging of the Labour Party simply will not do.

I want briefly to examine Labour's record in a number of areas on violence against women and what our Party ought to be doing in countering it. As always with this Labour Government, whenever one looks at a policy area there are multiple indices of failure; of necessity one must cherry pick. When it comes to their record on women, I wish to look at the severest offences of the government; increasing the threat to women of rape and domestic violence by lowering deterrent sentences on offenders; allowing young British girls to be sold into sexual slavery by refusing to act on forced marriage; and permitting the ongoing kidnap, imprisonment and daily gang rape of some of the poorest women of Eastern Europe and elsewhere by the shameless failure to act on human trafficking or to assist the victims of it.

## THE CONSERVATIVE RESPONSE

The Conservative Party's forward thinking response to the plight of women in these and other situations can be found in the important policy document, "Women in the world today", produced by Theresa May MP and the Conservative Women's Policy group. I recommend it to anybody with a serious interest in women's issues, feminist or not, and it has a much wider scope than the terms of this brief essay, covering the equal pay gap, body image, flexible working,

homelessness and women in international development amongst other areas. It's joined-up thinking with some bold moves that show up the poverty of Labour's top-down approach.

But even this important piece of policy work, I feel, understates the problem this government has caused. If there is no anger, there will be no change. If there is no recognition of the suffering of women, our Party will not be charged up with enough righteous rage to drive through bureaucracy and fix things. Take, for example, the section on human trafficking. It is a pithy diagnosis of the extent of the horror and Labour's refusal to act on it, but the language we are using as a party is insufficient. The report states "research...shows that in 2004, between 5,000 and 8,000 women were working in prostitution of this kind." It is not work, of course, nor is it prostitution. The terminology "working in prostitution" feeds a public myth that women are trafficked and become hookers. There is nothing voluntary about it; the women are forced to participate in fear of their lives. Often they do not keep even a percentage of the money. They are not working as prostitutes. They are undergoing gang rape, each and every day.

Similar euphemisms are employed in the case of forced marriage. Where a British girl refuses a forced marriage, she is all too likely to become the victim of an honour killing. Those that submit, through fear and without granting their consent, are then raped by their nominal husbands. Nor is that rape a one-time affair. For the young and terrified bride in a strange household, at risk for violence from both her husband's family and her own, the rapes continue every night he is forced on her. Using the term "marriage" makes the situation appear regrettable, distasteful; it is far more than that; it is a nightmare of sexual violation that will continue as long as she is trapped with her abuser.

Seen through the correct prism of multiple rape, it is easier to have a true empathy with the victims of forced marriage and human trafficking. Let us examine Labour's scandalously anaemic response to

both phenomena: the European Council convention on Action Against Trafficking has not been ratified by Labour; there are no separate interviews at the border for women travelling alone with an adult who is not a spouse or guardian; prosecutions for trafficking were down 40% last year; and policing has trafficking as only an ad-hoc or temporary phenomenon. To the very strong list of responses promoted by the Women's Policy Group paper, which include measures such as making Poppy Project accommodation and support available to 16-18 year olds who have been trafficked into prostitution and prosecuting employers who profit from women's sexual slavery (convictions to date under Labour: zero), I would add a further suggestion: legislate, or issue guidelines, such that those men who traffic these women receive a sentence commensurate with their true crime. If a man dragged a British woman off the streets and locked her in cellar, beat her, threatened to kill her, then forced her to undergo rape by himself and twelve of his friends every day for four years, you might hope he would receive an appropriate sentence. Under Labour, penalties for human trafficking are less than those for rape – but the former is an ongoing agony of endless and multiple rapes. Sentences last year for human trafficking ranged from a mere ten years to a completely inadequate ten months. That is an outrage. It is revolting. If a man, or men, traffic a woman to Britain and force her to endure multiple rape they ought to be jailed for life.

Forced marriage and rape may be an even worse indictment of this Labour Government than their record on trafficking. It beats me how a self-proclaimed feminist like Harriet Harman, Labour's deputy leader (but not, naturally, deputy PM), can remain a part of the government that has so shut its eyes and ears to the desperate suffering of young British girls. Labour's drive to multiculturalism has led it to accept things that are part of no mainstream culture or faith. There are more than three hundred official, reported cases of forced marriage each year in Britain – and most involve schoolgirls. That's right – British schoolgirls are being subjected to abduction, imprisonment and

ongoing rape. If we accept the simple euphemism of forced marriage we minimize fatally what they are going through. Labour has only recently allowed the age for spousal entry into Britain to be raised to 21. It refuses to compel local authorities to place posters in schools warning against forced marriage and educating potential victims as to their rights. Labour did nothing when over 250 British girls of South Asian ethnic origin disappeared from schools in Bradford. For ten years Labour has washed their hands of girls in forced marriages. Meanwhile, Labour puts the anti-women practice of polygamous marriage onto the rules books, admitting second and third wives from polygamous countries into Britain even when a “divorce” is clearly bogus. For the sake of pandering to a small and unrepresentative sample of what they consider to be multiculturalism, the Labour Government simply spits on the rights and dignity of women. If I sound angry, I am. The Conservative response must be more than robust. We have already shamed Jacqui Smith into raising the age limit for foreign spousal visa entrants; now we must institute a policy of educating girls in vulnerable communities, in their schools, as to their rights to say “no”. We must bring in properly deterrent punishments for parents, teachers, in-laws and “husbands” who abuse women in this way. The law must be tightened. This scourge is amenable to Home Office control and the sole question is do we have the will to stop it?

Lastly let us consider domestic violence. Many headlines were made a month or so ago by Ms. Harman’s proposal to allow provocation to contribute to a manslaughter defence, etc.<sup>69</sup> This was the worst sort of shameless political posturing. Instead of allowing women to live free of fear these policies would work to legitimize murder. Sentences for rape in this country are shamelessly low. They have fallen on average for the last three years. We hear about the judge who “reluctantly” sentenced the rapist of a 10 year old girl who “seemed older” to two years having his sentence appealed – and increased to four years, four

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69 BBC, “Changes in Murder Law Announced”, 29 July 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7528652.stm>

years for sex with a ten year old girl – but we do not hear about the common or garden minimization of sentences for rape and domestic violence. In my view this was the only disappointing section of “Women in the World Today”. It is welcome that it is Conservative policy to review sentences for rape and domestic violence. But we must be bold and state to both the media and judicial establishments what rape does to women; it is a crime of extensive consequences, psychological and physical. Sentences for rape and its cousin domestic violence, the affects of which are compellingly detailed in the report, must be commensurate with the crime. That will require a major cultural shift. We must state that they will increase very sharply. The Conservative Party has to take up this challenge. Violence against women, rape, forced marital rape, gang rape in trafficking – all of these are problems we must do our best to eliminate. And to do that we cannot pussyfoot around. We must be prepared to challenge cultures and take on elites in defence of the weakest.

I write this at a time when John McCain – and I am a McCain Tory – has nominated Sarah Palin as his Vice-President; Senator Clinton’s campaign for the White House received eighteen million votes; women candidates and MPs are being promoted in the Conservative Party, under David Cameron’s leadership, as never in its history. But as the advance of women in the political class continues, failure to help our sisters trapped in violence and fear, homeless, beaten, young or otherwise vulnerable, will be held against us. The Conservative Party has led the way after a decade of Labour failure. But we have to go further.

## CHAPTER 7: “BREAKING BRITAIN” – HOW TO ADDRESS THE CAUSES OF KNIFE AND GUN CRIME

PHILIPPA STROUD

I live in London and I have three teenage children who travel on the tubes and the buses. Every day I have to make a choice to let them go out into this great city whilst being bombarded by photos and newsreel telling me that I must be mad to do so. Everywhere I go I talk with other parents who are deeply concerned about the nature of our society and why we are producing a generation that is so ill at ease with itself. Gordon Brown tells us that Britain is not broken and yet teenagers are arming themselves and killing one another in unprecedented numbers. 27 in London alone last year and half way through this year we are already on 22 - and that doesn't even touch on the number of non-fatal stabbings.

As a mother who listens to other parents, I know they are worried and they hope their politicians and police will find solutions quickly. As a parliamentary candidate, I want to offer them that hope - hope that we can mend this social breakdown. But I can see in their eyes that this could just be another set of promises from another set of politicians. In a sense they are right to feel like that, they have had too many promises - they want the work, not the words.

As part of the Centre for Social Justice, I know from our detailed investigations into gang culture, alcohol and drug abuse and family breakdown, that to solve this will require the determination to understand the root causes, the vision to implement long-term policies and the courage to see this through to the end.

People are longing for a government with such determination and courage.

## SO WHAT IS THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUTH AND GANG CRIME IN BRITAIN TODAY?

The majority of young people in this country are responsible community members: they make positive contributions, work hard and succeed in becoming fully participating citizens of the future. But for some, and alarmingly this is an increasing number, this is not the case - for just how many though is a constant source of debate. A conservative estimate puts the figure at about 20 000 young people,<sup>70</sup> but when you ask young people themselves, 6% of 10-19 year olds say that they are involved in gang activity.<sup>71</sup>

If what we do not know concerns us then what we do know should concern us all the more and motivate us to action:

### Muggings

- Four in every 10 muggings in Britain are committed by children under 16 years old.<sup>72</sup>

### Knives

- The most likely person to be carrying a knife is a boy aged between 14 and 19;<sup>73</sup>
- Child knife victims are up by 62% in just 3 years.<sup>74</sup>

### Guns

- Manchester police stated that young people who get involved with gun crime should not expect to live beyond 24;<sup>75</sup>

70 T. Bennett and K. Holloway, 'Gang membership, Drugs and Crime in the UK', *British Journal of Criminology* 44, no.3 (2004), 312-313.

71 Home Office, *Delinquent youth groups and offending behaviour: findings from the 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey*, by C. Sharp, J. Aldridge and J. Medina (London: HMSO, 2006).

72 H. Sergeant, 'Gangs, alas, are offering what boys need', *The Times*, August 19, 2007.

73 Ibid.

74 Daniel Martin, 'Child knife victims are up by 62 per cent in just three years,' *Daily Mail*, June 28, 2008, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1030082>.

75 BBC News, 'Gun Gang members die by 24', July 19, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/manchester/3907049.stm>.

- In 2002, nearly half of all gang murders committed with firearms involved victims under the age of 18.<sup>76</sup>

## Punishment

- Every year an estimated 70 000 school-aged offenders enter the youth justice system;<sup>77</sup>
- An estimated 11% of all prisoners involved in serious assaults are children; this is despite accounting for just 3% of the general prison population.<sup>78</sup>

The stats facing parents and young people in Britain today do not make easy reading, but when you talk to the young people themselves it makes even harder listening. My son has a friend who goes to a large comprehensive school in Lewisham. At the age of 15 he told me how a friend he plays basketball with was in hospital following a stabbing. He said how many of his friends carried knives now – not because they wanted to attack anybody but because they are frightened and they feel the streets are out of control. This is a good kid who is looking for answers, looking for politicians to take a lead, looking for safety to be restored to our streets.

## HOW DID WE GET TO THIS PLACE?

In order for us to be able to address the problem we have to understand where it has come from and how we got here. We cannot understand the problem simply by listening to celebrity sound bites, or by reading sensationalist news. Instead, we must really listen to those who have the insight, expertise and experience to illuminate the drivers of this tragic

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76 Tony Thompson, "Gang membership spirals among under-16's," *The Guardian*, September 8, 2002, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2002/sep/08/youthjustice.crime>.

77 Department for Education and Skills, *Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment* (London: HMSO, 2005).

78 Howard League for Penal reform, "News Release: Imprisoned children trapped in 'hotbeds of violence'," October 15, 2007, [http://www.howardleague.org/fileadmin/howard\\_league/user/pdf/press\\_2007/Child\\_violence\\_in\\_prisons\\_15\\_October\\_2007.pdf](http://www.howardleague.org/fileadmin/howard_league/user/pdf/press_2007/Child_violence_in_prisons_15_October_2007.pdf).

development: a combination of academic experts who have tracked our social challenges, those who have lived in the communities that are now subject to gang warfare and those who are involved in gangs themselves.

Evidence taken by the Centre for Social Justice points to the emergence of gangs that are now semi-organised, violent, criminal and born out of acute deprivation. The gap between rich and poor is increasing and there are more people living in severe poverty today than a decade ago.<sup>79</sup> In our report, *Breakthrough Britain*, we identified the drivers of poverty as being family breakdown, failed education, addiction, debt and generational worklessness.<sup>80</sup> When you get close to the gang culture on our streets the same drivers are at work. Put simply, knife and gun crime are the products of social breakdown.

Before I came into politics I started and ran a number of projects that cared for those in need – a nightshelter, two hostels, a rehabilitation house for addicts and a half-way house helping people back into the community. The people that we cared for were typical of those who create the problems on our streets. They were the ones with the ASBOs, those who cause chaos in our town centres and the ones in A&E from self harm or drug overdose. They were some of the ones who were in the gangs that blight our inner city communities.

I can remember the first time that I ever spoke at the Conservative Party Conference. I had just become a member of the Conservative Party and I was still running a project in Birmingham. I was speaking in the debate “Party of the Vulnerable”. Before leaving for conference I sat down with each resident and asked them what they would like to say. I asked them:

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79 Mike Brewer et al., *Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2008* (London: Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2008).

80 Social Justice Policy Group, *Breakdown Britain: Interim report on the state of the nation* (London: Social Justice Policy Group, 2006).

"If there could have been one change that would have meant that you would not have needed a place like this, what would it have been?"

Their responses speak for many of those involved in gangs and who are picking up weapons across the UK:

"It all began when a father walked out",

"My life of being abused began when a step father walked in"

"I don't know who my father is – my mother says that it would have been one of 6 men but she can only remember the names of 3 of them".

We ask the question why crime and why anti social behaviour? I suggest that much of the answer lies in those responses.

Society will always have a criminal element – those for whom it does not matter what you do, they will decide to be aggressive and violent. But the level that we experience now, and that is spilling over into every community and every school, is being driven by something else. If you stop for long enough and actually listen to those who are kicking the cans, joining the gangs and shooting up, they will speak to you of broken families, of childhood abuse and of a longing to belong.

### Family breakdown

- more than half the babies born to British mothers this year will have been born out of marriage;
- Nearly one in 2 cohabiting parents split up before their child's 5th birthday, compared to 1 in 12 married parents;

- ¾ of family breakdown affecting young children now involves unmarried parents;
- If you have experienced family breakdown you are 75% more likely to fail at school, 70% more likely to be a drug addict and 50% more likely to have alcohol problems.

For decades, governments have languished under the belief that there is nothing that can be done about social trends – and even worse that it would be wrong to try and do anything anyway. The best that one could do is to stand on the side line and comment on the changing patterns or manage the breakdown in a way that minimised harm.

Meanwhile, a generation has emerged that, according to Unicef, is the unhappiest of all nations surveyed.<sup>81</sup> Britain's young people are the unhappiest in the West. Not only do they drink the most, smoke more and have more sex than their peers, they rate their health as the poorest, dislike school more and are among the least satisfied with life. Small surprise that social breakdown in Britain is virtually unparalleled:

- 70% of young offenders come from lone-parent families;
- 60% of the prison population come from broken homes;
- One-third of prisoners and more than half of young offenders have been through the care system (even though only 0.6% of children are in care at any one point in time);
- The UK has the highest teenage birth rate in Europe;

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81 UNICEF, *Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries, Innocenti Report Card 7* (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2007).

82 Alexandra Frean, "30,000 pupils leave school at 16 and have nothing to show for it," *The Times*, February 8, 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/education/article3330563.ece>.

- 30,000 children leave school each year with no GCSEs;<sup>82</sup>
- 73% of young offenders describe their educational attainment as nil;
- Approximately 1.5 million children in the UK are affected by parental alcohol problems, and 250-350 000 are living with parents who are misusing drugs.

We ask why our children are failing at school and we pump more money into the education system that is failing them.

We ask why our children are joining gangs and we incentivise lone parenthood through the benefits system.

We ask why our children are arming themselves and we toughen our enforcement response.

Yet a young boy living with his single mum having never experienced a positive male role model learns his masculinity from the local gang leader. The child whose parents are drug-addicted is focusing on where her next meal is coming from, not completing her homework. And the teenager growing up in the gang-infested inner city only feels safe enough to walk to the end of his street if he has a knife. Our government's response is not addressing the drivers, it is aggravating them.

### Reversal is possible

At the Centre for Social Justice, we are utterly convinced that reversal of social breakdown is possible. We are convinced that our levels of family breakdown can be reversed, our educational standards improved, that we do not have to accept that addicts can only be kept

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83 Evening Standard, *The Standard's Beat Knife Crime charter*, May 30, 2008, <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23488573-details/The+Standard's+Beat+Knife+Crime+charter/article.do>.

safe – they can be rehabilitated - and we know that having a job is the best protection against a bullet.

It is not rocket science to reverse the breakdown in our communities, but it does require political will and courage.

Some argue that a harder and harder crack down is required and that the police need more and more powers to lock a greater number of young people up. For example, the Evening *Standard's* Beat Knife Crime Charter recommends:<sup>83</sup>

- More targeted, high-profile searches backed up by more police with scanners on the streets, on public transport and inside and outside schools, with targeted patrols on routes to and from schools
- Training children in “peer-to-peer mentoring” and using citizenship and personal, social and health education to teach the simple message: respect cannot be won at the point of a knife
- Prosecuting everybody found with a knife, or using it, to the full extent of the law: no more police cautions and no more second chances
- Using the toughest possible sentences on knife criminals: end the slap on the wrist culture which lets offenders walk free
- Making prison work with compulsory therapy for young prisoners, in which they come face-to-face with the consequences of their crimes by meeting victims and the doctors who treated them.

The problem with these solutions is that they are short-term. You cannot just “arrest” yourself out of the problem. We can go on building prisons and psychiatric wings but at some point we have to intervene in the journey that takes people to the prison gates.

At the Centre for Social Justice we have had our Youth and Gangs Working Group travelling worldwide to find effective intervention models. What I want to propose is a combination of my own experience of caring for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the work of academic experts who have tracked our social challenges, of those who have lived in the communities that are now subject to gang warfare and those who are involved in gangs themselves.

## THE RESPONSE

The most critical need in the response to youth and gang crime is leadership. Who will take responsibility for bringing down the escalating number of gang murders? When you ask this question you don't see many stepping up to the plate. If no-one will put their name to the task, then the inertia that we are currently facing will remain. For action to be taken, someone has to step forward and say, "This one is mine. My career rises or falls on it, and I am prepared to do the long-term work to achieve it." I hear many politicians trying to set themselves manageable and measurable tasks that have manageable and measurable outcomes, but I do not hear many politicians saying, "This is the challenge of today so, irrespective of its enormity, this is the challenge that I will be responsible for." If we are to be the party of government, we have to be the party that accepts leadership for the real tasks and leads.

So what would that leadership look like? There needs to be a 2-fold response to the challenge coming from our streets. There is a serious law and order challenge but there is also a serious social challenge.

## LAW AND ORDER CHALLENGE

At its most intense, gang membership consists of 1-3% of the population of our most disadvantaged communities. With some serious work under some determined leadership, it would not be difficult to know where the gang activity is coming from. Just because

there is a murder on Oxford Street, it does not mean that we have a serious gang problem in the West End. The basic premise is that you cannot tackle what you do not know or understand. We have become a nation that collects and gathers statistics but what are we doing with what we collect and what is it telling us?

The first piece of work that is required is some basic raw intelligence. What is driving the gang activity and what is fuelling the fights and the youth violence on our streets? This would map gang activity, youth stabbings and youth crime.

Having done the work we can then deploy police activity accordingly. The message from the police needs to be firm – we are here, and we know about your turf warfare, we know what is driving it and we know who is causing it and we are not moving until it stops. Every legal tool at the disposition of the police should be used to restore law and order.

The goal of this targeted strategy is for a very real and clear message to be sent that the streets are being reclaimed for law-abiding purposes and that illegal behaviour will not be tolerated.

## SOCIAL CHALLENGE

However, if this were the only tool used we would only see a temporary downturn in gang-related deaths. What is needed, in conjunction with this reclaiming of the streets, is intense voluntary sector activity. Disadvantage and poverty is the seedbed of youth and gang crime. If we are serious about tackling these dynamics we have to be serious about providing long-term exit strategies to those who believe they have no future. A friend of mine is a teacher of 7 year-olds in a London primary school. Each member of her class already knows which gang they are headed for. Why? Because their elder brothers and sisters are already in them and these are their role models. As the police restore the right boundaries, the voluntary sector needs to be

mobilised to provide all the exit strategies required for these young people. Where education has failed to provide a sense of hope and vision, there exist organisations such as Tomorrows People or Motorvations who can harness young talent that has been squandered. At the CSJ Awards ceremony we invited a young girl to perform a piece she had written about the murder of her brother who was a gang member. There was not a single person listening who was unmoved by her performance. This girl with obvious talent had gone through the British education system and had concluded that she had nothing to contribute. Organisations like XLP, who work with gang members, and Tomorrows People, who provide the hard-to-employ with mentoring for work, are committed to "Making Life Work".

Gang activity and crime are also formed in the crucible of broken families and addiction. This is not just a British problem. I used to work in Hong Kong with ex-triad members. These were seriously tough Chinese gang members who had been paid for their criminal activity in drugs and had become addicts – useless now to the triad gangs they came from. I worked with about 300 of them and cannot recall ever meeting one who had been raised in a family by two parents. The most effective organisation in Hong Kong was based in the Walled City (where most of the illegal activity was stemming from) and, whilst providing a drug rehabilitation programme for the addicts, acted more as a new community and by extension a new family for these addicts. It was this new family that they craved. Every part of their lives needed rebuilding. This story is repeated the world over and mirrors the needs of young gang members on the streets of our UK cities. What we so often offer in this country is a 3-month rehab or a weekly meeting on a Monday at 10am. If any of us had seen half of what these kids had experienced we would need an awful lot more. There are organisations in the UK that have understood this. From Camila Batmanghelidj's work at Kids Company that provides a sanctuary and never turns a young person away, to Save the Family in Flintshire that provides reparenting and support to whole families residentially, it is the voluntary sector that is turning lives around.



So why was leadership our starting point? Because we need to harness into one clear response:

- The ground work to find out what is driving this challenge to our streets
- A clear message through targeted police action that things have gone far enough and that we are now reclaiming our streets
- A developed exit and reversal strategy pioneered by our voluntary sector, bringing together the best army of social entrepreneurs to be in the right place at the right time for the sake of the next generation.

Without the voluntary sector working on the ground personally knowing the gang members and providing effective life changing exit strategies for those who want out, none of this can happen. Without the police being able to demonstrate utter determination and commitment to the fundamental need for a prevention and intervention strategy as well as suppression, none of this could happen.

If this teaches us anything it is that it requires everyone to work together. We are thrashing around looking for a strategy when actually we should be providing leadership where we are prepared to put our reputation on the line and say, "I will be accountable for delivering this". What the parents of my son's friends want is this leadership. They know it is not as simple as locking up everyone who carries a knife. They know all young people need a hope and a future and that many do not have that, and they know that long-term success lies in tackling the roots of social breakdown. We know this too. The challenge now for us is to actually implement the strategies contained in our policy documents. To take them down off the shelf and turn them into a reality that can transform lives and cities. That is the privilege of government and that is why we came into politics.

## CHAPTER 8: THE STREETS OF LONDON: FINDING THE BALANCE

ANGIE BRAY

It may not be a truth universally acknowledged but it should be: good traffic management requires that we resist political ideology and cleave tightly to pragmatic common sense. The key to achieving harmony between the many differing ways we travel around London is to identify and maintain a proper balance between all the various modes of travel. That is the trick that has to be mastered. Where space is necessarily restricted, as it is in any town or city, it is essential to develop every opportunity for travel in a proportionate way. So far so straightforward, and yet it is extraordinary how frequently those in charge of twiddling the knobs that manage our traffic systems get influenced this way and that by various interest groups so that they invariably lose sight of the magic balancing act. A further seemingly obvious point that is far too often overlooked is that very few people can be accurately pigeonholed as a driver, a cyclist or a bus passenger. The vast majority of people depend on a variety of transport modes to get around. Monday's tube user will be Tuesday's pedestrian and Thursday's cyclist will be Saturday's driver. Most of us use some, if not all, of these transport modes at different times which makes it all the more imperative that those in charge of keeping London moving refrain from picking political favourites and try instead to ensure that a reasonable balance is maintained.

### CARS ARE ALSO PART OF THE MIX

In developing transport policies to achieve a workable balance, I believe we must end the fashionable hostility to the car, prevalent amongst urban planners, and be realistic about the choices people want to make.<sup>84</sup> However this does not mean that, as too many

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<sup>84</sup> I am excluding London Underground from these deliberations as it is currently bound into complex long-term contracts which take it out of normal decision-making.

planners in the 1960s and 70s decreed, the car should dominate. It is easy to find towns and cities up and down the country where planning has treated the car as king and where the end results have been communities sliced in half by massive roads. Pleasant places in which to wander about and enjoy the ambiance they are not. Conversely, to tip the system too far against the car creates another set of problems. For example, when London's former Mayor, Ken Livingstone, decided to lengthen pedestrian-crossing times, he yanked the delicate balance too far and simply piled on the waiting time for vehicles at the red lights, especially along roads with several sets of lights within a short distance. The aim of this particular new policy was supposed to be a better experience for pedestrians. But the unintended consequence was gridlocked traffic in central London with buses and taxis as well as private cars caught up in the jams and, of course, an increase in pollution with vehicles stuck, their engines idling. The balance had been lost, but I have high hopes for a better understanding under the new Boris Johnson regime.

London needs its traffic to move smoothly and freely just as much as its pedestrians need to be able to walk easily and safely. And nowhere is the issue of balance better demonstrated than in the heart of central London - Trafalgar Square. There, the pedestrianisation of much of the square has largely been a success and has made a visit there a great deal more enjoyable. However this planning gain was brought in alongside a totally unnecessary re-phasing of the traffic lights which manage the traffic flow in the more limited part of the square where traffic still passes through. Some of the lights are currently on red for over eight times longer than they are on green, forcing huge queues to stack up just beyond the square itself. The consequent traffic jams in the area could easily have been avoided if the agenda of those in charge had not been so ideologically determined to disadvantage those passing through on four wheels.

## BUSES: A FAIRER DEAL

Then there is the endless debate about buses and bus lanes. I am a keen bus passenger – although I will be keener still when Boris rolls out his new Routemasters – and I think that one of Mayor Livingstone’s genuine achievements was to revive the bus as a basically reliable mode of transport for Londoners, albeit at a price. When Ken Livingstone became Mayor, London’s buses were unsubsidised. Eight years later their subsidy amounts to over £600 million per annum as Transport for London (TfL) chucked money at the bus operator companies to meet bigger and bigger targets for putting more and more buses on the roads per day.<sup>85</sup> The trouble is, as anyone who passes through central London during the middle of the day will know; too often there are scores of buses, one behind the other, sitting in traffic with minimal numbers of passengers on board. And for TfL to have defended this by saying that the overall figures show an average of 15 passengers per bus daily is hardly reassuring. There must be a better method of getting the bus companies to provide the right number of buses at peak times when greater numbers are needed and an adequate but lower number in the quieter periods - a better-balanced provision. Possibly the contracts could be changed when they come up for renewal to reward operators for the number of passengers carried rather than just per bus put on the road.

As for the issue of restricted bus lanes, this takes us straight back to my theme of balance as it goes to the heart of the case for balancing traffic needs on limited road space. I readily agree that we need to tilt the balance on the roads in favour of public transport carrying large numbers of passengers to and from their places of work during peak hours - they are making an important contribution to the economy. So we rightly dedicate special road

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85 Department for Transport, *Local Bus Service Support – Options for Reform: Consultation Paper* (London: HMSO, 2008), 7.

space to allow them to get through the peak hour traffic more easily. But do we need to extend this to the rest of the day and night too? Given the limited road space in London, surely bus lanes should be opened up to the rest of London's vehicles outside peak hours to improve traffic flow. Additionally, there is a need for uniformity as nothing justifies applying different operating hours to so many bus lanes except to entrap unwary motorists into paying large fines. I appreciate that some bus lanes operate on roads run by local authorities, rather than TfL, and traditionally, therefore, it is the local authority which decides on the hours of operation allotted to its local bus lanes. But at the very least TfL could take a lead on the major roads it manages. My guess is that a move to introduce uniform hours for bus lanes would prove very popular and it would be a great deal easier for drivers to understand the system. It might also allay the suspicion that the aim of this complexity is to boost revenue from penalty fares.

## UNRESOLVED CONGESTION

Talking of penalties leads me neatly on to that most thorny of transport issues in London, the Congestion Charge. For his supporters, this was Ken Livingstone's finest moment, although almost every piece of polling done on this subject shows Londoners fairly evenly divided on those who like (or at least tolerate) it and those who would like it to be scrapped. It was striking that 62% of Londoners later voted against extending the scheme westwards, not that Mr. Livingstone took any notice.<sup>86</sup> I make no apology for the fact that I have always been an opponent of the Livingstone system. I have never believed that it achieved its purported aim of raising considerable revenue and cutting congestion – but it has inflicted real damage on many small businesses. Before it was introduced, TfL made sweeping claims about the amount of revenue it would

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<sup>86</sup> Transport for London, *Report to the Mayor* (London: TfL, 2005), 46.

raise for reinvestment in public transport, but it has never come close to matching those predictions and will never repay the capital costs incurred in setting it up. It is also a clunky, labour-intensive system which requires a large staff to check each and every piece of photographic evidence before a penalty can be levied – which is why so much of the revenue from the charge has to be ploughed back into the operating company. If Mr. Livingstone had been prepared to wait just a few years longer, he could have spent the money on a much more efficient system, capable of operating a far more flexible and sophisticated scheme, costing much less to run, which is called Tag and Beacon. TfL has been testing it for several years now. But the current system's greatest failing is that it has not achieved the cut in congestion or travel time across London that Londoners were originally promised. The CBI, which originally supported the scheme in the belief that it would speed up traffic sufficiently to allow companies to make an extra delivery to customers per day, later produced figures to show that this had failed to occur. Even TfL's own figures show that congestion is now worse than before the Congestion Charge was introduced. This, TfL claimed, was because of the huge increase in building work in central London - true to an extent. But of course the biggest reason for the renewed increase in congestion has been TfL's own management of the roads. Increasing dedicated bus lanes, cycle lanes and keeping traffic lights on red for longer comes at a cost: less road space leads to traffic jams. Tackling congestion is not simply about cutting the numbers of cars, it is about managing the limited road space. Even with fewer cars, if there is also less available road space, then the congestion problem arises all over again. The plain fact of the matter is that the so called Congestion Charge no longer meets its objectives and it has been said by some cynics that it is really a charge for the same old congestion that we used to get for free. It is now up to the new regime to make some crucial changes in the way it runs London's roads, starting with the much needed re-phasing of traffic lights.



If we are to continue to try to limit unnecessary car journeys in central London during peak hours with a congestion charge scheme, we need a much more flexible system which charges drivers during peak hours but then allows much easier access outside those hours. This would help to support those businesses which have been damaged by a system which deters their customers from coming in – and many have been badly hit. Again at least some balance would be restored.

Improving London's traffic flow would be a significant and practical contribution towards tackling air and noise pollution. I am amazed that, with the honourable exception of some local residents and taxi drivers, there has been so little criticism of the polluting effects of Ken Livingstone's traffic jams, created by his own stubborn policymaking. Keeping all traffic moving should always be a top priority. His policy of extending the Congestion Charge scheme westwards has simply encouraged more vehicles from within the Western Extension to travel into central London, thereby creating more congestion. Thankfully, this may now be reversed by a Mayor who has promised to abide by the upcoming consultation rather than gleefully ignoring it like his predecessor.

Encouraging the purchase of smaller, greener cars must also be part of the way forward. I see this as a job for government at the national level where I believe a positive approach of lowering taxes on buying them and running them is the right way forward. I prefer enabling to punitive governance. But where a London mayoral regime can help is in what sort of public transport vehicles it invests. Many Londoners look forward to cleaner, quieter buses – and the phasing out of bendy-buses which block so many road junctions. Vehicle emissions, however horrible they are, still make up only a small percentage of the overall pollution in London but getting public bodies as well as private citizens to buy greener can certainly help at the margins. Stopping the further expansion of Heathrow Airport will be important too but that is another matter.

## ON YOUR BIKE

One mode of transport, which is forcing a huge change in transport planning through sheer force of numbers, is cycling – and our bicycling mayor, Boris Johnson, can truly claim to be leading Londoners through personal example. It is hard to determine whether the increase in cyclists is down to the Green agenda or (more likely) due to enlightened self-interest as people realise that cycling is very often quicker and cheaper than the alternatives. Either way, cycling, along with walking, is obviously the greenest way of getting around London which has to be good for all of us whether we cycle or not. I welcome the new mayoral interest in introducing a cycle hire scheme based on the Parisian Velib model. Provided the bikes used are designed to be visually unappealing to would-be thieves, this is a great example of good positive urban-thinking. I think there is more too, that can be done to open up cycle lanes across some of our parks. Hyde Park ought to be a perfect short cut through parts of central London for cyclists – safer too than the roads round the edge. I appreciate the concerns of other park-users but surely the introduction of one or two designated cycle paths across large green spaces should keep cyclists off pedestrian paths? In return for increasing cycling opportunities, cyclists should be required to show greater respect for others not on bikes. Pavement riding, ignoring red traffic lights and a general hostility to everyone who challenges them is inexcusable. There is a balance of interests to be considered again.

## THE THAMES: LONDON'S FORGOTTEN HIGHWAY

My final thought on improving transport opportunities and weight of traffic for Londoners – and maybe the final piece of the jigsaw puzzle so to speak – is using the river. Virtually every Victorian print of the River Thames flowing through London shows a river full of boats going in every direction; some of them carrying goods, others full of passengers. Why have we neglected arguably London's greatest asset?

In a report I produced for the London Assembly Transport Committee on increasing river passenger services, I described the Thames as London's forgotten highway. It travels West/East right through the heart of London. The bridges can take us North or South but boats can take us in every direction. The usual answer to this question is that others have tried and failed because almost everyone prefers to use the roads or the underground and anyway there is no money to subsidise the services. But I think this argument has grown stale. While it is true that in the past the problem for river service operators has been a lack of demand outside peak hour travelling, nowadays the river is seeing more and more river-side developments which need servicing throughout the day and the evenings. And many of these developments are bereft of decent public transport services meaning far too many residents are left with no choice but to depend on their cars. The river could be the solution. There is more mixed development shaping up along the river; O2 is an obvious example and at some stage Battersea Power Station will be another. O2 is already starting to use river services because it makes good business sense.

Other businessmen, like Lord Sterling, are beginning to look at the river afresh for its business potential. London boroughs that sit alongside the river should be talking to all their potential river-side developers about putting money into river services as part of the negotiated payment they make to the community when they want to build there (Section 106 money). This was what happened in Greenwich where Berkeley Homes agreed to subsidize a river passenger service from Woolwich to Canary Wharf as part of the deal they negotiated when Berkeley Homes sought planning permission to develop the Woolwich Arsenal. So successful has the river service proved, that Berkeley Homes agreed to continue to support the service for a further three years until it has grown sufficiently to go it alone. And this is the point: river services do undoubtedly require upfront funding to get started – preparing (or sometimes building) the piers and maintaining them and buying the boats. But as passenger numbers grow, so the funding requirement falls.

Unlike buses and trains which require continual maintenance of roads and the tracks, the river is already provided. So persuading developers to put Section 106 money into river services when they are building along the river banks makes good sense in so many ways: the river services get the initial funding they need and the residents get convenient public transport and are less dependent on their cars.

One of the problems in building demand for river passenger services is that there is so little promotion of the few services that already exist. But it is equally true that many who do discover a boat service which suits their needs often become very loyal customers. (After the 7/7 bombings in London there was a large increase in the number of people who took to the river as a safer option and many have stayed there).

There is also much that TfL could do to help if it could just shift its mindset, which continues to think that only buses and tube trains really matter. For a start, the single biggest thing that would help would be better signage and promotion, including on the famous tube maps. A close second would be the Oysterization of river transport, which would help to bring the river more closely into the TfL family. TfL could also be far more proactive in working with those who own and manage the piers along the river to ensure they are all in good working order to an agreed acceptable level. What about setting up a central pier fund, paid into by everyone running a pier, which could be used to help where needed?

I will end with a few quick thoughts on getting the river going again: first we have the Olympics coming up and nobody is a greater enthusiast for the river than Lord Coe. He wants river usage to be one of the legacies of the games and in this I am in total agreement with him. What better way to ferry visitors, officials and VIPs to some of the games than via the Thames? There must be sponsors looking for a way of investing in the games and at the same time getting some publicity – what better way than a fleet of boats carrying the sponsor's logo? Secondly, the massive development of the Thames Gateway is already



creating headaches about how the community which eventually settles there will be able to travel into other parts of London. It is an area which is distinctly lacking in good transport connections. But it does have the river. I would have thought that a proper river passenger service, which could carry passengers to and from the Thames Gateway into central London, would be an ideal solution to at least part of the problem of providing a transport service for the community. Finally, this should not be just about London east of Tower Bridge. There are many commuters in West London near the river who would doubtless find a river journey to the City quicker and more comfortable by boat. In the past it has been repeatedly claimed that river boats cannot go west of Hammersmith Bridge because of the tides and the problem of high tides and low bridges. In fact boats are already being designed that could easily cope with strong tides and slip neatly under the bridges at high tide.

While the rest of our public transport struggles to cope with increasing passenger numbers, it seems extraordinary that so little attention is paid to this great asset, which was once heaving with river transport. While there are limits on what the river could deliver because of the restrictions on passenger numbers, river transport is still capable of making a real difference. Surely anything that eases the pressure must be worth proper consideration?

London needs a balanced transport system and I am hopeful that the Boris regime will provide just that because Boris is, above all, a pragmatist rather than an ideologue. A balanced transport policy is about creating the best possible conditions of travel for everyone in whatever way they choose to travel. Mostly, people will increasingly be persuaded to use public transport – and perhaps to walk a little more often. Cycling is the big growing trend and some people will continue to use their cars when they have to – and sometimes there really is no alternative to using the car. A well-run London transport policy will provide something for all of us however we want to travel – and best of all, we might even get there a little faster.

## CHAPTER 9: RURAL BRITAIN – A FORGOTTEN COUNTRY?

### WILFRED EMMANUEL-JONES

#### INTRODUCTION

*There is a land not so far away about which very little is known. The little that is known is based on romantic ideals of a bygone age. Many people believe that this land is inhabited by strange folk with strange customs and strange practices. These people have become a forgotten people, misunderstood and missing out on the riches of their more powerful neighbours. It is a beautiful land regularly visited by its rich neighbours. It is a land that offers peace, tranquillity and a refreshing tonic to its visitors. Most visitors love this land for the hospitality that it offers, as long as they are not expected to get involved in the politics of the place. The daily lives of its people must not concern visitors and while it is kept that way, people are prepared to visit in their millions.*

*For decades now the people of this land have been struggling to get a better share of their neighbours' wealth, quality of life and opportunities. This land is dependent on the riches of its neighbours for their survival and their neighbours make them pay for every penny that they get. Even though the people of this land pay millions of pounds in taxes to their rich neighbours, what they get back in return is negligible. Support from their neighbours is given grudgingly.*

*Over the last ten years the political powers that be have viewed the plight of these people as very low down on their list of priorities. The people of this land have been forced to change some of their customs and practices because it upset the sensibilities of their neighbours' citizens. They don't have the efficient infrastructure that is enjoyed by their neighbours. Even though the people of this land work hard toiling the land their neighbours show no loyalty in buying from them. Those who do manage to trade often find that the price their*

*neighbour is prepared to pay for their goods is an insult to fairness and human decency. Year on year they watch their young leave their land for the riches of their neighbours, leaving this land with an ageing population. Youth is the lifeblood of any land, and here they are leaving in their droves for the bright lights of their neighbours' towns and cities. This land is being starved of young people, opportunity, employment and hope.*

*What is it going to take for these people to get justice and equality from their neighbours? What is the question on the lips of many of these forgotten people? In the past, people of this land were prepared to grin and bear it and accept their fate of being irrelevant. Yet over the past three years attitudes have begun to harden and these people have started to take direct action, campaigning for their needs and concerns to be heard - but what good has it done? Marches to their neighbour's capital, which has had record breaking numbers turning out to give their support, has only resulted in the whole episode being treated as a pantomime ridiculed and chastised. It has acted only as an opportunity for the rich neighbours to see these strange folk up close in unfamiliar terrain.*

*In the past these people, led by the elder wise men, preached the course of reason. All that was needed was to explain the issues and problems that their people were suffering and their neighbours would come to their aid.*

*The influence of these wise men over their struggling people is beginning to wane and new voices are rising up and advocating a new way. A new approach to get their needs met. No more being grateful for pitiful handouts. A new thinking is evolving and some say it is a thinking that could be akin to revolution.*

*The land I am describing we all know very well and to our disgrace it is right on our doorstep. This land is rural Britain.*

*This is the land that I love and it is painful for me to see it suffering. This is not the land where I was born, but a land of my choosing, which puts me in a unique position to look at what we need to do in the long-term to make this land more equal to our neighbours. It is probably worth saying at this point that I am not advocating war between our neighbours, but I do think we need to have a dramatically different approach in order that the plight of rural Britain is heard. Our voices will never be heard if we don't galvanise the voices of urban Britain to help fight our cause.*

## LESSONS LEARNED

In the struggle to get the issues concerning rural Britain heard, I think we can now look back and see that the way that we went about getting support did not do our cause any good. It fed into the stereotypical views that many urban folk have of rural dwellers, the view that they are behind the times and partake in some barbaric practices. Choosing the fox hunting bill as a vehicle to explain the injustices that rural Britain was suffering was, in hindsight, a mistake. The majority of urban Britain sees fox hunting as barbaric and they had no sympathy with a people who would hunt in this way. I say this as someone who would like to see the ban repealed, but there is more to rural living than fox hunting.

The rural elders have for decades failed to grasp the idea that, for the urbanites to have any interest in what life is really like for rural Britons, we have to be able to show that we understand the daily struggles that urban living involves. Living in urban Britain is a daily endurance test. Negotiating traffic, dealing with crime, trying to find a good school for their children, dealing with anti-social behaviour, trying to find a sense of community - the list is endless. Many urbanites look at rural dwellers and envy their way of life. Trying to explain our ills falls on deaf ears and more often than not it is put down as the whining of an ungrateful people. Complaining about our woes somehow does not ring true for city dwellers when they compare our lives with theirs.



Those of us who love living in rural Britain understand only too well how we are governed by the seasons; our very existence depends on us being in harmony with them. Politically we have had a long winter in the rural community and it is time for us to look forward to the spring. To get to that point we need to stop moaning about the cold of winter and start looking forward to the freshness of spring.

It is time for us to sow a new crop of ideas, we need to be courageous and entrepreneurial, abandon some of the old regimes and start afresh. I would like to put the argument forward that the long-term survival of rural Britain will demand that we take some radical steps and here are just a few of my ideas.

## DECOMMISSION THE ARCHERS

Some 57 years ago the BBC Radio 4 programme, *The Archers*, was launched as a vehicle to provide farmers with information. As a radio programme it has become very successful and is listened to by millions every day. This radio drama is the only programme that is supposed to give the listener a flavour of rural living, but one has to ask whether its very existence is part of the problem by offering the public a stereotypical view of rural living? The story lines will not inspire respect among city dwellers for the rural way of life, nor does it demonstrate how important rural Britain is to the rest of the country. I can hardly see a young entrepreneur moved to relocate to the country to make their fortune. Instead, it is enough to make people want to stay clear of it.

## POLITICAL INTEREST IN RURAL AFFAIRS

The present government has, in the last ten years, shown no real interest in rural Britain. In fact, they could be accused of showing disdain for the people who live there. Many say this goes back to the days of the old class war between landowners and the working classes.

This government behaves as though it is their job to punish those landowners for the position they once held. Another argument would be to put the present the Labour government's inertia down to the fact there are 'no votes to be won, so why take an interest in their plight'. This cynicism has meant that government ministers have had little knowledge of rural affairs and the department is not one of the high profile portfolios. Heading up the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is often viewed as a demotion or a sideways move. To demonstrate that rural Britain matters, I would like to see Parliament being less London-centric in the way it operates and to invite the countryside in. What better signal of importance than to have the Prime Minister flanked by the Chancellor and the Agriculture minister?

## DEFRA

Anyone who has any dealings with this department will have experienced that it is a massive organisation that is sluggish, ineffective and a drain on the taxpayer. I often question whether it is fit for purpose. The department is too big, it has too many responsibilities over too many disparate areas and not enough people who work there live and breathe rural Britain. There is too much analysis and not enough action. An urgent review is needed. In my mind, the department should be broken up and made into smaller, manageable departments. A separate Ministry of Food should be created.

## POST OFFICE

The recent Post Office closures seemed like another attack on rural Britain, for while it may have made commercial sense to close city and large town Post Offices, this is not necessarily the case for rural villages. The post office is more often than not the hub of a village; the very heartbeat of the community for hundreds of people who rely on their services to make their lives easier and to stay in touch. However, in this



modern age it is not enough for post offices to remain simply for nostalgic and sentimental reasons. We need to take a long and hard look at how many post offices could be brought into the twenty first century by offering better services.

The answer I feel is staring us in the face. Go back to the roots of the organisation. It came about because of a revolution in communication – telegrams and letters made these places vital.

We are now living through another communication revolution and once again the Post Office could, if this present government were prepared to think outside the box, become a vital hub in people's lives. I would propose that post offices become digital internet centres.

Many people in the countryside are constantly living with the nightmare of their telephone or internet connections going down, which has a detrimental effect on their lives. It also makes running a business very challenging. Having a post office with modern technological facilities where they could go to continue their daily business would make things much more bearable.

## SUPERMARKETS

It would be very difficult to argue that supermarkets are not an invention that is very beneficial to urban living. A veritable one-stop shop with everything under one roof that helps the beleaguered city dweller make everyday living that little bit easier. For many market towns, however, the supermarket has precipitated their demise. Once thriving towns with a variety of shops have now found that they cannot compete with the buying power of the supermarkets and have been forced into closure. Up and down the country you do not have to travel far to see the destruction that supermarkets have caused. Once vibrant towns with proud histories and heritage are dying a slow death by having the character sucked out of them.

I am not suggesting for a moment that supermarkets should be banished, after all I am dependent on them to make my living - my own products can be found on their shelves. I am suggesting that the supermarkets have to play a more active role in helping to revitalise town centres and help independent producers get their goods to the consumer.

I would, however, like to see stricter planning laws when it comes to supermarkets. Planning permission should only be granted to supermarkets if they could offer the following things:

- 1 A regular half-hourly bus service to and from the town centres to incentivise customers to use the services.
- 2 Paid parking at the supermarket with the money raised going back to rejuvenate the local town centres. (It is hard enough for the small retailer to compete with the supermarkets, but this is coupled with the struggle for shoppers to find parking in town centres and then having to pay for it - it is little wonder that these retailers don't stand a chance).
- 3 A commitment to take 30% of their products from local and regional suppliers in the areas surrounding their stores.
- 4 A commitment to once-a-month hire out a third of their car park space to local farmers' markets. In this age of 24/7, supermarkets have taken ownership of convenience, and they should share some of that convenience around.
- 5 Finally, supermarkets should be granted an annual licence, which can be taken away from them if they fail to meet any of the above. I think there needs to be a mechanism to punish the supermarkets if they do not fulfil their local and regional responsibility. Suppliers to the retailers will tell you that they drive

a hard bargain and they are very tough to deal with. Suppliers are constantly kept in a perilous position having to operate without contracts or security of their long-term future trading. It is about time that the supermarkets experienced the same kind of pressure under which they expect their suppliers to operate and we should be giving local people more power to force the supermarkets to fulfil their local and regional responsibility.

## FOOD

Food labelling rules should be tightened up to give consumers a more informed choice. If a food product is labelled British purely on the basis that the product is compiled in the UK, but the ingredients are from other countries, this is not providing sufficient information. 'British' should mean all of the ingredients are sourced in Britain. I am a great advocate of buying British and buying local.

Food service rules need a dramatic overhaul. This is an area of food legislation that has been neglected for decades and we are now in a position where most of the food eaten outside of the home in food service establishments does not provide adequate, if any, information on its provenance. All menus - be that at a restaurant, road services, café, school or hospital or city establishment - should have details of where the food is sourced.

## FRESH BLOOD

As part of the school curriculum, every child living in the cities must visit and spend some time in rural Britain. It is a travesty that we have young children growing up in city schools who have no idea where the food they eat comes from.

The rural community desperately needs new blood. Attracting entrepreneurs and young people to the rural community will have a

very positive effect but, most importantly, it will help to bring rural and urban communities closer together, so that we go some way towards healing our divided Britain.

The land-based colleges and universities have traditionally been lazy, only recruiting students from rural schools and families. There need to be strong financial incentives for them to attract urban students into the rural professions, as well as monitoring from where students are recruited. Equally, land-based students should spend time in urban centres as part of their curriculum so they can experience at first hand what the urban consumer is looking for from its farmers.

Young people should be offered tax breaks if they will commit to working in the rural community for five years, and a rural investment fund set up to support people who commit to basing their business in a region.

## HOUSING SHORTAGE

One of the great injustices for people living in rural Britain is that their young families cannot afford to buy their own homes because city dwellers are buying up properties as second homes, which is pushing up prices and putting them out of reach. Yet there are many thousands of old farm buildings sitting idle, many of which would make ideal homes but draconian planning regulations prevent them from being done up for residential use. I also believe rural dwellers should be offered tax incentives to redevelop derelict or redundant buildings into affordable housing.

## TOWN MAYORS

Centralisation policy has been the enemy of rural communities. A Whitehall mandarin treating these communities as mere statistics is causing great damage. Local people should be able to determine their

own lives and, in order to allow this, we need to have the courage to hand over more power and responsibilities to them. In our current system, Parish Councils have no real power and I would like to see them abolished and replaced with elected Mayors with sizeable budgets and real power.

## A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

When I look at the relationship in continental Europe between urban and rural communities, it is with envy. There is mutual respect between urban and rural. There is a great pride in the connections between the two. Most city dwellers are proud to have a direct bloodline to a relative living and working in the countryside. In Britain, that bloodline was broken decades ago and we are now suffering the consequences. Our country will never have harmony between the two unless we go some way to repairing that line. First, we need to get politicians to see that it is urgent to repair this damage as a matter of national importance.

We are now in the era of change, the sort of change that in the past would have been unthinkable. Witness America, whose people may be electing their first black president. We all know that change takes courage. And, more often than not, change is painful. The sort of courage that is needed is that which keeps you moving forward, even though you do not know what lies ahead. You also need belief, and the wisdom to know that ahead is the only way.

On our journey forward, we must be prepared to pick ourselves up when we stumble. We must be brave enough to accept dissent, failure, mockery and the disillusionment of our fellow travellers. We must not despair when the going gets seemingly beyond endurance. For we have a friend that we can take with us on that journey and it is a friend that we know so well; that friend is history. If we are prepared to listen to its advice, it will comfort us with stories of man's endeavour

when posed with similar challenges. History has taught us that man's courage to continuously move forward more often than not reaps great benefit and rewards.

The tools we need for this journey are dreams and hopes for a better tomorrow. The consequences of not embarking on this journey are too grave: a divided country and the abandonment of a people who have got so much to offer.

Rural Britain is the heartbeat of our nation. Making sure that heartbeat is healthy is the responsibility of us all – urbanites and rural dwellers. I am ready to start on that journey. This is my rallying cry to you. I am pleading with those of you who also love our country to come with me on this journey towards a better tomorrow.

## CHAPTER 10: THE LAST MORAL FORCE<sup>87</sup>

ROBERT HALFON

“Increasingly, our schools are critical to bringing our communities together. We want them to serve the public not just during school hours but after hours: to function as vital community centres; places for recreation and learning, positive places where children can be when they can’t be at home and school is no longer going on; gathering places for young people and adults alike. Bringing our schools into the 21st century is a national challenge that deserves a national commitment.”

President Clinton, July 11 1996

Some critics argue that Bill Clinton’s prescription for schools is entirely wrong. These critics argue that schools should take the Gradgrind approach to education: to ensure that students are just educated to the best of their ability to prepare them for the world ahead. The idea that schools should become wider community institutions, or even social workers, is seen as profoundly wrong. This is because such a concept not only diverts schools from what they know best – educating – but it also means that they come to supplant the traditional role of parents. The state thus becomes the surrogate parent, charged with taking over duties that are traditionally seen as the prerogative of the family. Nick Seaton, Chairman of the Campaign for Real Education argues: “I would think that most sensible parents will think that children go to school to learn English, maths and science and that schools aren’t intended to provide child care.”<sup>88</sup> But this analysis is too rigid. At a time when communities are disintegrating and there is real and severe family breakdown, schools often serve as the last bastion of communities. When small shops have closed and local faith institutions are poorly

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<sup>87</sup> The author would like to thank Jon O’Connor of the Harlow Educational Consortium; Rose Pepper, Head Teacher, Paringdon School Harlow; and David Yeld, Head Teacher, Downs School, Harlow for their advice. The views expressed in the article are his own and not necessarily of the above or the Conservative Party.

<sup>88</sup> “Extended schools’aid community”, BBC, September 19, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/5357748.stm>.

attended, the school remains the one institution in a community that brings people together - not just children, but parents too. If a child comes from a broken home, then it is the school that will give that child order and structure, as well as a decent meal.

Those who argue that it is the job of parents to provide a moral force for the children and not the state are not necessarily wrong. But family breakdown will take years - if not generations - to deal with, both through fundamental welfare and educational reform, and through significant changes to how we deal with crime and disorder.

Schools, by contrast, provide an *immediate* response to community breakdown, which few other public policies can match. In poorer neighbourhoods with little economic power, the school can be the one body that empowers parents and pupils alike, and help transform the community.

The harsh reality about the state we are in means that we need to rely on schools more and more – not just as a place of educational attainment, but also as a bedrock of community engagement. This is something that is now being recognised across the board. Head teacher John Dunford, addressing the Association of Schools and College Leaders annual conference in March 2008, noted that: “Poor parenting and the erosion of family life are leaving schools as the only moral framework in many children’s lives”. Dr Dunford observed that schools not only had to teach basic behaviour, but also social skills, such as eating a meal together. This was due to “long working hours” or “chaotic family backgrounds”: The old certainties have gone and with them the institutions, such as the church, which articulated those certainties. So for some children, it is only the school that provides the framework that sets the line between what is and isn’t respectable”<sup>89</sup> *The Association of School and College Leaders* Union President Brian Lightman also stated

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89 “School is ‘the last moral force’”, BBC, 9 March 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7286123.stm>.



that schools now had to parent pupils as well as teach them: "Teachers were expected to teach pupils who seem never to have an opportunity to have a conversation outside a school with an adult."<sup>90</sup>

So, if in many cases schools have become the last moral force, the last solid bedrock of genuine community institutions in many of our neighbourhoods, how best to accentuate this movement? How can schools really be empowered to become leading forces in their communities, acting as an anchor to strengthen communities and a bridging force to achieve positive societal change with longer term policies on welfare and crime reform?

### WHAT IS A GENUINE COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

"Real Education should educate us out of self into something far finer: into a selflessness which links us with all humanity"

Lady Nancy Astor

Some mistake the idea of a Community School for one which just has extended hours and may offer playing fields for use on weekends and during the holidays. Others might define a Community School as that which is started by local parents or a local organisation. Whilst these schools have community characteristics, these kinds of schools represent an aspect, important nonetheless, of community involvement, rather than being the agent of community involvement.

A genuine Community School should have as its primary aim building and harnessing social capital - the social glue that binds communities together. A Community School would act as a connector between parents, children, local business, public organisations like the NHS and the Police and voluntary organisations such as residents groups and local charities. In essence they would become a one-stop shop - a magnet for essential services.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

Whilst ensuring that education remained at the forefront, offering other services would have significant benefits. In poorer areas with lower aspiration and educational attainment, it would encourage parents to come to the school if other services such as health clinics were offered. Schools that gave space for local charities - particularly those which work with problem youths - could have positive outcomes on helping schools dealing with children from troubled backgrounds. Similarly, schools which offered 'work stations' for the police could have a significant effect on anti-social behaviour problems. In Nottingham for example, a drugs charity, DARE UK has had immense success in placing retired police officers in schools to help with education about drugs (despite losing a £165,000 grant from the Nottinghamshire Police in 2007 due to budget constraints).

But how hard is this to put into practice? Many will cite cost implications, lack of teaching time in the curriculum and loss of educational focus. But is this really the case? In Downs Primary School, Harlow, the Head Master David Yeld has a forward looking vision about the future of his school as a major community engager. His aim is to develop links with a regional University (Anglia Ruskin) and to establish a Family Learning Centre at the School. The objective is both to provide support for children and also to give advice to parents on work related issues. For the University such a project would give them a chance to access future students and help improve the skills base. Most importantly it would allow the University to develop their early years provision. Far from being uncostered, the finance would be one million pounds if it were to succeed, with grants being sought from the European Union and the lottery.

Another community minded head teacher, Rose Pepper of Paringdon Junior School, (a remarkable school that has been transformed from a failing to successful school in recent years), believes that schools can become central to the community in a



number of ways. First by engaging parents, second by teaching children about community and actively involving them in it and third by using school facilities to bring in outside services and volunteers to work with the school.

Under this scenario, a genuine community school would have the following: workshops in which parents can work with children; a sustained effort to encourage teachers, parents and children to communicate more closely with the community by linking up with shops and businesses; and active encouragement of teachers and businesses to do work exchanges to allow more business involvement and financial support.

There would be lessons which have children writing and thinking about what community engagement actually means. In keeping with the belief of the school “as the last moral force”, the emphasis of citizen education could be defined around character education: good character, respect, active citizenship. The last hour of the school day - for example on certain days of the week - could involve the children led by teachers in some kind of community activity, supervised and led by teachers, such as environmental projects and charitable work. Such activities could also be done after SATs tests in the summer.

Another objective would be to allow local people to use the school’s ICT computer suite. For more involvement with public services, there would be police involvement in schools, and local politicians (the MP and Councillors) would be encouraged to use the school for surgeries, so as to encourage more people, particularly parents, to visit. Huge support would be given to local people who might be happy to volunteer around the school, such as tending the garden and school fields, planting flowers and the like. Regular clubs could be established to bring in additional members of the public.

## MAKING IT HAPPEN

The only way for Community Schools to really work is for the public to be actively engaged. Schools, teachers and local institutions need to be encouraged and incentivised to work together. Greater democracy, changes to the national curriculum and incentivisation of public services businesses and charities would transform schools in their local community.

## SCHOOL DEMOCRACY

School governing bodies should be changed to elected School Boards to encourage community involvement. Parents, community representatives, charitable organisations, local businesses and even local politicians should be allowed to stand for election to the School Board. Those elected would ideally be from the school catchment area or a certain radius. The School Board would be elected for a fixed term of around four to five years. Each school would determine how many representatives they wanted from each sector. For example a school with a more business focus might want more business representatives.

Elected School Boards would have the effect of galvanising both the governing body and the school within the community. School democracy would alert the school's activities to the wider community as members of the public and the school would be campaigning for votes. It would work much better than the existing system of appointing governors to the governing board where the only people who know about the school are those immediately involved.

## INCENTIVISATION

Schools as bedrock community institutions will only work if other public services are actively encouraged to get involved. Primary Care Trusts and GP surgeries should be offered financial incentives to share



facilities with schools. A special earmarked budget could be established by national Government for public services to be given special funds for school community involvement. Constabularies, for example, could have a special allocation of funds to allow local police to place police officers in schools.

Businesses which provided a local business-teacher-children exchange programme could be offered tax breaks in order to incentivise business and school collaboration. This co-operation would mean more than just sponsorship of buildings and donations: Tax breaks would only be provided for sustained collaborative programmes. In the same way, tax breaks or easier access to grants could be provided to charities which undertook similar engagement with schools.

## **VOLUNTEERS' AND CHILDREN'S INVOLVEMENT**

Community schools will only thrive if children and the local public are actively engaged together. Changes to the National Curriculum could really begin to enmesh children and community together, as well as providing that "last moral force". If part of the National Curriculum at all levels of schooling was dedicated to community activities this would really widen the nature of schooling. Time could be allocated in schools to offer children the chance to volunteer in their neighbourhood such as with environmental projects and helping the vulnerable.

There should be a nation-wide website - a community databank in which schools and volunteers could register. The schools would use the website to set out their community activities and volunteers could register on the site to show they were available to help and to see what community programmes were available. The community website could offer prizes and awards for schools and volunteers for their community involvement.

Overseeing this website - and to act as a catalyst for community schools - would be a new Foundation at arms lengths from government. The Foundation would act as a pressure-group and coordinator with the sole aim of furthering schools as community institutions. It could be part funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families with the majority of its funding coming from private funding, in order to protect the organisation's independence.

## CONCLUSION

It would be much easier to keep the *status quo*. Schools could carry on as before with the occasional hotpotch of community activity. But the nature of schooling is changing. Our current social circumstances mean that education cannot just be about reading, writing and arithmetic, with some sport on the side. It has to provide more than just academic attainment - albeit still of utmost importance.

Family breakdown, community atomisation, barriers to social mobility and a loss of common values mean that schools have an enhanced role to play. By becoming bedrocks of the community, the school can offer teachers, parents, children and local residents a means of empowerment and positive collective action. This is not about increasing the power of the state but a fundamental Conservative belief in buttressing civil society for the good of all.



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