

THE  
FAMILY SPECIAL

# Fabian Review

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Spring 2009



## FAMILY VALUES

*The left's winning ticket?*

*The Royals... the left... schools... work... the Tories... marriage... parents...*



## The politics of a new era

It is still unclear what politics will look like after the economic crisis. The left needs to make a stronger public argument for the kind of reformed capitalism we want.

"Thirty years of hurt never stopped us dreaming." That was the surprising message from New Labour's next generation at the Fabian New Year Conference in January. Both Ed Miliband and James Purnell argued that the financial crisis of autumn 2008 closed the political era begun by the winter of discontent thirty years earlier. They called for a political rebalancing after a crisis caused not by too much government but too little. This tacitly acknowledged that New Labour has reformed, but not realigned, British politics.

What next? The script remains to be written, said Ed Miliband. What this new script might be is less clear.

The contours of a post-Thatcherite British politics remain hazy. The political frontbenches have been unable to contribute much of substance to this season of Thatcher retrospectives because neither party leader can yet give a full, frank and honest public account of the Thatcher legacy. David Cameron cannot publicly own pre-Thatcherite 'progressive Conservative' traditions of Macmillan and Heath for fear of offending his Thatcherite party.

Labour remains in Thatcher's shadow because it too often still thinks of its acknowledgement of the role of markets as primarily the product of its 1980s political defeats. A critique of the excesses of neo-liberalism is necessary, but not enough. A credible alternative depends on working through, in our own terms, a social democratic account of the scope and limits of markets if they are to pursue economic, social and environmental ends.

This cannot be the left's moment without serious advocacy of the reformed capitalism we want. That centre-left ideas are in the ascendant internationally does not guarantee progressive outcomes. There was no British FDR. The British centre-left has done well only in moments of hope – in 1906, 1945, 1966 and 1997 – being badly defeated in times of economic crisis, in the 1930s and 1980s.

Doing better this time depends on a clearer public argument. A fiscal stimulus, quantitative easing and promoting global action at the G20 summit have been important, and necessary. But they do not yet amount to a politics of this crisis, and seem distant to a public disoriented by the scale of events, and asked to

decide whether the scars of inaction will prove more damaging than increased public debt.

Unemployment could prove the decisive issue. Those least to blame in this crisis are the 600,000 young people who will leave education this summer, with the same number again next summer. Perhaps only half will find jobs. To argue that government cannot do more is to accept four million unemployed as a price we have to pay.

Just as Iain Duncan Smith reflects a growing awareness on the right of the social legacy of the 1980s, Professor David Blanchflower (for a long time a lonely voice on the Monetary Policy Committee) has set out several credible, affordable and time-limited measures urgently required to prevent the scars of this recession being felt in 30 years time.

This could prove the central political choice of the year ahead. New Labour came to power seeking to address youth unemployment. The principle of fairness rightly insists that those who could work must be willing to do so; there should also be meaningful work or training for all who want it. Let us not offer responsibilities without rights. SK

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## Here are some recent highlights:

Monday, 19 January 2009

### [Mandelson: the filthy rich should pay their taxes](#)

Pushing up tax rates for high earners is not a "litmus test of social justice", Business Secretary Peter Mandelson told [the] Fabian New Year Conference. Instead, tax policy should be guided by the economic circumstances and national needs of the time, he argued – with the new 45p top rate necessary for everyone to pay their "fair share of the burden" during the recession. Speaking at the session 'Fairness in a Recession', Lord Mandelson began by reminding the audience that his renowned quote about New Labour being "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich" had come with an oft-neglected caveat: "so long as they pay their taxes". TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber later delivered his own rejoinder to the quote, saying: "But the trouble is, you know, they don't".

Posted by Robert Alcock

Monday, 19 January 2009

### [Chatting about feminism](#)

Is there a new feminist movement or just an illusion of one? Certainly the debate at the feminism session at the Fabian New Year Conference was one of the most interesting debates I have been to for a while. Rather than an old-style debate, this was more like a conversation wandering through the audience. There were no definitive answers, only questions. But there was a sense that young women in their 20s were often not happy to be connected with the word 'feminism' because they didn't feel it applied to them. Others were dismissive of this, because they felt it wasn't acknowledging the contributions of feminists of the past. But surely that is irrelevant, if young women who broadly believe in equal pay, and broad equality, chose not to consider themselves feminists is there a problem? Maybe not. Perhaps it doesn't matter at all what people call themselves, if they come together to fight for particular policies or positions.

Posted by Rachael Jolley

Friday, 20 February 2009

### [The PM shows his support](#)

Gordon Brown, a keen student of history and the politics of the welfare state sent a message of support to our Fighting Poverty and Inequality Conference:

*"Sometimes ideas are more than simple passing notions – some are insurrections in the human imagination, ways of looking at the world which once unleashed mean society can never be the same again. So it was with Beatrice Webb's 1909 Minority Report to the Royal Commission on the Poor. The report was a landmark moment in the history of political ideas; the first call for not just the abolition of the workhouse but for its replacement with a modern welfare state and national health service... While the politics and policy challenges of the global age are often very different, it is right that we should be inspired in our tasks by the progressive giants who came before. So I salute the efforts of the Fabian Society and Webb Memorial Trust in commemorating this centenary and asking how the ideas and campaigns of a century ago can inspire this generation as we work to build in this place and in our time that which Fabians have always dreamed of: the fair society. I'm sorry not to be with you today but look forward to hearing the results of your deliberations. With warm best wishes, Gordon Brown"*

Posted by Rachael Jolley

Tuesday, 3 March 2009

### [Phil Woolas: ONS playing politics with immigration stats](#)

My letter to Daily Mail Editor in Chief Paul Dacre last week about the his newspaper's report on immigration and citizenship, classifying British-born descendants of those born abroad as immigrants, generated a lot of interest around the internet. I dropped immigration minister Phil Woolas a note to see whether he had any public comment to make himself. I have just received this comment from him: "Most people believe that it is the Government who have released these figures in this way. In fact, it was the Office of National Statistics with no Ministerial involvement and indeed despite my objections... So, Government gets the blame by some for whipping up anti-foreign sentiment when it is the independent ONS who are playing politics." Phil Woolas had been asked about the foreign-born statistics at a Fabian breakfast seminar on immigration and skills... That was a Chatham House rule event... It is interesting that Woolas is willing to place that frustration with the dangers of the ONS media strategy on the record too.

Posted by Sunder Katwala

## Fabian Review

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# Valuing the family



Ed Wallis  
is Editorial Manager  
at the Fabian  
Society

The politics of the family has always been problematic for the left. The right has consistently owned the political territory with its clear and simple message on the primacy of the married, nuclear family.

This situation makes little sense. The issues that matter most to families, from support for children and schools to work-life balance, are also at the heart of the progressive agenda. But the left's approach has been muddled, caught between its desire to celebrate diversity and a recognition of the need for supportive family structures. In its wish to be all things to all people, it has failed to find a distinctive message that connects with the public.

This issue of the Fabian Review looks at how to redress this historic imbalance and forge a new progressive narrative on the family. Over the next pages, Tim Horton exposes the contradictions in Tory thinking on the family and shows where the left needs to look for a new message; Chair of the education Select Committee Barry

Sheerman calls on elected officials to commit to using the same community schools their constituents send their children to; pensions minister Kitty Ussher looks at Labour's position on marriage and argues for a focus on the relationships themselves rather than their structure; Kathryn White says we should scrap maternity and paternity leave and replace it with joint parental leave; Denis MacShane argues that the royal family are in many ways typical of families in Britain; and Kate Bell visits marriage promotion groups in America and reports that the recession might necessitate a change in their approach.

Families in Britain have changed. The figures reported here highlight the roots of the left's dilemma: the number of marriages registered in the UK has almost halved since 1972 whilst divorce increased throughout the 80s; and in 2004 42 per cent of children were born out of wedlock, compared to 8 per cent in 1970. Clearly Labour is right to not simply reward and support marriage – despite the evidence that time and again it produces the most successful outcomes for children – as this would exclude huge swathes of the population. But how can Labour formulate a better way of talking to everybody without being cast as 'anti-family'? It is only once this has been resolved that the left can begin to make the family a winning issue.

## REGISTERED MARRIAGES

2007  
**270,003**

1997  
**310,218**

1972  
**480,285**

## DIVORCES

2007  
**144,220**

(lowest since 1977)

1993  
**180,018**

(highest number recorded)

1977  
**138,445**

## NUMBER OF UNMARRIED COUPLES COHABITING 2007

**2.2 million**

Between 1986 and 2005, the number of cohabiting couples doubled to 24% of men and 25% of women aged under 60

## NUMBER OF ADOPTIONS (England & Wales)

2007 **4,725**      1970 **21,495**

## PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN BORN OUT OF WEDLOCK (England & Wales)

1970 **8%**  
(In WL 719,742, Out of WL 64,744)

2004 **42%**  
(In WL v369,997, Out of WL 269,724)

## NUMBER / PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN GROWING UP IN POVERTY

2006/7  
**2.9 million/22%**

1998/9  
**3.4 million/26%**

## NUMBER OF SAME SEX CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS 2007

**8,728**

## UNDER-18 CONCEPTION RATE FOR ENGLAND IN 2006

**40.6 per 1000 girls**

aged 15-17

Represents an overall decline of 13.3% since 1998

## PERCENTAGE OF CHILDCARE PROVISION PROVIDED BY GRANDPARENTS

**60%**

1 million+ grandchildren are denied contact with their grandparents as a result of adoption, divorce, separation or family feud





# The Royal We

*Denis MacShane argues that the royal family is more like us than we might like to believe: divorced, divided, but surviving. And it is our conception of the family that will keep shaping the debate about what the monarchy should look like in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.*



Denis MacShane is Labour MP for Rotherham and a member of the Fabian Society Executive

**Is the royal family a family? They** themselves refer to the collective of royals as 'the firm' and ever since the failure of three of the marriages of the monarch's offspring, there is less and less effort to present a model of family life for the nation to emulate.

It was not always thus. In the 1950s, under tightly controlled media management, there was a concerted campaign to present the royal family as very much a model family. Post Office savings stamps were sold to children with pictures of a young Prince Charles and Princess Anne. In fact, the Queen and Prince Phillip are typical of the 1940s post-war married couples who produced the baby-boom generation: marriage was for life and the reproduction of the nation was best handled by the institution of the family.

Public affection for King George VI and his Queen – who courageously lived in Buckingham Palace as bombs fell on London – was then transferred to the very young Queen Elizabeth II and her dashing young naval officer consort. After their marriage in 1947, the speedy birth of children, and the accession to the throne in 1952, their position as positive role models for the family seemed secure.

Already however there was a worm in the bud, as it was clear that Prince Philip was of lower status than his wife and had no right to share daily involvement in high state affairs that a British monarch enjoys. Margaret Thatcher complained after she was fired from Downing Street that what she missed the most was the pile of cables coming in from British embassies around the world, reporting in detail

what was happening in the world. The Queen has had that royal jelly of fascinating information as a morning feast every day of her life. But her husband hasn't. So from the moment she ascended the throne she enjoyed a professional life that was separate to her family.

After the arrival of her two youngest sons there was a last effort to present the royal family as a model family to the nation. The famous black and white BBC documentary of 1969 was a reverential effort to show the royal parents and their children as just an average British family. It was toe-curlingly awful, as, with false bonhomie, the poor Queen was shown flipping sausages on a Balmoral barbecue while the primitive fly-on-the-wall cameras tried to sell the Royal Family as a glowing example of unified and happy family activity.

The year was inauspicious, as 1968/69 marked the rejection by the baby boom generation of all the mores of their parents, especially the notion of marriage and settled family life. One can almost feel pity for Charles and Anne, and later Andrew and Edward, as they were expected to conform to a way of being that all their contemporaries were rejecting.

In fact, the royal family did become a very typical British family with three of the children divorcing their spouses, enjoying adulterous dalliances and relying on state hand-outs to pay for housing, food and travel. And in turn the next generation has reflected the hedonistic individualism which modern capitalism has privileged over the community of family. Recent pictures of Prince Harry show him with luridly



Photo: John Stillwell/PA Wire

In 2003, the Fabian Monarchy Commission made four recommendations on royal succession. The first two seem to be under current consideration but surely it's also an outdated idea that the Queen's family cannot marry without her permission and that, should she want to, she would be unable to resign her post?

- ✿ The line of succession should pass to the eldest child regardless of gender.
- ✿ The bar on Catholics in the Act of Settlement 1701 should be repealed, along with the requirement for the British Head of State to hold any particular faith or any faith at all.
- ✿ The Royal Marriages Act 1772, which forbids members of the royal family in line of succession from marrying without the consent of the monarch should be repealed.
- ✿ Changes to the Accession Oath should be made to allow for the voluntary retirement of the monarch if he or she so wishes.

painted finger nails as he staggers out of some night club. And, unlike his grandparents who married at a young age and settled down to make a family, Prince William seems unable to create a settled relationship.

In this, the royal family are closer to their subjects than is often realised. The model family of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century had a shorter shelf-life than its contemporary defenders and promoters care to admit.

This does not mean the efforts to help support other families should be discarded. The family remains the best example of socialist solidarity ever created: from each according to means, to each according to need is (or should be) the central tenet of family life. Families allow the transmission of wisdom across the generation. Families are where the cocky are teased, the strong are told to do the washing up, and where tolerance has to co-exist with firmness.

Capitalism always hates the family and seeks to segment and individualise family members. The de-regulated capitalism of Mrs Thatcher's regime was hardly challenged by Labour after 1997, which privileged pushing people into work at the expense of finding time for them to be with their children. There is still no adequate left politics of parenting and family life, save

perhaps, as usual, in Nordic countries. But the stark reality is that families cannot easily co-exist with social and income inequality. As unemployment grows so will family break-ups.

The debate is now open about what kind of institutional head of state Britain really wants, and that debate will necessarily be bound up with our conception of the family. The Commons recently debated ideas for removing the religious obligation for monarchs and their spouses to be Protestants and, according to newspaper reports, Gordon Brown has discussed this with the Queen at his weekly audience. He also raised the question of why male princes should have primacy over their sisters. (After all, women have been the best monarchs in our history.) It is clearly ridiculous that William and Harry cannot marry without their grandmother's permission.

As with the politics of family the politics of monarchy are now seeing old taboos lifted and fresh questions asked, and not before time. But the fact remains that the royal family does not know how to invent a new 21st century model of family life. The happy Balmoral pictures from 1969 now look as quaint as marmite and sandwich spread. The royal family is like too many British families: **divorced, divided, but survived.** ■



“I’ve always been a bit of a loner”

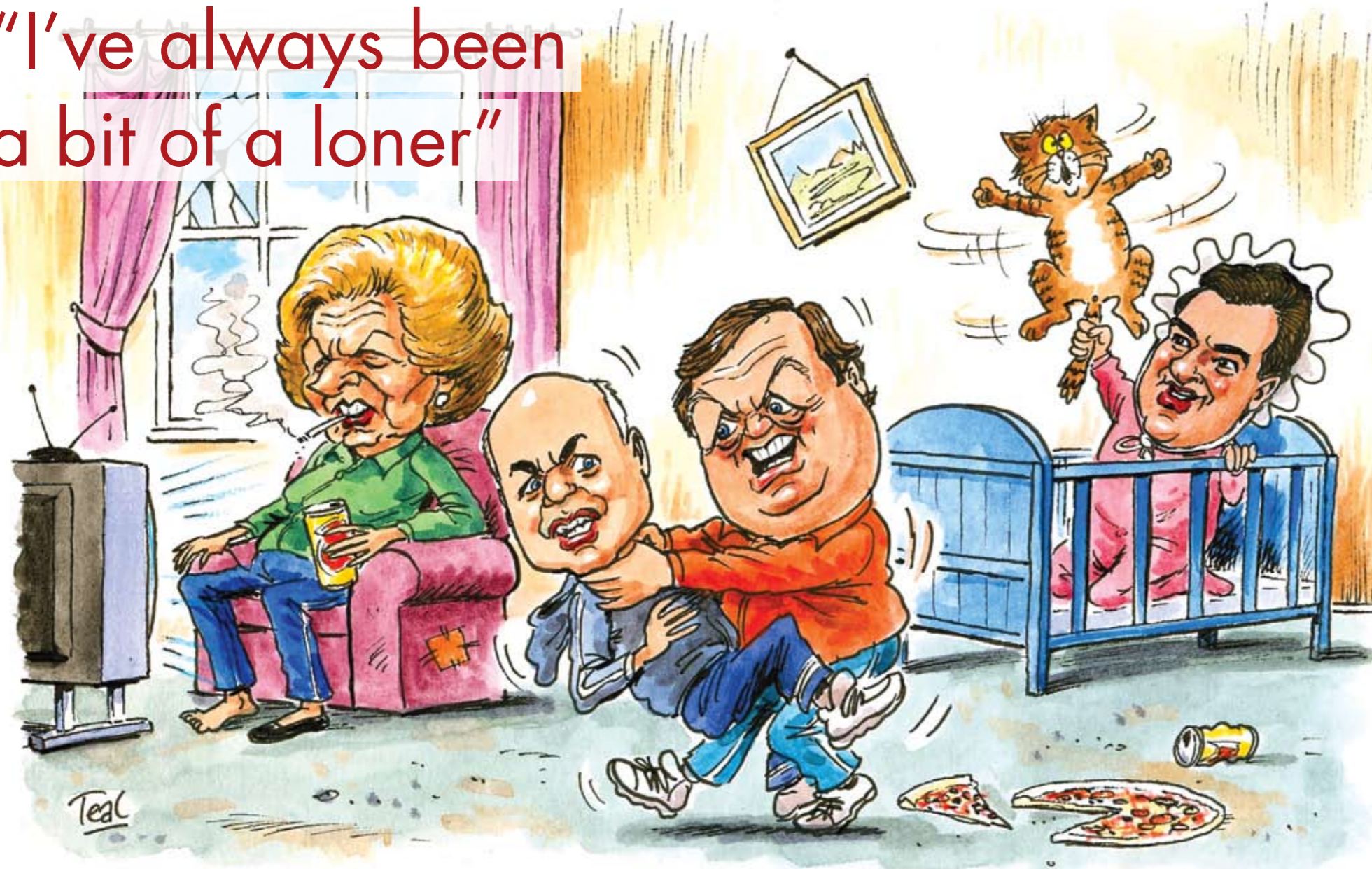


Image: Adrian Teal

Mary Riddell finds the former quiet man in forthright form: bashing Ken Clarke, critiquing the Thatcher legacy – and even praising Gordon Brown.



Mary Riddell is a columnist for the Daily Telegraph

Iain Duncan Smith is not only an unusual Conservative. He is also an unlikely politician. Dismissive of the House of Commons, which he calls “this terrible place”, he is the antithesis of a party tribalist. Heavens, he even concedes that Gordon Brown might win the next election.

“I think there must be an outside chance. What would be required?” he wonders. “The public turns round and says maybe things are picking up, maybe he was right.” While such musings are unlikely to warm the heart of David Cameron, the

Conservative leader owes much to Mr Duncan Smith.

If caring Conservatism has any credibility, then it is rooted in the IDS project. His meticulous research on social justice has earned him respect across the political spectrum. As his colleague, Oliver Letwin, says, he has “changed the terms of trade.” When I arrive at his Commons office, IDS (the initials have long since become a household name) hands me his dossier on Breakthrough Britain. Thicker than the Yellow Pages, it bespeaks a passion that baffles other senior Tories.

time ... And Michael Howard dropped back,” he says, rather gleefully, of his successor.

Ousted in 2003, he embarked, after a period of reflection, on his current mission. As chair of the policy group, the Commission for Social Justice, the self-styled ‘quiet man’ has found his voice. These days, he talks unstoppably. He is, in many ways, much changed.

Once, IDS seemed the creature of Margaret Thatcher, who endorsed his leadership bid. With the 30th anniversary of Thatcher’s accession imminent, does he now regret the brutal edge of Thatcherism or acknowledge the harm caused by rampant individualism? “Britain’s position by 1978/9 was appalling – we were just disappearing as a nation. It simply was not possible to go on any longer.

“You have to remember it was Denis Healey who did most of the serious hard work, the heavy lifting, before Mrs Thatcher came in. Had she come in without Healey’s work in the IMF, I don’t think she’d have lasted two years. She would have been out in 1983. Getting the economy back to a point where it was profitable and we had some sort of enterprise was [vital].

“But yes, what happened next was in some ways [unfortunate]. We forgot that, while the economy was moving on, society itself was not really ready for this. Swathes of the population got left behind in the process ...The gap between the bottom socio-economic group and the rest started to grow, and it’s grown ever since. Under Labour it’s grown almost faster in some senses.

“While I’m not going to point the finger and say the changes made in the Eighties were wrong, we didn’t have any real sense of where this might go and what needed to happen. Big social reforms should have taken place then, and they never did.” This partial denunciation of Thatcherism by her protege and heir will strike some Tories as a heresy. But few leading politicians are as familiar as IDS with the sink estates that symbolise the price of inequality.

Thatcher’s policy of selling council houses and failing to invest the profits in social housing added up, as he admits, to a disaster. “Nobody really thought about what happens if you allow only the most broken families to exist on housing

estates. You create a sort of ghetto in which the children who grow up there repeat what they see around them.”

IDS’s attempts to combat this familiar problem have landed him in some difficulty. Not long ago, he was lambasted in the media for suggesting that council-house dwellers were “workshy”. His aim is to abolish “ring-fenced ghettos” by breaking up grim estates and knitting social housing into mixed communities close to where people can work. The idea, which may strike some as fanciful, is that tenants, rather than bedding down for life, will move “through and up”, renting or buying their own homes and thus freeing space for other needy families.

The deeper question is what causes dysfunction. I put it to him that he has transposed cause and effect. The left would argue that poverty leads (though not inevitably) to crime, anti-social behaviour, educational failure, drug use, drinking, teenage pregnancy, family breakdown and the myriad of other social problems he cites. IDS, on the other hand, seems to suggest that it’s the other way round. Dysfunctional behaviour makes you poor.

“You say the left thinks these [problems] come as a result of being poor. I don’t think it’s like that.” His argument is that all the ills to which the disadvantaged are prone track back to family breakdown. And that, in turn, links into the other major area of difference between left and right: the focus on marriage.

I wonder whether IDS’s enthusiasm for the institution goes wider than his party’s enthusiasm and its policy of tax breaks for married couples. Is he also preaching a message about morality and the sanctity of marriage? If so, is that informed by his own happy marriage (to Betsy, with whom he has four children) and his teenage conversion to Roman Catholicism?

“Well, it may well be. We are all, to a degree, products of where we come from. Having said that, there are people in my family whose marriages have not lasted. That goes for the majority of my siblings. There are five of us, and only two are still married to the people we started with. I refuse to allow anyone to sit and wag fingers. Family breakdown happens.”

“I would never attempt to say you must get married – I don’t think any



government should say that. But alone among European nations, this country has absolutely no recognition in tax for a couple that chooses to get married and where one of them (he is careful to stress that fathers as well as mothers may opt for a nurturing role) chooses for a period to stay home." He justifies his corollary, that cohabitants should receive no such bonuses, by citing the "extraordinarily high" rate of break-up.

But France, Germany and the Nordic countries all have comparable level of unmarried couples who stay together to bring up their children. Surely Britain's particular problem again tracks back to the debilitating effects of poverty and inequality? And can he really take people back to some prelapsarian age of family life?

His answer is that he has no such wish. He merely want to "stem the tide of breakdown". But the Tories' own business spokesman, Ken Clarke, who IDS beat to the party leadership, is said to think the idea of tax breaks for married couples is rubbish?

"Well, Ken's wrong. Ken's been wrong about this ever since he was born, I expect, and I don't have any problem with that. Ken's had this view and hasn't changed it for years. He doesn't read any of the figures; he hasn't read any of [my]stuff. He held that opinion in government. He was one of the main architects of getting rid of the recognition of marriage under the last government." Will he cause any trouble? "No, because it's the policy of the Conservative party right now to adopt some of [the measures] we are discussing."

This broadside against Mr Clarke, issued in the tetchiest of tones, is an example of what makes IDS so interesting. He has been burned too deeply by politics, I imagine, to toe any effete line of party unity. If he wore a hoodie, you might call him feral.

"I've always been a bit of a loner," he says. "That may be one of the reasons why I'm no longer leader. I never spent my time trying to build a fan base. I don't think I'm very clubbable. I don't want to go on holidays with other MPs, and vice versa."

Despite this aloofness, he appears quite keen on Gordon Brown, with whom he has discussed his ideas. Does he have sympathy with the PM and

what he is trying to achieve? "Yes. He's not somebody you treat lightly. He's always tried to set out and do this [social reform]. Whether I agree with some of his prescriptions is another matter." Child tax credit is, IDS says, "a mess.. but Gordon Brown won't do anything about it, because that would somehow admit he's got something wrong. That's his big weakness."

**If you come into power and, like every other party, cut and trim and squeeze, I predict you will not succeed in any strategic way**

IDS's current political partner is the Labour MP, Graham Allen. Together they have produced a pamphlet for the Smith Institute on early years, which is IDS's current "obsession". In line with research by George Hosking, of the Wave Trust, and others, he wants to develop policy based on the neuroscience showing that the infant brain is hardwired by the experiences of the first months of life. "I hadn't realised before the huge degree to which the first three years almost sets the complete pattern of your life."

But how, as public debt mounts, can sufficient money be ploughed into early years? Perhaps, I suggest, by abandoning our record as the biggest jailer of teenagers in western Europe, but IDS seems not wholly keen on this solution.

"We are left with two ends of the coin. You still have very high bills for the social breakdown we have right now. If you come into power and, like every other party, cut and trim and squeeze, I predict you will not succeed in any strategic way." One answer, he suggests, is "double funding. You recognise the incredible savings that will flow from [early intervention]. In Colorado, the results have been dramatic. It's demonstrable. There are a number of possible mechanisms for borrowing against later savings. You would advance that money to the early years. You might sell bonds on

early behaviour that would return a reasonable rate."

It is, as he acknowledges, "a little unfortunate that we're in the middle of a recession." But even if the sun were shining, it seems doubtful whether David Cameron, pledged to ratchet down public spending, would invest the billions necessary to make IDS's dreams of a socially just Britain a reality.

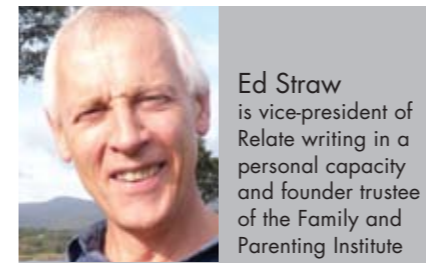
"Well, it's my job to find a way for any government to do this. We've built a benefits model, which will cost a lot of money. We'll have to borrow and beg. We're looking at dynamic benefits rather than the static mess we're in at the moment." Does he think Beveridge was wrong? "No. Beveridge wrote three papers, and the third – on the third sector – is never referred to. There has to be a voluntary sector, the self-help groups, the charities." All of which are also struggling now, I say, but he brushes this objection aside. "We've got a very unwieldy welfare state, but actually I thought Beveridge was quite far-sighted. If we'd built the model he was after, it might be more durable now."

What about child poverty? Does he agree that its abolition should be enshrined in law? "I don't know, really.. I'm always slightly concerned that once you bring the courts into politics, it becomes just another breeding ground for rows rather than innovative thinking."

He cannot personally be faulted for any lack of blue skies thinking. His interest is the long view, rather than the short termism of the Commons. "Which is so insular. We spend our time spitting at each other across the floor of the House." Independent to a fault, IDS scores no points and seeks no party advantage. Throughout our long interview, the phrase "broken Britain" does not cross his lips.

The question is whether Mr Cameron or Mr Brown will ever match his vision with enough public funds to re-attach Britain's failed and failing citizens to the mainstream. But, as he says, policing costs are up 40 per cent, the judicial bill has risen by a quarter and the prison population is soaring. When inequality is so pernicious and so costly, can they afford not to heed the gospel of IDS? ■

## Marriage signals stability, it doesn't create it



Ed Straw is vice-president of Relate writing in a personal capacity and founder trustee of the Family and Parenting Institute

Since 1999, politics has not entered marriage – we have now had a decade where the structure of the family has barely been an area for discussion. Ten years ago David Blunkett felt obliged to close off the debate by describing marriage as "the gold standard", which, of course, it is if you are fortunate enough to have a good one, and don't want to remain single, and you don't object to it as a matter of principle as strongly as those who believe it to be a holy sacrament.

But in the interim report on the family launched by Iain Duncan Smith's Centre for Social Justice at the end of last year – a report of otherwise much good sense – marriage made a return as the answer to the ills of the family.

The CSJ has fallen for cod statistics and adopted journalists' standards. "[This report] says that only changes that will reinforce marriage should be adopted. It restates the mounting body of evidence showing that marriage produces better outcomes for both adults and children. This review is working from an underlying assumption that marriage should be supported both in government policy and in the law and that, fatherlessness (or motherlessness), far more likely when relationships are informal, should be avoided..."

Alas its researchers evidently never heard the cautionary tale of my statistics course at Manchester Business School in 1972. In the US, a positive correlation was found between the number of university professors and the consumption of alcohol. But correlation does not prove cause. Thus reducing the number of professors would not reduce alcohol consumption. A common factor might be at play.

The simple act of getting more of the unmarried to marry will not cause better parenting en masse and will not cause the outcomes for their children to improve. Life is just a little bit more complicated than that. Marriage

signals stability, it does not create it. Thus the positive effects of marriage are more due to the distinctive characteristics of the individuals who marry and stay married (the 'selection effect'). For example, it would seem that such individuals have better mental health, are better off, have a more positive attitude to family, and have other attributes which make it easier to find and sustain a successful relationship.

The CSJ statistics also suffer from a repeated failing found in much policy analysis – the tyranny of the average. Thus much analysis concludes that average X produces better outcomes than Y and thus X should be adopted universally. This neglects the full distribution of outcomes and ignores the fact that the outcomes for some unmarried families are better than for some married. Thus, unmarried people can and do produce as good or better outcomes and we know that children from high conflict homes do better after divorce. But the average is used to tell them they are wrong.

However, more sophisticated and useful analysis is very slowly creeping into the civil service and academic world, called consumer segmentation. This is based on the startling notion that people need, want and use public services in different ways. The 'can't pay' before court for their debts need a different approach to the 'won't pay'. In Iain Duncan Smith and Graham Allen MP's excellent report, *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens*, they

write that "There are no quick fixes, no 'one size fits all', we need an integrated approach and a resolve that is shared by people across the political divide". Is this the same Iain Duncan Smith?

Just how much would trying to promote marriage really achieve? Changing social behaviour is notoriously hard. Governments fail by trying to do too much – carefully selecting a few policies for consistent implementation is essential.

But assuming that a political focus on marriage and on structure is the answer

**Governments fail by trying to do too much – carefully selecting a few policies for consistent implementation is essential**

is an easy trap to fall for. The English are prone to this black and white thinking. Schools have suffered for 40 years from the tug between the comprehensive and selective systems. Either system can work well – the trick is to commit to it, pull in the same direction, and all do the many things needed to make the system work. The criminal justice system suffers a similar diminution as punishment and rehabilitation are juxtaposed rather than cohered. Perennial structural arguments absorb energy and motivation, and take attention away for the real issues.

Instead we should be honest about the limits of our knowledge. A good marriage is great to experience, but quite what makes one is not known with enough clarity to give a government justification for pulling certain levers. Some people are lucky and find the right partner at the right time, one whose idiosyncrasies amuse in the long run and do not grate. Some people are not.

Society benefits from variety in its parenting output. The CSJ report implicitly measures family success by the educational attainment, addictions and employability of the children. These are all important symptomatic measures but the end-goals of our society are surely more about contentment and fulfilment.

Diversity produces a vibrant society which is resilient to unanticipated change – as it contains the social variety to respond. The social totalitarians would allow the minimum divergence from their norm. We would all be the worse off for it. ■





# Marriage promotion in the US



Kate Bell is Director of Policy Advice and Communications at Gingerbread, the charity supporting single parent families



Photo: Rex Features

With President Obama setting a date for troops to withdraw from Iraq, a commitment to close Guantanamo, and promises of a reversal of regressive tax cuts, the Bush legacy (deficit aside) seems to be being swiftly erased. But one lasting consequence of his presidency, with implications on both sides of the Atlantic, may prove to have been putting marriage back on the public policy agenda.

“Our economy is strong and it’s getting stronger.” This was the key message as Bush signed into law the 2005 deficit reduction act. But he also earmarked “new grants to promote marriage and responsible fatherhood”: \$150 million of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families budget, normally associated with traditional spending on social assistance and labour market programmes. The mission statement of this new initiative set out a goal for public policy that

many had previously seen as well outside the role of the state: “to help couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage.”

Bill Coffin, special assistant for marriage education at the Administration for Children and Families, expressed the aims perhaps more simply when I spoke to him this summer:

“When did it become ok to separate childbirth from wedlock?”

Spending three months this summer in Washington as a visiting fellow at the progressive think tank the Center for American Progress, I’d wanted to pick up on social policy ideas that might be heading towards Britain. I found advocates of traditional poverty and employment programmes fairly

downcast – having experienced a long period of neglect. Family policy champions however were still enjoying their time in the sun, and the chance to put their ideas into practice.

The advocates of marriage programmes say there’s something we can do about the dramatic – and, they argue, damaging – decline in the number of children brought up by two married parents over the last 30 or more years. “Let’s try stuff” as Ron Haskins, architect of much of the welfare reform legislation of the 1990s put it; and the approach of the Healthy Marriage Initiative authorised in 2005 has been to let a thousand flowers bloom.

This builds, however, on two more rigorous demonstration projects, authorised earlier in the Bush administration. Few previous programmes had been aimed at low income couples, amongst whom marriage rates are significantly lower.

jobs, problems with rent, the stress of childcare, and as one put it, “I got so sick in my mind with all these bills that it was affecting my physical health”.

The leaders of the group were keen to emphasise to me how they saw this as a research based, not an ideologically driven programme. The men and women I talked to had only good things to say about the experience: “It’s like an oasis”, and “If I hadn’t come here there’d be no us.”

Being married *might* help you to hold onto a job, but it’s unlikely to ensure that the job pays enough to help you cover the rent

But it didn’t seem that a programme like this was going to solve the problems that were leading them to feel under pressure: the two jobs or the rent increases. And when I asked the wider staff team delivering these services what they had found most useful about the programme, the ‘family co-ordinators’ assigned to each couple told me it was the ability to connect people to job supports, or help with other benefits, that they felt was really making a difference to people’s lives.

Baltimore is well known for its economic problems (insert your own reference to ‘The Wire’ here). The Center for Urban Families – whose *Building Strong Families* programme I also visited – started off providing services to men and runs a workforce development stream alongside its relationship and responsible fatherhood programmes. *Building Strong Families* targets unmarried parents, and the Centre goes out to the community to find participants – including in neonatal programmes and hospitals. The programme’s director told me they use the promise of educational and workforce development as part of their recruitment tools, and lever in the idea of relationship support as part of a holistic programme that also includes help with health and childcare issues.

The programme I sat in on ran in the same way as in the Bronx, with a

video prompting discussion. The topic for the week was ‘fun’ with the family, and the session was dominated by one enthusiastic couple who, talking almost constantly, seemed to be capable of generating enough of it for the entire group. Another similarity was in the desire of the programme managers to distance their work from a goal of purely promoting marriage. They believe that relationship skills can be taught, and that the communication techniques that they are giving people are useful not only in relationships but also in the workplace. But of those who’d been through the programme, around eight had married, and around 100 broken up. This was not seen as a problem however: a break up handled well was a good outcome.

We don’t yet know whether these programmes, or the initiatives funded in 2005, will succeed in increasing marriage rates (or, of course, whether the programmes will survive the new administration). But then we also don’t really know *why* marriage rates fell so dramatically between the 1970s and 1990s. When I asked the policy advocates, their answers were surprisingly vague, usually mentioning a change in cultural mores and something about women’s employment. The programmes I visited were trying to teach better ‘relationship skills’. But the suggestion that it was a collective loss of the ability to communicate that had led to lower marriage rates wasn’t one that seemed prominent.

We also don’t know enough about the direction of the links between marriage and poverty to suggest that, if the programmes did lead to a dramatic upswing in marriage, an equally large downswing in poverty rates would follow. Being married *might* help you to hold onto a job, but it’s unlikely to ensure that the job pays enough to help you cover the rent. Investigating these links further is of course worthwhile, and the U.S. programmes may yet provide a valuable evidence base. But in a climate where the U.S. economy is no longer ‘strong and getting stronger’, investment in an evidence base rather than in interventions with known outcomes could be seen as just too much of a luxury. Marriage may just have to wait. ■





# The myths of marriage

The debate on family policy has often focused around marriage, with the left finding it hard to get on the winning side. **Kitty Ussher** looks at the left's position on marriage and argues for a focus on the relationships themselves rather than their structure.



Kitty Ussher is Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Work and Pensions.

There are around 1.8 million single mums and dads in Britain. As a society, our attitude to these parents and their circumstances is often confused and ill-informed. The people who lose out in all of this are of course the single parents themselves. Little wonder then, that in a recent survey by the lobby group Gingerbread, 84 per cent of single mums and dads said they felt the media presented them in a negative light.

And if the parents are feeling stigmatised, what are the children feeling? My mother was a single parent for a while. At the time it was fashionable to attribute the ills of the world to so-called children from broken homes. "Like my children, you mean?" my mother would ask sweetly, whenever this came up in conversation, leaving me not quite sure which way to look.

And still today, the problem is that we are looking at the wrong thing. It's not the structure of families that matters so much as the quality of the relationships within them. A study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation comparing the long term outcomes of children born in 1958 from a variety of different backgrounds concluded that there was few specific things about family structures that affected children's long term outcomes; of more critical importance were stability and low levels of conflict and/or violence. In short, the family unit could be uniquely loving or uniquely violent irrespective of whether it conformed to the traditional ideal. The authors concluded that "the structure of the family in which a child had been brought up [is] less important than the context".

Having said that, it is also the case that children of single parent families have worse average outcomes in terms of health, behavioural problems at school and academic performance than children from couple families. But there is no evidence that these bad outcomes are actually *caused* by the mere fact of lone parenting. In fact, the reason is bad outcomes are *already there*: lone parents are likely to be younger, less well-educated, in poorer health, have lower incomes and work longer hours in more menial occupations than two-parent households.

What the same report also shows is that when a single parent enjoys relationship stability, either by remaining long-term single or entering another stable partnership, the outcomes for their children are significantly less negative than if they have multiple short-term partners. Again, it is the quality of relationships that is the determining factor for children.

So the link with marriage is that, because it is something not to be entered into lightly, it is likely to be a good indicator of the stability of the underlying relationship. Which is why the Tory policy of tax incentives for marriage is completely wrong: if people are getting married only for tax reasons the chances are they will not have the underlying stability of relationship that their children need. At best it is a waste of taxpayer's money to 'reward' marriages that would have taken place anyway. At worst, if it changes behaviour at all, it is

likely to encourage people to marry for the wrong reasons.

So what are the policy lessons that flow from this? First, the way to help get better outcomes for the children from single parent households is not to focus on a 1950s view of family relationships but to focus our anti-poverty measures on this group in particular. And the best anti-poverty measure is work. Quite simply, if you are the child of a single parent then you are three times less likely to be in poverty if your parent works part-time, and five times less likely if they work full time.

Currently, single parents move onto Jobseekers allowance – and so are expected to be looking for work – when their youngest child is 16. We are reducing that age to seven because of these positive effects that parental work has on children. It is a pity that the Liberal Democrats saw fit to criticise these proposals saying that single parents "will be taking the very jobs the long-term unemployed could have filled", as if a job for a single parent surviving on benefit with their children is somehow worth less than one for somebody else.

The Tories too have opposed giving lone parents more help to prepare for a return to work. It seems single mums and dads can't win with the Tories: they would exclude them from financial help through the tax system but also exclude them from back to work support.

The second lesson for us is that the way to support families, whatever their composition, is to focus on building relationships, with training and support through schools and elsewhere, so that all family members are given the best chance to make their relationships work. This approach lies at the heart of the Government's family policy.

And third, we need to get real and move on from the false debate of the pros and cons of marriage in itself towards a rhetoric that celebrates strong loving relationships, whether between parent and parent, parent and child and the wider family, whatever form that family may take.

That is the way to ensure we are communicating not just with those in stable relationships but also with the 1.8 million human beings in this country who are simply bringing up children by themselves. ■

# The left should encourage two parent families

We asked **Anastasia De Waal** for a response to Kitty Ussher's article; and here she argues that Labour has thrown the baby out with the bathwater on marriage.



Anastasia de Waal is Director of Family and Education at Civitas

There is much to agree with in Kitty Ussher's piece. Nevertheless it succinctly encapsulates the way Labour's good intentions on the family are currently marred by needless restrictions in their analysis.

The Tories consistently make the running on the family and Labour is left playing catch up. Labour's aim is twofold: to bury the demonisation of single parents and to dismiss the notion that marriage is a silver bullet. Both points are hugely important: the Tories are undoubtedly mis-selling the benefits of couple-parenting and misleadingly talking up marriage. But the problem with Labour's position is that, in its efforts to avoid stigma and be all things to all people, it throws the baby out with the bathwater. Family structure and marriage should not simply be

dismissed as Tory; indeed, both are fundamental to the progressive agenda and. Labour must be prepared to think outside the boundaries of the Tory family narrative in order to change the terms of the debate.

The fact is that good family structure *should* be an important tenet of progressive left thinking. There is nothing right wing about thinking that even when an adult relationship has ended the parenting structure should still remain intact, with both parents continuing to be involved. Indeed, the desire to keep parenting partnerships going (inside or outside a relationship) is very different from the Conservatives' interest in keeping adult relationships going. But Ussher repeats a common Labour refrain: family structure is irrelevant and it is instead the quality of family relationships which matters.

It is true that the quality of the relationships is crucial, but if one parent is entirely absent then quality becomes irrelevant. Another counter intuitive feature of Labour thinking on the family is that, by side-stepping family structure altogether, Labour is jeopardising both its gender equality agenda and its bid to eradicate child poverty. Children are more prone to face difficulties when the two-parent structure – the dual-parenting – collapses. The poverty that single parent families suffer is greatly exacerbated by the irresponsibility of non-resident parents. For women, combining work and childcare is even harder when the father is not participating. (Although Ussher talks of Britain's 'single mums and dads', the vast majority of single-parent families are headed by women.)

The reality is that Labour is not doing enough to facilitate co-parenting, either in intact partnerships or in separated ones. This is illustrated both by 'family' friendly policies which tend in fact to focus only on women, as well as the Government's failure to properly enforce non-resident parent responsibility. Ussher rightly highlights that it is the link between single parenting and deprivation which leads to poor family outcomes. However what she does not say is that single parenting itself is very often the *outcome* of poor circumstances. The single parent is more likely to have been younger, less educated and less well off, Ussher points out. But this is

not because the less educated and less well off do not share the same interest in couple-parenting and stability as the more privileged. Rather, it is because poverty destabilises relationships. Therefore poor couples are more likely to break up in the first place – and the poor family become the single-parent family. Ussher recognises that marriage signals stability, but perhaps not that many amongst the less well-off cannot achieve that stability, explaining the much lower marriage rates in poorer areas. Largely because marriage is a no-go area for Labour, non-marriage is not problematised even when it indicates deprivation rather than diversity.

As well as being in a minority, the conscientious objectors to marriage tend to be middle class. As it stands, Labour's position appears to think that people on low incomes don't marry because they have a different set of values.

This is a similar mistake to the one the Tories are making when they promise a married person's tax break to persuade the non-marrying to marry. Both parties appear to see the different trends amongst the poorer as signalling different aspirations rather than fewer opportunities. The main reason why the Tory tax break would be pointless, as well as illegitimate, is because those not marrying tend to forego marriage out of poverty: a poverty relating to under-employment which a few hundred pounds would not address.

As Ussher says, the best way to support families is through work, not through rhetoric or tax breaks. Labour's record on work however is not impeccable, having allowed too many young people to sink into long-term unemployment. Labour needs to be more ambitious, doing more to help not just single-parents into work but all young people. Work, with the self-worth, routine and income it provides is the most important ingredient for family stability and that stability needs to be cultivated from the outset. Added to that, the Government needs to do more to support a stable co-parenting structure, in all family types. ■

*We are keen to hear your views on Labour's position on marriage and your responses to both these articles: please email them to [review@fabian-society.org.uk](mailto:review@fabian-society.org.uk)*





# Ending Destructive Individualism

Social beings need a wide support network argues

John Battle



John Battle  
is Member of  
Parliament for Leeds  
West



Photo: Roger-Viollet/Rex Features

Last year at one of the Sure Start projects in my constituency a detailed survey revealed that, among young parents in the neighbourhood, the maximum length of their relationship was no more than three years before the first major breakdown and separation.

In other words, relationships between young parents are increasingly short-term and can be assumed to have ended when their child reaches nursery age. Inevitably the pressures of poverty – particularly the drastic shortage of two and three bedroomed housing – contribute to family breakdown. Sleeping on floors or in overcrowded ‘box’ rooms with their parents, in-laws and grandparents from the start of the relationship cannot help. Couples need their own space to be a separate unit together with their children.

This short-term nature of many relationships undermines both social and personal stability; but not only is it in tune with the dominant cultural mood of addiction to surviving in the ‘instant present’, but perhaps it is reinforced by

public policy approaches to ‘the family’.

Even the term ‘the family’ is freighted with traditional idealistic notions of a perfect unit (married mother and father and 2.2 children), characterised by a heavy dose of *nostalgie de la boue*. This romanticised image of poverty still defines public commentary and responses, despite the fact that it fails to address the realities of personal relations and child-rearing in modern urban Britain – especially in poorer neighbourhoods of complex disadvantage and increasingly restricted personal economic and social mobility. Images of the family around the kitchen table in 1950s suburbia or gathered around a family programme on TV in the 1960s are light years removed from the experiences of young parents locked with their young child into a high-rise flat, or trapped at home living with parents in the small spare room.

The weakness of individualistic policy approaches – even the focus on *Every Child Matters* – is that they can reinforce isolated, atomistic

responses which continue to neglect that every human person is essentially a ‘social being’. Policies, budgets and programmes focussed on the ‘individual’ child, or even tax codes that treat ‘two as one’ as a family, all contribute to failing to address the need for wider supporting relationships.

Regarding human persons as ‘social beings’ is particularly difficult to maintain in an individualistic culture. The old metaphor of the nuclear family needs breaking open into a wider supporting social network.

As a person who was described as a ‘house-husband’ thirty years ago ... I was more than aware that a child does not come with a ready manual or handbook

On Valentine’s Day, the Relationships Foundation published research on the costs and benefits of relationships: “When Relationships Go Wrong: Counting the Cost of Family Failure” and its flipside, “When Relationships Go Right: Enabling Thriving Lives”. Spelling out that tax payers in Britain spend £37 billion each year picking up the costs of family breakdown, and recognising that lone parents and their children bear the brunt of the costs of breaking down, the research also highlights the unacknowledged impact on the health, wealth and well-being of those concerned. As the Relationships Foundation proves, when relationships go right they provide significant benefits for society. Family businesses are the backbone of the economy, employing 9.5 million people and contributing £73 billion in tax. Carers, usually family members, provide unpaid care support worth almost £90 billion each year.

Personal relationships therefore should be of real concern to the state and our focus should be on supporting them, rather than narrowly focussing on whether two parents are better than one. New data from the Office of National Statistics reports for the first time since records began that unmarried couples outnumber married and that a divorce rate of 50 per cent is imminent. The reality is that now most

people live in relationships outside of marriage and that is the context in which children are actually being brought up. Simply asserting the value of marriage (whether as certificate or religious sacrament) does not address the fundamental need for wider social support for relationships.

In practice, a broadening of the sex education agenda to include relationship building and parenting skills is welcome. As a person who was described as a ‘house-husband’ thirty years ago, looking after a small child from birth

onwards, and being the only male visiting the clinic and experiencing the health visitor, I was more than aware that a child does not come with a ready

manual or handbook on how it is to be brought up in the inner city. Parenting skills have to be shared and developed on the basis of parents getting together and comparing notes and working out ‘best practices’. Similarly, supporting relationships – particularly when under extreme pressures – may require some basic work of arranging time out with friends or ‘peer group’ partners, again to compare notes on what works best.

In Leeds West we managed to secure funding from the Derwent Trust to set up a project working precisely and practically with groups of young parents

on building sustainable longer term relationships – helping avert premature breakdown and tackle crises together – and developing a wider social network of support in the neighbourhood that includes grandparents, in-laws and the wider street community and regenerating a loose kind of ‘extended family’ that does not depend on basic ‘blood ties’ alone.

Recently Richard Layard published the report ‘A Good Childhood’, commissioned by the Children’s Society, in which it identified “excessive individualism as the greatest threat to our children”. It recommended that “people who bring a child into the world should have a long-term commitment to each other and should aim to live harmoniously with each other”. But as well as free “parenting classes” and “1000 more psychological therapists to support children and families”, there needs to be a radical new focus on developing our neighbourhoods’ supportive networks for relationships, rebuilding “basic caring communities”.

Yes, the tax system needs to be part of economic support, as does legislation allowing more flexible working and greater parental leave; and there needs to be positive practical support at local and national level for voluntary sector bodies providing relationship education and counselling. But a longer term vision of supporting communities in practice would be the real challenge to destructive individualism. ■

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# Why all politicians should commit to sending their children to local schools

Those responsible for the state school system should not opt out of it says **Barry Sheerman**



Barry Sheerman is MP for Huddersfield and has been Chairman of the House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee since 2001

Has the recent spate of bank nationalisation made us all willing to think more radically about politics? As I get more and more irritated by the persistent and poisonous campaign against state education which we read in so many national newspapers, it makes me consider far more radical thoughts about the so-called independent schools sector.

We all have our pet dislikes; the *Sunday Times* and Chris Woodhead are certainly at the top of my list of those who constantly deride the performance of state education and extol the virtues of going private. The dominance of ex-private school children in positions of influence and leadership within British society has been well-documented. The BBC, full as we know from Sutton Trust research, of privately educated managers and journalists, follows slavishly in this same rut. In this context, just how objective and impartial can the Beeb's educational coverage be?

We are drip fed the notion that if you have the income, you have no option but to push your child into the independent sector. To consider the local community school, the comprehensive or academy is to show a complete lack of interest in your child's future. This rhetoric leads only to greater socio-economic segregation across schools and reinforces further socio-economic disadvantage.

Yes, independent schools only account for 7 per cent of the school population, but their effects on social mobility and the achievement of a fair society are not to be underestimated.

Elected representatives in public office should lead by example and send their children to the kind of community schools that their constituents send their children to. This is particularly important for Members of Parliament. I have been disheartened to hear MPs who represent affluent south-east constituencies declaring that they cannot find state schools good enough for their children. Not only do I not believe this, I am convinced that community schools can only be made better when all of the community supports them. Education is not a

commodity it is our preparation for a democratic society.

We are in the unique position where all three party leaders have young children and – admirably – all three look likely to stay in the state sector (though Nick Clegg has sounded rather wobbly about this at times). We have the chance to embed this change and to build cross-party consensus by asking MPs to follow their leaders' example, and to sign up to a commitment to use the state sector and to encourage others to do so.

I am not suggesting that we do away with the independent sector entirely but I do believe that questions should be asked when well-paid managers in the public sector fail to support community schools. Those who are in education – Vice-Chancellors,

I am convinced that community schools can only be made better when all of the community supports them. Education is not a commodity it is our preparation for a democratic society

Head teachers, Directors of Children Services and so on – should feel morally obliged to support the state school system. If wealthier parents persist in sending their children to independent schools, then there is a clear tension between individuals' strategies to raise standards and our policies to reduce inequality. I would like to extend this ethos to all those local and national civil servants who receive their salaries courtesy of the public purse.

A final thought: I believe that priests, like politicians, have a similar responsibility in this regard and what a delight it would be for so many parishioners to learn that the leader of the flock thought their community's schools were good enough for their own children. ■



# The new politics of the family

Tim Horton is Research Director of the Fabian Society

Perhaps all politics is founded, ultimately, on how we think about the family.

That was the theory put forward by George Lakoff to solve the mystery of where ideologies of left and right come from in the first place. Lakoff, a psychology professor, is now well known for his book *Don't Think of an Elephant*, which became a must read for US Democrats seeking to understand John Kerry's 2004 defeat and why so much of the language of American politics is framed by the right. But his most intriguing argument was made a decade earlier, in his book *Moral Politics: How Conservatives and Liberals Think*.

He noted that we tend to think about families in one of two ways: either a disciplinarian, 'strict father' model of the family, or a more nurturing and caring model. An expert in how we use metaphors to structure our thinking, Lakoff then observed that many political arguments are rooted in extending these moral concepts to society as a whole.

The right thinks of the state as a traditional father, whose disciplinary role is to prepare the 'children' - citizens - into adults, to develop self-reliance and moral responsibility. Once they can support themselves, the father/state should not interfere. This helps to explain the clustering of apparently contradictory beliefs within right-wing ideology, such as advocating a strong military and police while preferring a smaller state.

By contrast, the left's 'nurturing' approach sees human nature as essentially good, but views the state as having an important parental role in fostering citizens' development and protecting them from external pressures. On this reading, the left's social vision extends to strangers a similar duty of care to that we owe to family members and friends. Perhaps that's why Swedes call their welfare state the *folkhemmet* - 'the household of the people'.

If the way we think about the family matters so much, the irony is that the left doesn't seem able to talk about the family anymore. This is strange: Labour can credibly claim to have done most of the good things for the family – from creating the NHS and introducing maternity and paternity leave, to supporting family incomes through tax credits. The Conservatives meanwhile, in habitually opposing such measures, have arguably been one of the strongest anti-family forces in society.



Yet the left has no story of the family. The right is confident it 'owns' the politics of the family: the left tends to retreat when it is mentioned. This is a significant political mistake.

### Where the left got lost

The left's dilemma arises in part from a huge social transformation. Driven by changes in social norms and greater gender equality, family structures have diversified enormously over recent decades. Around one in seven families in the UK are cohabiting couples (though the majority of first-time cohabitations turn into marriage). There are now 700,000 step families, 2.4 million lone parent families, 20,000 civil partnerships and around 2 million people in relationships but living apart, to name just a few. The liberal left has wanted to

Anybody on left or right who is genuine about equal opportunity has to be concerned about how excessively life chances are determined by parental income and background

avoid a politics of stigma, so rightly steers clear of making value judgments about non-traditional family structures. In addition, the historic subordinate role of women in the family has led to fears amongst some that talking about the family would reverse the gains of feminism in challenging the treatment of women as second class citizens.

So the left does not talk about 'the family' anymore. The Government and Labour Party talk about 'children' and talk about 'families' (and, famously, 'hard-working families'). Focusing policy on children is surely right. That the priority should be to support all children, not pick and choose which children to support depending on the relationship status of their parents, is an important fairness principle. But talking about 'children and families' isn't enough. 'The family' is an incredibly important and resonant ideal in society. While that ideal might be vaguely (though decreasingly) attached to an image of a nuclear family, its strongest images and resonances are less about family structure than about duties of care, nurture, love and all that is dear to us in our personal relationships. The word 'families' does not tap into that imagery or emotional resonance: 'the family' does.

The second, and perhaps deeper, family dilemma for the left arises from its historic commitment to equality of opportunity. What Lakoff describes as the left's 'nurturing parent' conception of the family can actually lead to a rather dry, disengaged view: the family as transmission mechanism. From this perspective, individuals spend some time growing up within a relationship structure, and when they 'pop out' at the end of it we measure where they are in society in terms of equality of opportunity.

Parents have enormously different capacities to confer advantages or disadvantages on their children. Richer parents can buy private education, for example; poorer parents cannot. Anybody on left or right who is genuine about equal

opportunity has to be concerned about how excessively life chances are determined by parental income and background.

But if this is the only driver of the way we think about the family then the result will be a very arid agenda. Many policy measures to moderate inequalities in the intergenerational transmission of advantage, such as inheritance tax, are of course perfectly legitimate. But if the only thing the left has to say about the family is that it is concerned about loving parents passing something on to their children, then we will be in deep trouble.

And there's a further twist here. The more research that emerges on how family background affects life chances, the more we realise that much of the key influences lie in very intimate aspects of family relationships, aspects of family life that nobody could or should constrain.

Particularly crucial is parent-child interaction in the very early months and years. Time spent on stimulating child-centred activities, the responsiveness of parents to their children's needs and the warmth of family relationships are all key determinants of children's subsequent cognitive, emotional and behavioural development. (Indeed, it's hard to overestimate just how important these factors are: one recent research study concluded that as little as 14 per cent of the variation in children's attainment is determined by school quality.)

Yet to stop parents reading to their children in the name of equality of opportunity would clearly be quite mad.

### Why the right is wrong

Vacating the territory of 'the family' means the left has allowed itself to be caricatured as anti-family. Yet does the right's claim that it 'owns' the politics of the family really stand up to scrutiny?

Unlike the left, the right is confident about its account of the family. Historically, it has thought about the family as a private institution, in opposition to 'the state'. The plight of the family under European fascism and communism is the point of departure for this account.

But the idea that in Britain today the most important pressures and disruptions to family life are coming from the state lacks credibility (except to a small group of right-wing commentators who have to make their living arguing this). In the midst of a global financial and economic crisis, families desperately want governments to protect them from the instability and insecurity of markets. As with libertarianism in general, a philosophy that evolved as a reaction against the tyranny of the mid-20th century now seems absurdly irrelevant in an age of turbo-charged global capitalism.

In practice, setting up a tension between the family and the state has served another function for the right: providing a narrative to undermine the broader idea of collective responsibility for welfare. 'There is no such thing as society' might be Margaret Thatcher's most famous remark, but it's what she said next that was more revealing still: 'There are individuals and there are families'. For many Conservatives, the duty of care belongs to the private domain, to the family (and, beyond that, charitable impulse). If the family plays its role, there should be no need for a welfare state; conversely, collective social protection is seen as a force undermining the family and settled social structures.

The right is interested in family structure: it is pro-marriage and wants to promote the traditional family (Lakoff's 'strict father' model). Yet Conservatives' strong sense of family privacy means they like seeing the nuclear family as a 'black box', unable to peer inside. A little bit of moral leadership to promote the model of husband, wife and 2.4 children and - hey presto! - families will be fine and welfare will look after itself.

Leave aside for the moment the fact that the right has not found any plausible means to bring about significant changes in family structure. (Often, it places excessive faith in small tax and benefit changes to bring about profound social change: the sort of micro-management and social engineering it usually decries).

The fact is that the right's argument has now been debunked by an enormous weight of social scientific evidence which bothered to peer inside the black box and study what was going on.

The central empirical finding is that the successful workings of a family do not emerge magically from a particular family structure: they reside in features like the quality of relationships. The advantages to marriage are much weaker than the right thinks (even if those new marriages incentivised by tax breaks were as robust as those motivated by love). Yes, married couples tend to be happier and less likely to separate than cohabiting couples. But it's also the case that happier and more committed couples are more likely to get married in the first place. The more you control for these underlying variables, the smaller the relationship between family structure and subsequent outcomes gets.

In the case of married couples, it's almost certainly those high quality relationships – the ones which make it more likely that people get married in the first place – that are then primarily responsible for the positive outcomes for children of married couples, not the institution of marriage itself. A clue is provided by research which compared outcomes for children in single parent families, on the one hand, with those of children in 'intact' families experiencing high levels of conflict, on the other; it found the children in the intact families fared less well. It was the conflict, not the structure, that was the key factor.

There's a political problem here for the right as well as an empirical one. The rationale for promoting marriage at the expense of other family forms must be that the right does not see alternative forms that people have chosen as equally legitimate or valuable. But, given that this is no longer a defence of the status quo, in attempting to promote its preferred family form, the right also now appears to be violating its own core principle of family privacy – utterly at odds with their belief that the state should not interfere in people's lives. As an exasperated White House staffer in *The West Wing* complains to a Republican senator, 'you guys want to reduce the size of government down to the point where it's just small enough to fit inside people's bedrooms'.

### The politics of the family we need

So the left should feel confident about unpicking the right's family agenda. But we need a new positive argument about the family too. Labour's problem is not lack of a policy

agenda, but the broader public narrative that will be needed if it is to make deeper progress in supporting families.

There are three key steps here. Firstly, we need to get over our fear of the language of the family. We should talk about 'the family', as well as about 'children and families', not because it signifies a particular structure but because it reflects the importance we attach to the intimate bonds and duties of care that underpin family ties. (In any case, the way to reclaim the term is to use it, not avoid it.) The same goes for talking about marriage – it needn't be a value judgement, nor signal that marital status should be a relevant distinction for the tax system. After all, didn't civil partnerships matter not just because they extended legal rights, but because ensuring all couples could make a public commitment mattered symbolically too? Surely the left can't celebrate gay marriage, but be scared of talking about marriage involving anyone else.

Secondly, the left needs a deeper equality agenda which understands the family not simply as a means (the 'transmission belt'), but values it as an end in itself too. As the philosophers Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift have suggested, a pro-family politics of equality would focus on why 'relationship goods' matter – such as the quality of parenting – and then worry about how we can ensure a more egalitarian distribution of these. This means supporting all parents to promote their children's well-being and development, and giving most support to those who are struggling. It's not just that any effective 'life chances' agenda will have to do this anyway. This shift to a focus on family relationships suddenly makes the promotion of 'family values' integral to a politics of equality and redistribution, rather than dissonant with it.

And, thirdly, this is where the new progressive politics of the family can take on the right's agenda. For the policy agenda that follows from this – more investment in children's centres, paid parental leave, etc. – rarely involves the state getting out of the way. Those who believe the smallest state is always best will fail to offer sufficient practical support. And an instinct to always side with employers first will relegate the needs of families to the margins. It's no use emoting about the financial and time pressures on families if you're ideologically unwilling to do anything about them.

The right often says supporting families is more than just about income. True, but income matters tremendously too. Research shows material hardship damages parent-child relationships through factors like increased stress and the longer working hours that result. And US evidence suggests it's the sudden drop in income following separation that does most to damage outcomes for children in lone parent families. So we should make a 'family values' case to end child poverty, and indeed to raise lone parent benefits too. It should probably mean dropping moves to introduce work requirements for lone parents of children under seven too.

So this should be the left's pro-family argument. It puts the focus where it belongs: the quality of relationships in the family – of whatever kind – not the nuclear structure. It grounds progressive welfare policy in strengthening family relationships. And it takes head on the misguided idea that the state is always the enemy of the family and never its ally: the family needs the state. ■



# The case for parental leave

Separate maternity and paternity leave entitlements encourage the notion that childcare is 'women's work'. They should be scrapped and replaced with a shared parental leave says **Kathryn White**.



**Kathryn White** is an employment law barrister at 11KBW, Labour's PPC in Aylesbury and a trustee of the Fawcett Society. She writes here in her personal capacity.

Since credit started to crunch, the UK has witnessed renewed attempts by politicians to put 'the family' at the top of their agendas. At the start of this year Nick Clegg – then due to become a father for the third time – announced that the Liberal Democrats would extend maternity leave provision and introduce an extension to the current paternity leave allowance for new fathers. Gordon Brown took his full entitlement of two weeks in 2006 on the birth of his son, and his Government has extended maternity leave provision under a series of legislative measures. Meanwhile David Cameron's Conservatives have proposed a more radical shake-up of childcare provisions, offering more generous maternity leave and a partly flexible leave arrangement for fathers during the first year of the child's life.

Though such pronouncements are welcome, they somewhat miss the point. For while women have long had lengthy leave entitlements, the position for men continues to lag woefully behind. Expansions of maternity rights are often lauded as key to women's progress, allowing them to juggle childcare responsibilities whilst remaining active participants in the labour market. Yet ironically, the persistent failure to provide equal paternity rights for both sexes increasingly seems a regressive



Image: WestEnd61/Rex Features

step for women. Not least, it encourages the perception that childcare is 'women's work', embedding an assumption that it is women who should take time out to 'look after baby'. This legislative position is increasingly at odds with the lives of young people, particularly those of professionals where women may earn as much (if not more) than men and are equally ambitious in their careers.

A new means of reflecting this reality in policy terms urgently needs to be found.

Since the Employment Protection Act 1975 introduced new statutory rights for female employees, the UK has been subject to a creeping expansion of maternity leave provision. No less than nine Acts of Parliament, supplemented by numerous regulations, have given female employees in the UK some of the most generous maternity rights in the world.

This expansion of rights has been welcomed by many women to date. Yet

childcare leave is automatically more likely to be taken by women.

Scrap maternity leave as a concept. Scrap the distinct (and currently minimal) paternity leave. Create, instead, an equal entitlement to 'parental leave', which minimises any inherent presupposition as to sex. Using our existing maternity/paternity leave provisions as a starting base, parental leave might look something like this:

- two weeks of paid 'compulsory leave', commencing at birth, to be taken by the mother for health and safety reasons in compliance with the underlying EU Directives. This compulsory period of leave exists already under the Employment Rights Act 1996 and effectively prohibits employers from permitting female employees to work for the period of two weeks commencing with the day on which childbirth occurs. Failure to comply with this prohibition renders the employer liable (if convicted) to a fine;

- a commensurate two week period of paid 'compulsory leave', to be taken by the minority carer within the first month following birth. This could work along the same lines as the 'compulsory leave' that exists currently for new mothers, placing a duty on employers not to permit the minority carer to work within the agreed two week period. As with the current right to two weeks paternity leave, this proposed entitlement could be subject to the minority carer providing evidence to his employer on request that he is the minority carer. This may include evidence that the minority carer is the child's registered father or legal guardian; and; and

- twelve months paid parental leave, inclusive of the compulsory periods, to be divided between the child's two main carers (usually, but not necessarily, the mother and father) as they see fit, in consultation with their employers. To encourage greater paternal involvement in child-rearing, the UK could adopt a Swedish model and require that a minimum of two months out of the twelve month period be used by the 'minority' parent, in

practice usually the father, otherwise that time is lost as an entitlement.

Even this proposed model has limitations. Expanding the 'compulsory' element in its present form would make

**Protecting the health of mother and baby must run alongside pro-active measures to promote equal treatment in the workplace**

parental leave specific to the employer-employee relationship as governed by the contract of employment and relevant legislation. It offers no protection to self-employed individuals or agency workers, for example. Yet even within the limited context of the employer-employee relationship, the potential effects of equal provision are startling. It would diminish, over time, the current in-built incentive for employers to discriminate against female applicants for pregnancy-related reasons. It would help narrow the gender pay gap, both through the increased likelihood of employers recruiting women to high productivity (and well-remunerated) posts and through enabling families to arrange childcare appropriately to maximise their earning capacity. Most importantly, it would challenge fundamentally our cultural assumptions about the respective potentials of men and women as 'carers'. It would enable men to play a fuller, more flexible role in their children's lives (and women to do likewise in the public workplace).

With its proposal for Additional Paternity Leave (only some of which is proposed to be paid), Labour is edging ever closer to a more equal approach. Now is the time to make bold proposals. Protecting the health of mother and baby must run alongside pro-active measures to promote equal treatment in the workplace. Childcare is a concern of parents, not just of women. Parental leave provision which is neutral as to sex is a key step to recognising, and further fostering, that cultural shift. ■



# We have the facts; now what?

*The Spirit Level* provides much fuel for the progressive cause. But Jemima Olchawski argues we shouldn't expect too much from it.



Jemima  
Olchawski  
is Events Director at  
the Fabian Society

Teen pregnancy, drug addiction and rising crime rates are always high up the media and political agenda. The left's response to this is to address the poverty and inequality that lie behind the stories; the right, however, blames individual failure and a broken society.

With *The Spirit Level*, the left can now feel we have the facts on our side. Co-authored by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, the book sets out detailed evidence to prove that it is inequality that matters and causes all kinds of social dysfunction and breakdown. But as well as providing an important fillip to progressives, it also presents a strategic dilemma: how can the left use this information and not reinforce the popular impression that, by obsessing with money and income, we miss the point?

David Cameron himself has made this claim: "The Labour Party for a long time said it, only it, could deal with deep poverty because it understood about transferring money from rich to poor, but I think we've reached the end of that road...we need quite conservative solutions to deal with those problems".

Hearing these words, progressives bristle with frustration but perhaps also unease. Despite record investment and real improvements in the material conditions of whole swathes of the population, many of the problems Labour have been so committed to addressing remain as prevalent as ever. Before the recession hit and made cheery optimism a harder

sell, the Conservatives captured the public's imagination with talk of mending a 'broken society', claims that we should "let sunshine rule the day" and that we should focus on the Gross National Happiness.

But *The Spirit Level* shows that Cameron is wrong to claim politics should occupy itself less with taking from the rich and giving to the poor and more with families and the moral fibre of our society. The two are inextricably linked; and the surest way to improve the quality of social relations is to make Britain more equal. Bringing together over thirty years of research on life expectancy, teenage births, levels of trust, obesity and a whole range of other social outcomes, Wilkinson and Pickett show that time and again, on each of these measures, more equal societies do better.

Their evidence shows that beyond a certain level of wealth further growth does not improve well-being. What *does* make a difference is how evenly that growth is distributed. And, crucially, it is not just the poor that are to gain from a more equal society, but the prosperous too: even the middle classes and more affluent do worse than those with the same income levels who live in more equal countries.

The evidence here is compelling. Wilkinson and Pickett use comparative data to unequivocally show that as inequality has risen, so too have stress and anxiety levels. Our sense of self-esteem is dependent on social status – the feeling that we are valued by others. But this is harder to achieve

in a highly unequal society, as when rewards are distributed so unevenly there is a dramatic social polarisation. And where this inequality is accompanied by a belief that we live in a meritocracy – where higher levels of wealth indicate our abilities and success – the psychological impact is all the more vicious: we are encouraged to believe that a position on the bottom rung of the ladder

Progressives must accept that we need to talk in terms of the goods that equality produces and not the material conditions needed to get there – our campaigns must address people's sense of insecurity and offer a vision of a better quality of life

is a reflection of individual worth. The result is the constant scramble of competitive individualism and rising levels of anxiety. Consumption becomes a way to demonstrate our status to others, so we all work harder to keep up with the Joneses.

But even the Joneses do not escape. Everyone is damaged by the status competition, because there will always be someone who has done better for themselves. People live with the fear of falling down the ladder and so must work harder in order to keep or improve their position. The result is that we all experience higher levels of stress than our more equal counterparts.

The authors highlight experiments that show that this kind of "social evaluative threat" – that we may be judged by others and perhaps not match up – will reliably produce a cortisol rise in the body, a hormone released when we are under stress. In unequal societies we all live with such judgements, but for those with lower levels of income there can be



Photo: David Hartley/Rex Features

a highly damaging sense of shame and inferiority. Health research has shown that prolonged periods of stress damage our health, our ability to learn or perform tasks well and many other physical processes; stress during infancy can alter our cognitive and physical development – making us more aggressive and more inclined to put on weight.

It is easy to see how this creates the kind of society that progressives balk at, with mutual suspicion and fear of judgement feeding into lower levels of trust and social capital – and so creating the conditions for higher crime, addiction and so on.

Friends, family and good social relationships are insulation against status anxiety; they like and value us and help to reinforce our sense of self-worth. But inequality makes it harder for us to relate to each other or to trust our neighbours and it limits the public spaces in which we are prepared to interact. Working hard to improve our position often means we don't have

the 'quality' time with each other that we all crave.

It's this status anxiety that Cameron has tapped into. Many report dissatisfaction with the 'materialism' of our society, expressing a desire to get out of the rat race and to focus on the things that really matter to them. That's why the 'broken society' narrative has been so powerful: people do feel that there is something profoundly wrong that has not been dealt with by the Government and that money or more spending is not the answer.

So Cameron has begun to identify the problem but his diagnosis of the underlying sickness is wrong. The evidence in *The Spirit Level* suggests that making Britain more equal is a pretty sure way to lower murder rates, improve educational attainment, strengthen family relationships and harmonise community life – and is likely to have a far greater impact than any number of smaller scale policy measures (or tax breaks). Indeed the



authors estimate that if Britain became as equal as the four most equal countries in the study (Japan, Norway, Sweden and Finland) then mental illness might be halved, murder rates would fall by 75 per cent, and everyone would live a year longer.

Our social relationships are absolutely vital to 'mending' our society but we can only achieve that by creating the material conditions that enable people to trust and enjoy each other. Contrary to what the Conservatives would like to suggest, Labour's problem has not been that it's pushed the idea of redistribution to the limit: it is that it simply hasn't gone far enough to begin to scratch at the surface of the ingrained inequality and class boundaries that riddle our society.

The book provides important evidence for all; but those working to modernise the Conservative Party will need to integrate it into their thinking on, for example, youth crime and child poverty. Failure to do so will expose 'compassionate conservatism' as nothing more than lip service. We might even hope The Spirit Level will persuade a few in the Government to be a little less relaxed about the super-rich.

But The Spirit Level is only half of what is needed. It offers a valuable resource – but we'd be fools to think

that the facts will speak for themselves and once they see the graphs the public will happily jump on the equality bandwagon. When Cameron talks about family values, community life and sunshine he may miss the causal point, but when we talk about income, money and inequality it looks to the public as if we have.

People experience the problems not the cause. We worry about whether we'll be safe walking home at night, whether we can afford to work less and how well our children will do at school. Few people are aware of or worry explicitly about the impact of their status anxiety and how those who have not ranked as well as themselves might be faring.

What's more we are starting on the back foot. More equal societies with low status differentials reinforce and perpetuate their egalitarianism. People have a greater sense of solidarity, higher levels of trust and more empathy for their fellow citizens, making support for the poor and measures to narrow the gaps more politically viable. Change will be harder for us: inequality and status competition mean people may fear they have more to lose, be more individualistic and more resistant to the value of a fairer society.

The good news is that Cameron's rhetorical success shows us where we

can get a foot in the door. Progressives must accept that we need to talk in terms of the goods that equality produces and not the material conditions needed to get there – our campaigns must address people's sense of insecurity and offer a vision of a better quality of life. But if we do not find a way to communicate the underlying causes and importance of inequality there will always be a limit to what can be done. We must find a way to make the causal link between inequality and social dysfunction plausible and intuitive. This is not on offer in *The Spirit Level*.

In the meantime our best bet is likely to be to work with the grain of people's underlying sense that there is something wrong with a society where we are constantly struggling to have the newest, the trendiest and the most expensive. We've got to do that without sounding puritan or disapproving – but in a way that encourages people to believe that they are not alone in feeling uneasy about it, and that the things they really value are central to the left's mission.

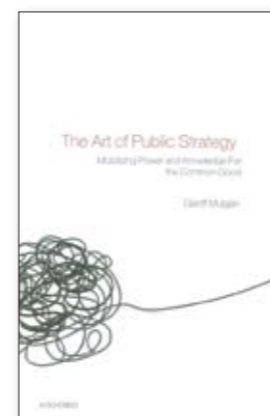
*The Spirit Level* should provide confidence to egalitarians and give pause for thought to Cameron's Tories. But we can't just send it off into battle and expect it to win the case for equality for us. We have to learn how to do that for ourselves. ■

## Living in a wonky wonderland?

Can Geoff Mulgan's message on strategizing for the public good make it outside Westminster Village asks Steve Haines?



Steve Haines is Head of Global Campaigns at Save the Children



The Art of Public Strategy: Mobilizing Power and Knowledge for the Common Good

by Geoff Mulgan

Oxford University Press £25

Handy's *Understanding Organisations*. Like both these authors, Mulgan scatters through each chapter a rich – though at times haphazard – selection of academic thinking, pithy quotes (including the inevitable observations of Winston Churchill) and personal reflections to prove his point.

The first part of the book concerns itself with defining what a public strategy might look like and this sets the frame for the book. Given the many carrots and sticks government has at its disposal, how can it deliver its manifesto commitments whilst responding to the slings and arrows of 'events'? Mulgan's first piece of advice is consistently to position resources – be they staff, financial investment or political capital – on short, medium and long term horizons. This means investment of around 2 per cent of any public organisation's resources on looking to the future, modelling potential scenarios and seeking solutions.

Good strategy, argues Mulgan, can put a man on the moon, even if Kennedy had no idea how this would be achieved when he announced his intention. There are countless examples throughout the book of how governments have sought to achieve impressive goals through good strategy, from Germany's rebuilding of East Germany to Egypt's dramatic reductions in the rates of child mortality.

However, as Mulgan points out, there are countless reasons why this might not be the case. States exist in rapidly changing environments and they have different capacities to respond to the delicate balances of tax and spending

or freedom and security that their citizens demand. The key to a successful, legitimate government, Mulgan argues, is to have sufficient knowledge about the environment in which you are operating, and clarity of direction you are heading.

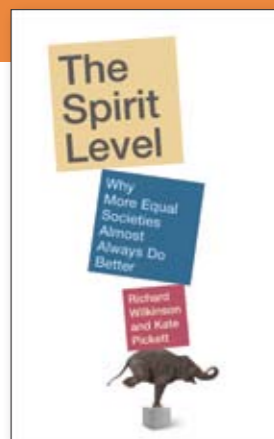
Good strategy can put a man on the moon, even if Kennedy had no idea how this would be achieved when he announced his intention

Despite good intentions, Mulgan diagnoses a range of barriers that governments may face: poor structures, processes and cultures; insufficient public trust; or ineffective measures of performance. Even if these are in place, good strategies can encounter a range of obstacles, from a lack of motivation or the trappings of a civil service designed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

At times, the book reads more like a notebook than a textbook, supported by engaging and entertaining examples of successful tactics for governing. For example, Mulgan describes Antanas Mockus, Mayor of Bogotá, who inspired change in theatrical ways, by dressing as Superman or hiring 400 mime artists to improve traffic control by mocking the bad driving of errant motorists. However, it has to be acknowledged that despite Mulgan's enthusiasm for innovation, such events are mostly, though perhaps regretfully in this case, one of a kind.

The second part of the book takes a more detailed look at the enablers and barriers to good strategy. This section reads like a series of essays or speeches (and was undoubtedly adapted in many cases from these) on evaluating

## FABIAN QUIZ



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*Spain and Portugal are similar countries: they are geographic neighbours, have much shared history, and close cultural connections. However one is significantly more unequal than the other and has correspondingly worse social problems. Which one?*

Please email your answers to [review@fabian-society.org.uk](mailto:review@fabian-society.org.uk) or send a postcard to: Fabian Society, Publications, 11 Dartmouth Street, London, SW1H 9BN. Answers must be received no later than Friday 15th May 2009.





risks, negotiating conflicting demands and leadership. Like much of Mulgan's other work he champions innovation and the involvement of citizens. Academia, business, NGOs and civil society are all seen as important in delivering long term goals, by both developing and delivering solutions and by pushing or pulling government to act.

Some of the best sections of the book are Mulgan's reflections on his time in government. Though these are often too brief to add more than an additional example amongst the management theory and innovation rhetoric, the reader is rewarded with a couple of lines of advice to any budding adviser to a prime minister: "[Tony Blair] made much better decisions when he had sufficient time to immerse himself in an issue – the decisions made on the fly reflected his instincts or recently heard anecdotes and were often worse for that".

In a note on leadership, Mulgan also recalls how a group of senior civil servants looked baffled at Tony's suggestion that they should think of themselves a 'social entrepreneurs'. Unfortunately, this is also the biggest problem with the book. It is so steeped in the language of think tanks and US popular psychology that it will have difficulty reaching many of the audiences who would benefit from it. I showed an apposite chapter to a colleague of mine who works with the most disadvantaged children in the East End of Glasgow, and whom I would describe as every bit the social entrepreneur. She looked as baffled by the chapter as the civil servants in the story.

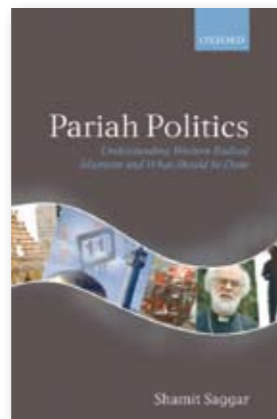
Ambitious in its subject matter, the *Art of Public Strategy* offers an avalanche of ideas for anyone working to increase the public good. But perhaps more importantly, it tells us why the altruistic aims of governments and public servants can often fail to become reality. ■

## Radical misunderstandings

Shamit Saggur's book is a much needed call for a new analysis of extremism writes Patrick Diamond



Patrick Diamond  
is Strategy Group Director at the Equality and Human Rights Commission. He writes here in a personal capacity



Pariah Politics:  
Understanding Western  
Radical Islamism and  
What Should be Done

by Shamit Saggur

Oxford University Press £25

Western radical Islam presents an acute challenge to British political thought. On the one hand, the liberal left has found the potent mix of politics and religion discomfiting, assuming that radicalism emanates from poverty and inequality. On the other, Muslim intellectuals insist that foreign policy is a significant trigger in radical Islamic ideology. The British Government has avoided acknowledging this obvious link because of implied criticism of the conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Meanwhile, many have struggled to understand the place of radical Islam in a society such as Britain that has traditionally valued moderation, confusing political radicalism with religious devotion. As Shamit Saggur notes in his epilogue to this study of the long-term development of Western Muslim identities, levels of political anxiety over Islamic radicalisation are palpable and unlikely to diminish quickly. Saggur's concern is the bundling together of these misunderstandings, creating a visible group of Muslim 'pariahs' permanently marginalised from Britain's imagined community. His mission is to disaggregate Muslims

as a homogenous group using forensic socio-economic analysis, bringing clarity to the concept of radicalism in an effort to banish the pariah stereotype.

Saggur acknowledges that liberal societies are struggling to adapt to such a profound assault on established ways of thinking, allowing greater space for grand narratives such as Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations* thesis, in which it is assumed that the modern world is comprised of a set of binary identities and resulting conflicts. For Huntington, Muslims and non-Muslims "experience differences of an essentialist and unmanageable kind" and are therefore set on an irresolvable collision course. Saggur is surely right to question such cosy binary assumptions and interrogate sweeping generalisations. In *Identity and Violence*, Amartya Sen remarks on, "the blurring of the distinction between being a Muslim and having a singular Islamic identity (and) the emergence of reactive self-conceptions in anti-Western thought and rhetoric".

*Pariah Politics* is a timely plea for a more nuanced analysis of extremism and radicalisation. Three central causes of the development of radical Islam in Britain animate the book, giving life to a complex sweep of arguments, issues and evidence.

The first relates to international security in the post-Cold War world. Saggur reminds us that the politics of religious and ethnic difference are likely to play a disproportionate role in shaping cleavages and conflicts, given the disappearance of the historic contest between capitalism and communism. He alludes to the intriguing but complex relationship between the demographic diversity of a country and the foreign and security policy it pursues, brought alive by the recent conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle-East, and the impact on the mind-set of British Muslims in particular.

The second cause arises from the confusion of ethnicity and religion, and the challenge of separating both from socio-economic status and class. Having done this, according to Saggur, it is clear that Muslims in Britain are integrating economically and taking advantage of ladders into

education and jobs. The large-scale improvements in school attainment among Bangladeshi girls show that change is possible. But if we observe the two wider groups that are often taken as a proxy for the British Muslim population – Bangladeshis and Pakistanis – the outcomes look far less positive: a colossal 60 per cent of those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage are in the bottom fifth of the UK income distribution, compared to 26 per cent of Indian communities and 19 per cent of Whites. While perceptions of the UK Muslim community are often

There is relatively little that is unique about Muslim disadvantage: the drivers are common to a wide range of socially excluded groups

shaped by Pakistani and Bangladeshi experience, there is nonetheless far more variance and the situation is ever-changing.

The third and final cause is a restatement of the sheer enormity of the politics of religious extremism among Western Muslims. Saggur insists that Western Muslim communities are today's 'pariahs' and in turmoil. We need to better understand the networks of tacit support that lead to violence. The failure of current policies in fostering moderate Islam can hardly be overstated. The Government has struggled to resolve two big questions. The first relates to cohesion: narrowing the economic and cultural gap between Muslims and the rest of British society. The second is countering the threat of those prepared to commit violence.

Saggur suggests this has been quite inadequate as a strategy to curb extremism, and relies on a large element of wishful thinking. 'Winning hearts and minds' is an appealing proposition, but too little

is known about the levers that are required to ensure 'moderately minded Muslims' actively reject extremism and terror.

Of all the concerns raised in *Pariah Politics*, averting the creation of a 'Muslim underclass' is surely among the most compelling and urgent. Saggur usefully reminds us that the weaker life chances of some British Muslims are the product of human capital poverty, poor links to the workplace, circumstantial barriers such as housing, and overt discrimination towards visible minorities.

In other words, there is relatively little that is unique about Muslim disadvantage: the drivers are common to a wide range of socially excluded groups.

Nonetheless, it would be wrong to prioritise tackling socio-economic disadvantage above all other concerns. Economic equality does not necessarily lead to social and political integration. There is the wider question of how to determine foreign policy when a substantial section of the population has strong global ties. Alongside that sits the role of religion in public life. Saggur believes that a 'national Muslim policy' should be avoided, but there must be stronger sensitisation to faith, mirroring the trend towards greater recognition of ethnicity over the last forty years.

While one can appreciate Saggur's prescription, this is a significant challenge given the strength of support for secularism in Western societies. It is certainly the case that far greater attention should be paid to the role of faith in public life. The left in particular remains confused about whether religious affiliation aids or promotes a healthy process of cultural integration, and what it might offer us in an increasingly fragmented and individualised society. This reminds us that whatever the current turmoil over the future of the global economy, the question of the kind of society we aspire to remains an urgent one. Its resolution will affect not just the future prospects of the 2.4 million Muslims who live in Britain, but all sixty million of us who inhabit increasingly diverse, multi-ethnic communities. ■



# NOTICEBOARD

These pages are your forum and we're open to your ideas. Please email Tom Hampson, Editorial Director of the Fabian Society at [tom.hampson@fabians.org.uk](mailto:tom.hampson@fabians.org.uk)

## FABIAN FORTUNE FUND

### WINNERS:

**Eric Johnson** £100  
**Ivan Gibbons** £100

Half the income from the Fabian Fortune Fund goes to support our research programme.

Forms available from Giles Wright, [giles.wright@fabian-society.org.uk](mailto:giles.wright@fabian-society.org.uk)

## TRUST AND THE CITY

A special panel discussion with **John McFall MP** (Chair of Treasury Select Committee) and many more

**Wednesday 29th April  
18hr30 to 20hr00**

Venue announced shortly: go to [www.fabians.org.uk](http://www.fabians.org.uk) for details.

This event is kindly supported by Barclay's

## Fabian Vision and Values:

November's Fabian AGM supported a motion calling on the Executive to conduct a review into the future of the Society and ways to make it fit-for-purpose in the 21st century, inviting contributions from all parts of the Society.

To kick this off, the December mailing asked members for statements 'Why I am a Fabian'. These are being used to inform Executive discussions of how Fabian vision and values should inform organisational strategy. A selection of responses can be read online.

The Summer Review will include details of a more formal members' survey: local societies and voluntary sections will also be asked for contributions. This will inform the EC's organisational review report, which will form the basis of a members' open debate on this theme at the 2009 AGM.

The Young Fabians have recently held their own membership survey. In addition to being encouraged to participate in the survey, individual members are invited to contribute any further ideas about the Society's organisation, for consideration by the Executive, by writing to the General Secretary at the Fabian office, or [sunder.katwala@fabians.org.uk](mailto:sunder.katwala@fabians.org.uk)

## DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

### South Western Regional Conference

Saturday 9 May, Tudor Grange Hotel, Bournemouth

### 'Next Left – Social Democracy in a Post New-Labour World'

Speakers include **Martin Salter MP**, **Alan Whitehead MP**, **Dr Howard Stoute MP**, **Stephen Twigg** of the Foreign Policy Centre, **Jessica Assato** of Progress, **Sharon Carr-Brown PPC**, **Kate Groucutt** Chair of the Young Fabians.

Tickets are £20 including coffee, lunch and afternoon tea.

Please send a cheque made out to Bournemouth and District Fabian Society to **Ian Taylor** to 71 Shaftesbury Rd, Queens Park, Bournemouth, Dorset BH8 8SU, or contact him on 01202 396634 or email [taylori@bpc.ac.uk](mailto:taylori@bpc.ac.uk)

## Annual House of Commons Tea

Tuesday 7 July  
Members Dining Room

More details tba

## ALAN JOHNSON LECTURE

Secretary of State for Health **Alan Johnson** will give a lecture on health inequalities in spring.

Details will be announced on [www.fabians.org.uk](http://www.fabians.org.uk)

# Listings

## A note from Local Societies Officer, Deborah Stoute



It's hard being a local society secretary trying to find topics and speakers for meeting which will attract members to meetings. What one person finds fascinating other members might regard as anathema. For instance, 'The Cuban Revolution – past present and future' attracted 20plus members to Dartford last week and it's hard to see

how **Brian Keegan** of our Executive Committee won't tempt far more with his attractively titled '35 Years in Sewage' talk which he will give to Chiswick and West London Society.

Listings prove a useful tool for social historians.

One thing's for sure – if you're prepared to travel, you're almost bound to find a Local Society meeting to interest you somewhere.

### BIRMINGHAM

All meetings at 7.00 in the Birmingham and Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham. For details and information contact **Andrew Coulson** on 0121 414 4966 email [a.c.coulson@bham.ac.uk](mailto:a.c.coulson@bham.ac.uk) or **Rosa Birch** on 0121 426 4505 or [rosabirch@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:rosabirch@hotmail.co.uk)

### BOURNEMOUTH & DISTRICT

**27 March.** Glyn Ford MEP on 'June 4th Where Does Europe go from Here?'  
**24 April.** **Fiona MacTaggart MP** on 'Democracy: How it is Changing and the Lessons we should Learn' Please also contact **Ian Taylor** if you are going to the House of Commons Tea on 7 July. All meetings at The Friends Meeting House, Wharmcliffe Rd, Boscombe, Bournemouth at 7.30. Contact **Ian Taylor** on 01202 396634 for details.

### BRIGHTON & HOVE FABIAN SOCIETY

**Saturday 13th June**, 10:00am - 4:00pm. NHS Study Day. Brighthelm Centre, North Road, Brighton. Contact **mairemcqueeney@waitrose.com**  
**Sunday 14th June**, 2:00pm - 4:00pm BHFS Garden Party. Contact **mairemcqueeney@waitrose.com**

### CANTERBURY

New Society forming. Please contact **Ian Leslie** on 01227 265570 or 07973 681 451 or email [i.leslie@btinternet.com](mailto:i.leslie@btinternet.com)

### CARDIFF

Details of all meetings from **Steve Tarbet** on 02920 591 458 or [stevetarbet@talktalk.net](mailto:stevetarbet@talktalk.net)

### CENTRAL LONDON

Regular meetings at 7.30 in the Cole Room, 11 Dartmouth Street, London SW1A 9BN. Details from **Ian Leslie** on 01227 265570 or 07973 681451

### CHESHIRE

New Society forming in Northwich area. Contact **Mandy Griffiths** on [mgriffiths@valeroyal.gov.uk](mailto:mgriffiths@valeroyal.gov.uk)

### CHISWICK & WEST LONDON

**30 April.** **Mike Parker** on 'What Labour Could have done in Transport' 8.00 in the Committee room at Chiswick Town Hall. Details from **Monty Bogard** on 0208 994 1780, email [mb014ff362@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:mb014ff362@blueyonder.co.uk)

### CITY OF LONDON

For details contact **Alan Millington** on [amillington@orrick.com](mailto:amillington@orrick.com)

### COLCHESTER

Details from **John Wood** on 01206 212100 or [woodj@fish.co.uk](mailto:woodj@fish.co.uk)

### CORNWALL

Helston area. New Society forming. For details contact **Maria Tierney** at [maria@disabilitycornwall.org.uk](mailto:maria@disabilitycornwall.org.uk)

### DARTFORD & GRAVESHAM

Regular meetings at 8.00 in the Ship, Green Street Green Rd at 8.00. Details from **Deborah Stoute** on 0207 227 4904 email [debstoute@hotmail.com](mailto:debstoute@hotmail.com)

### DERBY

Regular monthly meetings. Details from **Rosemary Key** on 01332 573169

### DONCASTER AND DISTRICT

New Society forming, for details and information contact **Kevin Rodgers** on 07962 019168 email [k.t.rodgers@gmail.com](mailto:k.t.rodgers@gmail.com)

### EAST LOTHIAN

**25 March.** **Douglas Hamilton**, Head of Policy and Research, Save the Children in Scotland. Details of all meetings from **Noel Foy** on 01620 824386 email [noel.foy@tesco.net](mailto:noel.foy@tesco.net)

### FINCHLEY

If you're interested in joining this new Society, please contact **Brian Watkins** on 0208 346 6922 email **brian.watkins60@ntlworld.com**

### GLASGOW

Now holding regular meetings. Contact **Martin Hutchinson** on [mail@liathach.net](mailto:liathach.net)

### GLOUCESTER

Regular meetings at TGWU, 1 Pullman Court, Great Western Rd, Gloucester. Details from **Roy Ansley** on 01452 713094 email [roybrendachd@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:roybrendachd@yahoo.co.uk)

### HARROW

Regular monthly meetings. Details from **June Solomon** on 0208 428 2623. Fabians from other areas where there are no local Fabian Societies are very welcome to join us.

### HASTINGS & RYE JOINT MEETING

Hastings & Rye/Brighton & Hove Fabian Societies. **Friday 29th May**, 7:00pm. **Norman MacKensie** on 'The First Fabians'. 8:00pm **Polly Toynbee** on 'Reflections on the situation'. **White Hart Hotel**, High Street, Lewes. Contact **mairemcqueeney@waitrose.com**

### HAVERING

**12 June.** **Andrew MacKinlay MP**  
**30 April.** Invitation to meet **Jon Cruddas MP** at the House of Commons. Please contact **Dave** if you want to go. **Fairkytes Arts Centre**, Billet Lane, Hornchurch. Details of all meetings from **David Marshall** email [david.c.marshall.t21@btinternet.com](mailto:david.c.marshall.t21@btinternet.com)

### HERTFORDSHIRE

Regular meetings. Details from **Robin Cherney** at [RCher24@aol.com](mailto:RCher24@aol.com)

### ISLINGTON

**22 April.** AGM and speaker **Jessica Assato** of Progress, 8.00 at Islington Town Hall. For details of all meetings contact **Pat Haynes** on 0207 249 3679 or email **Derek Sawyer** at [tiscali.co.uk](mailto:tiscali.co.uk)

### MANCHESTER

**2 April.** Pub Night. 8.00 in the Slug and Lettuce, Albert Square  
**30 April.** Debate with **Sir Richard Leese** and the Centre for Local Economic Strategies on 'What Now for Regeneration?'  
**7 May.** Pub Night – details as above  
Details from **Graham Whitham** on 079176 44435 email [manchesterfabians@googlemail.com](mailto:manchesterfabians@googlemail.com) and a blog at <http://gtrmanfabians.blogspot.com>

### MARCHES

New Society formed in Shrewsbury area. Details on [www.MarchesFabians.org.uk](http://www.MarchesFabians.org.uk) or contact **Kay Thornton** on [Secretary@marchestfabians.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@marchestfabians.org.uk)

### MIDDLESBOROUGH

New Society hoping to get established. Please contact **Andrew Maloney** on 07757 952784 or email [andrewmaloney@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:andrewmaloney@hotmail.co.uk) for details

### NEWHAM

For details of this and all other meetings, contact **Anita Pollack** on 0208 471 1637 or at [Anita\\_Pollack@btopenworld.com](mailto:Anita_Pollack@btopenworld.com)

### NORTH EAST WALES

Further details from **Joe Wilson** on 01978 352820

### NORTHUMBRIA AREA

For details and booking contact **Pat Hobson** at [pat.hobson@hotmail.com](mailto:pat.hobson@hotmail.com)

### NORTHAMPTON AREA

New Society forming. If you are interested in becoming a member of this new society, please contact **Dave Brede** on [davidbrede@yahoo.com](mailto:davidbrede@yahoo.com)

### NORWICH

Anyone interested in helping to reform **Norwich Fabian Society**, please contact **Andreas Paterson** [andreas@headswitch.co.uk](mailto:andreas@headswitch.co.uk)

### PETERBOROUGH

Meetings at 8.00 at the Ramada Hotel, Thorpe Meadows, Peterborough. Details from **Brian Keegan** on 01733 265769, email [brian@briankeegan.demon.co.uk](mailto:brian@briankeegan.demon.co.uk)

### PORTSMOUTH

Regular monthly meetings, details from **June Clarkson** on 02392 874293 email [jclarkson1006@hotmail.com](mailto:jclarkson1006@hotmail.com)

### READING & DISTRICT

For details of all meetings, contact **Tony Skuse** on 0118 978 5829 email [tony@skuse.net](mailto:tony@skuse.net)

### SHEFFIELD

Regular meetings on the 4th Thursday of the month, 7.30 at the Quaker Meeting Room, 10 St James Street, Sheffield S1. Details and information from **Rob Murray** on 0114 2558341 or **Tony Ellingham** on 0114 274 5814 email [tony.ellingham@virgin.net](mailto:tony.ellingham@virgin.net)

### SOUTH EAST LONDON

Meet at 8.00 at 105 Court Lane, Dulwich London SE21 7EE. For details of all future meetings, please visit our website at <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/sel/sel/>. Regular meetings; contact **Duncan Bowie** on 020 8693 2709 or email [duncanbowie@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:duncanbowie@yahoo.co.uk)

### SOUTHAMPTON AREA

**8 May.** **Richard Harris** on 'Selection Procedures for Education: Can they ever be fair?'

**12 June.** **Dr John Coleman** on 'The Science and Politics of Energy Generation'

**10 July.** Annual Summer Social For details of venues and all meetings, contact **Frank Billett** on 023 8077 9536

### SOUTH TYNESIDE

For information about this Society please contact **Paul Freeman** on 0191 5367 633 or at [freemansmb@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:freemansmb@blueyonder.co.uk)



**SUFFOLK**  
For details of all meetings, contact Peter Coghill on 01986 873203

**SURREY**  
Regular meetings at Guildford Cathedral Education Centre Details from Maureen Swage on 01252 733481 or maureen.swage@btinternet.com

**TONBRIDGE AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS**  
All meetings at 8.00 at 71a St Johns Rd. Details from John Champneys on 01892 523429

**TYNEMOUTH**  
Monthly supper meetings, details from Brian Flood on 0191 258 3949

**WATERSHED**  
A new Local Society in the Rugby area, details from Mike Howkins email mgh@dnu.ac.uk or J David Morgan on 07789 485621 email jdavidmorgan@excite.com. All meetings at 7.30 at the Indian Centre, Edward Street Rugby CV21 2EZ. For further information contact David Morgan on 01788 553277 email jdavidmorgan@excite.com

**WEST DURHAM**  
The West Durham Fabian Society welcomes new members from all areas of the North East not served by other Fabian Societies. It has

a regular programme of speakers from the public, community and voluntary sectors. It meets normally on the last Saturday of alternate months at the Joiners Arms, Hunwick between 12.15 and 2.00pm – light lunch £2.00  
Contact the Secretary Cllr Professor Alan Townsend, 62A Low Willington, Crook, Durham DL15 OBG, tel, 01388 746479 email alan.townsend@wearvalley.gov.uk

**WEST WALES**  
Regular meetings at Swansea Guildhall, details from Roger Warren Evans on roger@warrenevans.net

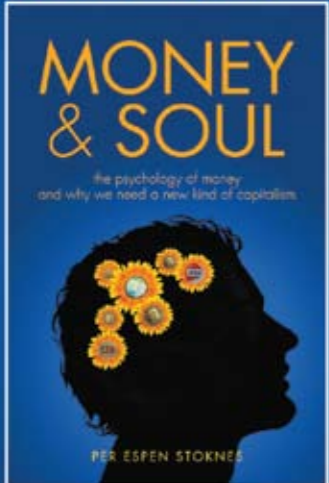
**WEST YORKSHIRE**  
4 April. Cllr Ian Greenwood and Chris Leslie, Director of New Local Government Network on 'How Can Labour in West Yorkshire have a positive impact on Social Mobility. 10.30 am – 12.30, Bradford City Hall Details from Jo Coles on Jocoles@yahoo.com

**WIMBLEDON**  
New Society forming. Please contact Andy Ray on 07944 545161 or andyray@blueyonder.co.uk if you are interested.

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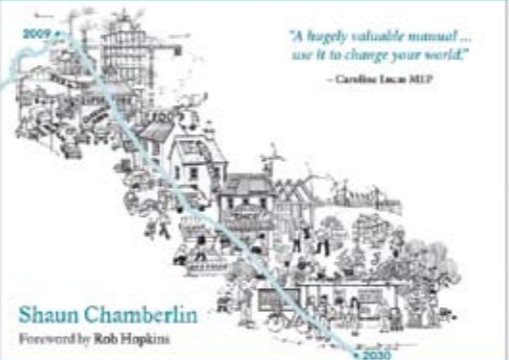


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The initiatives have brought together ICAEW members and schools around the country to create innovative ways of delivering and supporting personal finance education.

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Jeremy Cox, Financial Planning and Analysis, Coventry Building Society

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Claire Lewthwaite, Commercial Evaluation Accountant, Npower

**It's been so useful to draw on their expertise and experience. My job is to convert that into user-friendly material. It's already been helpful for my pupils to talk to them about their work.**

Jayne Ward, Head of Maths, Higham Lane School, Nuneaton, Warwickshire

The ICAEW passionately believes in the importance of building people's confidence in dealing with their personal finance. By working with schools and community organisations across the country, we are helping to build capacity where our members can add the most value – equipping people with the basic knowledge and skills to manage their money. Our members offer hands-on support and mentorship to teachers and community groups to help introduce financial competence where it is needed most, in the classroom and in areas of deprivation. The accountancy profession is committed to playing its part in helping our young people to fulfil their full potential and in supporting families who are struggling to make ends meet.

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**For more about the ICAEW's work in this area:**

E [rebecca.hewitt@icaew.com](mailto:rebecca.hewitt@icaew.com)

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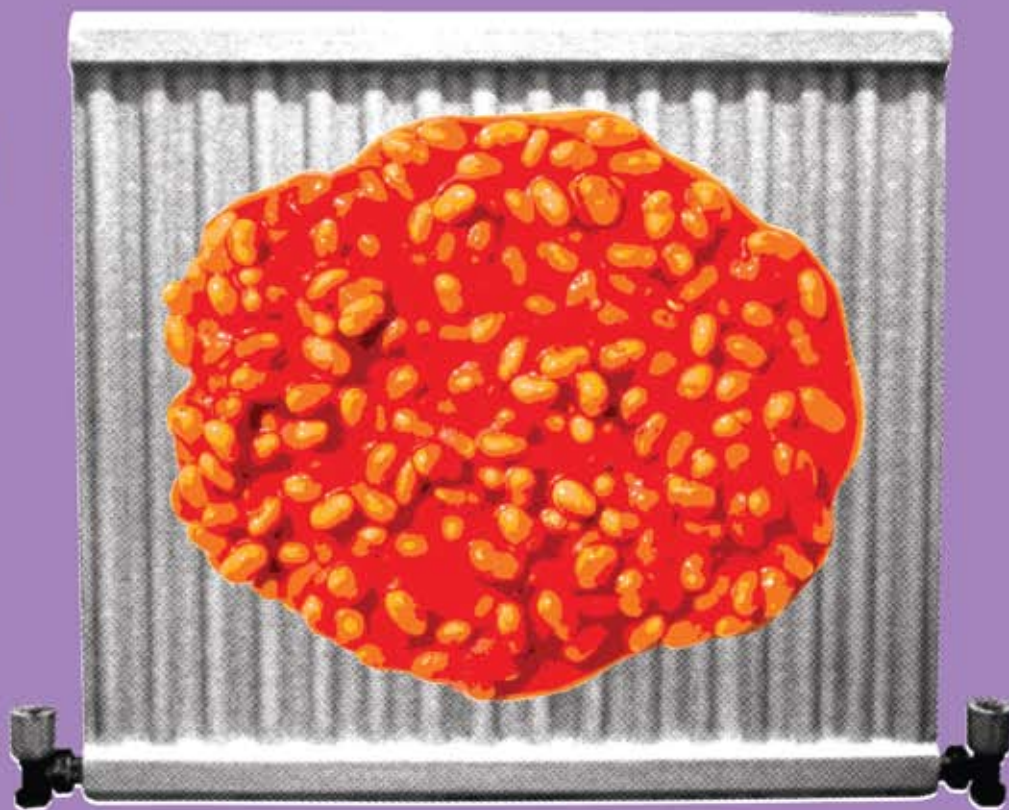


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