the progressive conscience

CLASH OF THE GENERATIONS

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bright blue

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The Voiceless Need Representation

By **Ryan Shorthouse**

As the General Election fast approaches, the political parties mudslinging and hyperactively announcing policies to woo the so-called Motorway Man, we in politics must not forget who we should really be fighting for.

It cannot be right that – as more of us in Britain enjoy longer, healthier, wealthier lives than ever before – there remains people who are caged in miserable poverty, entrapped in dire and unthinkable circumstances, unable to even taste the opportunities so many of us take for granted.

We should be angry. Very angry that so many children in our country live in homes so depressing that their health is appalling and they lack the love needed to grow into emotionally and socially competent people. Angry too that people are so fearful - or forgotten - that they are locked in their homes, a stranger in their own neighbourhood, unable to forge friendships and participate in society. Angry more that so many youngsters cannot access a decent education to get on in life and escape the wretched environment of their childhood.

These people have no suited and booted lobbyist to represent them. They are the voiceless – they have been for generations. And we must stand up for them.

David Cameron's new Progressive Conservatism recognises this. But he should be careful of the ideologues who urge him to attack the state, say it has failed to tackle the unacceptable levels of poverty. Politically, this is a mistake. About one in five people in this country are public sector employees. Many of them work for the state because they are driven by an overwhelmingly desire to do public good. They will be angry, quite rightly, if they are described as failures. And they will be fearful for their jobs if Cameron talks about cutting the state without saying exactly where.

Too often the Tory mission has been caricatured as just wanting a small state – and all good will derive from this. But what matters most is people: not systems or ideology. The Tory mission really should be about empowering people to lead more independent and flourishing lives, less dependent on the state in the long-run.

Of course we have to fix our frightening public debt. Savings can and will have to be found. But let us not fool ourselves that redistribution of wealth via the state fails. Increased benefits and tax credits have lifted more people over the poverty line since 1997. The state, when it works well, is good.

> "The Tory mission really should be about empowering people to lead more independent and flourishing lives, less dependent on the state in the long-run"

But too often rigid rules and targets have thwarted the innovation and passion of people working on the ground - in hospitals, schools, Sure Start centres, social services - to support our most vulnerable. Labour has done well to build up the framework that provides the all-important raw materials. Yet, for the past ten years, we have seen a rise in stubborn, extreme poverty. We now need real activism and passion by people in the state and voluntary sector to transform hard-pressed communities. This is where the Conservatives are needed in the next chapter in the fight to end the evil that is poverty.

Cameron's team is right to say that power over public services is too concentrated in bureaucracies such as Whitehall and Town Halls. We need a radical decentralisation of power: real power to the people. So many Tory proposals are very welcome. Allowing co-operatives to manage state services. Letting parents and philanthropic groups set up and run schools. Outcomes-based commissioning so people shape their services, rather than being dictated from above. More voluntary organisations, with the money from Government, delivering programmes. Greater flexibility in contracts for third sector organisations. This will give people the freedom, power and enthusiasm to innovate their services and make lasting impact in deprived communities.

We need a new approach to support the voiceless. With its commitment to decentralisation, the Tories provide an answer. But there will be those around Cameron sceptical, calling for the same old – and failed - libertarian methods. So the Conservative Party, if in Government, will face its own clash of the generations. We in Bright Blue hope new, progressive thinking will prevail. In fact, the reason why Bright Blue was created was to fight for such thinking.

Young People

In a different way, many young people today are also voiceless. Children cannot vote – so they cannot shape the political direction of our country. Instead, they can only hope that the generations that come before them leave an environmentally and economically sustainable future. Even those who are eligible are not taking a stand – 56% of 17-25 year olds are not on the electoral roll.

They need to start talking. Shouting, even. The Tory's leading thinker, David Willetts, has published a book called The Pinch, providing insightful analysis of how the actions of baby boomers – though not deliberately – have made it harder for the next generation.

Indeed, younger workers have been hit the worse during this recession. Over the past few decades, a more flexible labour market has made youth employment less stable and earnings have declined relative to older workers. Getting on the property ladder remains a distant dream. Debts from education and high livings costs means savings for tougher times are often non-existent. Assets and wealth have become increasingly concentrated higher up the age scale. Coupled with our massive public debt and ageing population, the young will be more burdened taxpayers.

But if Willetts and his front bench colleagues are serious about a fairer distribution of wealth and power across the generations, this raises questions about policy direction on university tuition fees, inheritance tax and lowering the voting age.

I do hope you enjoy the first edition of The Progressive Conscience, exploring the clash of generations. The magazine would not have been possible without all of the creative and passionate Bright Blue team – Tim, Jonty, Vikki, Pete, Liam and James. And I am particularly grateful to Pete for designing what I hope you will judge a fantastic magazine.

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The Broken Contract

The contract between the generations has broken. Conservatives must find a way to heal it.
By **David Willetts MP**

I welcome the launch of a new group devoted to fresh Conservative thinking. Some Conservatives are of course instinctively suspicious of such a dangerous activity, which they may regard as deeply unconservative. So for example Dr Johnson dismissed the Toryism of the great philosopher David Hume, saying: "Sir, Hume is a Tory by chance."
He meant by this that Hume had reached his Toryism by a process of intellectual argument not because of a deep instinct. The danger, they may fear, of depending on evidence and rational thought is that the conclusions one reach could change - hence the suspicion that these are weak foundations on which to erect any political programme.
We can understand the point. Conservatives respect the traditions and institutions of a society and are understandably wary of the arrogance of changing all that just because of an idea. Edmund Burke resolved this problem in a masterful statement of the true conservative approach:

"We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages. Many of our men of speculation, instead of exploding general prejudices, employ their sagacity to discover the latent wisdom which prevails in them. If they find what they seek, and they seldom fail, they think it more wise to continue the prejudice, with the reason involved, than to cast away the coat of prejudice, and to leave nothing but the naked reason; because prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence."

Especially nowadays there is no alternative to reason, evidence, and argument – and that is what Bright Blue is devoted to. But it should be respectful of popular wisdom. This is where social science is changing. Indeed one of the most exciting developments at present is the maturing of relatively new disciplines such as game theory and evolutionary biology. These are transforming our understanding of for example how cooperation works, the role of institutions and traditions, and the environment in which a modern market economy functions.

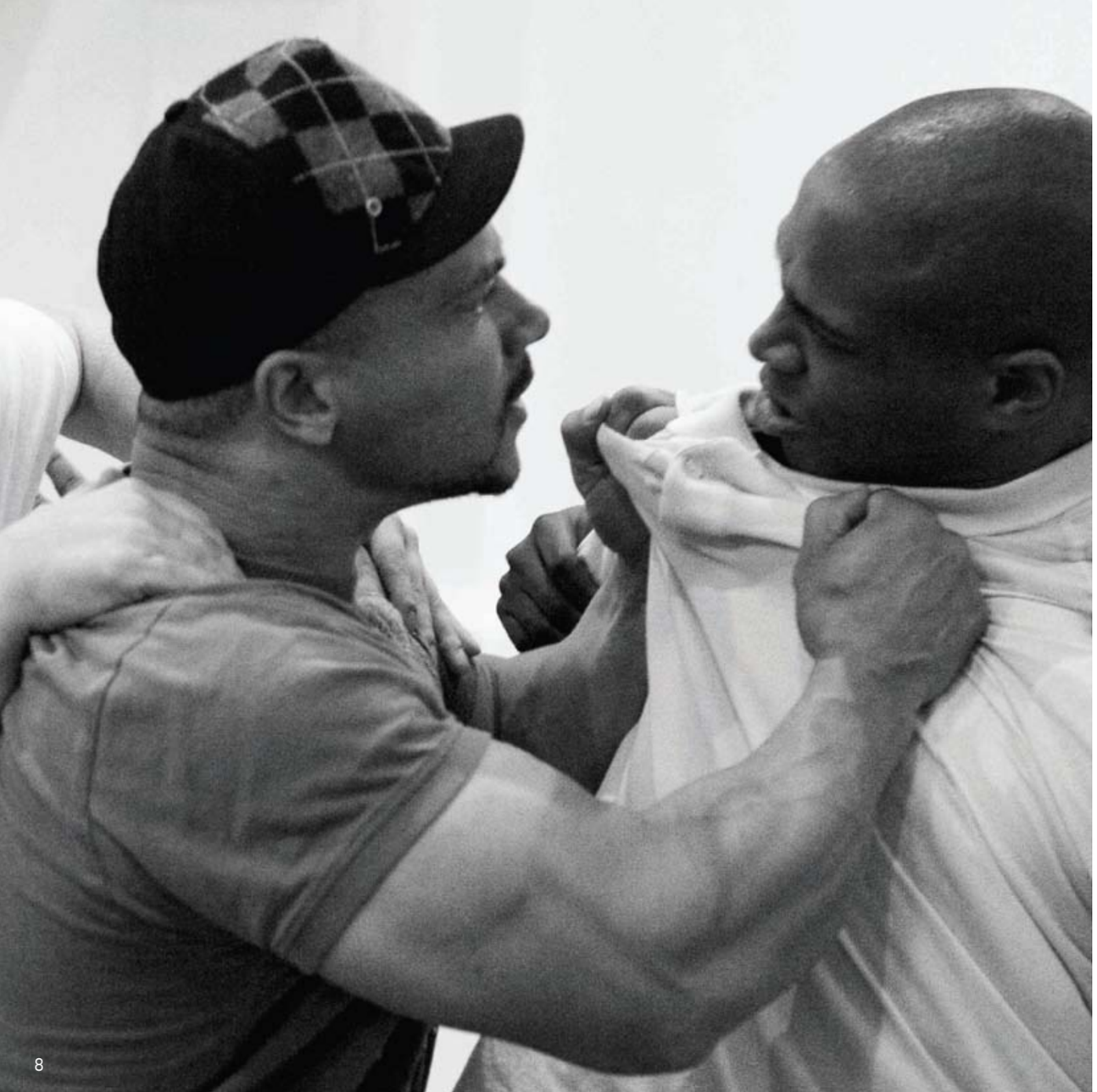
> "As our links with other generations have weakened, we have become more dependent on the family"

In addition the increase in the sheer volume of affordable computing power is enabling social scientists to analyse far more detailed data sets and detect deeper patterns of cause and effect than ever before. All this activity is not necessarily exploding Conservative "prejudices" but often providing a much deeper understanding of, for example, the significance of the family or the efficiency of social conventions.
I hope therefore that what will make Bright Blue really significant and persuasive will be the way in which all this evidence sometimes emerging from whole new disciplines is deployed. That can really enrich our understanding of our society and open up a far more sophisticated debate about policy than ever before.
It is particularly needed at a time like this when over 80% of people believe our country is heading in the wrong direction. They are desperate for change and that is what the Centre Right must offer. Our argument is that our economy, our society and our politics are all broken and need to be fixed. This must rest on a deep understanding of what is going wrong with our country and why.
My new book tries to rise to this challenge. It goes back to deep-seated and very human concerns about the kind of world we are passing on to our kids.
I am convinced that the most powerful measure of what is broken in our society is the breakdown of the contract between the generations. It means our society is marked by a deep distrust between the generations. And this is not just a wider trend in the Western world, it is particularly acute in Britain. Surveys across Europe ask adults if they would intervene if they saw a 14 year old vandalising a bus shelter – in Germany 65% would, in Spain 52% and in the UK just 34%.
The generation gap within the family has healed but outside it has broken down. This means that, paradoxically, as our links with other generations have weakened, we have become more dependent on the family.
It is widely understood that what has broken our economy is our dependence

on debt and borrowing. This is revealed in extraordinarily low levels of saving over the past decade. In fact, OECD figures show that British households were running negative savings in each year from 2005 to 2008. This is virtually unprecedented in the modern western economy. Even in the US their net saving rate did not go negative like ours. This is a catastrophic failure to value the future. It means that even if there is physical investment in our country, it does not belong to us as others provided the capital. This in turn threatens the standard of living of future generations who will not be endowed with the capital they need to enjoy rising prosperity.
It is not that the baby boomers are bad people. But by virtue of their sheer size and power the boomers have ended up shaping a society and an economy which works for them but not for the younger generations.

> "All too often the media caricature them as a problem when they are our future"

We can appeal to their better natures to set things right. And we can appeal to enlightened self interest too. After all the boomers will end up depending on the younger generation and should remember that great American bumper sticker, "Be nice to your kids - they choose your nursing home."
All these failures are possible because of a third failure – a broken polity. It is one in which inter-generational exchange and communication has reduced. All too often the media caricature them as a problem when they are our future. Young people are not likely to vote so they are caught in a vicious cycle in which their voice is not heard as clearly as it ought to be and that leaves them even more disengaged from politics.
This suggests that one of the central tasks for the next Conservative Government as we try to repair our broken society will be to repair the broken contract between the generations. I hope Bright Blue will play a leading role in thinking about how we tackle that and other such challenges.



Connected to the Community

__Danny Kruger__ talks to __Ryan Shorthouse__ about his departure from the inner circle to being centre stage with young offenders in his charity Only Connect.

Ryan Shorthouse So, it's been nearly four years since you wrote the "hug a hoodie" speech for David Cameron.

Danny Kruger As you know no-one ever said anything about hugging anyone.

RS But it was quite a surprising, significant speech for the Tories – a real shift in tone from just sounding tough on criminals – to understanding, empathising even, with the turbulent history of people who turn to crime. Is that still the right approach?

DK I think we need to show young people that they matter, that they are significant and valued - the reason they go wild is often because they haven't heard that message loud enough in the families and communities they grew up in. But as we also said in the speech, young people need firm boundaries and clear penalties for crossing them, which is why this wasn't a 'soft on crime' message.

RS I just want to pick up on what you say about families. Because there's a strong narrative out there at the moment which says family breakdown can lead to really serious problems like increased criminality. But is it really the case that if a child's parents split up they are going to end up in some gang? What do you really mean when a family has broken down?

DK It depends on the context. When parents split up partly in consequence of other negative stuff going on - poverty, unemployment, addiction - then the child is already in trouble, and the breakup of the family is just another, really serious, problem that is added. Of course when middle class parents split up there's not much added chance of criminality in the children. But the lack of a dad is directly linked to other social problems, for boys and girls. It's common sense but it's also empirically proved.

RS You left David Cameron's office in 2008. When the Tories were high in the polls. Power was in touching distance. There wasn't family breakdown in Team Cameron, was there? I mean: why did you turn your back on it?

DK I was trying to do two jobs at the same time and it wasn't fair to my employer - the Conservative Party. I simply found I was more excited and passionate about growing our little charity than about the eighth draft of a speech about helping the voluntary sector - honoured as I was to be writing those speeches the excitement of actually churning them out tends to pall after a while

RS You left just before the economic crisis. Before some say sunny, optimistic Cameronism was replaced by talk of an age of austerity. Has he taken a wrong turn?

DK I think we still need a positive, can-do alternative to the grim gloominess of late-stage New Labour. The topic of politics has shifted from social to eco-

nomic policy, but we still need to focus on restoring the broken parts of our society - not least because the taxpayer can't afford to go on bailing out social failure for ever.

RS Interesting that you say parts of society are broken rather than a broken society.

DK I do think we have a broken society but some parts are more broken than others - obviously.

RS I remember you saying you wanted to do something practical rather than theoretical to help quell social breakdown. So why theatre?

DK The arts are simply the most effective way to engage alienated and traumatised young people, and therefore start the process of transforming their lives. People who have failed in conventional education respond hugely positively to creativity. It helps them see themselves and their world in a new light and also gives them an opportunity to be applauded - something we all need as much as possible.

RS I really agree with that. So should there be more opportunities to be creative in schools? Would that help?

DK The best schools manage to mix traditional rigour with real creativity - I rather think the two are linked, like the wild sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins that actually follow traditional rules of poetry

RS What difference has Only Connect made to young people? Have lives been transformed?

DK None of us follow a straight path in our lives and our members are battling a lot of demons. But yes we've seen some hugely inspiring changes - long-term crack addicts beating the habit, parents reconciled to their children, people getting jobs for the first time ever. But the most inspiring thing is seeing someone who came in aggressive and hostile, holding their head up and looking like they feel good about themselves - and all without doing anything illegal.

RS I hear you even lived with some of them?

DK We did have a project where Emma and I lived with a bunch of ex-offenders. It was fun while it lasted but we have a baby now and we need our space

RS Sorry to sound like a tub-thumping Labour backbencher but how can on old Etonian like you - or David Cameron for that matter - understand these people?

DK The key to everything is relationships and if you're around someone long enough you forget what colour they are or how they speak and you pay attention to their character. Ex-offenders are pretty unprejudiced about people's background and I can honestly say I don't think any of our members know, or are remotely interested in, what school I went to.

RS I agree. Any budding Colin Firth's in the group?

DK Some of our members are phenomenally talented. I don't think Colin Firth is quite the comparison though. They tend to play somewhat grittier characters.

RS Yes. Quite. Have you learnt anything from them?

DK Yes I have learnt a huge amount about growing up in chaos and the ways you learn to cope - not all of which are bad. Beyond the often awful aggression and criminality, out of sight of the public, is a remarkable warmth, a spirit of getting along, a respect for character, an appetite for life in the moment, which educated people from safe backgrounds often lack. It's invigorating being around them.

Only Connect

Founded:	2006
Founders:	Danny and Emma Kruger
Location:	King's Cross
Website:	http://www.onlyconnectuk.org/
Works with:	Prisoners, ex-offenders and young people at risk of crime
People involved:	100 prisoners a year in workshops or plays
Performances:	10 theatre productions since 2006
Proudest achievements:	Seeing prisoners applauded by the public for doing something positive

Open Data, Smaller Government?

Matt Warman *asks if a new post-bureaucratic age will mean people demand a diminished role for the state.*

When David Cameron opened YouGov's conference on The Post-Bureaucratic Age, he spoke of the practical consequences of using technology to cut through red tape, empower individuals to feel like they make a real difference and to move away from big government.

That last one's surely the most interesting for a Conservative audience – no government has ever, after all, stated its desire to bureaucratise and disempower – but it's worth unpicking why this new idea will mean a smaller state, and just how far it might go. The ramifications for politics, for leadership and for technology can hardly be overstated.

First, however: just what is the "post-bureaucratic age"? Will Straw, the left's leading blogger, argues that it's a loaded, party political term for an idea with obvious cross-party appeal. But, in short, it means transparency about decision making, devolved down to as low a level as is reasonably practical. So every government contract under £25,000 would be published online, there'd be a public reading stage for parliamentary bills, and the ongoing use of technology to make as much data public as possible. That way, it is hoped, what Mr Cameron called "gentle social pressure" can be applied on individuals and institutions.

A case in point is at local councils such as Maidenhead: simply publishing energy usage figures for government buildings has encouraged staff to be more energy efficient. If you might get caught, people are more likely to do what they ought – but perhaps more powerfully, and more conservatively, the notion of competition is introduced: my building's saved more money than yours. The advantages of greater public accountability are obvious. Make this approach widespread, it's argued, and the advantages are plain to see and vast in extent.

There's a second dimension to the public availability of data on things such as this, however: not only will it make how taxes are spent more obvious than ever before, at a granular level, but it will also stoke the forces of competition.

For example, take a Parish Council's precept: in the post bureaucratic age, the council's treasurer is likely to have to put his accounts online, mainly because some other parish council up the road will have started doing it already.

It might reveal, for instance, that there's an annual grant made to the parish magazine, because it is the main vehicle for publishing minutes of parish council meetings. But if enough residents don't like the parish magazine's partisan line, now - more easily than ever before - they can lobby against that grant and argue that they should pay less tax to the parish council. The idea of citizens taking control of their politicians, at every level, has never been more stark.

Or take a larger scale model: many councils offer a service to collect large waste items such as fridges, for a supposedly nominal fee. Release the data, and it will be obvious that Much Binding has a large number of white goods that it disposes of every month. Suddenly the rag and bone men might just be able to come out of retirement: knowing you could make some money cruising the streets of Much Binding once a month might be a useful motivational tool, and it might relieve the council of a task that's either a burden or perhaps a useful way of subsidising the perennially unprofitable collection of the fridges in Little Binding.

If the whole service is axed because it's simply no longer viable, however, costs of clearing up after fly-tipping might increase – release more data, introduce completion without consideration and there's the risk of the unsightly problem of the fridges of Much Binding in the marsh.

Or how long would it be before parties or campaigners gathered data together on a range of small issues, pointed out to voters that it added up to a certain amount of council tax per year, and stood on an electoral platform based on saving people that amount in tax, because those specific services could be cut? The politician's prerogative to lead could be profoundly changed, especially if confronted at the ballot box by pure economics.

The hope, of course, is that the people of Much Binding will realise that it's worth paying for a better environment, free of dumped fridges. And that technology will drive forward new ways of analysing and publicising data. Perhaps it's even the role of a government in the post-bureaucratic age to make sure that data is presented to the public as effectively as possible. Either way, the post-bureaucratic age is about treating voters like grown ups – it's an approach that's so long overdue.

Plural Problems

An increasingly pluralistic society needs collective identity. Brown's Britishness bombed, argues **Rafael Behr**, *but Cameron's decentralisation poses problems*

The corridors of Whitehall are haunted by the ghosts of New Labour initiatives, conceived of the need to grab a day's headlines, delivered in poorly attended speeches, soon abandoned. These starveling policies are soon forgotten by all but the unfortunate civil servants whose professional obligation it is to take what ministers say seriously.

That is how most people would judge Gordon Brown's various calls for a renewed concept of "Britishness". Remember a new British Day? It was going to be our 4th July, except not commemorating a defeat. The idea bombed.

It was much derided as an attempt to neutralise English voters' (largely imagined) wariness of Brown's Scottishness. Besides, it takes a leader with charisma and a clear democratic mandate to lead a debate on symbols of nationhood. Brown was unqualified.

That doesn't mean Brown was wrong to see disorientation in national identity as an issue. A Conservative government will end up grappling with the same questions.

For Brown the driving argument was security. Speaking in 2006 about the terror attacks on London the previous year, he said: "[The terrorists] were British citizens, British born apparently integrated into our communities … We have to be clearer now about how diverse cultures which inevitably contain differences can find the essential common purpose also without which no society can flourish."

That was a fair point, but it set the debate in terms of patriotism and loyalty, which sounded too much like traditional nationalism for most liberal sensibilities.

And yet progressive politics cannot so easily dismiss the solidarity deficit in British society. This is not some social hernia that suddenly occurred when a tiny minority of religious fanatics turned to terrorism. It is the expression of gradual but massive cultural change in British society, brought about by a wide range of forces: mass migration; the digital revolution; economic globalisation; social liberalisation; changes in family structures.

The national identity question is, in that sense, also an expression of inter-generational conflict. The children of globalisation have a kind of consumer power in the formation of their identities that their parents struggle to appreciate. They are also subject to powerful supra-national forces wanting to influence their loyalties, from commercial brands to radical religious sermons on YouTube.

That has radical consequences for the way society confers its loyalty on public bodies. In the past, they would have had some intrinsic authority simply by virtue of being part of the institutional fabric of the nation. In essence, national identity automatically included deference to historic institutions, including government and the constitution.

But increasingly, the relationship between citizens and public authorities is purely transactional. What, the citizen-consumer asks, is in it for me?

In policy terms that has important fiscal implications. A group of people that has no profound sense of collective identity is disinclined to pool its capital. A disunited society resents paying taxes. The individual becomes less likely to see the provision of public services, or welfare, to his neighbour as a benefit - by extension of community interest - to himself.

"Although the ambition might be to empower the sensible majority, the current climate of political apathy favours a well-mobilised fanatical minority"

"A group of people that has no profound sense of collective identity is disinclined to pool its capital"

Then, as public services cease to be viewed as a shared endeavour, social cohesion becomes even harder to maintain, with all sorts of associated hazards.

Consider, for example, Michael Gove's education plans for a new generation of independent, state-funded schools. The idea is to allow providers from civil society to compete for pupils, thus driving up standards. That is a perfectly rational and admirable goal.

But there is a risk that, even with the obligation to teach the national curriculum, the new schools are "captured" by proponents of ideas that make mainstream British society squeamish: creationism; radical Islam; ethnic nationalism.

The same risk applies to Conservative plans for new schools are "captured" by proponents of ideas that make mainstream British society squeamish: creationism; radical Islam; ethnic nationalism.

The same risk applies to Conservative plans for elected police commissioners and cooperative ownership of other services. Although the ambition might be to empower the sensible majority, the current climate of political apathy favours a well-mobilised fanatical minority. Radical entryism could undermine the project and corrode trust in vital institutions.

What assumptions, if any, can government make about the reasonable parameters within which a new generation of service providers will set their working ethos? What beliefs would be considered beyond the pale for a provider of education or health or, for that matter, leaning services? Must they be spelled out in law? And if so, does that not lead a Conservative government back into the New Labour trap of central command-and-control?

OPINION

None of this is to say that Conservative plans are bad. The implicit faith in the good sense and moderation of the UK public is refreshing, especially when compared to the homogenising bludgeon of New Labour's regulatory approach.

The traditional Left often conflates the values of the nation with the functions of government. That is a mistake. It leads to the assumption that, for example, insufficient national loyalty can simply be remedied by teaching "citizenship" in schools and confecting national holidays.

The Right, meanwhile, is deeply suspicious of state involvement in fostering identity, believing nationhood is transmitted through cultural and civic institutions separate from government.

But those institutions constitute a traditional Establishment whose authority is not guaranteed when power is devolved in a society characterised by religious pluralism, cultural diversity and the largely unchallenged power of consumer choice.

That offers an intellectual challenge - and an opportunity - to Progressive Conservatism as a movement. What is its approach to the dilemmas of social cohesion in an atomised society? Can it find a way to express the tension between the ambition to trust people with power at a local level and the need for national government to command moral authority?

It is, of course, possible that Britain can muddle along without a clear sense of identity indefinitely. Britishness has always been fluid, defined, to some extent, by its unwillingness to submit to definition. But it is possible that, in austere economic times, these questions will cease to be abstract. A government that inflicts painful cuts will need moral authority. It must be felt to be acting on behalf of the nation as a whole, or risk being overwhelmed by public anger.

Gordon Brown showed that a weak prime minister, wedded to central state solutions, cannot lead a debate on what it means to be British. That doesn't prove the debate is unnecessary. It just means another generation will have to look for the answers.

Progressive Party People

We had to modernise. We still need to go further. But the next generation belongs to progressive conservatives.
By **Fiona Melville** *and* **David Skelton**.

In 2005, the Conservative Party suffered its third landslide election defeat in a row. This was unprecedented – it had been the governing party for two-thirds of the twentieth century, never out of power for more than a few years at a time, and generally seen as a moderate centre-right party – a party for 'people like us', who wanted to do well and who wanted to do the right thing, but who understood that you can't do it alone. The 'natural party of government' resonated with the British public – sometimes leading them, sometimes being led by them, but never far away from them.

Crushing electoral defeats in 1997, 2001 and 2005 meant that sluggish turnover of MPs and members artificially skewed the Party in favour of those who were more extreme. The Parliamentary Party was not renewing in the numbers it would have done had the Party been in Government. Membership was dwindling - being on the losing side is never fun. In Parliament and in the country, the Party was increasingly narrow, increasingly right-wing and increasingly out of touch. The Party in Parliament and in the country looked and sounded increasingly unlike modern Britain, and was faced with Labour's most electorally successful leader ever.

Despite initially encouraging attempts to modernise by William Hague, Iain Duncan Smith and Michael Howard, bad poll numbers always pulled them back to the extremes, in an attempt to at least halt the decline by guaranteeing a minimal number of 'core' votes. In both 2001 and 2005, while voters may have liked some individual policies, they did not trust the Conservatives to deliver them either competently or with compassion – as soon as they found out that the policies belonged to the Tories, support dropped away. The Conservative brand had become 'contaminated' – people were turned off policies they would otherwise have been attracted to because they were Conservative policies. To many people who would previously have been considered natural Conservatives, voting Tory had become anathema.

By 2005, the party realised that it had to stop this downward and self-reinforcing death-spiral. It had finally sunk in that being uncompromisingly on the fringes of where voters are is no way to win an election. There was a realisation that the Party had to modernise and move away from being a pressure group for narrow interests. Most Conservative members realised that the best chance of winning again was to vote for David Cameron as leader.

His basic challenge was this: how to reframe the electoral conversation when for so long the brand had been so damaged and held in such mistrust, even contempt? The Party had to move back into the centre-ground – where the voters are and elections are won – and ensure that it focused on what voters actually care about. And it had to fundamentally alter its outlook on the world – Britain is a greatly changed place since the last heyday of the Conservatives. If voters feel that they are being judged and held in contempt, they will simply switch off. So there were three, interrelated problems: the brand, the policies and the voice.

Determined action on the brand meant surprising people with Conservative support for environmental action, international development and fighting poverty.

Determined action on the policies meant focusing relentlessly on the NHS and schools - the services that voters actually come in contact with every day. Most voters do not care about the intricacies of European policy. They do care whether their children have a high quality education and whether they and their family are assured of high-quality healthcare when they need it.

Determined action on the voice with which the Tories spoke had to be less that of an uptight Sussex spinster and more that of a working mum of two from the Midlands. And it meant changing the way that the Tory Party looked. For too long, the Party had been very male, very public school and very white – egged on by a membership that wanted its MPs to be very male, very public school and very Thatcherite. So there has been concerted action to start the process of removing this bias.

Modernisation has meant broadening the Conservative coalition. It has never been about abandoning the voters we already have, but appealing to the voters we need to win an election. They are people who have never voted Tory before or abandoned the Party fifteen years ago. This means that the Party must continue to emphasise how perennial Conservative values apply to the things that those voters care about.

People with progressive values and a belief in fairness are once more welcome in the modern Conservative Party. 'One nation' and 'social justice' are Conservative watchwords again. The leadership team is once more a team of all the talents, with the likes of Ken Clarke and William Hague both returning to the fold.

Modernisation is an ongoing process. More still needs to be done. There are still too few candidates from deprived backgrounds. There are still too many MPs and members who refuse to understand that there is no alternative to making sure that the Party reflects the country it seeks to govern. There are still too many observers, commentators and political participants who want to continue to carry out old politics rather than the new approach that is required. Perhaps most significantly for a potential Cameron government, there are too few people who really understand the extent to which and the premise on which he has led the modernisation of the Party.

There is little doubt that this will be tested further by the pressures of government. But modernisation is real and it is deep. It is appealing to people who haven't thought about voting Tory before and has put a Party once thought to be at an electoral dead end in with a real chance of returning to Government at the next election. The Party is, once more, in tune with the British people. A progressive Conservative Party in opposition will also be a modern, progressive Government.

A Greener Future

Moving towards a low-carbon economy immediately, argues **Lucy Stone**, *is the only way to rectify the greatest injustice to our children.*

Growing concerns about the ageing population in industrialised countries tend to focus on health and financial burdens on the working population. Yet perhaps the biggest intergenerational inequality has already taken place - the consumption of resources and the legacy of climate change. Children growing up today are coming to realise that their parents and grandparents will leave them with a heavy debt. The era of cheap energy and food, not to mention cheap money, is ending with the next generations left to pick up the social, economic and environmental tab.

There is still a window of opportunity for the current generation responsible for high fossil fuel consumption to counter this massive inequality and demonstrate its commitment to stewardship. There is a tremendous opportunity right now to stimulate global recovery in a manner that is sustainable and equitable. Shifting from non-renewable to renewable sources of energy, technological innovations and sustainable products can stimulate job creation, innovation and enterprise, and can be exciting and attractive to investors and consumers. Investing our current accumulated wealth in a radical shift towards a low carbon economy and in climate resilience in the most vulnerable countries would ensure that all children will grow up in a safer, cleaner and fairer world.

For anyone wanting to ensure children have a fair chance in life, support for a green economy is essential.

After the disappointment at Copenhagen, and the recent confusion over climate science, many will be feeling disillusioned with the climate change agenda. Climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions is a symptom of a deeper problem: a short term bias to lifestyle choices and resource use. Of course, many might argue that it is human nature to value the present more than the future. Yet we should point to intergenerational values already underpinning prevailing attitudes that exist in society today: pension schemes and personal sacrifices made by parents for their children, the preservation of heritage and opposition to inheritance tax.

> "We should point to intergenerational values already underpinning prevailing attitudes that exist in society today"

As greenhouse gases accumulate over time, resulting in progressively greater stress on the ecosystem, children will be particularly vulnerable and child survival will be increasingly threatened. The Stern Review found that climate change could cause anywhere between 40,000 to 160,000 additional child deaths per year in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa through GDP losses alone, under a scenario of minimal climate change. Children currently born in industrialised countries must also adapt to the changes caused by their parents' and grandparents' generations. Previous, and current, short term thinking, whether through lack of information or simple greed also has clear financial implications. The costs of reducing emissions and adapting to climate change are set to impose a heavy fiscal burden on future governments and economies already pushed to the limit.

The economic analysis of climate change by Sir Nicholas Stern was an influential argument for placing a near equal value on future generations as the current population when weighing up how much we should pay for climate change now. Intergenerational justice requires that there be distributive justice between generations and that the rights of generations, to a clean environment for example, should be considered equal over time. This argument has since been strengthened as the estimated cost of climate change continues to increase. Using this low discount rate in policy and fiscal decision making would lead to more commitments like the recent UK law to reduce national emissions by 34% by 2020 and 80% to 2050. This commitment was supported across the political spectrum, showing a common support for long term action.

While in their rhetoric political leaders recognise the importance of intergenerational justice, these words repeatedly fail to be put into action, as the consequences of climate change will mostly occur when they are no longer in power. The focus remains on the immediate costs of emissions reduction, which not only ignores the rights of future generations, but also misses the benefits of making an early transition to a thriving low-carbon economy, greater energy security and independence, improved air quality and greater health and well-being. So how does a politician obtain public support for this intergenerational approach to climate change, and how would a shift in social norms achieve this?

Programmes in developing countries that involve children in planning and preparing for weather related disasters can have a powerful impact. Research shows that children involved in these programmes are not only less likely to be in danger of fatality or injury, but they themselves can create change within their community in addressing risk. Investing in programmes now that build children's resilience to climate change can be a cost effective intervention reducing the level of funds required when disasters do strike or to support development objectives. Already development assistance is being diverted away from core development areas such as education and health into emergency and distress assistance; up from 4.8 % from 1990-94 to 7.8 per cent in 2003. For every $1 invested in 'Disaster Risk Reduction' programmes $13.38 is generated. And this is not including the social benefits, such as reduced anxiety amongst children and maintained schooling.

Legal tools to ensure intergenerational principles are upheld include enshrining environmental and intergenerational rights in national legislation or international agreements. Legislation or treaties can provide guiding frameworks for policy and behaviour but their primary use is likely to be a means for recourse after the act. Other legal methods for safeguarding intergenerational principles include mandatory environmental impact reviews for policy or business development and citizen action under environmental law.

A child rights approach to climate change would take the principles of intergenerational justice and radically transform the policies and commitments of those in power. Children themselves recently issued a declaration to coincide with the Copenhagen climate negotiations that included the statement: "we commit to personal lifestyle changes that place the common good above our individual desires and current way of life." Polls in the UK show that young people - 80% of 16-24 year olds - have high levels of concern about climate change, and feel that individuals and communities should play a strong role in tackling the issue alongside government and technological innovation.

> "If children and young people were consulted on wind farm planning applications, this might change the rate at which they were successfully passed"

Providing children with effective political representation and involvement is a core child right that the UK government has committed to, and yet it is rarely implemented. For example, if children and young people were consulted on wind farm planning applications, this might change the rate at which they were successfully passed. Children have the right to be consulted on how public policy and major infrastructure decisions are taken. Being involved in designing their community and their future should be a given. The Department for Energy and Climate Change has been a rare example of open consultation with young people on this issue, recognising the specific concerns of children. But even these opportunities tend to focus on macro level, or global questions. Involving children in devising solutions and on local issues should also be a focus.

Ultimately, tackling climate change in a manner that values intergenerational justice will only happen when social and personal values prioritise long-term sustainability. Understanding scarcity of natural resources and valuing heritage are examples of cultural norms that have perhaps become less commonly experienced in an age of high consumption that assumes perpetual abundance and values novelty. Education and a desire for sustainability for all, not just for children, will be an essential to ensure that intergenerational equity becomes a social norm, particularly in the context of climate change.

Our response to climate change and approach to sustainability now, will profoundly affect the quality of life of our children and future generations, yet the principle of intergenerational justice has not been at the heart of climate change policy and behaviours. Although most people would hope that the next generation inherits a world in no worse shape than the one they themselves inherited, when we examine our choices, behaviours and lifestyles, it is clear that at the moment we fundamentally and repeatedly fail to ensure that this occurs.

There will always be trade-offs between current needs and future interests. A first step would be to make these trade-offs explicit so that we can have a more honest debate about the solutions. We have an unprecedented opportunity to decide the future world we want to see. Investing in low carbon development now is a huge opportunity to implement the rights of all children, to survive and thrive, meaningfully and to improve intergenerational justice.

Faithful Education

Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain *says we need our faith schools to encourage a new era of unity.*

One of the astonishing developments over the last decade is faith schools being a subject rarely mentioned in public to being a contentious part of the political agenda.

They have been around a considerable time in Britain, with Christian schools established for centuries and the first Jewish school since 1732.

The public's view

It seems that there are four reasons why faith schools have become much more controversial. One is that whereas they started off as private endowments, they are now publicly funded, and so much more answerable to the taxpayer.

Of course, that has been the case for at least a hundred years, but public scrutiny is so much higher today than it was a century ago, with demands for transparency and accountability placing not just faith schools but all institutions - the BBC, NHS, police force - under a much more rigorous spotlight than ever before.

Secondly, the tax-paying society of today is very different from that of 1870 when the great transition occurred in the Education Act of that year with Church schools receiving funds from the state. Amongst other changes, it is a much less religious society, both in terms of observance and knowledge.

Curiously, this lessening of faith has had a polarizing effect on the general public with regard to faith schools : with some members being opposed to them on the secular grounds that they are biased and doctrinaire; others, knowing their own lack of religiosity but sensing that religion still has something to offer, want to send their children to them to obtain what they themselves cannot give their offspring.

> "If you colour-coded Britain according to each religion in the 1930s and again in the 2000s, then the map of the UK will have changed from virtually monochrome to a kaleidoscope of colour"

Thirdly, society has also changed in another way, no longer being predominantly Christian with a small Jewish minority, but now consisting of a plethora of faiths. If you colour-coded Britain according to each religion in the 1930s and again in the 2000s, then the map of the UK will have changed from virtually monochrome to a kaleidescope of colour.

That is wonderful in many ways and enormously enriching, but has led to issues being raised that rarely surfaced before - particularly over integration, and whether separating children of different faiths, which can also often mean of different ethnic backgrounds, into faith schools encourages integration or inhibits it?

The fourth reason for why faith schools is now such an issue is partly due to concern from particular events : the Bradford Riots; then there was 9/11 in the USA, whose shock-waves hit harder here after the July 7 bombings in London.

Unity and division

Let me state very clearly that there is no evidence that the bombings were connected with faith schools - but, unfairly or not, they made people look again at the increasing number of faith schools - the pledge to build one hundred new Christian ones, the expansion of Jewish ones, equally of Muslim schools, and the recent appearance of the very first Sikh and Hindu ones.

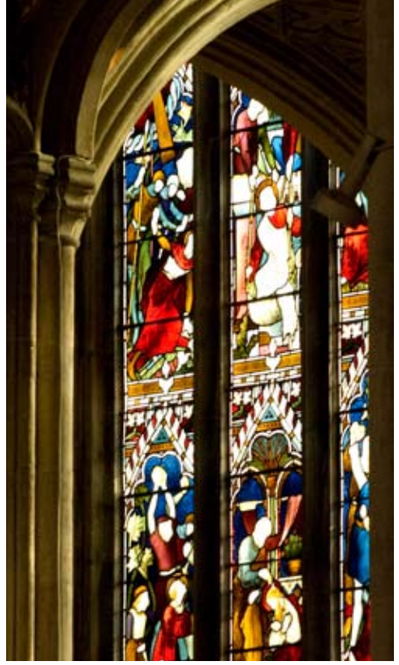
They worry such schools might produce a climate in which those like the bombers could flourish.

The battle-lines are well rehearsed: proponents of faith schools praise the way they work at producing good rounded citizens, while opponents condemn them for ghettoising the children and fragmenting society. But rather than engage in stale arguments, we need to locate larger principles that will give guide us into the future more accurately.

I shall therefore not laud the brilliant CofE school that teaches its pupils not only the Gospels but also about Yom Kippur, Ramadan and Diwali, and is genuinely interested in religious diversity. Nor shall I rant about the Catholic School that does cover other faiths - but only very occasionally and as part of its class on Heresy. We need to avoid citing best and worst practices and concentrate on trends.

A modern approach

There is no doubting the extraordinary debt that the school system today owes to the religious institutions that laid is foundations. But given the society we are in 2010 - multi-faith, multi-ethnic and with many of no faith - what is the way to educate the next generation which from the child's point of view, not



only preserves their particular identity but does so in harmony with all the other identities swirling around them? And from society's point of view, produces a generation that is diverse yet coherent, that values social cohesion and is able to function effectively?

We have to take account of individual families and their traditions, but we also need to consider the overall social health of Britain at large.

Assuming that we are to continue to have faith schools - and I suspect even their most ardent opponents secretly know that they are an ineradicable part of the landscape - there are some big questions looming.

Reforms for the better

For instance, are pupils best served by the current distinction between Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided schools, with VCs answerable to the local education authority over admissions, employment and curriculum, whereas VAs have considerable independence - including wide powers of discrimination in all three areas - yet both almost totally state-funded.

> "It really is time we had a National Curriculum for RE"

Another pressing issue is that although RE is a statutory subject and has to be taught, there is no National Curriculum for RE. Moreover, although each area has its own locally agreed syllabus, faith schools can opt out of them.

It really is time we had a National Curriculum for RE, so that although faith schools may teach more about their own faith, they also have to inform their pupils about other religious and non-religious beliefs - simply as a matter of minimum standards and basic general knowledge.

Research

An indicator of the importance of our topic is the leap in the amount of research that has been undertaken on different aspects of faith schools in the last few years.

Many of them pick up concerns about social inequalities, such as the IPPR in 2007 which showed that 'where faith schools are their own admissions authorities [ie Voluntary Aided schools] they are ten times more likely to be highly unrepresentative of their surrounding area'.

That is a serious charge, and backed up by the Runnymede Trust's report in 2008 which concluded: 'Despite high level pronouncements that suggest a mission to serve the most disadvantaged in society, faith schools educate a disproportionately small number of young people at the lowest end of the socio-economic scale'.

Still, there are also positive conclusions and a report published late in 2009 by Elizabeth Green for Theos on the impact of schools with a Christian ethos argues that students at many schools with a Christian ethos generally display a more positive attitude towards religion and a better spiritual health.

In addition, it says that there is some evidence that students at maintained church schools achieve more highly. This is not due to their selecting pupils who are more likely to achieve. There is a real 'school effect'.

However, none of these and other research projects deal with the schools of minority faiths and their impact both on pupils and on society - so we are still in fairly unchartered waters when we try to cater for that kaleidoscopic map of religious and secular Britain. It makes the current debate on faith schools, their current growth, what they teach and how they should be regulated even more important.

As a rabbi I am strongly in favour of faith but am concerned about the discriminatory way many faith schools currently operate. The organization I chair - the Accord Coalition - seeks to promote inclusive schooling and urges the Conservative Party to tread the fine line of honoring religious commitment but not at the price of social division.

It is not a matter of being for or against faith schools, but of creating an environment where children of different backgrounds grow up as neighbors rather than strangers, and forge a society that is at ease with itself.

The Rise of The Modern Man

Men want to spend more time with their children, says **Anushka Asthana.** *For their sake - and their relationships - we have to find ways to let them.*

The dramatic decline in the male-breadwinner model is a reality that is sure to accelerate. Speak to a handful of female graduates and you'll soon realise they have ambitions just as lofty as their male counterparts.

But to a woman who works full-time and brings in a substantial – perhaps the majority – slice of a couple's income, life at home has to change as well. For too long the expectation and welcome encouragement of women to succeed in work has not been matched by a commensurate shift in cultural and political attitudes about their role at home.

Survey after survey has concluded that while men may be doing more on the domestic front than ever before, women still carry the bulk of the burden. Some say it is just the way men and women are made. Like the journalist James Delingpole who argues that for men "self-esteem and happiness depends far less on how good we feel as parents than on how well we feel we're doing out there in the big, nasty, competitive, aggressive world of money-making. It's the way we're designed". His sex, he concluded, just weren't interested in childcare.

It is not a reality I recognize among my peers. But if even a sizeable minority share Delingpole's attitude, it is an enormous obstacle for those women that want to ascend the career ladder unimpeded. It is a view that feeds straight into that ever sturdy glass ceiling. Or, as Nicola Brewer described it in 2008 when she was Chief Executive of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), one made of "reinforced concrete".

As for evidence, an EHRC report recently showed that almost half of all men failed to take-up their meagre offering of two weeks paternity leave for £246.12. Most felt unable to afford it.

So the question comes down to whether Delingpole is right: that men just aren't made for housework. Or, and I'm much more convinced by this, is it that our societal attitudes are so in-built it would take a huge effort to shift them.

> "We hear again and again that in Sweden things are different"

So where do we start? Can changing policy lay the foundations for such an enormous change in attitude? After all, we hear again and again that in Sweden things are different. That there, where men and women are given similar, and far superior, leave following birth nine out of ten men take up at least some of the benefits.

It is not because they are designed differently. But the truth is it took a huge effort to achieve that shift in Sweden. One academic I spoke to said: "they almost had to force men to take the time". So it needed policy and then something more than that – but eventually it did appear to work.

That raises the question, could the same happen here? Because policy change is in the air as both parties chase after the vote of 30-something, career women. A poll released earlier this month found that 47% of professional women in London had not made up their mind about which way to vote in the general elec-

-tion. And one thing they liked was the recent promise from Labour of transferable maternity and paternity leave of up to six months.

For their part, the Tories are also banging the drum for parental – rather than maternal – leave. Their policy allows parents to share 52 weeks of maternity of which 39 is paid. The first 14 weeks go automatically to the mother, but it is up to parents what they do with the remaining 38. The couple could take off 26 weeks together if they choose to.

All very welcome although it will be interesting to see to what extent David Cameron holds this women-friendly line if in power. After all, he did vote against introducing paternity pay as part of the second reading of the Employment Bill in 2001.

But one thing is clear: any attempts to move society in this direction could lead to enormous benefits for families themselves. A study published in December from the University of Western Ontario revealed that couples that shared responsibility for domestic work had higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction than those in other family models.

The researchers found that although the traditional breadwinner role was still dominant, in more than one in four cases, families were organized in such a way that each partner did between 40 and 60% of unpaid work. This arrangement was most likely where women were better resourced and the couple less religious.

Shared roles, the study concluded, were advantageous to society in terms of gender equity and maximizing wealth. It meant women were less vulnerable in the case of separation, divorce or the death of a spouse.

To promote the family-model, researchers said policies should support equal opportunities for men and women, ensure access to education and work, create the conditions that help work-life balance and – importantly – promote greater involvement of men in housework and childcare. And for that, it found, government needed to create a society with adequate childcare facilities and equal opportunity to parental leave.

So policy change is heading in the right direction. But it is for government and employers to ensure that the offer of parental leave is something that men feel able and encouraged to take up. That might require a few more men to admit that it doesn't matter how you are designed: looking after your child or participating in the home is part of being a good father.

The Progometer

Ryan Shorthouse checks the progressive pulse of Conservative Party policy

Introduce a pupil premium

Michael Gove MP and **Nick Gibb MP** have promised to extra school funding for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This will give schools with Academy status – which Gove wants to greatly expand – the opportunity to attract the best teachers by paying them more. And evidence points to the quality of teaching being the biggest determinant of the quality of education

Full funding for apprentices aged over 19

Not everyone aged above 19 can get full funding for a work-based apprenticeship. **David Willetts MP** and **John Hayes MP** have promised full funding – direct to employers - for 77,000 work-based apprenticeships so older students have a second chance in life at a high-quality vocational education.

A 'Right to Move' for social tenants

Too many people grow up and die in the same sink-estate. **Grant Shapps MP** wants to introduce a comprehensive national mobility scheme which will allow good social tenants to demand that their social landlord sell their current property and use the proceeds, minus transaction costs, to buy another property of their choice – anywhere in England. This will allow responsible citizens – trapped by poverty – to escape hardship.

Flexible parental leave

Women still face a motherhood penalty, leaving a gender pay gap in the UK which is a third higher than the European average. Meanwhile, men want to spend more time with their children. **Theresa May MP** will change maternity leave so parents can decide how they divide 39 weeks of parental leave between them, giving parents power over how they juggle their work and family commitments.

4,200 Sure Start Health Visitors

The number of Health Visitors has declined and these professionals report that their caseloads are too high to protect the most vulnerable children. **Maria Miller MP** has promised to reinstate a universal Health Visitors service, providing non-stigmatising support to all parents and increasing the chances of giving children from the most challenging backgrounds a healthier start in life.

Changing Childhood

Today's children do not enjoy the freedoms of the past. **Tim Gill** *calls on authorities to create child-friendly spaces.*

We now know that family-friendliness will be a key theme in the Conservative manifesto. But what does this imply for the way we shape the spaces our children grow up in?

The beginnings of an answer to this question can be found in a 2008 report on childhood written by David Willetts. The report's provocative title - More Ball Games – flags up its equally provocative message: getting children out and about, playing and socialising, is an aim worthy of serious political attention.

Such a vision should be uncontroversial. After all, it fits perfectly with the memories of almost anyone over the age of 30, of a childhood unfolding in local parks, streets, fields and - yes - building sites. David Cameron himself has noted that "just one in five children regularly play outside in their neighbourhood. The rest are denied the chance to get out of the house and have the everyday adventures that – to people of my generation – are what childhood is all about."

Children today value freedom just as much as their parents and grandparents. Contrary to popular belief, most would happily spend less time in front of screens if they had a real choice. Likewise most parents would like them to.

And yet the goal of expanding children's horizons is often met with great resistance. Local planning regulations often mean that a single complaint about an upgrade to a playground can halt investment, while the merging of social services and education in Local Authorities means that sometimes play services have been left out.

image: Play England

Some question the premise, insisting that children have more freedom today. However, they are confusing appearance with reality. For the past thirty years or more, childhood prior to adolescence has been characterised by shrinking freedom of action for children, and growing adult control and oversight. For instance, in 1971, nearly all 8-year-olds went to school unaccompanied. Today few of that age are allowed outside their front doors on their own.

This loss of freedom has serious consequences. Robust studies show rising levels of emotional problems amongst teenagers. Experts say this may well be because they have been denied the chance in their earlier years to learn coping mechanisms that would help prepare them for life's ups and downs. International comparisons of child well-being confirm that in the countries that score highest - the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark – children enjoy far more autonomy than their British peers.

Since 2007 – when Britain came out bottom of the well-being comparison - the Government and Big Lottery have earmarked over £380 million to improve parks and play areas. Market research shows that the new facilities are enormously popular with children and families. The wider community, far from being hostile, often welcomes and values the improvements, and some of the best designs have created places that people of all ages can enjoy.

We know that, no matter which party holds the purse strings, budget cuts will be the order of the day. Yet there are still levers of power as yet untouched by central government, such as shaping the planning system, and setting relevant standards for schools, childcare and extended services.

Our metaphor for childhood should not be the battery chicken but the salmon. The truth is that the presence of children of different ages enjoying public space, like the presence of wild salmon in a river, is one of the best indicators of the quality of the environment in which they live.

Fluid Families

Families have changed tremendously over the past thirty years. Our attitudes towards family life have too. **Penny Mansfield** *thinks we need 21st century support for 21st century families.*

Marriage rates began to decline from the high levels of the 1960's. Yes, that decade, the Swinging Sixties, was in fact the golden age of marriage. Marriage was almost universal and spouses exchanged their vows young. Whatever the new pop music idols said and did, sex outside of marriage was disapproved of and if there was a baby on the way there was pressure to rush to the altar or Register office.

But attitudes were changing and the 1970s saw the demise of the shotgun marriage. The stigma of illegitimacy had lessened and there was less pressure from parents to marry. In 1972, just over four out of ten pregnant teenagers married before the child was born. By 1982, less than two out of every ten pregnant teenagers chose that option. In the 1980s the two equally favourite options for a pregnant teenager were legal termination or giving birth without marrying the father - at least before the birth.

Women began to marry at later ages as the rapid rise in women's earning capacity relative to men's reduced the benefits of marriage. For young men hit by the recession, unemployment diminished their eligibility in the marriage market.

The reform of divorce law at the end of the sixties allowed many people trapped in unhappy marriages to start afresh. The number of marriages between a single person and someone previously married increased – one in five single women marrying in their late twenties, married a divorced man. Cohabitation had been the predicament of an unfortunate minority who were unable to marry - because they couldn't get a divorce - or the choice of an exceptional few who were anti-marriage. But in the 1980s, moving in together as the final phase of courtship became popular, especially for older more educated brides. However, most childbearing still occurred within marriage. In the nineties that too began to change.

> "Marriage was still the symbol of adulthood, marking the move from being your parents' child to being a spouse, and soon enough, your own child's parent"

In the last thirty years, family life in Britain has been transformed; the number of marriages has halved, divorces doubled and extra-marital births quadrupled. Today, the common sequence of family formation is cohabitation followed by marriage and parenthood. It is predicted that if current trends continue, within five years the majority of babies will be born to unmarried parents.

Changing attitudes

When I began researching family formation in the early 1980s, in the interviews, just three months after their weddings, new spouses were asked why they had married at that time in their lives. "Because we fell in love" was the common answer. Yet, as they described their courtship these young men and women spoke about getting married in less romantic terms. It was "what most people did", the beginning of a sequence leading to "an independent life", "your own place and "a family of one's own". A powerful sense of the future permeated their perceptions of marriage.

"The Beginning Of The Rest Of Your Life?" was the title of a book I co-authored. As the 1980s kicked off, marriage was still the symbol of adulthood, marking the move from being your parents' child to being a spouse, and soon enough, your own child's parent.

Over the centuries marriage has served many functions: ordering kinship, establishing roles and identities within families, regulating sexual behaviour, attaching men to their offspring, supporting the care of children, organising the flow of economic resources and mutual aid between generations. Before the mid 18th Century there was no consensus about how legally binding marriage ceremonies should be conducted and many couples opted for private verbal contracts, valid 'in the eyes of God' but unenforceable in the courts. The 1753 Marriage Act ended any legal recognition of informal marriage rites such as common-law marriage in England and Wales. From the 19th Century the penalties of bearing illegitimate children were heavy and for the next one hundred years Europe and America came as close as any society has ever done to making formal marriage mandatory.

The pendulum has now swung the other way. The Millennium Cohort Study gives further insight into how families are forming in 21st Century Britain. While two out of three of the 18,500 babies

were born to married parents and one in four to cohabiting parents, 15% of babies were born to mothers not living with a partner. Of this 15%, about half described themselves as 'closely involved ' with their baby's father and nine months later a quarter of the 'closely involved' parents were cohabiting. For a small but growing group of parents the transition to parenthood now coincides with the transition to living as a couple.

What we do is reflected in what we believe. According to the British Social Attitudes (BSA) Survey and the British Household Panel Study (BHPS), over the last quarter of a century we have as a nation become more tolerant of a range of relationships, heterosexual and same sex.

The proportion who say that those who want to have children should get married, declined from almost three quarters in 1989 to about half in 2002. Since then attitudes have remained very stable. A slightly different question posed in the BHPS since 1998 asks individuals about their agreement or disagreement with the statement: "It makes no difference to children whether their parents are married or just living together". On that issue we as a nation are equally divided. Younger generations are more likely to agree than older generations that the marital status of parents makes no difference to children.

> "Self fulfilment of the individual partners is increasingly the reason for getting together and staying together, with huge implications for children and the wider family network"

There is a clear period effect with all generations becoming a little more liberal in their views on cohabiting parents between 1998 and 2006. Interestingly, those aged 60 or older in 1998 have become relatively more liberal than any other age group in that period. The authors of the 2010 BSA report suggest that this may denote the impact of personal experience – as an increasing number of older people become grandparents to children whose parents are not married.

Attitudes to staying in an unhappy marriage or getting divorced have been consistent since the mid 1990s. The British Household Panel Study shows that in 2006 four fifths of us agree that it is better to divorce than to continue an unhappy marriage. There is some difference between the attitudes of older and younger generations - with the older showing less support for divorce. The very young and those aged 45-60 were slightly more likely to agree that an unhappy marriage was preferable to divorce while those in their 30s and early 40s were more likely to favour divorce.

The explanation may be that this age group is at that point in their lives at which they or their peers are divorcing.

Different roles for men and women

Another major change in attitudes is towards homosexuality. The proportion of people saying that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are always or mostly wrong has declined from 62% in 1983 to 36% in 2007. There was a slight increase in prejudice in the late 80s when we became less tolerant of homosexual relationships following the AIDS epidemic. This century regulations have been put in place to make it unlawful to discriminate against workers because of sexual orientation and by 2005 the Civil Partnership Act came into force enabling same sex couples to obtain legal recognition of their relationships. In proposing the legislation government said it would be an important equality measure and stabilise family life.

Meanwhile inside marriage men and women no longer have fixed attitudes to what He does and She does. Studies show that over the last fifty years, there is less emphasis upon the gender specific roles of husband and wife, and more emphasis upon mutuality and equality. This more companionate relationship – the marriage of good friends - has emerged in part as a challenge to the power of the wider family where family interdependence was based on the authority of older generations in the family and deference to it. Couple relationships are more flexible but more expedient. Their essential purpose has shifted from the social to the personal. Self fulfilment of the individual partners is increasingly the reason for getting together and staying together, with huge implications for children and the wider family network. Yet as the importance of formal marriage has declined its symbolic significance as a confirmation of commitment may have increased.

Marriage

The very informality of contemporary relationships creates challenging issues both for public policy and the families themselves. A substantial body of evidence indicates distinct advantages in being married for men, women and for their children. On average married men and women enjoy better physical and mental health, do better socially and economically than men and women who are not married, and, their children do better too. Is it simply the status of marriage that creates these advantages or the quality and durability of the relationship between the two individuals ? Clearly there is an association between the two.

There is also a selection effect. Certain people – men and women from economically and emotionally secure backgrounds are more likely to marry and sustain satisfying relationships. Both personality and upbringing contribute to our capacity to form and maintain close supportive relationships. Unmarried parents are mostly, younger parents, in more socially disadvantaged groups, men and women who have partners and children from previous relationships and have experienced the breakdown of their own parents' relationships. Would their children enjoy the benefits of continuing relationships with their parents simply because their parents were married? It is unlikely that getting married alone is the glue needed to consolidate such unions. The marriage rush of the 1960s did not result in more stable and enduring unions. On the contrary.

21st century family life

It is very difficult to make policy on these broadly social but intensely private issues. Tolerance rules. But separation as a result of poor relationships and poorly managed break-ups is costing us economically and in terms of adult and child wellbeing. The quality of children's lives is affected by the quality of their parents' relationship. If the quality is good it offers protective factors. But if it is poor it is associated with poorer parenting and poorer parent –child relationships.

One advantage we have in the 21st century compared to 25 years ago is compelling evidence that stable harmonious relationships improve the quality of life for adults and children and growing knowledge about what makes relationships work, how to improve them and how to cope when they go wrong. There is much still to learn about how to deliver that knowledge in accessible and, most importantly, acceptable ways to 21st century families.

In 2008, we at One Plus One developed a new relationship support service thecoupleconnection.net designed to put that knowledge directly into the hands of couples. The service has reached around a quarter of a million couples so far, the majority of users are men and women between 20 and 40, about 2/3rds are parents. And frontline practitioners working with families are using the materials with families directly or signposting them to the online service. A 21st century approach to strengthening 21st century families.

The Junked Generation

Just guaranteeing young people any old job does not solve the NEET problem. We need to invest early and give the vulnerable the competencies and pathways which will ensure long-term success. By **Yvonne Roberts**.

When Labour came to power, 702,000 young people were unemployed. In 2005, not for the first time, Tony Blair said: "Long term youth unemployment has been virtually eliminated under this Government." Today, the figure is 943,000. Almost one in two young black youths aged 16 to 24 is out of work, one in three Asians and one in five white youths. The number of young people who have been looking for work for longer than twelve months has risen by 50% in the past year.

Graduate unemployment has also soared since 2008, with one in ten who graduated in the summer of 2008 out of work in the following January, the highest rate since 1995/96. This level of carnage to the job prospects of young people obviously has ramifications for their individual health, wealth and wellbeing.

A young person who is out of work for a lengthy period will pay a financial forfeit of between 10-15% in middle age, according to economist David Blanchflower.

The young unemployed tend to drink more, have poorer health, higher rates of suicide and smoking, become involved in crime and suffer much more from depression. This sets up a chain reaction: young people with health problems have less success in finding jobs and are also more likely to lose or leave their jobs. In the West Midlands region, for instance, 15,000 young people were claiming Incapacity Benefit in 2009 - 60% of those on IB have been claiming for over 5 years.

Unemployment hits communities particularly hard, depleting social capital, and - as the Government's Social Exclusion Task Force argued - it means that some families hand down an inheritance of hopelessness, for generation after generation. So much so that education has no currency. The tragedy is that, in parts of the UK, that scenario has already arrived with teenagers growing up in households in which neither their parents nor grandparents have known regular employment.

Both Labour and Conservatives have acknowledged the scale of the crisis with a raft of measures but, for a number of reasons, many of these polices amount to increasing the size of the sticking plaster instead of addressing the question of why the wound is refusing to heal. The social injustice on youth today cannot easily be repaired without radical measures focused as much on prevention as cure.

The Conservatives have outlined that Get Britain Working will replace Labour's Flexible New Deal programme. A key proposal is that the young unemployed will be given personalised help after six months without a job, delivered by the voluntary and private sector, paid to get individuals into jobs for up to a year. The Tories will also create a new network of academies supported by business and industry experts such as Travelodge, Tesco and Microsoft.

Working Rite, a Community Interest Company, established by Sandy Campbell in 2001, and now supported by Learning Launchpad at The Young Foundation, will also be expanded. Hosted by a housing association, Working Rite matches young people with an older self-employed tradesman for a six month placement in a work environment. 75% of young people who go on the scheme move into employment or further training. The Tories would also offer tax breaks to employers for hiring young people and the expansion of apprenticeship and training places.

Labour introduced the Future Jobs Fund - a £1 billion fund - at the 2009 Budget and aims to create 150,000 new jobs, 100,000 of these aimed at young people. The Young Person's Guarantee provides a guarantee of a job, work focused training or 'meaningful' activity to young people aged 18-24 before they reach the 12 month stage of their claim for Job Seekers Allowance. Other measures include raising the leaving age from education and training to eighteen, reviewing current qualifications, introducing new qualifications and expanding apprenticeships and moving responsibility for children up to eighteen to local authorities.

The value of spending wisely on customised support to get young people into work is beyond doubt. The difficulty is that not enough help is sufficiently customised for a sustained period of time, and tailoring is compromised by targets that show little understanding of the scale of the challenge. In addition, employers need to do more. Sixty thousand young people are in jobs with no prospect of training. The Government is a powerful contractor – why not stipulate no contracts with employers who fail to offer training opportunities?

However, even greater attention needs to be paid to prevention and to a much stronger and dynamic recognition that the young unemployed are anything but homogeneous. Different groups need to be supported in diverse ways, and some may require support for the very long term - support that does not lend itself easily, for instance, to target driven goals and current evaluations. When that diversity is not sufficiently recognised, paradoxically, the measures to reduce joblessness may mire those at the bottom of the pyramid even further into a world without work, hope and self respect.

Prevention means investment in the early years and an urgent reconfiguration of our education system. David Cameron, understandably, says he wants a return to the teaching of British history. What he also needs to address is the capacity of many young children to learn anything at all.

Work on two longitudinal studies that followed young people born in 1958 and 1970 show that in just over a decade, personal and social skills - the ability to exercise self discipline, motivation, understand others, develop relationships, interact positively, communicate effectively and believe that what you do does make a difference - became 33 times more important in determining life chances at the same time as they were less likely to be acquired by many young people as a result of family and social change. Any education system that fails to address this loss of life skills early enough in a child's development will continue to create an alumni of NEETS – young people not in education, employment and training.

NEETS include young people with varying needs – the most challenging of which is the 38% who believe 'it's too late for me'. A 2008 report by the British Chamber of Commerce gave a number of reasons why some young people become NEET – they include educational disaffection, family disadvantage and poverty, being in care, teenage motherhood, special educational needs, becoming a young carer, belonging to certain BME groups and participating in crime and risk activities.

An analysis of 6,000 who had been through the New Deal for Young People found that 80% had at least one of these markers of disadvantage. 40% had experienced multiple disadvantages. Many of these young people in spite of, or as a result of an entire lifetime of experiencing profound challenges, also have resilience which could be the life blood of this economy if channelled effectively.

At present there is a plethora of schemes to help young people – over 270 in London alone. Too many, however, are short term and lack rigour, evaluation and a clear consensus on the outcomes that are required as a test of success. Getting a job is not the same as staying in a post for a lengthy period of time, developing capabilities and acquiring qualifications. At one stage in the New Deal, half of those given help were back on benefits within a year.

A recent study of worklessness shows how the unqualified dip in and out of poorly paid work that fails to elevate them out of poverty or allow them to make incremental steps up the ladder of opportunity. The wonder in that context is why any bother to seek employment at all. Some initiatives are excellent such as Career Academies UK, that boosts the number of under-privileged young people moving into higher education as a result of intensive support and Local Employment Access Projects or LEAP , a charity based in North West London that focuses on 'tough love', discipline, motivation and employment in jobs with opportunities. Both, however, are attempting to correct the mistake that the system has already made.

What else might help? Improving the education system, including embracing the potential in vocational education and giving extra investment in the acquisition of life skills very early in a child's life. Providing intensive and sustained support for some young people particularly in the transitions from primary to secondary school and from school into further training or work. Adopting a path, already followed in Scotland, of getting employers involved in primary schools. Widening the experiences of young people - a civic three week national service is a start, but too little, too late - so they can break out of the cocoon of impotence that unemployment often weaves around an entire community. All these are measures which, as part of a coherent strategy, linked across Government departments, might contribute to a solution. As would an improvement in the employability, persistence and motivation of graduates so they offer more of what employers seek.

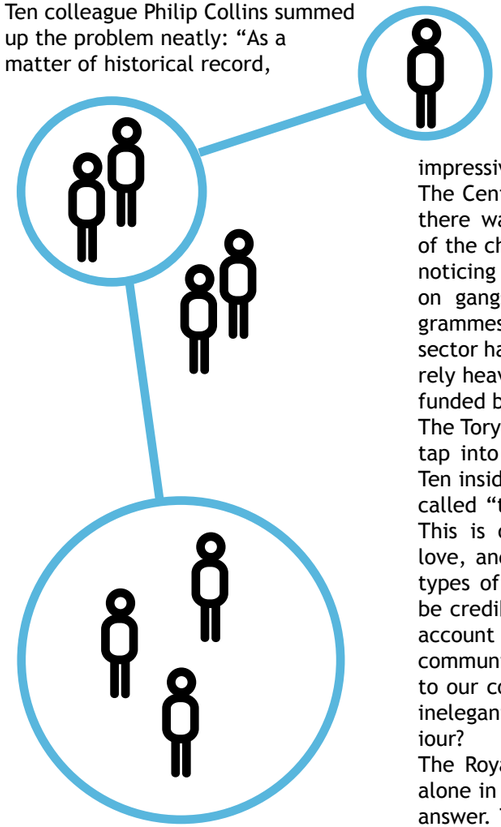
Youth unemployment isn't a set of statistics – it is the weathervane of the kind of society in which we wish to live. A signal of the investment – or lack of it - in our collective future. And a test of the compassion and innovative thinking of our politicians. A test that, at present, they are failing.

Power to the Networked People

Cameron's vision of active citizenry needs state support and sophisticated thinking about strengthening community networks. By **Matthew Taylor**.

The big question for Cameron Conservatives is how to reconcile a commitment to social justice with a determination to reduce the reach of the state. Talk about cutting waste and burning quangos may work rhetorically but given the scale of both challenges no one seriously thinks this would resolve the dilemma.

Writing in The Times, my old Number Ten colleague Philip Collins summed up the problem neatly: "As a matter of historical record, pretty much every time that a Conservative Government has left a progressive legacy it has done so by adding to the functions of government rather than by subtracting from them".



> "Our own behaviours are shaped not just by the people we know, but by the people they know"

A few days ago I went to an impressive event on gangs hosted by The Centre for Social Justice. Although there was much emphasis on the role of the charitable sector, I couldn't help noticing that the CSJ recommendations on gangs included new national programmes and targets. Even if the third sector has a bigger role it will inevitably rely heavily on being commissioned and funded by the state.

The Tory answer to this conundrum is to tap into what another former Number Ten insider, David Halpern, has recently called "the hidden wealth of nations". This is our capacity to provide care, love, and trust as well as more formal types of philanthropy. For this idea to be credible, the Conservatives need an account of the factors that strengthen communities; what is it that contributes to our collective capacity for what can inelegantly be called 'pro-social' behaviour?

The Royal Society of Arts (RSA) is not alone in offering social networks as the answer. The evidence for the power of the connections between people has been building for many years. Robert Putnam's social capital theory argues that nature of social bonds is an important influence on the well-being and life chances of members of a particular community. More recently Connected by Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler has brought together evidence for the way our own behaviours are shaped not just by the people we know, but by the people they know.

Looking at social networks themselves there are some simple rules to distinguish those most likely to provide empowerment and resilience. They contain many hubs, that is, people and places to which many people connect. There are many peripheral links, so that people in one network are connected to people in other networks. And there are many links out from the community to the external world, providing what Putnam refers to as "bridging social capital".

Current RSA research among the residents of New Cross Gate in South East London finds a predictable pattern. There are many "social isolates" with no connections and many others who have a network of just one or two. The hubs which exist tend to be public service institutions – like the school – or public employees - like the dustman or local MP. Many networks are closed with few if any links to other networks or outside the locality. The purpose of this RSA Connected Communities project is not simply to map networks but to explore how local people themselves can strengthen their ties and exploit the capacities often hidden away in their midst. And in this regard there is a fascinating, but as yet only tentative, finding from our research. It appears that a characteristic of the people that are most often cited in other peoples' networks is that they are inclined themselves to value neighbourliness.

Nicholas Christakis cites research suggesting a significant genetic component in people's networking propensities, and this may be reinforced by socialisation. This suggests that every community will contain people who both particularly enjoy, and are particularly adept, at networking. These people are obviously a huge potential resource. Yet those resources may not be being tapped to the benefit of the community as a whole. Circumstance or misfortune may mean these people are marginalised - they may, for example, be housebound. It could be that the networks they engage in are anti-social (the Mafia has loads of social capital). Conversely, it might also be that those who we tend to assume are the most significant figures in the community lack networking skills.

If we could be better at discovering, engaging and supporting those in who have, what might at a stretch be called, the "people gene" our interventions could be much more powerful. This wouldn't mean that these communities didn't still need a great deal of support from the state but it might mean we could ensure public investment spread further and was more likely to help people survive bad times and grasp new opportunities.

Even if it is confirmed in the eventual research findings, this insight won't on its own resolve the Tory dilemma of how to help poor communities without spending more on them. But it might help.

The War On Poverty

Tim Montgomerie *laments the rise in poverty. The vulnerable need a fresh approach: neither Labour nor libertarianism, but compassionate conservatism*

Under Labour something went badly wrong in the war on poverty. 900,000 more people fell into extreme poverty. More kids failed at school. Brown missed his child poverty targets. The disposable income of the poorest families fell.

What should concern us all is that these reverses happened during years of plenty. Labour lost another generation to poverty even though the economy was growing and tax revenues were flooding into the welfare state. George Osborne's soundbite – "Labour didn't fix the roof when the sun was shining'"– should only begin to capture the anger we should feel at Labour's thirteen wasted years. Years during which the poor got even poorer.

If compassionate conservatism is to succeed it has to offer something very different from Labour's approach. It cannot mean more of the same. We have to bring new weapons to the war on poverty.

Our fight against poverty starts with the basics that Labour has neglected. We need to create a society that nurtures the behaviours that defeat poverty. Evidence suggests that three behaviours matter most. Leaving school with at least a basic skills set. Taking paid work, however low-paid, but getting on to the ladder for something better. And building a stable family for your partner and your children. Other important poverty-defeating behaviours include staying away from debt, drugs and alcohol. This might seem like an obvious list but Labour has systematically rewarded people who do the wrong thing and ignored or penalised those who do the right thing.

A traditional right-wing or libertarian approach to poverty would end at this point of listing the poverty-defeating behaviours. A young person in the brave libertarian world is left to sink or swim. That can't be a compassionate conservative's approach. Compassionate conservatives need to be different in two important ways. First, we need to actively encourage good behaviours. Second, we need to build what David Cameron called "the nation of the second chance".

> "A young person in the brave libertarian world is left to sink or swim. That can't be a compassionate conservative's approach"

First, there's the challenge of helping people do the right thing. It's not enough to say that a good education is important. We need to put extra resources into the disadvantaged communities that might otherwise struggle to recruit good teachers. We need to encourage diversity in education so that those who are not academically gifted can acquire vocational skills. We need to give headteachers the powers to ensure schools are places where discipline is strong.

The same conservative interventionism can be applied to the family. That's why I support David Cameron's willingness

to invest in relationship education programmes, as delivered by the private and voluntary sectors. Children from broken homes need to learn basic parenting and relationship skills. We also need to end the perverse disincentives within Labour's welfare system that actually encourage two parent families to live apart.

Iain Duncan Smith's Centre for Social Justice has formulated a variety of other policy measures that will underpin the most reliable pathways away from poverty. The CSJ's Dynamic Benefits report offers the most important of these – recommending a simplification of the welfare system that will ensure that work always pays more than benefits.

The second key feature of compassionate conservatism is to help those people and families who find themselves in poverty despite best efforts or no efforts. In a speech to the CSJ in early 2006, David Cameron said that he wanted to build the nation of the second chance. "For the mum who got pregnant as a teenager the nation of the second chance will enable her to study when she's 35," he said. He continued: "The nation of the second chance will offer rehab to the man who has frittered away his twenties on drugs. The nation of the second chance will find a warm home and a job for the man who has slept rough since he ran away from the father that abused him."

At the heart of this offering of a second chance is a reinvigorated voluntary sector. Conservatives need to develop new models of voluntary sector funding so that more innovative not-for-profit groups can flourish. Matched funding arrangements, voucher systems and venture funding must all be a bigger part of the future than direct grant streams.

Helping more able-bodied people to live independent lives will ultimately reduce the burden on the taxpayer. Taxpayers will be able to keep more of their hard-earned money and that which does go into the welfare state will go to the most needy and most deserving – the very sick, the very old and the very disabled.

Creative Thinking is Needed to Support Small Businesses

Supporting small businesses need not be the job of Whitehall. Local solutions can revitalise local communities.
By **Damian Collins**.

Running your own business, like owning your own home, is at the heart of the aspirational economy. It is not only a measure of personal fulfilment but often a driver of innovation in the economy and creator of jobs. And the fact that Tesco started on a stall and Google in a garage, show that entrepreneurs are often better at spotting new opportunities than Governments are.

But if you want to see how the greatest recession in modern times has affected life in Britain today, you can walk down the high street of most towns and shopping centres. According to the Local Data Company's 2009 report, in towns like Margate and Wolverhampton, around one in four shops are empty. In Folkestone in my own constituency, the rate is estimated to be around one in six. This decline has been driven in the recession of by the loss of independent businesses, as well as larger national chains like Woolworth and Borders.

These are difficult times for all businesses, but I fear we have reached a tipping point where shops in town and village centres are struggling to be viable. They have suffered the triple whammy of the rising burdens of tax and regulation, competition from larger retailers and the internet, and the steady retreat of local institutions like bank branches, post offices and pubs.

New challenges

We cannot turn back the clock, nor should we try. All businesses have to adapt to changing times and we cannot recreate the high streets of the 1950s. Independent businesses will struggle to beat their larger competitors on price. So instead they must offer something else – whether it is expertise, local knowledge to spot a new market opportunity or a more creative approach to the sourcing and presentation of their goods and services.

In the past, if you wanted to understand the social scars of business failure, you went to the old industrial heartlands. So Margaret Thatcher went to Teesside and the London Docklands. Enterprise Zones were created to attract new private sector investment and create jobs. There was an acceptance that to re-establish a viable market economy, that investment needed to be attracted from outside. Similar problems now exist in our town centres.

In many older town centres which have been suffering from decline for a number of years, dilapidation has become a problem. This means that the premises are in such a poor state that it would cost too much to restore them. In Folkestone, the Creative Foundation established by the Roger De Haan charitable trust has bought a number of properties in the Old High Street and area near to the harbour. They have invested in renovating the properties and then trying to attract creative businesses like artists, designers and florists into them at discounted rents. However, the size of the investment required bringing the properties up to scratch is currently well ahead of what the local property market could afford. The rents you would need to charge to repay the investment in the buildings would mean that a fully commercial rent would be too high. Yet, without the investment to improve the quality of this shopping centre it would be difficult to attract new businesses, and with them new customers.

Local solutions

High street and village centre businesses are part of the communities they serve. They employ local people and often buy goods and services from other local businesses. It has been estimated that 50% of the money taken over the counter by a local business will go straight back into the community. Measures to encourage local enterprise can be considered not just as business support, but part of the regeneration of the whole community.

Business support measures also tend to benefit individual companies, whereas a key part of the survival of a local community business could be the strength of its neighbours. Local businesses will cluster together knowing that the combination of their offer will help to attract customers, not just their ability to make themselves a destination in their own right. This is just not the case with local food businesses - where a butcher, baker and greengrocer will sit together in the same high street. The creative economy works in a similar way. Commercial photographers will often like to work near picture editors, advertising and marketing companies, casting agents and web designers because they may benefit from working together and referring customers. This is as important in a major centre like Soho as it is in emerging centres like the new Media City in Manchester, Brighton and the

new Creative Quarter and Foundation in Folkestone.

The decline of businesses at the heart of our communities requires a bigger solution than the manipulation of tax rates and relief from heavy handed regulation alone. It requires creative thinking to develop an effective local plan to regenerate businesses. It means involving councils, landlords and businesses in that area. But for these plans to succeed, policy makers need to consider a number of reforms.

Supporting localism

Local authorities have had no direct incentive to invest in reviving high streets and local business centres. This is because they do not keep the business rates they collect for the Government. Therefore the level of business activity in their area has little direct financial impact upon them. With council budgets under pressure any money spent on business support initiatives must come from other services or from additional increases in council tax. Conservative policies to allow councils to keep part of an increase in business rates if new businesses are encouraged into an area will give local authorities an incentive to support business development.

In Folkestone in the week before Christmas, Shepway District Council paid for three days worth of free parking in the town. This led of an increase in the number of shoppers in the town centre of 11% against the same period in the previous year, and when the national trend over was actually a fall in customer numbers. The local traders regarded this as a great success: an effective measure to stimulate trade in a recession. But other than gratitude, the council gets nothing back from this. The policy has cost it lost parking revenues. Business groups have long criticised parking charges as something that depresses trade, but councils have an incentive to charge as much as they think they can to subsidise other areas of their work.

In a similar way, developers of new retail parks pay councils following a planning approval, known as Section 106 agreements, which creates incentives to approve more business development away from a struggling town centre. In a recession, budgets for local marketing, promotion and events to encourage visitors may also be one of the first areas of spending to be cut.

Regional Development Agencies can support regeneration projects in town centres, but the decision makers in this process of allocating funds can be distant from the local economies they could support. Their support, whilst welcome, can be relatively short term when an area might need more consistent help over a number of years and across a business cycle. It could be more effective instead to use resources at a local level, so that authorities are given an incentive to take the lead in supporting local business growth. So if the council want to support the renovation some run down shops, it could recover that investment when tenants had moved in and were paying business rates.

If the council decided to invest in reducing parking charges, or funding a marketing campaign, this cost could be recouped from increased business rates across the area if activity was a success. It may be possible that this work would not have to be underwritten by the local authorities, but perhaps by a not for profit company comprising of a variety of local business interests, working with the support of the local authority.

The ability to create new local business regeneration bodies should also be partnered with greater independence of operation and their ability to seek and give advice and support from a wider range of sources.

Creative ideas

There are a number of large companies and not-for-profit organisations pioneering new ways to support business development. However, there is often the complaint that Government-run services like Business Link are reluctant to refer people to a service that is only offered by one or two private companies, even if it could be of benefit. For example, Microsoft runs schemes to support new high tech business start ups, but this is not offered by all technology companies. We could also help promote local awareness of organisations like 'Pub is the Hub' which is supported by the Prince of Wales and works with companies, agencies and in some areas local government to help keep local pubs open by increasing the diversity of the service they provide - for example, encouraging a local food shop or post office under threat to trade from part of the premises of a pub.

The regeneration of businesses in the community requires urgent and creative thinking. It is not a matter of returning to a way of doing business that is past, but instead embracing new ideas and planning for the future. But key to this is to give local bodies an incentive to support business growth and the tools to provide more local assistance. With a local plan for a new local economy, we have the opportunity to support a new generation of businesses in the community, and perhaps create a business ownership revolution, to rival the home ownership revolution of the 1980s.

The Young Ones

Yes, young people have got a raw deal. But what are we going to do about it? **Nick Hillman** *offers his suggestions.*

Perhaps the hardest question I have been asked since becoming the Conservatives' Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Cambridge was from a 17-year old sixth-former. He asked me, and the other parties' candidates: "why should anyone from my generation vote for you, when your generation have mucked up the country and left us in so much debt?"

The implication behind the question was a bit harsh given that, in my case at least, I have never (yet) voted for the winning party at a general election. However, there is a powerful truism at its heart: today's politicians have left a gigantic mess for the next generation to pick up. The intergenerational contract has been stretched to breaking point. At the election, the biggest single issue is likely to be the eye-watering levels of debt the Government have built up which – one way or another – will have to be dealt with by the taxpayers of the future.

This problem was captured well in those Conservative posters saying "Dad's Nose. Mum's Eyes. Gordon Brown's Debt." But, to date, much of the focus on intergenerational equity has been on assessing the problem. That is the right starting point, as the issue must be understood before it can be tackled. But we need to start thinking about the policy prescriptions that will help that 17-year old too. Here are three possible ones.

First, we should think about where the training budget is best directed. In particular, it would make sense to shift some of the £1 billion Train to Gain budget that is currently spent on those in work to the provision of more apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeship training and further education college places for those yet to enter the labour market. In practice, that means a shift of resources down the age range.

Second, savings and pensions. While the current fiscal crisis may necessitate some reforms to the Child Trust Fund, we should not lose sight of its key strength: that it promotes the building up of assets among younger people in poorer families in a way that has not occurred since Margaret Thatcher sold off council houses in their thousands. We should also do more to promote good pensions. Currently, older workers - and public sector workers - tend to have access to gold-plated pensions, while younger workers tend to have access only to inferior ones with very low or no employer contributions. In those schemes open to older employees, the companies take on all the risks by promising a certain level of pension at the end. In the schemes open to younger employees, the individual takes all the risks and may face penury in retirement depending on the future state of the annuity market. This has to be changed if pensions are not to be grossly unfair to younger workers.

Thirdly, in my view, we should give 16-year olds the vote. If people are fearful that the baby boomers might unfairly outvote other age groups in the battle for public resources, then extending full democratic rights lower down the age range is a good idea. Indeed, giving the vote to 16 and 17-year olds should be a higher priority than giving it to prisoners, as has been suggested in recent months.

Whether or not these specific policies are implemented, one thing is certain: for the sake of our future social cohesion, politicians should be looking at bold policies that are designed to give younger people a fairer deal.

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