The Neighbourly Society

Collected Speeches 2001-2003

OLIVER LETWIN MP

CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES
57 Tufton Street London SW1P 3QL
2003

THE AUTHOR

OLIVER LETWIN is MP for West Dorset and Shadow Secretary of State for Home Affairs. He was previously Opposition Spokesman on Constitutional Affairs; Shadow Financial Secretary; and Shadow Chief Secretary. Before entering Parliament, he was a Director of NM Rothschild & Sons Ltd; was a member of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit from 1983 to 1986; was Special Adviser to Sir Keith Joseph, then the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1982-1983); and Fellow of Darwin College, Cambridge (1981-1983). His publications include: *Ethics, Emotion and the Unity of Self*; *Privatising the World*; *Drift to Union*; *Aims of Schooling; The Purpose of Politics*; and numerous articles in learned journals and popular press.

ISBN No. 1 903219 60 4

Printed by The Chameleon Press, 5 – 25 Burr Road, London SW18

CONTENTS

PREFACE

The speeches in this volume set out a view of what is happening to our society and a view of what we can do about it. By implication, they also set out a view of modern social Conservatism.

The central concern, exhibited in all of the speeches, is with the relationship of the individual to society. The analysis of our current social condition is that our civilisation has been in retreat as more and more young people have been drawn onto the conveyer belt to crime, and as more and more of our neighbourhoods have seen the streets captured by the gang.

But there is no talk in these speeches of great social forces – and no suggestion that economic determinism is the cause of our social ills.

The thesis, informing all of the speeches is: that free individuals, responsible for the lives they lead, make society what it is; that the state cannot and should not try to respond to our social ills by seeking to run the lives of free people through a welter of bureaucratic initiatives or through legislation that reduces our fundamental liberties; that the only sustainable means of creating and preserving a neighbourly and civilised society, is, on the contrary, for the state to foster the natural associations of family, neighbourhoods and civil society; but that such natural associations will flourish and sustain a civilised, neighbourly society only if the state does play the role it can effectively play (and has not been playing) – the role of recapturing the streets for the honest citizen through adequate neighbourhood policing and the role of enabling young people to find ways off the conveyer belt to crime.

I hope that, by bringing these speeches together into a single volume, it will be made clear that today's Conservative Party has a distinctive contribution to make to a serious debate about the restoration of order in Britain.

Oliver Letwin
August 2003

ONE

BEYOND THE CAUSES OF CRIME*

"Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime"

With these words, Tony Blair moved Labour ahead on the issue of law and order. It was, perhaps, the single most effective sound bite of recent times. And yet, for all their brilliance, those nine words sum up much that is wrong with the established approach to crime.

There is always a choice

What did the Prime Minister mean by the 'causes' of crime? He meant the social circumstances of the criminal – as if a child born into a particular home, in a particular street, in a particular town is condemned to a life of crime. But there is nothing inevitable about crime. There is always a choice. Even after the first offence there is a choice. Even after a thousand offences there is choice.

To call social circumstance the 'cause' of crime is to deny the autonomy which is the centrepiece of our humanity and to adopt instead the mechanistic conception of society that Keith Joseph, in whose honour we come together today, struggled so hard to combat. Before we can begin to think rationally about crime, we must acknowledge the capacity of every individual for autonomous choice. We must acknowledge, in other words, that each individual has a personal history, of which each is as much the author as the subject.

The conveyor belt

But, in acknowledging this, we must recognise also that liberal individualism is not the same thing as social atomism, and that individuals are affected by what they learn from the society in which they grow up and subsist. The Kantian half of the truth about virtue and vice is that they are chosen; the Aristotelian half of the truth about virtue and vice is that they are learned. The reality for children born into a certain kind of home is that the temptations are stronger and the sources of moral instruction more distant. Each one of us has a choice – but, for some, the help needed to acquire virtuous habits is less present.

---

* This Lecture was delivered to the Centre for Policy Studies on the occasion of the Sixth Keith Joseph Memorial Lecture, 8 January 2002.

An image that springs to mind in describing the personal history of the law-breaker is that of a conveyor belt on which the individual passes through successive stages: neglected or abused child, disruptive pupil, anti-social teenager, young offender, first-time prisoner, repeat offender, hardened criminal. At each stage, the individual has the option of stepping off the conveyor belt. But it cannot be expected that this choice will be made unless society finds ways of providing for the individual not only easily accessible exit points off the conveyer belt to crime, but also a hand helping him to take those exits.

And yet in tens-of-thousands of cases the authorities appear powerless to make this happen. Powerless, that is, until the terminal stage when the crimes committed are serious. Then the state steps in and removes the criminal from the conveyor belt by long terms of imprisonment.

This was the common sense point that Michael Howard was making when he said that 'prison works'. By giving courts greater powers to lock up persistent criminals, he was the first man in his position to hold back the tide of crime.

He saw the need to stop the conveyor belt of crime. His achievement was to do so at its terminal point, the point at which prison works. But what do we do before that point?

The conveyor belt rolls on

Let us examine the failures stage by stage. The fight against crime starts in the family. We rely on parents to teach their children the difference between right and wrong through all the subtle arts affection is heir to: persuasion, example, emulation, gentle attrition. Yet, all too often, the supportive network of family and friends, on which such moral education depends, is absent – its place taken by the gang, which provides, in a perverted form, the fraternity missing at home.

Then to school. In a good school, the orderliness of its proceedings, combined with the evident interest of its teachers in the moral and academic advancement of the pupils, reinforces the support and direction of a good home and may even make up for the absence of such familial support and direction. But, in a school where order has broken down, or is sustained only superficially, the gang is likely to exercise the same baleful influence that it has already established in its role as a substitute family outside school.

Encouraged by the mores of the gang to engage in minor acts of mischief or worse, the young person – usually the young man – comes into contact with the criminal justice system. What does he learn then? All too often it is that the authorities are impotent, that anti-social behaviour is tolerated and that minor crimes are rarely punished.

And if he moves on to more serious crimes and if these are detected and if these are brought to court and if these are convicted, what does he learn

at that stage? That punishment is weak and ineffectual, with no element of reparation to the victim and no expectation that the perpetrator should even apologise for the harm that he has done to others.

But if, finally, he finds himself in prison, what does he learn from this hardest of lessons? As I have said, prison works. But in many cases the respite for society, provided by removing the persistent offender, is temporary. The offender is released, unreformed, into a destructive cycle of re-offending and re-imprisonment.

Families, schools, the courts, the police, the probation service and the prisons: each should present a series of diversions from the path to crime. But instead, for all too many, the conveyor belt rolls on, pushing and pulling young people from one stage of desolation to the next.

Misunderstanding the choice, asking the wrong questions

Why have we failed? If this were an easy question with easy answers, we would have found the answers long ago. We cannot hope for some single illumination which will, by itself, show the way to a crime-free society. But the very difficulty may indicate at least one helpful line of enquiry. May we have been asking the wrong questions? All our questions focus on crime: What is the attraction of crime? What makes young people choose crime? What are the causes of crime? May these questions be misdirecting our thoughts?

This is what Michael Novak intended to suggest when he said:

> People often ask what causes crime. But they're asking the wrong question. Let me give a parallel from economics. If you ask, "what are the causes of poverty?" you are asking a really useless question. Suppose you discover the answer? Terrific! Now you know how to make poverty… The interesting question, the fruitful question, is quite different. And it didn't occur to anybody to ask this other question until late in the eighteenth century: "What are the causes of the wealth of nations?" If you can figure that out, then you can begin to imagine a time of universal prosperity, in which there will be no more poverty and in which a firm, general base can be put under the feet of every man and woman on earth. That was the dream of Adam Smith. He looked for the systemic, social causes that would bring about the creation of *new* wealth, not to take existing wealth from others and redistribute it.

We need to ask the "fruitful question" about crime, just as Adam Smith did about poverty. His insight seems obvious to us; of course it is better to inquire after the causes of wealth than of poverty. However, as Novak reminds us, it is an insight that had eluded politicians before Smith's time; and, for that matter, many of those after.

We are indebted to Keith Joseph for repeating Smith's great question in our time. What seems obvious to us today was not, just three decades ago. And it is because of the answers that he and his colleagues provided that the fortunes of our nation and of the Conservative Party were transformed. Now, at the start of this century, I believe we stand on the brink of an opportunity of equal significance.

We won in 1979 because we found new solutions to an old problem, that of economic decline. The next 18 years brought unparalleled prosperity to our nation. But prosperity is not enough. The days when governments could rest on their economic laurels are gone. The voters understand that it is they who create the wealth and the state that consumes it. In return, they expect a better quality of life. Living standards may rise, but that counts for little while the taste of economic success is soured by continuing social failure. And there is no stronger evidence of such failure than the persistence of crime and incivility in the midst of prosperity.

The opposite of crime: the neighbourly society

That is why the Prime Minister's famous words on the causes of crime found such resonance. But Michael Novak reminds us that they miss the point completely. Just as Keith Joseph sought not the causes of poverty, but of its opposite, so we must seek not the causes of crime, but of its opposite.

What is the opposite of crime? Some would say 'order', but that is no more than the absence of crime while what we seek is something that is in active opposition to it. Crime is a destructive force; its opposite must be a constructive force. In modern English idiom, this constructive force goes unnamed. It is a symptom, and perhaps to a slight degree a cause, of the failure of our society to overcome crime that we have no word for its opposite.

This is not true of all languages and cultures. There is, for example, the Hebrew word shalom. The inadequate English translation is 'peace', but shalom signifies much more than the absence of conflict. The true meaning is more akin to 'the wholeness of community', the totality of right relationships within communities, between persons and families and social groups, between man and his environment. Shalom has an obvious affinity with the Arabic salaam, also crudely translated as peace, and with the Greek eirene which again signifies much more than the absence of conflict. This enlarged concept of peace found its supreme Christian expression in Augustine's classic exposition of the kaleidoscopic varieties of moral and social peace:

> The peace of mankind, an ordered concord; the peace of the household, an ordered concord of ruling and obeying amongst the members of the household; the peace of the state, an ordered concord of ruling and obeying amongst the citizens.

The same sense is preserved in that ancient English form of words: "the peace and tranquillity of the realm". Until a very few years ago, these words formed part of the prayer that opened every sitting of Parliament, when MPs would pray for:

> …the maintenance of true Religion and Justice, the safety, honour and happiness of the Queen, the publick wealth, peace and tranquillity of the Realm, and the uniting and knitting together of the hearts of all persons and estates within the same…

In 1998, the old prayer was discarded. However, its key phrase still resonates to this day. In June last year, Ann Widdecombe held a press conference in one of London's poorest housing estates. These are her words:

> On estates like this all over the country, live huge numbers of people whom I have called the forgotten decent. They are people like us but with only a fraction of our resources and all they want to do is live normally, but instead their lives are made a daily hell by drugs, thuggery, intimidation and degradation of the environment.
>
> Physical regeneration is necessary, but on its own insufficient. I am often accused of being old-fashioned so let me use an old-fashioned phrase: the peace and tranquillity of the realm. Where are peace and tranquillity for the people who live here?

Where indeed? But it is not enough for Conservatives to have the right instincts, we must formulate them in a contemporary idiom. That is why we must coin our own term for what the Hebrews meant by *shalom*, Islamic culture by *salaam*, the New Testament Christians by *eirene* and our predecessors by the peace and tranquillity of the realm. The term I will use is *the neighbourly society*.

The causes of the "neighbourly society"

The choice before our young people is between crime and participation in the neighbourly society. It is this participation that keeps our young people off the conveyor belt to criminality or gets them off if their earlier choices were destructive ones. That is why we must seek not the causes of crime, but the causes of the neighbourly society.

Lest imagining the opposite of crime may seem an exercise in the intangible, let us imagine instead the opposite of a criminal. What are the images that form in the mind? Of someone who gives instead of takes, who earns instead of steals, who creates instead of destroys, who welcomes instead of abuses, who persuades instead of threatens.

These contrasts are relational, because the neighbourly society is first and foremost about the establishment and preservation of right

relationships amongst persons. These relationships are not part of the world of natural science; they are man-made; neighbourliness is something that each of us has to learn and, in learning, helps to establish. This activity of learning and creating takes place throughout our lives, but especially in childhood and adolescence. Nor is neighbourliness something that we learn on our own, but rather in relationship to others – most of all from within our families, but also, as we grow up, from within the wider community.

I should make clear that by 'community' I mean much more than a street, or housing estate or some other category of neighbourhood. By 'community' I mean a series of relationships, descending from the nation to the family – interlocking networks of relationships that turn collections of people, places and artefacts into living wholes. Aspects of community are to be found in every example of friendship and mutual recognition – in the residents' association and the local football team, in the everyday interactions of good neighbours, in the gossip of villagers who know each others faces and histories.

The relationships that form communities also form and sustain individuals. The family is, of course, the greatest influence on a child's development – but families depend upon the nourishment and sustenance of the wider community, as we are horribly reminded by the way in which families are torn apart by tyranny and anarchy. Nor do individuals subsist solely within their families; we draw, inevitably, on the wider community for our models of neighbourliness, our understanding of right relationships between friends, between different generations, different ethnic groups, students and teachers, employees and employers, citizens and the authorities. Only strong communities can provide the initiation into these relationships; and only these strong relationships can foster strong communities. This is the virtuous cycle of social responsibility: the neighbourly society inducts the individual into the community and the community sustains the neighbourly society. To put it in more traditional terms, one generation conveys by intimation and emulation to the next the indescribably complex and subtle requirements of social tranquillity in a given setting.

Community depends on security

Without security and tranquillity, this act of transmission becomes perilously difficult. In a hostile environment, neighbours don't stop to say hello, old people are too afraid to open the door, mothers won't let their children out, teenagers join gangs as the only way to find a substitute-security. Shops close down; those that can move out, and street-by-street a community dies.

Crime destroys security

The last few months have focused our minds on global insecurity. But what about the insecurity on our streets, and not just on the streets, but in our classrooms and casualty wards where teachers and nurses no longer feel safe just doing their jobs? We, in this country, may be free from famine, war and natural disaster, but we are still subject to the insecurity generated by crime and disorder. The cause of this insecurity is not only the official count of reported instances of particular crimes, but also the everyday acts of disorder that are deemed too minor to warrant police attention – the anti-social activities of the bad neighbour who steers (just) clear of breaking the law but who nevertheless does much to damage the tranquillity of the neighbourhood.

Fear of crime and disorder diminishes the sense of security, driving adults and their children out of the shared spaces where the neighbourly society is built. What we see in too many neighbourhoods is a vicious circle of disorder leading to insecurity, then to community breakdown, then to the retreat of socialising influences, and therefore to further disorder.

It is the poor that suffer most of all. New Labour's 'causes of crime' rhetoric wrongly identifies poverty as a mechanistic cause of criminal behaviour; but, with crushing irony, it ignores the status of the poor as the principal victims of crime. Only recently has the present Home Secretary – to his credit – begun to acknowledge the effect of crime on the poor. The official statistics show that people in social housing are twice as likely to be burgled as homeowners; residents of flats are twice as likely to have a vehicle stolen than those in detached homes; and the unemployed are twice as likely to suffer violent crime as those in work.

More than a year has passed since the shocking murder of Damilola Taylor. The outcry that followed prompted a major government effort on the North Peckham Estate where Damilola lived and died. In 12 months, 505 flats have been demolished and 133 new homes built, the police presence has been increased and resources have been ploughed into local schools. But the testimony of local people is that they still live in fear.

A mother of a three year old said:

> When Damilola died, the cameras and reporters saw how we were living and the council seemed ashamed. But we are still here and things are no better.

A shopkeeper said:

> Just look over there at those people; they are drug dealers and will quite openly ask you if you want anything. Tell me, does that look like change to you?

A pensioner said:

> It's nice to see they've finally tidied up the churchyard for Mr Blair, but they wouldn't like him to see this place at night… It's very sad to say but, even after Damilola, nothing's changed.

One thing is clear. Labour's crude economic determinism will not improve those lives made a daily hell by crime. The failure to deliver real change in North Peckham is not an accident. It arises from a failure of analysis cloaked in a tough rhetoric so far unaccompanied by effective action to restore security. Improvement of the housing stock and increased funding for schools is not a cure-all. We need a deeper understanding of what is really going on in our society.

Since the war, trends toward greater wealth, better education, wider car ownership, new communications technologies and looser social ties have created entirely new forms of community. Most importantly there are the virtual communities whose members don't need to know their neighbours or use the shared spaces of their neighbourhoods. They have the means to isolate themselves from their immediate physical surroundings, and engage over time and space with the people and places of their choosing. In a world of high-speed transport and even faster communications, this is how enormous numbers of people live today.

But not everyone shares in these new possibilities, especially the poor, the unemployed, the elderly, young people, the disabled and members of ghettoised ethnic groups. For many people in these categories, it remains true that community – if it is anywhere – is where you live. That is why the poor are more vulnerable to crime. They rely on the traditional neighbourhood community, where anti-social behaviour has its greatest impact; where shutting out the criminal also means shutting out your friends and neighbours and other sources of support; where those without the means to get out just have to endure.

Recreating the cycle of responsibility

It is time for the Conservative Party to reclaim its lost inheritance, both as the 'party of law and order' and as the 'party of one nation'. Our message must be this: that the only just society is a crime-free society.

To make good that message, we have to find the means of re-establishing the cycle of responsibility, of recreating the neighbourly society, where these have broken down.

Current policies aren't working

We can all think of 'bad neighbourhoods' or 'rough areas', some of which have achieved national notoriety, others only local infamy. However, few, if any, started off that way. Even the worst designed of Britain's post-war estates began with crime rates at a fraction of what they are now. In other cases, once respectable neighbourhoods have been dragged down by a

cycle of crime and dereliction. One such neighbourhood is Burnley Wood in Lancashire. The slide began when a few abandoned, but structurally sound, houses were boarded up. In the back lanes discarded furniture accumulated, ignored by refuse collectors, but attracting fly tippers. Vandals and arsonists followed behind, prompting another wave of residents to abandon their homes. As one resident explained:

> I was brought up in Burnley Wood and it was a nice area until a few years ago. Then the rot set in. Now there are fires in the empty houses, windows put out, rubbish everywhere – it's just not safe.

The shocking fact is that all this has happened since the mid-1990s. At a time when the national media spoke of nothing but rocketing property prices, the people of Burnley Wood suffered an epidemic of negative equity. Houses bought for £30,000 were made worthless within in a few short years. Many homeowners have simply walked away and, in Burnley as a whole, 5,000 homes lie empty. The local authorities are now involved in desperate efforts to revive the housing market. But state-provided economic solutions will not solve essentially social problems.

There are no economic excuses. The decline of manufacturing in the North West cannot explain the fate of Burnley Wood. The same destruction of the neighbourly society can take place where regional economies are booming. The North Peckham Estate, for instance, lies at the heart of a job-generating metropolis. And yet, as regeneration money is ploughed in, crime continues to blight local lives.

Nor can this be blamed on some inherent inner city malaise. Crime can destroy communities in every place and at every scale from entire conurbations to tiny villages. In my own constituency of West Dorset there are villages, which tourists may think of as quaint, but where lives are still ruined with impunity by the actions of just one bad neighbour.

All kinds of community may fall prey to the vicious circle that destroys the neighbourly society, but in each case the underlying pattern is the same. The process starts with disorder, be it petty vandalism, fly-tipping or casual intimidation. The environment is degraded, creating niches for crime and obstacles to community action. Rising crime and a heightened fear of crime prompt those that can get out to do so. Those that are left are those who cannot afford to leave and are also those who rely most on the retreating tide of local shops, employers, public services and community institutions.

The eventual outcome varies. At the extreme, whole streets and estates are bulldozed and grassed over, proof that crime can quite literally destroy community. More often the result is a pocket of degradation. This may spread or it may be contained. The worst effect is on those too poor to live anywhere else, but too honest to profit from the disorder that mounts around them.

Tackling degradation

It makes sense that we should break the vicious circle at its weakest point, the point at which the signs of environmental degradation and disorder are just emerging.

At its simplest this means making neighbourhoods safe for children to play in, towing away abandoned cars, removing rubbish, repairing playgrounds, pushing out the drug-dealers. More trusting than adults, children may be the first to re-colonise the shared spaces of safer neighbourhoods. But then parents may gather round their playing children and start chatting among themselves, perhaps keeping an eye on each others' children and swapping neighbourhood news. This is the start of community. It may be informal, but it generates the networks that police and teachers and care workers can be part of. And it generates the right relationships between neighbours, generations and ethnic groups that children learn from as they grow older. And out of the informal community, comes organised community action, with neighbours forming their own mutual aid groups or feeling a greater sense of ownership over projects run by outside organisations.

High-level policing and active community policing

None of this can work until and unless a combination of high-level policing and criminal intelligence with tough sentencing have removed from the midst of the affected community the drug barons and the organised criminals whose interests are wholly opposed to the recreation of the neighbourly society. Nor can the cycle of responsibility be re-established unless there is highly active community policing, providing a visible police presence, reassuring the law-abiding, and convincing the young people who are at the early stages of the conveyor belt that the choice of a criminal lifestyle will be unpleasant and unrewarding.

Civil society in action: the formation of character

But recreating the neighbourly society also involves dealing with individuals as individuals. Crime is not impersonal; it is not some generalised phenomenon spread indiscriminately through a local population. Crime is committed by individuals: criminals do not spring fully formed at birth or at any given age; nor do their law-abiding neighbours. The choice between criminality and neighbourliness takes place within an individual consciousness. The manifest battleground between crime and social may be the shared spaces of a neighbourhood, but the deeper battle is within the conscience of the individual.

It is the formation of character within the family and within the wider community that can alone lead us from broken communities and broken laws towards the neighbourly society. To deprive a child of the support and kindly discipline that forms character is to commit an act of inhumanity, to

start the child on the conveyor belt to a life of crime. The object of policy must be to bolster those institutions that can provide the character-formation which is the indispensable precondition of neighbourliness.

A great part of the burden has to be borne by our schools and teachers. A significant contribution also needs to be made by the incentives provided in our tax and social security system. These are areas of social policy on which the Conservative Party is working and which – while too large to be covered in this lecture – will have a huge influence on our success or failure in fighting crime.

But we cannot expect to rely solely on action by agencies of the state. We must look, also, to the work of the voluntary sector. Many of the most important voluntary acts will inevitably be on so small and personal a scale as to be virtually invisible. Some, however, are visible.

There is, for example, a YMCA programme that uses a shared love of sport to bring fathers together with their sons. Britain suffers from an epidemic of father absence. More than a fifth of our children now live without their fathers and, for half of these, contact is so infrequent that they are effectively fatherless. Through activities as straightforward as a football match (of the sort that is an everyday occurrence in a functioning family) projects like this work to restore relationships weakened by desertion and divorce.

Not all is lost or gained in the family. There is a battle to be won in the classroom too. *DARE* is a charity that works with Police Officers to provide drug education programmes in schools. The ethos is one of moral responsibility. The message is that there are choices between right and wrong to be made and that children should be told the truth. DARE supplies education resources at no cost to police forces and schools, as funding is raised from local communities and other voluntary sources.

Even at the far end of the conveyor belt to crime – in prison – there is an opportunity for civil society to provide exit points through rehabilitation. I made a visit to The Verne prison recently. The Verne is one of three prisons in which an entire wing has been taken over by the Kainos Community Trust, a charity that has pioneered a new approach to changing the lives of prisoners. The results of the programme are striking, the transformation in the way that prisoners think about themselves, the prison authorities and their social responsibilities is profound. As prison officials said themselves, conditions before Kainos were horrendous. But within two years, the violence and the threat of violence that haunted the wing were gone.

Another charity whose work I recently saw, concerns itself with working alongside the probation service to reintroduce ex-prisoners to a useful role in society once they emerge – and starts its work whilst they are still in prison. This builds on the long efforts of NACRO.

From these few points of light we can draw hope – but only if they are allowed to gather and multiply. And that is just the problem. There are those with a vested interest in the existing system, who fear the introduction of new approaches not because they might fail, but because they might succeed. When I visited the Kainos wing, for example, I heard to my astonishment that the Home Office had ordered its closure for reasons that the Home Secretary has been unable to explain.

We must seek solutions that open up the system to the riches of civil society. We must remove the obstacles and inequities that stop what works from working for those that need it. Let us look for what changes lives, not for the easy life of establishments.

Re-establishing the neighbourly society

So this is our approach: to break the vicious circle that destroys community through a proper combination of sophisticated high-level policing and highly active community policing, drawing on all the agencies of the state and of local government; to remove the barriers that stop the community from supporting the individual; and, by these means, to facilitate the re-establishment of the neighbourly society where it has broken down, in order to restore the cycle of responsibility. This does not necessarily involve more police. It does involve more effective use of existing police resources. It will also require the active co-operation of local inhabitants and of voluntary agencies.

This will form a new chapter in the Conservative approach to fighting crime – but one which is a logical evolution from the policies of the last Conservative government. Then, we rebuilt our defences against rising crime and began to beat it back. We gave the courts power to take thousands of persistent criminals off the streets in order to protect the individuals, households and businesses that they exploited and plagued. We must continue and enhance that effort against organised crime with all the sophisticated apparatus of criminal intelligence at our disposal. But our new task must be to strike at the heart of crime: by active community policing which makes criminality a lifestyle that fewer and fewer people are inclined to choose, by tackling neighbourhood degradation and bringing the resources both of the state and of the voluntary sector to bear, in order to give communities the means literally to re-form themselves as the guarantors of the cycle of responsibility.

The task of restoring the neighbourly society where it has broken down is a task for a political party which understands that politics has its limits as well as its uses – a party which understands that, when freed from the suffocating menace of crime, communities are spontaneous, innovative and personal in a way that governments and bureaucracies are not and can never be.

TWO

YOUTH JUSTICE – OR NOT?*

The neighbourly society versus the destructive society

Earlier this year in a speech to the Centre for Policy Studies I observed that growing up in Britain sweeps up many children on a conveyor belt of crime without offering any exit routes. This is a conveyor belt that starts with individuals growing up in disruptive homes. They become an inconvenience and a problem in school. They start a life of petty crime and move on to serious crime. They begin their prison sentence, come out and repeat the offence. They are given a longer prison sentence and they become hardened criminals. Institutionalisation is then the only option left.

This was described recently by the Metropolitan Commissioner, Sir John Stevens, when he said:

> The next generation of children could be growing up in an environment where crime is seen as unexceptional in some areas of large cities – just a part of everyday life… the bullied become bullies, the beaten become aggressors, and cruelty becomes the norm. Victims become robbers and so the cycle of crime escalates.

This scenario is allowed to develop because of the absence of the neighbourly society. Children grow up in neighbourhoods where the stability and support provided by networks of friendships, families, schools, neighbourly associations and other sources of identity and self worth is non- existent.

The dissolution of these networks of support indicates that the role of the police, as custodians of the neighbourhood – as guarantors of authority and order – is ever more important. Their retreat from the neighbourhood frontline, about which I spoke in March, means that yet another layer is stripped away from the neighbourly society as troubled youngsters have no barriers to the conveyer belt to crime.

In the face of crime and social disorder, a community can only retreat, ceding more ground to the criminal and exposing young people to values wholly opposed to those of the neighbourly society.

---

* This Lecture was delivered by Oliver Letwin to the Centre for Policy Studies at the Annual Meeting of the CPS, 19 June 2002.

The paradox is that, where the neighbourly society has disappeared, young people still desperately crave the things that sustain it – security, stability and freedom from fear.

Their response to the absence of the institutions that sustain the neighbourly society is to establish their own institutions that maintain the destructive society. Their answer to an absence of family, neighbourhood and community networks is to create their own network of support – The Criminal Gang.

For, what does The Criminal Gang provide but a substitute family? What does The Criminal Gang offer, but a route away from malnourishment and impoverishment? What does The Criminal Gang ensure, but a feeling of power and security? What does The Criminal Gang bring, but a sense of purpose and excitement? What does The Criminal Gang guarantee, but a right to belong?

In short, The Criminal Gang fulfils that most basic human desire of association and belonging. But, just as with the children in the 'Lord of the Flies', the substitution of 'Gang rules' for moral rules leads to chaos and destruction. The Criminal Gang sweeps up the weaker members of the neighbourhood, intimidates those outside the gang and embarks on an orgy of vandalism, pillaging and virtually unrestrained violence.

Of course not all gangs are bad – and some will be worse than others. Some gangs will constitute just a few children stealing from sweet-shops. But, at their worst, gangs led by hardened thugs, with no consciousness of right or wrong, have a power to destroy any semblance left of community.

Their efforts can lead to abuse, rape or murder. The tragic cases of Stephen Lawrence and Damilola Taylor bear witness to the destructive power of The Gang and illuminate gang terror in its purest form.

The extent to which young offenders and gangs are nurturing the destructive society cannot and should not be underestimated.

Young offenders are now responsible for about a third of all criminal convictions. But the recent Youth Justice Board survey showed that the number of criminal offences committed by young people is probably far higher than the conviction rates suggest. In that survey, 26% of school pupils claim to have participated in some form of crime in the last year – and this alarming statistic is borne out by other surveys.

Nor does the crisis of youth crime consist just of youths committing crimes. It consists also of young criminals growing up into adult criminals. Until we can find ways of reducing the level of youth crime, we will not succeed in reducing the supply of hardened adult criminals.

Prevention in the place of cure?

There is little doubt that we could make – and that we must make – much greater and more effective efforts to tackle youth crime by means of crime

prevention. As one group of criminologists recently put it to me, we need to raise the hurdles rather than merely attending to the hurdlers.

One great hurdle that can and should be erected against the young criminal is police presence. If we can get the police visibly back onto the streets, with effective neighbourhood policing, well supported by community watchfulness, and move towards the two minute response times, that have worked so well in New York, with the locality controlled by the police rather than by the gangs, then the hurdles that have to be jumped by young people contemplating a crime will be raised substantially.

A second great hurdle is "designed-in" crime prevention. The evidence from a number of studies, that particular residences or businesses are repeatedly and disproportionately the victims of burglary, suggests that the proper employment of anti-theft designs and anti-crime technology could make these attractive locations less attractive and thereby raise the hurdle-rate for youth crime. The statistics, here, are echoed in the kind of comments I frequently hear from those – often shopkeepers – who have been victims of repeated crime: 'the youths who hang around were put off once we put in anti theft devices and put up the CCTV'. No doubt also, the design of items such as mobile phones can contribute significantly to making them more difficult to use when stolen – as we hope the new moves to block GSM handsets and the new "designed-in" blocking of GSM phones will do.

But I do not believe that we can afford to put all our faith in hurdles. We must also attend to the young hurdlers. I persist in believing that our society must be capable of addressing – and in a high proportion of cases, altering – the character of young criminals and potential young criminals.

Some people believe that it is left-wing nonsense to suppose that the behaviour of young criminals or potential young criminals can be addressed or their character altered.

But I am too acutely conscious of the subtle fabric of affection, reputation and emulation that tenuously and imperfectly sustains the moral characters of those of us who are generally non-violent and generally law-abiding, to believe that there is so vast a gulf as some people imagine between "them" and "us".

I take young criminals to be 'us', but gone wrong. I cannot see that there is much hope for society, or much hope for humanity, if we give up on the task of preventing them from going wrong. Crime prevention: yes – more of it; but also the prevention – as far as we are able – of criminality itself.

The Youth Justice System does not work

At present, the youth justice system does very little to sustain my optimism. Indeed it does much to sustain the deepest pessimism.

The youth justice system in Britain today serves one purpose. It protects the public against some of the most persistent and serious Young Offenders for the periods during which those young criminals are locked up. Such protection of the public is, of course, enormously important.

But alas, the protection of the public only occurs while the young people in question are in prison – and, all too frequently, a brief spell in a youth offender institution is followed almost immediately by re-offending.

The re-offending rates in Young Offenders Institutions are roughly 75%. This means that, within two years of emerging from such an institution, 75% of the leavers will have been reconvicted of a crime. When one allows for the very low clear-up rates of crime which are under 10% at present, the presumption must be that an astonishingly high proportion – perhaps close to 100% – of the young people concerned – actually go on committing crimes after being in a YOI.

So the youth justice system isn't working as rehabilitation.

But if a quarter of the pupils in our schools committed a crime last year – as the surveys suggest – then the youth justice system isn't working as a deterrent either.

I submit to you that a youth justice system which offers some short-term protection to the public but neither deters nor rehabilitates is, to a very considerable extent, a failure.

The system of local authority 'care' does not work

But the youth justice system is not the only thing which is failing. The system of local authority care is also a flop.

Our care system is at the very least, failing to undo the moral damage already done to many of the children who find their way into it.

Although many many children in care are very often horribly damaged, it is a tribute to those working in the care homes that many do emerge against the odds and live fulfilled lives. But, alas it is often not so. An appalling number of children in care become young people in prison.

Figures from the National Prison Survey suggest that 38% of prisoners under the age of 21 have been in local authority care.

Recently, I was presented with a published book of poems, written by Young Offenders.

One poem entitled "This Angry Boy" particularly struck me.

Let me read it to you:

> At the age of ten he was classed as a problem child and that he needed special attention and so they packed him off to an approved Boarding School.
>
> He was there for three years getting into fights here and there this angry boy.

> There was a lot of frustration but no one looked into the reason why he was angry and or frustrated.
>
> So he got kicked out of the Boarding school for assaulting another boy and was charged with GBH at the age of thirteen.
>
> That was the first of many offences. Then for the next year he was sent from Children's home to Children's home to Children's home never having a place to settle for more than a month.
>
> Then at the age of fourteen he got into crimes ranging from car theft to armed robbery and he also had a reputation to defend in his area which also caused problems without him getting into fights. He had a criminal record as long as his arm. But why did he do these crimes and where was he going to go?

What better critique could there be of our youth justice system in operation?

Or of the failure of our system of care?

We fail from the age of four

There is, however, a yet deeper failure. We are failing to tackle this problem at its roots. Some months ago, I was sent a book entitled *Ghosts from the Nursery*.

Ghosts from the Nursery opens with the true story in the US of a 16-year-old boy, Jeffery, who was charged with the murder of an 84-year-old man in 1993 and sentenced to death. The authors observe that:

> Jeffrey's story is one told hundreds of times daily in courtrooms across the nation. It is a story told by events, psychiatric reports, interviews with victims, witnesses, friends, and family….. But the beginning of stories like Jeffrey's goes untold. One chapter is nearly always missing--the first chapter, encompassing gestation, birth, and infancy. And because it goes unseen and unacknowledged, it repeats itself over and over at a rate now growing in geometric proportions.

Sad and shocking though this story is, it is not so surprising when we learn that Jeffrey himself was the product of a chaotic and abused home background. His mother was a drug and alcohol addict. As a very young child, he was beaten, abused and neglected.

The authors go on to examine the effect on children of abuse, neglect, and lack of warmth from their mother and father, their inability to relate to the world around them and their likelihood of some becoming tomorrow's offenders.

Academic research on both sides of the Atlantic is growing to support the evidence that the seeds of future offending are sown in infancy.

Although the UK crime statistics do not provide much evidence of the background of offenders, the results of some long-term studies are beginning to be evaluated.

In the UK, for example, Dr. Stephen Scott , of the Department of Child Psychiatry at King's College London, has shown that by the age of five, 15% of children display early signs of behavioural problems and are rejected by their parents. Nearly half of these will go on to have substantial criminal records. Looking back, of those who become serious repeat offenders, over 90% showed severe anti-social behaviour in childhood.

In the last 40 years, the breakdown of family structures in the UK is both striking and worrying. A quarter of all children in the UK are being brought up with one parent absent – usually the father – easily outnumbering other EU countries. We also have by far the highest rate of teenage mothers in Europe. Whilst many lone parents do a heroic job against the odds, the evidence suggests that young people are less likely to be tempted onto the conveyer belt to crime if the family unit is at full strength.

The evidence also shows that the single most important ingredient in a young child's life is the quality of his or her parenting. Harsh, physically abusive, neglectful and chaotic parenting, devoid of love, makes for anti-social, disruptive, dysfunctional children. The building blocks of a normal childhood are missing. The ladder is kicked from under the children's feet before they learn to walk.

On a visit to a Parenting Centre in Hereford recently, I was told of a baby, born to a heroin addict, who was ante-natally addicted. What sort of start in life is that? When a child is traumatised by what he sees and hears in the home, how can he develop normal relationships outside? When there are no boundaries in his life, how can be expected to respect the rights of others?

But what, apart from taking children into care, are we doing to prevent the first steps onto the conveyer belt to crime? When a child first arrives at school, clearly displaying the "early signs of behavioural problems", what strategies do we have for addressing these problems?

The answer at present, is next to none. If the child is physically at risk, action – alas, often involving removal to local authority care – will be taken. But if the problem is moral and spiritual, if the child is 'merely' an outsider, even to the point where the teachers notice and worry, there is no sustained, coherent, readily available arrangement for effective intervention. We just wait until the problem becomes a crisis of criminality – and then leave it to the care system and the criminal justice system to fail to address the crisis.

The way forward: two ambitions

It is not enough for a politician – even for a politician in Opposition – to preach about our current failures. Constructive politics consists not only in identifying the current problems but also in putting forward solutions.

Accordingly, since my speech on the neighbourly society, we have been working, not only to locate the areas of failure but also to identify the broad lines of possible solutions. We are not yet sufficiently advanced in that work to offer detailed policy prescriptions. But I want to sketch today, two major ambitions which – if fulfilled through effective detailed policy, and if set alongside a reassertion of effective neighbourhood policing and other effective crime prevention and criminal justice reforms – could, I believe, make a significant contribution to the reduction of youth crime, and hence to the reduction of crime in general.

The first of these ambitions is the establishment of effective programmes to lead the 'problem child' away from the conveyer belt to crime, from the age of four or five onwards.

The second of my ambitions is the establishment of a new approach to persistent youth offenders – so that those whom the programmes within the first ambition have failed to rescue are nevertheless effectively deterred and rehabilitated at a later stage.

Effective programmes to lead children away from the conveyer belt

The first of these ambitions – the establishment of effective programmes to lead children away from the conveyer belt to crime – is not new.

In 1852, a Metropolitan Police Magistrate wrote:

> The characters of children brought up in London are so precociously developed that I should find it difficult to mention an age at which they should not be treated as criminals.

The Nineteenth Century response to ever rising juvenile delinquency – as portrayed by Charles Dickens in Oliver Twist was to set about trying to nurture neighbourly institutions that would both help parents to bring up the children and, to the extent that the parental role was not fulfilled by the parents themselves, to provide a partial replacement.

Great philanthropists like Lord Shaftesbury, Mary Carpenter and Thomas Barnardo saw it as their duty to take action.

Aware of the shortfall in educational institutions for the poor, Mary Carpenter established a number of schools, including a reformatory school in Bristol in 1854. In her schools, teachers were responsible for becoming acquainted with the child's home and family surroundings.

Mary Carpenter believed that support for children should "'be left in the hands of volunteers, who were the 'the best means of supplying to the child the parental relation".

The same desire to remove youngsters from the conveyer belt to crime motivated the Boys' Brigade and the Scouts as well as the Sunday School movement which, by 1880, had some six million Sunday scholars.

Nor should we be so insular as to suppose that the problem of youth criminality – or the need for an effort to reduce it by intervening very early and very persistently – are restricted to the UK.

The Head Start programme in the US is an example of community based, charitable organisations that have developed innovative programmes to meet local needs, often using volunteers.

The idea behind Head Start is to tackle rising juvenile crime, child abuse, neglect and poor education results by intervening with children under five, pregnant mothers and their families. Since 1965, Head Start has served over 15.3 million children and their families and it plays a major role in focusing attention on the importance of early childhood development. It draws together the major components affecting a child's development under one roof as part of a fully integrated service: education, health, parental involvement and social services.

Head Start is not a perfect model. It is noticeable that President Bush – in a series of early childhood initiatives – has asked for reform. He is intent on basing the allocation of federal subsidies upon the evaluation of results.

But the Head Start principle is the right one – it uses both the state and the voluntary sector to try and prevent children in their early years from embarking on the conveyer belt to crime.

We are beginning to see a movement in this direction here, with primary schools playing a leading role in providing breakfast clubs, after school clubs, holiday clubs and counselling courses for parents. Schools are in touch with families in other ways through the educational welfare officers, health visitors and social workers – and the Sure Start project is in its early stages. These schools are only picking up the pieces – they have an enormous task.

But many different agencies are involved, they are not fully co-ordinated, they are danger of becoming too bureaucratic and large numbers of children can, and do, fall through the net.

Above all, we have not yet found in the UK – perhaps because we have become so centralised and so bureaucratic in our attitudes and practices – a suitable means of doing what Head Start does: namely, to mobilise and co-ordinate the resources of the voluntary sector.

I agree with Rob Allen, the Director of Research at NACRO when he says:

> There is a need for community based supervision to utilise as wide a range of resources as possible in the task of promoting responsibility… schools, youth clubs, churches, voluntary organisations and employers need to accept a greater measure of responsibility for the life of the community as a whole and for offering opportunities to reintegrate young people excluded from it…

But, in the UK today, we do not do it. The state all too often either ignores the problem or takes the child into 'care' – and all too infrequently sees itself as the facilitator of voluntary, neighbourhood-based efforts to provide or reinforce the stability and moral education that homes have been unable, or partially unable to provide.

If we knew how to use the vast powers and riches of the state to release these voluntary, neighbourhood energies without bureaucratising them in the process, we should have the beginnings of an answer to the crisis of the conveyer belt. We know this because we know that despite the present lack of state facilitation there are – around and about – remarkable examples of voluntary neighbourhood activity.

One of the most remarkable is a charity in Camberwell, Kids Company.

Kids Company holds out a hand to children who are drowning under a system, that has failed them at every turn.

Many of the children at Kids Company have witnessed all manner of criminal behaviour which in some cases defies the imagination. The case of one particular child provides an illuminating example. This child's mother and partner are both drug addicts who in their preoccupation to feed their habit forget her most basic needs and sink to depressing levels of depravity. There is no food in the house, no sheets on the bed; the furniture has long since been smashed up. She has witnessed many frightening scenes due to the fact that drug dealers frequent her home.

Nine out of ten of the children have no father; many rarely see food in the place they call home. Many will have suffered abuse and been exposed to a life of crime since early childhood. Over the years, usually by about the age of 11, they will have learnt to absent themselves emotionally from feelings.

These children are already in a prison of their own making and it requires intensive work to bring them to return to feelings. Because they do not have a full capacity for sympathy or remorse and have little regard for their own future, they are not much concerned about the welfare of others, and not much worried by the prospect of compromising their freedom. Deterrence does not work for them because they do not feel they have anything to lose.

Kids Company provides three hot cooked meals a day, incentive points which can be exchanged for clothes, education, psychiatric counselling, help

with housing, drugs and benefits. It is in the business of picking up the pieces of discarded lives and attempting to put them back together.

Kids Company is a local solution to a local problem meeting a specific need. It has established itself spontaneously and its essence is its autonomy which would be lost if we ever tried to make it fit a bureaucratic straitjacket.

We need to invoke the spirit of the great Victorian social reformers, but we need to translate the working of that spirit into a modern idiom, the idiom of the Head Start programme and the idiom of the Kids Company. We need through concerted and co-ordinated action to find the means of harnessing the resources of the public sector and of the voluntary sector, to intervene early, to provide support and reinforcement for parents and their children, so that the 'outsider child', does not become the 'problem child', the 'impossible child' and the 'young offender'.

A new approach to dealing with young offenders

We have, however, to accept that – however much we improve upon our current, lamentable approach to 'problem children' – there will still be failures. There will still be some, I hope, ultimately very few, who slip through the net and become serious and persistent young offenders.

At present, our principal response to such offenders is to incarcerate them in Young Offenders Institutions. I have spoken today about the statistics which indicate that the system of YOIs in the UK is failing lamentably, both as a deterrent and as a system of rehabilitation.

Some other places do better.

You will recall that, for the UK's Youth Offending Institutes, the latest figures show that 75% of young offenders reoffend within two years of release – and those figures are only for those juveniles who are caught.

75%. Now let me contrast that figure for a moment with a Young Offenders Reformatory in Ankara, Turkey – a country not normally associated with a Hampstead liberals or a liberal penal policy!

At this Reformatory, just 3% of those released had been reconvicted of an offence within four years. Yet the inmates of this Reformatory were convicted for severe crimes.

The Governor of the Reformatory states:

> This place is more like a school than a prison because we believe this project will be one that will help the children who have committed crimes return to the community as normal citizens.

This Reformatory succeeds because it is embedded in the local community. It is the very opposite of a child jail. The young people leave the prison campus every day to work in local businesses or study in local

schools. The Reformatory is partly staffed by local volunteers. Although there is tremendous opportunity to escape, very few children do.

Why?

Partly because the conditions of the Reformatory are pleasant and provide replacements for all the things that were notably absent throughout the young person's upbringing: positive support, education and sustenance.

However, there is one important threat that hangs over these juvenile offenders: they know that they will be sent to a harsh closed prison – most likely to the end of their sentence – if they run away. They know what this closed prison is like due to the fact that they were detained there before trial proceedings.

Let me give you another example in Texas – also not an area associated with lenient punishment.

Over 70% of Juvenile offenders who pass through the Harlingen Camp in Texas do not reoffend (roughly the inverse of the UK figure). Although the Camp is highly disciplined, the offenders are given specialised mentoring and education programmes.

They are constantly re-modifying their programs to create the highest success rate. For example, most juvenile institutions have at least 200 beds, whereas this camp only has 32. This allows for greater personal contact, or as Mr. Coan, the Prison Captain said, "A smaller unit leads to greater individual counselling and better end results".

The camp is not completely "military". It emphasises the fact that it is an educational institution, where the children can learn moral and physical courage.

Six months is the minimum time of stay for the average child; the longest stay was 13 months. Children can be kept longer than six months if there are problems finding proper placement for them upon departure (if for example the family i s not involved or willing to help).

The children and counsellors meet with the family every two months to check on progress and try to streamline the network of support from the camp to the individual homes. 26 children have applied for the High School equivalency exam; 20 have passed, thus earning their High School Diploma from the camp. The camp also works to help the young people go to college with a two-year program they are connected with once the kids leave the camp.

These examples of Ankara and Texas have a lot to teach us – because the contrast with our own arrangements is so great. This is of not, of course, to deny that there are examples of good practice within some UK institutions.

Thorn Cross YOI in Warrington has proved that if they can hold on to a young offender for long enough they can make a difference to the life of that young person.

Thorn Cross operates a High Intensive Training programme known as HIT which recent research shows has a positive impact on re-offending rates.

Cognitive-behavioural programmes, education, skills training relevant to the person and the location, preparation for a useful life, strict routine, detox programmes, mentoring, career planning and through-care on the outside have helped to reduce re-offending.

A few weeks ago I visited the Orchard Lodge Secure Training Centre in South London. The staff are dedicated and do everything they can to help the children who are placed there. In many cases they do an excellent job and I witnessed some youngsters taking science GSCEs.

But there are crucial differences even between these good UK examples and the really successful cases in Ankara and Turkey.

What both the Boot Camp and the Ankara Reformatory have in common is what happens to juveniles when they leave.

They offer a really serious rehabilitation and settlement service. The staff frequently calls on and check on the children and their families. They help them with their educational qualifications and the young people are invited back into the institutions on a day-by-day basis for further support.

What a contrast to Britain. I have lost count of how many projects looking after young people, how many Secure Training Centres, and how many Young Offenders Institutions do not have the ability to offer a decent aftercare service.

Although Thorn Cross – unusually – does make efforts (heroic under the circumstances) to support the boys after resettlement, they struggle in a policy environment that does not recognise what a pivotal time the weeks and months after a young person is released can be.

They are often unable to find out what happens to former residents, and they have strictly limited capability for any kind of rehabilitation support. In the case of most Youth Offending Institutions and Secure Accommodation Centres, there is no serious after-care at all.

Unfortunately once young people leave Orchard Lodge, for example, there is nothing. The youngsters go back into their neighbourhoods whence they came. With no positive networks of support, before long, many are tempted back into the gangs and rejoin the destructive society.

The staff of Orchard Lodge are as frustrated by the system as I am. They told me that they pushed for as many children as possible to go to College, as that would be the one network of support that might keep them off the conveyer belt to crime.

Recently a member of my team met a young man who had been in and out of Juvenile Units and YOIs since the age of 15. Each time he was convicted he was given a short-term sentence from two to five months.

He behaved well in prison, he welcomed the opportunity to clean up and come down from whichever drugs he had been taking at the time he was convicted. The problem was he was never anywhere for long enough for any good to be done.

When his sentence was up he was back on the outside, back to the estate he had come from, exposed to the pressures and the gangs and the vulnerable lifestyle that had contributed to his past pattern of offending.

Whilst he was in prison he had a routine, three cooked meals a day, his life took on an order and although to you and I that order would be abhorrent, to him, someone who had since a child had lived a life in chaos, it was comforting.

Health care was on tap, he successfully went through detox, and the prison service, which possibly provides the most comprehensive drugs support programme in the UK, successfully built him up with nutrition and exercise.

However the education he received was minimal, he was given no skills training for a life on the outside, he had received little in the way of mentoring or counselling and nothing which happened on the inside prepared him for a life on the outside. In fact everything on the inside was the opposite of what it would be on the outside. His meals were cooked, his clothes washed, others took the majority of decisions, he didn't really need to think about anything.

Someone who came into prison unable to completely think about the consequences of his actions or his future had all decision-making responsibility removed for the time he was inside.

The irony was that he wanted a better life for himself. In his words he wanted "a nice house and a job that paid good money". He had aspirations, which to someone from his background presented a huge leap. By the end of his sentence, he was ready to take a step towards a better life, He was off drugs, had pulled himself together. But, just when he was best placed to make the transition from a life of social exclusion and persistent offending, the system throws him out into the community and virtually abandons him.

The result being that within weeks he relapsed and was back through the revolving doors for another useless short-term spell at the expense of the taxpayer. This is the human reality behind the dismal statistics: the principal reason why the Youth Justice System fails is that it offers only sporadic episodes of improvement (after a long series of cautions and the like), without any coherent, consistent long-term rehabilitative approach.

How can we improve upon this dismal performance and begin to achieve the kind of results that are being achieved in Ankara and Texas?

The first imperative is to recognise that short, sporadic sentences with nothing in between will do very little, if anything, to rehabilitate persistent and serious offenders. There is at least some evidence to suggest that a long sentence, coupled with the reforms I am proposing, would lead to a better chance of successful rehabilitation and potentially reduce the total amount of time that young offenders spend inside.

The second imperative is to recognise that a 'sentence' for such a young offender need not be, and in most cases almost certainly should not be, uniform or composed solely of straightforward incarceration: what is needed is for the serious and persistent young offender to be placed in the custodianship of some agency that can use a combination of support and discipline, sticks and carrots, gradually to wean that young person off crime and into a different style of life.

In the case of Ankara and Texas, the custodial institutions themselves play these roles. For reasons which have to do with the history of our own institutions, I doubt whether that is a model which could generally be applied here. I believe that we need to build, instead on the Youth Offending Teams – whose origins lie in the work done by Michael Howard when he was Home Secretary.

The Youth Offending Teams have many natural advantages as prospective custodians of persistent offenders under longer term rehabilitative 'sentences'. They are locally based. They are devoted to dealing with specific problems of individual, persistent offenders rather than a wide range of other issues. They contain representatives of many of the organisations that need to be involved, from the police to the social services. And they have already showed signs of imagination – with, for example restorative justice programmes and ISSP supervision and mentoring programmes.

But the Youth Offending teams are a foundation, rather than the whole answer.

If we are to build effectively on that foundation and begin to emulate the low re-offending rates achieved in Ankara and Texas, we will need to look again not only at sentencing and the powers of custodianship (i.e. the use of sticks and carrots) for long term youth rehabilitative sentences, but also at the structures of the Youth Offending Institutions and secure accommodation, the availability of longer term education and training, psychological help, access to safe housing and much else besides.

Fulfilling the ambitions: tough but constructive

These then, are our ambitions – a truly effective programme, mobilising the public and voluntary agencies to lead 'problem children' away from

the conveyer belt to crime, alongside a new approach to serious persistent youth offenders involving longer term rehabilitative sentences with a 'seamless' support service focused on the reform of character.

To make a reality of these ambitions, we will need much further policy work. That work is now in train.

That work will need to develop all parts of the five point plan for fighting crime in Britain that I authorised at the beginning of the year.

It will need to deliver not only effective action to combat youth crime, by early years intervention and longer term rehabilitative sentences for persistent offenders, but also effective means of putting police back on the streets and turning them into the custodians of our neighbourhoods. It will need to identify effective means of rehabilitating our creaking criminal justice system – so that trials are conducted efficiently and effectively.

And – as importantly as any of this – it will need to provide real methods of conducting an effective campaign against drug dependency in this country – without which no fight on crime stands any material chance of succeeding.

Beyond all of this we shall require a much broader programme of decentralisation, to create a remoralised and sustainable welfare society in which neighbours and parents alike take responsibility, in which family structures are supportive rather than torn apart, in which local communities and individuals feel they have power over their own destiny.

We do not have to choose between soft action and hard action.

That is a stale argument.

We can instead, take action that is tough but constructive, action that is based on a real acknowledgement of the crisis and a real belief in individual moral responsibility, but action that derives at the same time from optimism about the capacity of our society to reform moral character and to lead young people away from crime, to the huge benefit of us all, if only we go about it in the right way.

THREE

THE FRONT LINE AGAINST FEAR*

Introduction

In this speech I intend to set out a vision for the future of policing. But before I describe that vision, I want to say something about our overall philosophy on law and order.

Back in January I delivered a speech at the Centre for Policy Studies, in which I set out a framework for Conservative thinking on law and order. I called the speech Beyond the Causes of Crime, because the central thesis was that – just as in economic policy we need to direct ourselves towards identifying and promoting the causes of wealth-creation rather than the causes of poverty – so, in the field of law and order, we need to direct our efforts towards dealing not with the causes of crime but with the causes of the opposite of crime – in other words, all those assumptions, attitudes and actions that make for what I call the neighbourly society.

The neighbourly society is the most important defence we have against crime. A neighbourly society is built upon strong and supportive relationships within families, between neighbours and throughout the wider community. A united, concerned and vigilant community not only guards against the depredations of the established criminal, but also prevents the development of criminality in its young people. A neighbourly society is self-sustaining because its responsible, adult members provide their young with a proper start in life and, thereby, a cycle of responsibility which sustains the neighbourly society from generation to generation.

The frontline against fear

But there can be no neighbourly society without community, by which I mean the human networks that make a neighbourhood out of a physical network of streets and houses. And there can be no community without security, by which I mean, principally, the safety of the shared spaces of a neighbourhood where community takes root.

* This Lecture was delivered to Conservative Mainstream on 19 March 2002.

We need to understand crime and community as two opposing forces, one of which will overwhelm the other. In this struggle, crime has powerful weapons at its disposal: above all, violence and the threat of violence. In the face of such violence and intimidation, the peaceful community can only retreat, ceding more ground to the criminal, exposing young people to values wholly opposed to those of the neighbourly society. If crime wins the struggle and criminals take possession of the streets, the cycle of responsibility is thrown into reverse, with the result that neighbourhoods decay; the young are corrupted; people who can, get out; and people who can't, live blighted lives. All this, because decent people are afraid.

The cause of this fear isn't just the headline offences of rape and murder, or even the more common offences of mugging and burglary. It is also all the other crimes and near-crimes that affect the quality of life, conveniently filed away under the term social disorder: graffiti, vandalism, petty theft, fly tipping, drug dealing, intimidation, bullying, racial abuse, the corrupting influence of gangs, and the underlying, but entirely viable, threat of violence against anyone who stands up to the wreckers. Yes, of course, people do fear the headline crimes, but in many neighbourhoods there is another kind of fear, closer to despair, born of the knowledge that we must limit our lives or become victims; that the street is owned by the criminal, not by the citizen; that vandals can do what they will, even if everyone knows who they are; that thugs may torment their neighbours with only retaliation guaranteeing a decisive police response; that the gang is a stronger influence on our children than the school; that in the frontline against fear no one is on our side; that we are right to be afraid.

I have spoken of the struggle between crime and community. It is a struggle that the community is losing and the evidence of defeat can be seen most starkly in Britain's poorest neighbourhoods. There is something desperately wrong with our society when the people we put in the front line against fear are those least able to stand up to the thugs – the poor, the very old and the very young. They need some one to fight for them, not just holding the line against fear, but taking back the ground lost to the forces of disorder.

The role of the police

Who will take on this role? In my view it should be the police. But the conventional view is that the proper role of the police is to confront serious, organised crime through the discipline of criminal intelligence.

The strength of conventional policing is the development of high-tech, intelligence-led methods that seek out connections and pursue them to the criminals at the other end. But its strength is also its

weakness – the targets are now so selective that the police can confront crime without engaging with society. Conventional policing in the UK has, I believe, ignored the deeper connections that lead back to the frontline against fear.

Do you remember the Peter Cook and Dudley Moore sketch about the one-legged man who auditioned for the lead role in a Tarzan film? The casting director tries with great diplomacy to tell the aspiring actor that he is unsuitable for the part. Accentuating the positive he tells him that he likes his left leg: "it is a great leg, I have nothing against your left leg… the trouble is neither have you".

I have nothing against conventional policing methods. Indeed, I believe that they are integral to the vision of a neighbourly society. We need a combination of high-level policing, criminal intelligence and tough sentencing to take out the organised criminals whose interests are wholly opposed to the creation of the neighbourly society. But however intelligent the criminal intelligence, however tough the tough sentencing, high-level policing will never be sufficient on its own. And as long as it is on its own, we will only have half a police service.

Whether crimes occur singly or in some organised fashion, they do not arise out of nothing – nor do they return to nothing after the recorded event is over. For every crime there is a criminal, and for every criminal there is a personal history of unchallenged anti-social behaviour degenerating into a lifetime of crime. For every crime scene there is a neighbourhood, and every neighbourhood has its story too – one in which social disorder is allowed to multiply and feed upon itself as it feeds upon the community. In terms of both people and places, every crime is the product of a complex web of events, decisions, relationships and conditions – stretching back for years, even generations.

This is a view of crime that defies conventional attempts to record, but any one of us would recognise the phenomenon in a neighbourhood that just isn't safe anymore. The corollary is a view of policing which regards social engagement as necessary and inevitable.

To distinguish this role from conventional policing, the catch-all term of community policing is often used. But this term is woefully insufficient, and the activities it represents are nothing like the serious engagement which I have in mind. At its best, community policing can involve worthwhile activities like harm avoidance education in schools. At its worst, community policing can amount to little more than putting PR consultants in epaulettes. But both forms of what we have come to call, in the UK, community policing suffer from an overwhelming deficiency. Just as conventional policing in the UK confronts crime without engaging with society, community policing engages with society, but without confronting crime.

What I want to talk about is distinct from conventional policing. It is also much more than what is commonly understood by community policing. I want to talk about something that is currently being practised only in small areas or for brief periods in the UK – something that, if practised universally, would constitute a virtual revolution in British policing. This is a type of policy that relates to real lives, led in real homes, in real neighbourhoods. I am going to call it neighbourhood policing.

Neighbourhood policing is distinct because it both engages with society and confronts crime – and can do so because it operates within a tangible geographical area. Neighbourhood policing is integral to the Conservative vision of a neighbourly society.

We must view conventional and neighbourhood policing as two halves of a whole. Of course, this is a simplification; the conventional and neighbourhood methods of policing are not mutually exclusive and there are many overlaps. Nevertheless, the emphases are very different: One deals with specific crimes, the other with general disorder; one targets major offences, the other minor offences; one is reactive and remedial, the other proactive and preventative.

I don't think that anyone could reasonably claim that these respective emphases form two halves of a whole in today's police service. Neighbourhood policing can only be restored to its rightful position through fundamental reforms that transform the police service from top to bottom. What I am proposing is the biggest change to policing since the foundation of the police service by Robert Peel.

Appropriately it was Robert Peel who enshrined the ideal of neighbourhood policing in his nine principles of policing. For instance, the first principle is about prevention: "The basic mission for which the police exist is to prevent crime and disorder."

And the ninth principle sets out the ultimate objective of neighbourhood policing: "The test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder."

Whatever happened to neighbourhood policing? These are not just the words of a long dead politician, but the basis of a system of policing that endured into living memory. So whatever happened to neighbourhood policing? The simplistic answer is that policing has moved on, because crime has moved on: There is more crime than ever before; it is more sophisticated than ever before; it is more brutal than ever before. But some things never change – it is still the case that failure to deal with minor crimes will create the conditions from which major crimes arise. We must continue to advance those conventional policing methods that deal most effectively with the major crimes, but unless we return to the roots of the police service we will never effectively deal with the roots of crime.

How are we to achieve this effect? I do not believe it can be done by re-visiting our own past. Circumstances, when we last took neighbourhood policing seriously in Britain, were too different from those we face today. We cannot go back to Peel.

Instead, I think we need to invoke Peel's near-contemporary, Canning. We need to call "the New World… to redress the balance of the old." It is American cities that have shown, over the past decade, how a true combination of conventional policing and neighbourhood policing can be used to crack crime.

The achievement of the NYPD

Two weeks ago, I was in New York as the guest of the NYPD. What did I see there? I saw policemen walking the streets.

I saw patrol cars, which patrol small areas on a continuous, 24-hour basis. I saw the teams available to move in behind the beat-cops and the patrols to tackle crime on the street.

I saw how the NYPD provides transparent diagnosis of street crime and forces policemen at all levels to produce strategies for dealing with it through the so called Compstat which is much more than just a matter of comparative statistics.

I saw how the Police Department and other agencies tackle quality of life issues as well as crime. I saw a criminal justice system which exhibits vitality and a sense of urgency at all levels.

It is difficult to convey the full extent of the difference between what I saw and heard in New York and what one sees and hears in Britain. Let me try to illustrate some of the differences.

Let me start with what we would call "the bobbies on the beat". Every policeman in New York starts by walking the streets. A policeman typically has about four blocks to walk. There are no set hours. The beat-cop is regarded, from the first day, as a professional, entrusted with a task – the task of accumulating low-level intelligence that will enable the NYPD in his Precinct (and, if necessary, on a wider scale) to trace disorder and crime. If that beat-cop needs to deal with specific circumstances that require unorthodox hours, that is his or her decision.

I also rode along with a patrol car. We moved, very slowly, up and down the narrow area, patrolled day after day by the two cops in the car, in one of three shifts, providing 24-hour surveillance of a small area. Drivers showed no surprise at seeing the slow-moving police car – it was evidently a sight with which they were fully familiar. Passers-by joked with the officers at traffic lights (perhaps it is significant that some of these passers-by were black and the cops, in this case, white; perhaps it is also significant that many of the policemen I saw in the Precinct Headquarters in North Harlem were black). As we went along, the

patrolmen pointed out to me individuals with specific criminal histories: they knew them by sight. When I asked how long it would take to reach the scene of a reported crime if one came through on their radio, they said "a couple of minutes." I assumed this was hyperbole. I was wrong. A call came through; a couple of minutes later, without even the need for a siren, we were at the scene.

Back in the Precinct – and in other precincts – there were groups of policemen, some specialist, some generalist, ready to move in, or taking proactive steps to prevent crime and disorder identified by the beat-cops and the patrolmen, or through wider intelligence. Nowhere did I see evidence of a divide between conventional, high-level intelligence-led policing and neighbourhood policing. The two were interdependent. Neighbourhood policing was understood to be an intelligence-accumulating activity as much as any other – the focus of crime and disorder was specific and local – but the specific and local was tied into the fabric of general intelligence.

At Borough Headquarters, I sat through a Borough Compstat meeting. This was exactly as described in the literature. A Precinct Commander, whose precinct showed increases in particular types of crime over the previous week, was being subjected, in front of the other Precinct Commanders in the Borough and in the presence of representatives of other agencies, to a cross-examination by the Borough Commander and other senior officers, on the basis of statistics and maps showing the particular crimes committed on particular streets in that precinct over the previous week. The Precinct Commander and his two senior assistants were having to give (and were giving) a detailed account of the specific measures they were taking to apprehend the villains in question and to prevent recurrences of these types of crime in these and other nearby streets. To appreciate the full force of this experience, one needs to understand that the Borough Commander – who had spent a good part of the previous week, he told me, as in every other week, studying for this session – was in charge of 2,300 policemen and was therefore equivalent to a Chief Constable of a mid-sized UK Police Force: he ranked as a "two-star Chief" broadly equivalent to an Assistant Commissioner at the Met. He himself feared that, at little or no notice, he might be subjected to a similar demand for explanations from the Chief of the Department (broadly equivalent to the Deputy Commissioner at the Met).

The transforming effect of a few simple statistics available and published on a weekly basis, transformed into maps showing exactly the hot-spots, and allied to a system of open and accountability was evident. Right from the top to the bottom of the NYPD attention is focused on crime, where it is occurring, when it is occurring – and on what is being done to stop it.

I saw this same phenomenon played out at the lowest level when I met officers in the North Harlem Precinct, who had donned plain clothes in order to mount a immediate operation to deal with a specific form of crime that was occurring in a small area within the precinct. When I asked if this was because that form of crime had shown an increase in the Compstat statistics, they explained to me that it had not because it had only occurred in the last couple of days. Their intention, they explained, was to stop this becoming the cause of an increase which would embarrass their Precinct Commander the next week in the Compstat meeting.

Neighbourhood policing – in the sense of directly addressing crime on the streets of New York and other American cities – is not an idea or a theory: it is a reality which has focused the attention of policemen at every level of the force on crime and on stopping crime, in real time.

But the neighbourhood policing I saw in New York goes beyond attention to episodes of crime. New Yorkers have their equivalent of our 999 number – 911. But they have something we don't have: they have a 311 number, for citizens to make complaints about quality of life issues. These are not regarded as unimportant, insoluble or low priority. The broken windows theory which governs policing in New York and many other American cities today – and which has very often been misrepresented as aggressive "zero tolerance" – stems from the progressive and liberating idea that citizens do not need to tolerate low-level disorder and that in order to reclaim the streets for the honest citizen from the criminal or low-level disorder needs to be tackled with the same energy that is applied to dealing with episodes of crime. Once again, I did not find any of the NYPD regarding low-level disorder as something separate from crime. I met police officers at all levels who saw these phenomena as intrinsically intertwined with one another, and who understood very well that low-level intelligence, derived from street-cops and continuous patrolling was intrinsically related to an understanding of the location and causes of low-level disorder.

Finally, I saw something that would have warmed the cockles of the heart of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. I spent time in the District Attorney's office, and I talked to police officers responsible on a daily basis for arrests and for taking people to court. The sense of co-operative effort and of urgency was unmistakable – and very different from the pattern obtaining in the UK. The aim of the system as a whole, from the moment of arrest, was to achieve speedy justice. I stress both elements of that proposition. There is a deep and fine tradition of civil liberties in the United States and perhaps the strongest concept of due process in the world. The aim of the system is to deliver justice, not arbitrary punishment. But the aim is to deliver speedy justice. And that is just what happens.

In timescales that would seem impossible in Britain, arrests are turned into arraignments, summary justice, or indictments and plea bargaining, or trials. The police have not given up on the courts, and the prosecutors and the courts have not given up on the citizen. There is a sense of common purpose to identify, comprehend and convict the guilty.

Does all this mean that, in New York and other cities such as Philadelphia, Boston, San Diego as well as other municipalities on a much smaller scale, such as Lowell in Massachusetts, the result is unpleasant, aggressive, intolerant policing? The mythology on this side of the Atlantic would often have it so. But that was not my experience in New York. You will recall the black officers of whom I spoke: the NYPD has a record of employing black officers of which we would be proud in the UK and which we have yet to achieve. I spent instructive time in the Community Affairs Department – I was told of activities mirroring the best practice in the UK used to establish and maintain appropriate relations built between the police and the communities they serve. New York, unlike some English cities, has not seen riots in recent years.

The cities I have mentioned where the model first initiated by William Bratton has been implemented are cities in which policing is conducted very largely by common consent. You have only to walk the streets of North Harlem, or drive with the cops at night, to see, as I saw, a city in which the police benefit from far higher public esteem than our own.

Does it work? The figures speak for themselves. Over nine years, murder in New York has reduced by 80%; robbery, burglary and car theft by over 70%; theft by just under 50% and rape by just under 40%. Across these crimes as a whole, the reduction is 60% since the new methods were introduced. New York is now noticeably a safer and more pleasant city to live in than London. The city is cleaner; there is less low-level disorder. The morale of the ordinary policeman is far higher. Ordinary New Yorkers report vast improvements. The crime surveys show a trend that matches those of the official figures.

Are we dealing with cause and effect? New York and other American cities have seen the reinvention of neighbourhood policing and, with it, the prevalence of transparency and accountability throughout the force – together with the provision of low-level, continuous, timely intelligence allied to the 311 reports. Has all this been responsible for the significant decrease in violent street crime? No doubt this will be debated for many years to come. But in a ground-breaking study produced last December by the Manhattan Institute, Kelling and Sousa subjected the disaggregated New York statistics to rigorous analysis – using the fact that the various precincts have significantly differing social compositions – to eliminate non-predictive variables. Their work deserves intense

study from anybody interested in such analysis. Its results can, however, be summarised in one sentence:

> The average NYPD precinct during the 10-year period studied, could expect to suffer one less violent crime for approximately every 28 additional misdemeanour arrests made.

If anyone needed to put a nail in the coffin of scepticism about the effectiveness of the broken window thesis and of properly organised neighbourhood policing, that does it.

How do we apply the lessons in England?

Let us, then, turn our attention from the United States to our own little island. What do we need, here in the UK? We need that same virtual revolution in policing which American cities began to undergo a decade ago. What does it take to foster such a revolution?

Let me start with what it does not require. It does not require – and, indeed, it cannot be achieved by – Clauses 5 and 7 of the Police Reform Bill, which give the Home Secretary the power to intervene at every level of the police force and, in effect, seek to run the police forces of this country from a desk in Whitehall. I know of no reason to suppose that an effective revolution in policing methods can be delivered by the Home Office, which has given us an Immigration and Nationality Department that cannot process applications in a timely fashion, an asylum system that is, by the Home Secretary's own admission, in a state of chaos, a prison system whose recidivism rates, particularly for young people, are the envy of criminals everywhere.

I do not believe that a revolution can occur in any way except through enthusiastic sponsorship and initiative by the Chief Constables and their senior officers, supported and enthused by Police Authorities. Such enthusiasm will not occur if efforts are made to achieve this virtual revolution through bureaucratic imposition.

Nor will this virtual revolution be brought about by trying to achieve neighbourhood policing on the cheap through community support officers with limited training, limited powers and limited duties. I see no reason to suppose that such people can properly do the job of the policeman on the beat. But, beyond that question, lies the far deeper question: How can our police forces be expected to take neighbourhood policing seriously if it is plastic policemen who are to carry it out? On the contrary, if neighbourhood policing is to be taken seriously in the UK, as it is in American cities, the very best people entering our police forces will need to see the accumulation of low-level intelligence, the provision of rapid response and the taking of effective action against localised crime as part of the essence of good policing, and will need to see

training in such activities as fundamental to the achievement of the glittering prize of the policeman's profession. To be taken seriously by policemen, neighbourhood policing needs to be policing by policemen.

What the virtual revolution for which I am calling does require is a fundamental cultural change in our police forces, led from the top, achieved by consent and pursued with enthusiasm. I have no doubt that the Home Office will need to play its part in increasing transparency and accountability – perhaps through its own version, on a national scale, of real-time Compstat. I have no doubt that the Home Office will need to provide better means of opening up to public and professional view examples of good and bad practice. I have no doubt that the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department will need to look at serious changes in the methods employed by our criminal justice system. Very possibly, we may need to look again at the internal structure of our Police Authorities to see how they can be provided with the means to hold Chief Constables to account.

All of these questions – and many more beside – will need to be addressed if we are to create and then to sustain the virtual revolution that I have described. But I am sure that, so far from moving towards the establishment of a single national police force in the way prefigured by the Police Reform Bill, we should expect to see, and we should welcome, the blooming of many different flowers. In the United States, there are about 20,000 police forces. We have less than 50. There is every reason to suppose that we shall see 50 different models emerging – and every reason to suppose that the virtual revolution will be best achieved in 50 different ways, each responsive to the differing configuration of the area and population served by the police forces in question.

I argue for common aims: a level of attention to neighbourhood policing not seen in this country for many years; a level of attention to the timely identification, analysis and effective resolution of street crime and disorder not witnessed in our police forces today, and a sense of urgency to address crime and disorder through the criminal justice system which we do not have today. But I do not argue for uniformity of method.

There is one enemy. But against that enemy many battles must be fought on many different turfs under many different generals. Victory will be achieved only by the implementation of tactics suitable to each turf.

Unless we begin to achieve that victory, we will never reclaim our streets for the honest citizen. We will never recreate a neighbourly society for Britain. We will fail this generation and the next. We cannot let that happen. This is a war we have to win.

FOUR

THE RETREAT FROM CIVILISATION*

I've entitled this lecture The Retreat From Civilisation. Some of my critics may look no further than that and write off what I have to say as exaggeration. Yes, there is something grandiloquent about those words – as if they'd been lifted from a Cecil B. De Mille epic. And yet those words signify a true story that needs to be told, and for far too many people in Britain today it is the story of their lives.

It is, for instance, the story of Phil and Mandy Brooking. I have changed their names and other details because their story is yet to end. It began when the Brookings helped a friend escape from a cruel and abusive partner. For this they were rewarded with a sustained campaign of hate and intimidation. Over a period of months they were subjected first to threats and then to acts of vandalism against their property. Then one night, as Mandy, Phil and their two children were sat down to dinner, shards of glass exploded into their front room, under the impact of a brick thrown through the window. Once more the police came. Once more the police were told who was responsible. Once more the police said they knew full well who was responsible. Once more the nobody did anything about it.

Later that night the Brooking family fled their home. They drove fifty miles to relatives in a car that had no windscreen because that too has been smashed some days before. While they were away their tormentors returned, breaking into the boarded-up house, systematically smashing up anything that could be smashed up. When the Housing Association that owned the property assessed the damage, their response was to send a bill of several thousand pounds… to the Brookings.

The family were not without friends and received a lot of support from the community – though when a local clergyman approached the police over the matter he was told it was none of his business. There was another sense in which the Brookings were not alone, because they weren't the only victims. The same thugs had been terrorising another family for over two years. Eventually a court order was obtained against one of the thugs, exiling him from the locality. It made the front page of the local paper and everyone breathed a sigh of relief. But then somebody somewhere decided to reduce the punishment. The thug stayed where he was, and instead it

* This Lecture was delivered to the Centre for Policy Studies on 24 February 2003.

was his victims that left town. This wasn't Northern Ireland. Nor some inner-city estate. But a prosperous market town in the Home Counties.

Yet while the rule of thuggery respects few boundaries, its heartland consists of our most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This is not for lack of self-respect amongst the residents. That was brought home to me when I visited the Clarence Way Estate in Camden, where I was shown round by a remarkable woman called Silla Carron. Silla gives meaning to the often meaningless term, 'community leader'. She stands up for her neighbours and stands in the way of all those who would acquiesce to the colonisation of her neighbourhood by junkies, dealers and prostitutes. As we toured the tower blocks she spoke with pride: "I love this place, it's got an air of peace about it". It was true, contrary to stereotype I heard no booming ghetto-blasters, screaming children or revving motorbikes. But that air of peace has been violated, repeatedly, by outsiders, by drug abusers who view the estate's stairwells and balconies as ideal places 'to jack up', the resident's doorsteps to relieve themselves. On sunny days the junkies take over the green, while parents keep their kids inside. And between hits, the users amuse themselves by persecuting elderly tenants. There is no safe time of day. Residents can open their door at any hour to be confronted with the enemy – as was Silla's own granddaughter, by a user with his trousers round his ankles, injecting himself in the groin, at twenty to nine in the morning.

Though drug abuse is nothing new, the users' blatant disregard for all decency is. It is the twenty-first century that brought fear to the Clarence Way Estate. Though not to the junkies and dealers, who conduct their affairs without worry of police intervention. Indeed, while we were there, Silla pointed out a couple of addicts using a telephone box to arrange a delivery. The pair seemed utterly unconcerned that they might be seen by the police. And though incidents are logged with the police, their presence on the estate is minimal. Of more use are the private dog patrols which at least keep the junkies on the move. But the residents of Clarence Way are still afraid and have every reason to be.

I wonder how many more millions like them are afraid tonight?

Different stories. Different people. Different places. But a common thread. First of all, the devastating effect on the victims' lives. Occasionally, a life is lost. We remember the faces of the dead because they stare at us from beneath the headlines. But for each of these there are the unseen faces of those who at times wish they were dead. Mental torture is not too strong a term for what they suffer day in, day out, for months, for years.

Secondly, there is the weakness of authority. The police that don't protect. The courts that don't punish. The prisons that don't reform.

Thirdly, there is blame for the victim, excuses for the perpetrator.

Fourthly, there is the decay, the descent to new depths. The things that happened yesterday that didn't happen last year. The things that happened last year that didn't happen ten years ago. First fists, then

knives, then guns. First pot, then smack, then crack. First cities, then towns, then villages. First men, then women, then children.

So lastly, there is the retreat from civilisation. Boundaries are pushed and they don't push back. Instead people are pushed out. Those that can get out of the worst neighbourhoods do so, perhaps into gated communities where for a time at least they will be safe. And as for the poorer, the older, the weaker, they retreat as best they can. From parks and playgrounds, from streets and shopping areas, to behind locked doors.

It is said that civilisation is not the natural state of things, that the natural condition of mankind is Hobbes's "war of every man against every man". In at least one sense this crude interpretation of Hobbes is wrong. Because, before the second brick was laid upon the first, there must have been some civilising spirit at work amongst humanity. Because, if that spur to build, to trade, to live in peace with one's fellow man had not existed, then neither would the outward signs of civilisation.

And yet the crude interpretation of Hobbes isn't all wrong. There is that countervailing force in humanity to steal what you did not earn, to destroy what you did not make, to kill what you did not give life too. And we know that even if only expressed in a tiny minority, that force is immensely destructive. We guard against it in two ways. First of all there are the outward defences of civilisation. The police, the courts, the prison system. Then there are the inward defences of civilisation: family, community, education, religion, and all the means that civilisation has to transmit its values from one generation to the next. These outward and inward aspects come together in the law, which is manifested in our daily lives as order.

Last year I delivered a speech entitled Beyond the Causes of Crime. This made what I considered to be the entirely uncontroversial point that we must strengthen both the outward and inward defences of civilisation. That without effective police, court and prison systems we cannot create a safe space for the transmission of civilised values. And that, equally, without an ambition to reclaim young offenders for the civilised world, police, courts and prisons become little more than cogs in a conveyor belt of crime. To put it crudely, I was arguing the complementarity of carrots and sticks; or, less crudely, that the hard and soft power concepts of international policy are just as relevant to law and order policy.

But, of course, the speech, and everything I have based upon it, was, and is, the cause of considerable controversy. First there are those that see only the need for hard power, for the stick wielding institutions of the criminal justice system – especially where the sticks are far from metaphorical. Then there are those for whom a diet of carrots is sufficient. This may also be less than metaphorical given recent research linking better behaviour in offenders to vitamin intake. Finally there are those who reject both carrot and stick, who perceive outward defences of civilisation as oppressive, and the inward defences as repressive.

These rejectionists have many friends in the Labour Government. But David Blunkett isn't one of them. He knows what the retreat from

civilisation means for the people he grew up with. That's one reason why I won't pretend there are differences between us where none exist. But in one vital respect there is a difference. We both want to rebuild the outward and inward defences of civilisation, but where I want to build them from the bottom-up, he wants to build them from the top-down. To put it another way, there is something very social about my conservatism, and something very conservative about his socialism, but he is a socialist nonetheless.

The socialist mindset is one that always seeks a central solution to a local problem. And, yes, the retreat from civilisation is always and everywhere a local problem. It can be measured only in the real lives, of real people, in real places. And thus it is not measured at all, because fear cannot be measured, despair cannot be measured, misery cannot be measured.

This is a Government that thinks that mobile phone theft matters because you can count mobile phones. But it doesn't send clear signals to first time burglars because the violation of the home cannot be expressed in statistical terms. This is a Government that values theory above experience. Hence the concern with institutional racism, but the lack of action to tackle the everyday racism of excrement pushed through letterboxes on rundown estates. This is a Government that values the big above the small, that launches initiatives twice a week, but has not created the means to let our people obtain that neighbour-hood policing that has reclaimed the streets of New York and other US cities.

This is a government that doesn't understand why its policies don't work. If crime is uncontrollable, they say, it's because Whitehall doesn't have enough control. So they chip away at the checks on executive power. Trial by jury, the double jeopardy rule, the independence of the police. All of these are under threat. To their credit, many of the left don't like this, but they are placated in discreditable fashion. They are bought off with measures that diminish authority, not at the centre where there is too much of it, but at the bleeding edges of society where there is not enough.

The result is a sense of helplessness felt by parents in the face of drugs, by teachers in the face of indiscipline, by good neighbours in the face of thuggery. This is the final irony of Labour's smash and grab raid on our ancient liberties. They arrogate power to the state, but do so uselessly. They are not the ones that hold the line against chaos. The burglars will not come for Lord Irvine's wallpaper. At least not until they have smashed their way through the homes of the vulnerable.

It is time to make a stand at the doors of the defenceless. That is what the next Conservative Government will do. Of course, it won't be me on the beat. Which is why I won't be taking power for myself, but giving power to those who do hold the line – to the police, to teachers, to parents and to neighbours. It is through them that we will first contain the attack on civilisation and then rebuild what has been destroyed.

We will give people the ability to get police back onto their streets, visible, active, proactive, gathering local intelligence, responding fast to crime, recapturing the streets for the honest citizen. We will introduce

compulsory rehabilitation of school age crack cocaine and heroin addicts. We will establish coherent long-term programmes to get young people off the conveyor belt of crime. We will help parents to provide difficult children with the framework of affection and discipline the child needs if she or he is to grow up into an honest citizen. We will provide long-term rehabilitative sentencing for persistent young offenders to reform characters and change lives and make a profound impact on recidivism.

There are no quick fixes. But we can stop the retreat of civilisation. We can stand our ground against the vandals, thugs and drug dealers. We can restate the boundaries and start pushing back.

The Task is made more urgent by the fact that we are threatened, today, by a second retreat from civilisation – a retreat into fascism.

Faced with this threat, the present Government's combination of rhetorical power and ineffective, centralised control is not merely useless, it is dangerous. There is a danger in talking tough and achieving little. Faked action is more dangerous than inaction. Ultimately it's not the Tabloids the Government's talking to – they are talking to the people back home, to those left behind by the retreat of civilisation. Political spin elicits mostly cynicism in people like us, but what does it do to those in despair? How much crueller is the illusion of hope to the hopeless? False security to those in fear?

This is no time to auction off our liberties. In a bidding war of empty gestures, the extremist will always outbid the democrat, with five such bids already accepted in towns across the North. Hasn't this government seen the evidence? Hasn't Philip Gould made his presentation? In places like Oldham, Burnley and Halifax the alienation of the electorate is unprecedented in its depth. This is not about asylum seekers. It is about people who have every reason to be afraid, and no reason to trust the authorities on anything they say. A crisis of order is a crisis of democracy. And the BNP are ready, willing and able to exploit the situation.

The fascists don't have to take over to do terrible damage. If, heaven forbid, they did only half as well as the National Front in France it would poison our politics for decades to come.

It doesn't need to be this way. While we can look abroad and at home to see what could go wrong, we are able also to see what could go right. From drug prevention in Sweden to neighbourhood policing in America to grassroots action in our own country, the solutions are within our grasp.

These might not make for good headlines, but they would make a difference to the lives of people like Phil and Amanda Brooking or Silla Carron and her neighbours.

Only by making that difference can we hold back the forces of irrationality and barbarism. We have to prove to our electorate that we can fulfil the most basic responsibilities of government to the governed. We must show that democracy is both the true guarantor of freedom, and the true guarantor of security. We must rekindle a faith in the ability of a civilised state to defend a civilised society.

FIVE

THE MORAL MARKET*

This conference is unusual for the Conservative Party. Actually it's unusual for me. I hate conferences, but I'm enjoying this one. I'm glad to be here. I think we will look back some years from now and see that it was worth being at this conference because – unlike some conferences – it is about something. It is about what the Conservative Party really is. It defines where the fault line in British politics is going to be for the period up until the next election.

I know a lot of people think that this has been a long time coming. For some, patience rather broke by July. But the fact is that Iain Duncan Smith said a year ago that it would take us a year to think through what we wanted to be and say in the run-up to the next election. He said that we would announce at this conference where we were headed – not in every last detail, but programmatically; that we would base the programme on what we had thought about and seen during the year; and that during the succeeding two or three years we would not be all over the shop arguing this one week and that another week, but remorselessly developing the themes, the aspirations, and the programme that we set out at this conference.

Now, there's been an enormous amount of discussion in the popular press during the last year, as we've been doing that work, about whether Conservatives favour A or B. And the point I want to make today is that the supposed dichotomy is wholly false.

What is A and what is B? A, is freedom. Individuals. Liberty. The right to choose. The ability to run your own life, to make your own way in the world.

B, is civil society. B is social capital. B is all the things that from our earliest days, through our families, through our friendships, through our neighbourhoods, through our schools, through everything that we do with other human beings, support and nourish us as human beings.

The debate that's been fostered for us by the media over the past few months asks this question: are Conservatives for individual freedom or are they for society? Are they for letting people run their own lives or are they for traditional moorings? Are they mods or are they rockers?

---

* This speech was delivered to the Centre for Policy Studies fringe meeting at the Conservative Party Conference on 8 October 2002.

This is a sterile, vapid, useless distraction. Conservatives have never been arid, atomistic, individualistic libertarians. We've always acknowledged that human beings do not emerge into the world as perfectly formed individuals with no social background, and we've always acknowledged that people do not grow up to be the people they are without the inheritances that they gain through the society they enter, the families they have, the friends they make, the languages they speak, the institutions of the country in which they live. The reason we are called Conservatives is that we believe in those inheritances. We believe that people are, in great part, what they come out of.

But neither have Conservatives ever been authoritarian, totalitarian or believers in the doctrine that individual liberty is of no significance. That has never been a Conservative doctrine. Conservatives have always believed that you make of yourself what you are, that the great endeavours which we celebrate in our history were the products of individual initiative, of effort, of choices, of the use of liberty.

Conservatives have defended liberty for age after age against encroachments against it. I do so on a daily basis against Mr. Blunkett – a man who has no concern for individual liberty. A fine man. A man who believes deeply in society. I have called him, I think accurately, a Christian Socialist. But I've also called him a Christian Stalinist because he genuinely doesn't believe that the fabric of liberties in this country, that have been established over 900 years, are worth preserving. He once said in a debate I had with him, sponsored by *The Daily Telegraph,* that for a single mother in a tower block in Tower Hamlets 'freedom has no meaning'. I don't believe that. I admit that her problems today are not the problems of lack of freedom as she sees them. They are problems of housing, problems of education, problems of the way her children are growing up. Problems with drugs. Problems with crime. Of course that's how she sees things. But if she were living in the Soviet Union her concerns would have been different. They would have been the knock on the door at night, and the visit to the cell, and the torture. The things that stand between her and that condition are of infinite preciousness to every Conservative.

So the fact is we are not believers either in A or in B, but in both. The tradition of the Conservative Party has been to achieve, day by day, case by case, the right, the sensible, the changing balance between the demands of individual freedom and the demands of civil society. Tony Hawkhead, chief executive of Groundwork UK, gave me a phrase for which I have been searching for months. He said that our agenda was about 'setting people free, not setting them adrift'. That expresses more profoundly than I have yet been able to formulate the Conservative doctrine. We are about setting people free, not setting them adrift. When Janet Daley says that we are looking for a moral message, an acceptable alternative to statism, something that people can ascribe to without condemning themselves as participants in what she called the 'greed-fest', she is asking us to articulate the message that we are setting people free and not setting them adrift.

So if Conservatism is not about the debate between individual liberty and society, because we believe in both, what is Conservatism about? Now that has been the problem for many recent years.

There was a time when people thought they knew what Conservatism was about. Gradually they lost this sense, and the reason there has been this sterile, arid, useless debate between A and B is that there has been a vacuum of ideas.

The purpose of this conference – and the purpose of the Conservative Party in the next three years – is to fill that vacuum by inaugurating a different debate. A debate which reaches far into our past and will stretch far into the future. That is a debate about whether either individual liberty or civil society – either the individual or that which nourishes him – can possibly be sustained in the face of the dead hand of bureaucracy and of the State. The Conservative Party wishes to liberate both our society and the individuals within it from the all-encompassing claims of a State that is still believed by some to be able to reap miracles.

This Government came to power because it identified, correctly, and long before we did, that people had been so liberated by our economic reforms that they had become rich. I should say that these economic reforms stressed the claims of a market in which contract and trust and relationships between human beings are as vital as individual effort and entrepreneurship. Let no one ever delude you into thinking that the free market in economics is a matter of atomistic individuals. When Durkheim said that contracts have implications beyond themselves, he meant it.

The fact is you can't operate a market unless you have a society. So we never, in liberating the economy, subscribed to the idea that there was no such thing as society – and if you read Mrs. Thatcher's remarks in full you will see that abundantly.

But we made people so rich that they transferred their attention from economics, and that is what Labour recognised. They recognised that people were now concerned about the quality of life and not just their standard of living. And they had a series of recipes for this. In fact their approach boils down to one recipe.

And the strange thing is that, almost unnoticed by the British public, this was the very same as the recipe they were ditching for the economy. How, they asked, do you improve people's quality of life? Why, they answered, the State. We will run everything. We will control everything. We will regulate everything. We will monitor everything. We will have targets for everything. We will have bureaucrats for everything and everybody.

They have been trying that experiment for the last five years. Even the Prime Minister is beginning to lose faith in that experiment. That is why at the Labour Party Conference, he suggested that maybe they ought to let things run themselves. But of course there's Gordon Brown and Gordon Brown is a much bigger figure than the Prime Minister when it comes to running Labour Party policy. You can bet your bottom dollar, euro or pound on the proposition that Gordon Brown won't let that happen.

Gordon Brown is powerful not because he's the most brilliant politician in Britain, though he probably is, but because the Labour Party supports him. And there is a deep, abiding, morally noble but utterly misguided view which runs the length and breadth of the Labour Party, stretching way back into their past and their traditions: the belief in the beneficence of the State. They believe that the State is the great engine by which society will improve the condition of mankind.

Conservatives see no evidence of it. The people of Britain are seeing no evidence of it. And the Prime Minister has a sneaking suspicion that at the next election there will be no evidence of it.

So we have a massive opportunity and one which, at this conference, we are grasping. It is the opportunity to argue, not that we stress liberty at the expense of civil society or civil society at the expense of liberty, but that we can rescue both individual liberty and civil society. We can set people free without setting them adrift, but if, and only if, we are willing to tame the State: to seek to improve the quality of people's lives, as we once sought to improve their standard of living, by diminishing the role of the State as the comprehensive provider of all, the comprehensive regulator of all, the setter of every target and the monitor of every performance. We are seeking – and we will go on seeking as we go through the next few years – device after device, fitting into a single pattern of thought, to give back to the people of Britain, individually and collectively, the power to change their own lives for the better, to make Britain a better society and to do that without excessive interference from the bureaucracy.

For the bureaucracy has its own agendas and will never succeed in the ambitions set for it by politicians. Will never succeed in producing excellence in education for all. Will never succeed, any more than in any other country, in offering the best in healthcare. Will never succeed in giving people their own homes to run in the right way themselves. Will never succeed in abolishing crime. None of these things can be done just by the State. All of these things have to be done by setting people – neighbourhoods, schools, hospitals, professionals, patients, pupils, teachers, everyone everywhere in this country – free to act, together or individually, with a helping hand from the State but without the dead hand of bureaucracy upon them.

We've spent a year talking about helping the vulnerable. Many people thought we were doing this because we had some crazy idea that we could take over the Labour Party's territory. Many people thought that we were doing it because we'd gone collectively mad. But in fact we were doing it because we wanted to set the scene for adopting some radical policies and presenting them as they are, not as a basis for feathering the nests of the rich and powerful, but as a basis for helping those people in society whom the dead hand of bureaucracy has comprehensively failed to help. If we've achieved nothing else in that period, I think we have achieved the negation of a negative.

The media aren't saying what they said about us in the 1980s – the attack which drove us off these policies. They aren't saying these Tories just want to help the rich and powerful and devil to the hindmost. And they're not saying it because we've dinned into them for the last year that we're about helping the vulnerable.

In the 1980s people thought we were just advocating selfishness. I worked for Mrs. Thatcher for three years. I worked for a year before that for Keith Joseph. During that entire period we thought endlessly about the possibility of setting schools free, of setting parents free. Of enabling parents to take the State's money and go to a school of their choice. It went on being thought about after I had left, through the latter years of Margaret Thatcher and through the Major years. During eighteen years of radical Conservative Government most people thought we were bringing out policy after policy. And yet we never had the courage to say what Damien Green said yesterday in this Conference.

Similarly, we thought during those years that we should consider how patients who could not get excellent treatment with the National Health Service could find a way out. We sought a way of helping them to help themselves. We never did it. We retreated, we retracted. In 18 years of Conservative Government, we never made the statement that Liam Fox made in the Hall yesterday. We are taking steps which, despite all the courage and all the determination that remarkable lady showed, we never had the courage to take during eighteen years of Conservative Government.

On this occasion we knew we had to change the rhetoric, and convince people that our agenda is not one of individual selfishness. It's an agenda of trying to help vulnerable people stuck in bad circumstances find a way out to excellence.

That's why we want to give State Scholarships to people, stuck in lousy inner city schools, to go to good schools with public money. It's an agenda to allow people to make a collective effort to do something which the State isn't doing and can't do as well. And that's why we've not just proposed State Scholarships, but also that – as in Denmark, as in Holland, as in Sweden – people should be able to get together in a voluntary group, a church, whatever it may be, to set up an excellent school and receive State funding for it directly for the parents of the children who go to it.

So the distinction we have come to make in the last year, and which is contained in everything we're doing in this conference and beyond, is a distinction between State funding and State provision. People founding schools. People operating hospitals with public funds which are not directly controlled by – and indeed I hope in due course, not controlled at all by – the State.

Tomorrow I am going to be announcing a series of policies about lifting young people off the conveyor belt to crime. If I was standing before you as a Labour spokesman I would be advocating policies that used the State to achieve those results in each case. I will be standing before you tomorrow

advocating that we use the voluntary sector, funded by the State, to achieve these effects. There is a world of difference. When an authority visits the home it is an authority. When a voluntary agency funded by the State visits the home it is a helping hand.

There is a huge difference in the relationship between the recipient of the help in the two cases. It used to be the case that people who could not help themselves were helped by the community – it wasn't necessarily done by the State. For centuries, particularly under the Victorians and right up until the nationalisation of welfare following the second world war, there was an enormous network of friendly societies, self-help agencies, community groups and voluntary associations who took it upon themselves to be morally responsible for those who couldn't help themselves. My suggestion is not that nobody should help those who can't help themselves, but that it isn't necessary for the State to do the job directly in all cases.

Things have changed, of course. Time was when there were a large number of intelligent, energetic women, under the age of 50 or 60, who were otherwise under-employed. Their children had grown up, or were at school and they had time on their hands. They were the main stay, not just of the Conservative Party, but of very many voluntary efforts in our society.

The fact is that there is now a shortage of such people because if they are not bringing up children they are at work, or both in many cases. But something else has happened, which is that people live longer. Now if people live longer and if, as also happens, many of them retire earlier, then there is a huge new well of people who are active, are healthy, are energetic, are experienced, are intelligent, are available – and what we have to find is means of tapping that resource.

For the resource we need is not simply money – financial capital. It's human, or social capital too. We don't want simply to improve the bottom-line efficiency of the public services. Certainly, official bureaucracies waste an enormous amount of money. But perhaps more important than cases where money is technically being wasted are cases where technically, according to the bureaucratic norms, it is being perfectly properly spent. The school is there. The teachers are there.

The pupils are there. The records are there. Everything is perfectly proper. The Public Accounts Committee is not in the least concerned, but the pupils are emerging not knowing anything. That's where we want to make a difference.

That is the message of this conference. That is the message which I believe we can fight for with passion and conviction. A message we can argue for constructively and optimistically and by means of which, for the first time in a decade, we can again recreate politics in this country.

SIX

E PLURIBUS UNUM*

We are in the midst of war. Alas it is a war that has brought to the nation's attention deep and striking differences of view. A society without differences would be a society without argument, without intellectual vitality, without passion – so far from being colourful, it would not even be black and white or Daguerreotype; it would be monochrome. I, for one, do not want to live in a monochrome Britain, a Britain without differences. But there is a paradox of difference. As it increases beyond a certain point, it fractures the society it has enriched.

To adopt a metaphor from music rather than the visual arts, one might say that social harmony is the desirable mean between a suffocatingly boring unison and an unbearable cacophony. The cacophony becomes unbearable when the different voices do not accept common limits, when one or more seeks to drown out the others in an effort to establish a particular uniformity. These voices – and there are some of them in Britain today – are the enemies of harmony.

For those of us who seek to live in harmony, avoiding equally the horrors of cacophony and the cultural extinction of an imposed uniformity, the question is this: how can we agree to differ? Unity from diversity was the underlying theme of the 2002 Dimbleby Lecture, delivered by the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams. It provoked a fierce counterblast from my opposite number, David Blunkett, the Home Secretary. We can learn a lot from this encounter. Dr Williams begins by asking a question of his own – why should we do what the government tells us? He asks his question because he believes that the good society can proceed only from a purposeful state. He believes that globalisation is undermining the capacity of the state to have any higher purpose than to service the needs of the individual within the marketplace.

In support of his argument he refers to *The Shield of Achilles* by Philip Bobbitt, a senior advisor in the Clinton administration. Bobbitt's analysis is that the authority of the nation state rests upon its ability to provide for its citizen's security and welfare, but that in an age of ICBMs, international terrorism, currency speculation and global markets, such

* This Lecture was delivered to Renewing One Nation on 10 April 2003.

provision is no longer possible. Thus the nation state is giving way to the market state in which governments, in Dr Williams's view, survive only by enhancing the power of consumers to buy their own security and welfare. In the words of the Archbishop, the result is:

> …the 'franchising' of various sorts of provision – from private prisons to private pensions – and the withdrawal of the state from many of those areas where it used to bring some kind of moral pressure to bear.

The proposition that an amoral 'market state' is weakening the moral forces in society annoyed David Blunkett, who had this to say in an article for the *Spectator*:

> Communities are portrayed as passive recipients of public services in which basic mutuality is dead. This is a travesty of the past and a misleading and selective view of the situation today... Historically, we should remember, the most deprived areas were those in which the most profound non-governmental mutuality developed in the 19th century. Ordinary people living in conditions of acute poverty, made real the values of interdependence which allowed them to survive. They created 'goose and burial clubs', friendly societies, penny-reading groups and the early insurance systems. These were the voluntary mutual precursors of the welfare state.

David Blunkett imagines this spirit of mutuality survives:

> The advent of the welfare state throughout the first half of the 20th century replaced these institutions with state provision, but the spirit and practice of mutuality is alive and well in many of our poorest areas 100 years on.

But this is – as Dr Williams points out – a romantic illusion, which blithely ignores the facts. The ideal of mutuality has been all but driven out of welfare provision by an overbearing state, crushing community spirit. In Dr Williams's words:

> In those environments where there is acute deprivation, including deprivation of everyday habits of mutuality and respect, a school bears an impossible burden of trying to create a 'culture' practically on its own, because the institutions that help you shape a story for your life are not around. Family continuity is rare; conventional religious practice is minimal; shared public activity is unusual. These are communities in which a school curriculum about 'values', however passionately believed, can yield heartbreakingly disappointing results.

The sad truth is that David Blunkett's hopes, are as unjustified as Dr Williams's fears. The state is not making room for other forms of social provision and it is not making way for other forms of social provision. In

fact, the welfare state is more dominant than ever. Individuals and communities acting through the institutions of civil society are more disempowered than ever. The reason why this debate is relevant here is that the strength of relations within communities affects the harmony of relations between communities. By usurping the proper role of communities, the state attacks their pride, identity and cohesion. Communities that cannot define themselves by what they are, can define themselves only by what they are not.

But not content with the mere disempowerment of communities, the same top-down, we-know-best approach is applied to the communal tensions that arise as a result of disempowerment. Those at the top of the bureaucratic food chain employ all their usual weapons – committees, quangos, targets, initiatives, paperwork, tick boxes, codes, compacts and the rest of it – to try and manage these tensions out of existence. I don't doubt their good intentions, but whether any of this achieves real positive change is open to question.

After coming under pressure to apply for the top job at the Commission for Racial Equality, Yasmin Alibhai Brown expressed much the same doubts in an article for the *Independent*:

> New Labour, like the BBC, loves managerial anti-racism, with monitoring forms, numbers, targets – all that tedious stuff that gives such a good impression of noble intent, while nothing changes in terms of real power and impact…

She also asks whether organisations like the CRE are adaptable enough to reflect the changing nature of community relations. We have had our own experience of this. Last year we were approached by Sikh community leaders who felt aggrieved that the CRE code of practice on the monitoring of ethnic groups by local authorities, did not recognise Sikhs as a separate ethnic group. The CRE opposes ethnic monitoring of Sikhs because the code reflects the 2001 census, which included Sikhs as a religious grouping, but not as an ethnic grouping. This is despite the fact that the Sikh identity has both religious and ethnic components – in a way comparable to the Jewish identity. And yet while the CRE strenuously monitors other smaller ethnic groups, Britain's 600,000 Sikhs are rendered invisible.

Surely there is something wrong with a system where communities pop in and out of existence at the stroke of a bureaucrat's pen? What is the alternative? We won't find it in the Cantle report, the official response to the race riots of 2001. The report makes a number of recommendations, including: 'an inter-agency support group'; 'community cohesion plans'; 'various cross-community fora'; 'challenging and measurable targets'; 'extensive diversity education and training in all key agencies'; 'Local Services Partnerships communication strategies'; 'the development of a wide

range of thematic bids'; 'a reconsideration of the impact of changes to ethnicity indicators'; 'individual capacity building programmes'; 'a review of the present arrangements for cross cultural joint working'; 'a good practice guide on communications systems'; and not forgetting 'a powerful task force to oversee development and implementation'.

The BNP must be quaking in their jackboots. As the left-wing writer Josie Appleton observed at the time:

> Many of the proposed solutions involve subjecting local communities to bureaucratic control and procedures that are likely to increase their sense of disengagement from mainstream society… it seems that the government is trying build a common identity from the outside in – when it is obvious that common identity works from the inside out.

So we must engage people at the local level and recreate the neighbourly society. We will do this only if we recognise that communities are networks of relationships that turn collections of people into responsible individuals. Active communities with strong relationships foster social trust – shared respect and decency between individuals. To foster those relationships, to create that sense of community, we need to give impetus to every institution that makes it possible. We must give succour to every neighbourhood across the country which, instead of waiting for the state to solve a problem, is getting together to produce home-grown solutions.

Just one example is the Haillie Selassie Peace Project in Handsworth, Birmingham. In response to concerns about crime and communal relations, volunteers from the Rastafarian community go out on the beat with police officers twice a week. Known as Peace Officers, the volunteers not only participate in beat work, but also accompany the police during or after arrests, searches and interviews. The volunteers are trusted by their own community and well regarded by their police associates. They are privy to crime maps and figures, and even join the police on raids and other sensitive operations.

The Peace Officers wear a distinctive uniform, which they designed and paid for from their own funds. Consisting of a tan shirt and trousers, dread cap and bright yellow jacket, the uniform bears the Rastafarian flag on the left breast and the Union Jack on the right – an image of community and national identity to which I will return.

As well as building bridges between communities, the Peace Officers have established a virtuous circle within their own, encouraging their neighbours to set up other voluntary projects including mentoring schemes and youth activities. And yet there is the fear that this remarkable scheme may close due to a lack of funding. Yet what example could there be for a better use of funds?

We need a new infrastructure to support voluntary organisations such as this one. This will be a major theme of Conservative policy, on which I will make announcements in the near future. The reinvigoration of voluntary and community effort – and, with it, the reinvigoration of the neighbourly society – are indispensable pre-conditions for the establishment of social harmony. In the neighbourly society, neighbours of differing creeds and colours, backgrounds and aspirations, lifestyles and mores, can live together in harmony because they share the common enterprise of sustaining a neighbourhood, and the common enterprise of ensuring that their children are brought up to be law abiding and active citizens.

The continuous re-creation of active citizenship, from one generation to the next; the recapture of the streets for the honest citizen through neighbourhood policing; the lifting of young people off the conveyor belt to crime; the reinvigoration of communal institutions and of a common sense of purpose in the neighbourhood; all of these are part of what it takes to re-establish peace and harmony in conditions of disorder and civil strife.

But they are not the whole of what it takes. Attachment to the little platoon – to the family, to the school, to the club, to the neighbourhood is not enough. Each is part of – and can be sustained in peacefulness and harmony only by being part of – a greater whole. And this whole, too, demands its own sense of common purpose, its own identity.

I am speaking of an entity, an idea, even more under attack than the neighbourhood, an idea so unfashionable as to be – in certain quarters – almost unmentionable. I am speaking of the nation-state.

On every American coin is written the words, "e pluribus unum": from many, one. This is the most profound and concise expression of the point and purpose of the state – to draw out of many strands a single whole.

Each part of the proposition is as important as the other: the many matters much as the one, the one matters as much as the many. There is much to commend the American example: unparalleled diversity, unequalled strength, unsurpassed liberty. The American constitution, the American flag, the American dream, all that gathers together and unites, celebrates liberty.

Any comparison between America and Europe should tell us that there is no contradiction between strong communities and a strong nation. Like a string of pearls, each community – and the liberty of each community – is precious in its own right, but all the more valuable (and all the more free) for the common thread that holds them together.

What symbols could the communities of Britain unite around? Remember that image of the Peace Officer's uniform; the Rastafarian flag displayed along side the Union Jack? Our nation does not lack for symbols. But what do they symbolise? I would argue that, like America,

they are symbols of liberty. But there are important differences. British symbols have emerged from a long history, a pattern of accident and reaction, not a recent and deliberate act of foundation. They are bound up with all the complications of history.

In particular, our symbols are permeated by a religious tradition. It used to be said "there ain't no black in the Union Jack". Well, there ain't no Crescent neither. Nor, for that matter, no Star of David nor any religious symbol, but the Cross. Does this mean that Britain needs entirely new symbols, in order to maintain unity in a multicultural, multiracial, multi-faith society?

It's not just a matter of our flag. In England, and Scotland, there is an established church. The head of state is also Supreme Governor of the Church of England. 24 Bishops of the established church sit in the House of Lords. Walk around the Palace of Westminster and you will see, embedded in the very fabric of our national parliament, multitudinous explicit and implicit references to the Christian faith, beginning with the prayers we say before the proceedings of the House of Commons begin each day.

We can expect an increasingly vociferous campaign to strip our constitution of its Christian heritage – indeed the campaign is underway.

There are advocates of state secularism who propose a 'neutral' non-religious basis for the constitution and institutions of society. But can a non-religious worldview ever be neutral? Surely it must embrace values of some sort, otherwise our national symbols would symbolise nothing and provide no basis for unity. A truly secular constitution rests on the fundamental assumption either that there is no God, or that the concept of God is utterly irrelevant to public life. The secular worldview is therefore neither neutral nor inclusive. Like any religious view, it imposes a set of assumptions on everyone who plays a part in public life.

But there is a second line to the secular argument – which is that religion is dangerous. Religious people are seen as somehow subject to unique constraints of outlook that simply don't apply to others – the secularist believers – and that, as a result, religious people make a category of demands on society that are not made by others. It is a poor argument. The assumptions of the secular state certainly had implications in the Soviet Union, in Nazi Germany, in Maoist China. If religion is dangerous, then the secular state can match that danger, corpse for corpse.

Of course, one would hope that such things could not happen in our time. And yet, state secularism still poses a real threat to genuine pluralism. This can happen in a few short philosophical steps. We start from the idea that different faiths have an equal right to co-exist. We move on to conflate this proposition with the claim that all faiths are equally valid. From this point it is argued that exclusive claims to the truth by any one faith undermine the validity of other faiths and thus

their right to coexist. Finally, exclusive claims to truth are seen as a basis for intolerance, which, the power of the state should be used to counter, or at least discourage. Hence the attack on faith schools from those who speak as if Muslim schools had caused riots in places were no such schools exist; or as if Catholic schools were tearing Scotland apart; or as if parish schools could bring sectarian conflict to the English shires. That such attacks should continue in the face of all the facts, testifies to a prejudice that has no place in our constitution.

If state secularism has its own deficiencies and dangers, we are left by elimination with the status quo. But our existing arrangement is more than the least worst option; it has a great deal to be said for it.

Let me quote from a recent *Guardian* editorial:

> This is a Christian country. Not in the sense that it has an established religion – although in England it has. Not in the sense that we might wish it to be so – it is not this newspaper's role to prescribe such matters of conscience for readers. This is a Christian country simply in the unanswerable sense that most of its citizens think of themselves as Christians. Earlier this month, in a report on the 2001 census, it was revealed that 42 million people in Britain – some 72% of the entire population – stated their religion as Christian. Enter what caveats you like about the figures – that this profession of Christianity may be mostly nominal, that the followers of other faiths must not be excluded, that the profession of any religion, or none, should be a purely private matter – but they are striking none the less. At the very least, they show that the church provides an extensive institutional and collective bond for many more people than we might otherwise imagine in what is often seen as an atomised and secular society.

Whether religious or secular, a constitution always embodies one worldview or another. The worldview embodied in our constitution is that of the majority, to change that would be perverse. But as someone who does not belong to that majority, I believe that such a change would also be to the disadvantage of other faiths. Again, let me quote from the pages of the *Guardian*. In a thought-provoking column, the historian Timothy Garton Ash compares Muslim immigrant communities on each side of the Atlantic. He asks why it is that the process of integration has been more successful in America, with its overtly religious culture, than in secular Europe. His answer is this:

> The leap of imaginative sympathy from Christianity or Judaism to Islam is much smaller than that from evangelical secularism to any of them. That's why America, which has preserved the religious imagination it imported from Europe, may actually be better placed to accept the Islamic other.

Britain's religious imagination, though dimmed, is not dead. In particular, it is an imagination refreshed and inspired in the established church in its buildings, its rituals, its traditions. The established church embodies and transmits the religious imagination of the past and the present. I am not alone amongst non-Christians in believing this. The Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, has described the Church of England as an umbrella under which all religions can contribute to public life. And the pre-eminent Muslim scholar, Dr Zaki Badawi, has defended the established church, because its very presence defends his community against sectarian and secular extremism. Given Britain's tradition of tolerance, we should presume in favour of existing arrangements. Indeed the burden of proof should be placed on those seeking radical change – proof not only that existing arrangements somehow curtail freedom, but also that new arrangements would extend freedom.

Ours is an inheritance that has stood the test of time. If it is to stand the test of the future, it needs to be celebrated in the media, in academe and in our schools. I wonder how many children are taught that Britain was the first nation to abolish the slave trade – and that for much of the 19th century the prime duty of the Royal Navy was to stop the slave trade of other nations? I fear that, at present, it has become fashionable not to speak of such things. I fear it is more likely that our children will be shown the low points of our history than the high. It is more likely that they will take away a sense of shame, than of pride. We will not build unity on a basis of guilt and grievance, but rather through an appreciation of the freedoms we all enjoy and a knowledge of how they came to be ours. It is strange that asylum seekers from the furthest reaches of the Earth should have a better understanding of the liberties of this land than those with the good fortune to be born and bred here.

Britain does not lack for symbols of liberty. But post-modern culture has so drained those symbols of meaning that their connection to our freedoms can no longer be seen. It is time to mend these broken connections. How do we mend them? How do we reconnect the liberty of individuals and communities to the symbols of the nation to which we all belong? There may be several different ways of achieving this and we need to look at all possibilities. We do not need new symbols, institutions and freedoms; we have these already. They have come down to us through centuries of struggle for justice and liberty, not as one coherent whole, but as the scattered elements of an unwritten constitution, each with its own story, each having proved its worth. And together they have served us well, upholding liberty where other constitutions have crumbled.

But as Britain grows more diverse I increasingly believe we need a focal point; a means of tying our institutions and each of our freedoms to one another; a common thread for a nation of diverse, differing citizens

– a central point that creates harmony out of liberty, in place of drab uniformity or unbearable cacophony.

In the last six years there has been an all but unseen revolution in our jurisprudence. 600 years of common and statute law, the law that has defined and upheld our liberty, has been subjected to the unpremeditated effects of the incorporation of the European Convention of Human Rights, through the Human Rights Act and its sequel – the de facto incorporation of a suite of international treaties signed by prerogative power. The interaction of this quiet revolution with the other revolutionary development – of European law – has begun to pose fundamental questions about the conceptual integrity of our legal system and about the relationship between our judiciary, our Parliament and our democracy.

Where once our freedoms were built up layer by layer through the subtle interpretation of the courts and the democratic deliberations of Parliament, they are now subject to the intricate overlay of treaty upon treaty, generality upon generality. I fear that if we do not begin to act now, to re-establish a structure of constitutional law and a doctrine of rights consonant with our history, we may in the not too distant future find ourselves losing liberties that we presently enjoy.

I fear that, perhaps without the will of Parliament or people being expressed, we may find faith schools loosing the freedom to choose their pupils, orthodox synagogues being stripped of charitable status if they keep out female rabbis, mosques being fined if they employ only Muslims. And I wonder, if in ten years time, it will still be legal to proclaim Jesus Christ as the only way to heaven, a proposition from which I dissent but which I wish to preserve the right of others to utter.

There are other threats to our liberties: the European Arrest Warrant; a restricted right to trial by jury; an end to the double jeopardy rule. Everywhere I look, I see around me the evidence of a need to enshrine our liberties, to delineate and protect the independence of our judiciary, to set out in some perspicuous form the constitutional relationships that protect us from tyranny.

We may not yet appreciate the freedoms we have today, but we will do if they are taken away from us. We may not appreciate the history of tolerance and respect – the history of agreeing to differ – that we have forged in this country. But if we begin to see it crumble, we will long for its return.

Let us begin to prevent now the need for such nostalgia and such longings in time to come. Let us reaffirm and enshrine in a new and more robust form the substance of our most precious inheritance – the inheritance of liberty under the rule of law. And let us, in so doing, provide for the whole nation a means by which the many can become one without ceasing to be many. Let us build a nation that upholds the freedom of each community, so that in return each community may uphold the nation.

SEVEN

SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIETY*

Society and the State

Conservatives are sometimes accused of lacking ideas. But like London buses two Conservative ideas are arriving in a pair this evening. Tonight I want to present and unpack two ultimately inseparable ideas. The ideas of sustainability and society.

My essential argument is the only way that we can sustain our way of life is through a renewal of society.

Society has, of course, been a word that has been difficult for Conservatives in recent times. A famous interview given by Mrs Thatcher in 1988 was grotesquely misrepresented. But I do not believe that what I am going to say tonight is in any way inconsistent with Mrs Thatcher's values and philosophy. In that misrepresented interview Margaret Thatcher suggested that – and I quote:

> We've been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the government's job to cope with it. 'I have a problem, I'll get a grant'. 'I'm homeless, the government must house me.' They're casting their problems on society. And you know, there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours. People have got their entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations.

In these remarks Mrs Thatcher was attacking the Left's constant and unthinking call for 'society' to rush in and solve every ill. And when the Left say 'society' – then and still today – they inevitably mean the state. In the part of the quotation that the Left never repeat, Mrs Thatcher points to a more enduring vision of society – a society composed of active citizens, strong families and of neighbours who look out for each other.

Tonight I want to focus on this central distinction between the Conservative party and the parties of the Left.

---

* This Lecture was delivered to the Adam Smith Institute on 3 July 2002.

Conservatives understand society as existing and flourishing on a human scale – in hugely varied people-sized institutions that are connected by a complex web of mutually-supporting relationships. The institutions and relationships of society provide each of us with a sense of identity and belonging. They are multidimensional in character and purpose. They have evolved organically and have stood the test of time.

Conservatives still envisage an important role for government but we believe that its main role is to support the institutions of society and the complex, infinitely varied relationships between those institutions. The state's role should never be to supplant or nationalise society.

This state-society distinction is absent from Labour's worldview. It is true to say that for New Labour there is no such thing as society, only the state.

Free enterprise and the state

During the 1980s Margaret Thatcher's governments freed the economy from an attempted takeover by the state. The state was interfering in every nook and cranny of our economic life. The command economies of eastern Europe demonstrated the inability of the state to manage supply and demand. Whenever the state suppressed the price mechanism – as British governments often did before 1979 – they blocked out the information that is the basis of a properly functioning market economy. By heavy taxation and regulation, the same governments supplanted the entrepreneurs and small businesses who act as the essential interpreters of market signals and ensure that consumers' infinitely varied demands are heard and heeded. In ignoring the complexity and sophistication of relations between market players the state produced the catastrophic economic mess of 1979.

That was the reality that faced the new Conservative government of 4 May 1979. It boldly began a programme of reform that freed people to make their own economic d ecisions. That Conservative government trusted entrepreneurs, businesses, and trade union members to make economic decisions and power was taken away from politicians, monopolies and trade union barons.

This was not to say that the state did not have any role. The state still had a vital responsibility to maintain a hospitable environment for free enterprise. The market was naturally self-sustaining if it was protected from external shocks and the sometimes dangerous tendencies – identified by Adam Smith more than two centuries ago – to monopolistic practices against consumers' interest. That is why Conservative governments of the 1980s waged war on inflation, renewed competition policy, liberalised the financial sector and reduced high marginal rates of tax and other government controls.

Today the Conservative focus is different but similar philosophical issues are at stake. Margaret Thatcher would, I believe, strongly approve

of this new agenda. Our belief is that the expansion of the centralised state threatens society as much today as it once threatened free enterprise. The state still has a vital set of roles to play but it must redirect its energies and become the servant and protector of society and its institutions and relationships.

In understanding how the free market economy and ecological systems process complex information and how they are essentially self-regenerating we begin to understand how the state-society relationship might be rebalanced.

I intend to use these two key ideas of sustainability and society to show how the Conservative party's principal themes of recent months intimately relate to each other. Those themes being public service reform, decentralisation and help for vulnerable people.

And over the next few weeks Iain Duncan Smith and other shadow cabinet colleagues will also be using speeches to focus on the Conservative vision for a sustainable society. As we do so the coherence of the Conservative message – our Helping the Vulnerable campaign – will be become very clear – as will the fundamental importance we attach to the three major themes of high quality public services, localisation and effective compassion for disadvantaged people and their communities.

But, first, having examined how free enterprise was damaged by ham-fisted systems of intervention I would like to emphasise the analysis by focusing on how natural ecological systems have also been destabilised by unthinking intervention.

Sustainability and the natural environment

There are, I believe, four key warnings from environmental science's understanding of the damage done to freely evolved systems by crude human interventions.

One – the real world is irreducibly complex; two – simplistic targets can be exceptionally destructive; three – crude intervention damages natural regeneration; and four – systems can absorb a limited amount of disruption before suddenly deteriorating irreversibly.

Let me expand upon each of these lessons in turn.

First, the real world is irreducibly complex. When people work against the grain of nature it is because they think they know nature backwards. They interfere with natural systems confident that they can predict all the consequences of doing so. It's as if they could reduce nature to a simplified model governed by a few ground rules to be manipulated at will, just as socialist governments thought they could do the same with the economy. But increasingly scientists realise that natural systems are irreducibly complex and that we can never reliably predict the consequence of human interference. For instance, because scientists have mapped out the human

genome many people imagine that we now have a working model of what our genes do. But that assumes that there is one function for every gene, and one gene for every function. With 30,000 genes that seems quite complicated enough. The truth is that our genes interact with one another in countless different combinations for countless different functions. This is irreducable complexity that we are only just begining to understand. So while we can start modifying DNA, putting in a gene here, taking one out there -- we have no way of being sure of all the consequences of doing so. But if the human genome is complicated, what about human society? In this country alone it consists of sixty million elements called human beings. Yet while we express concerns about modifying so much as a tomato, that state thinks it can change human nature. Perhaps we should be as concerned about social engineering as we are about genetic engineering.

Secondly, simplistic targets can be exceptionally destructive. In 1958 Mao's communists launched the Great Leap Forward. Part of this programme was the so-called 'War Against the Four Pests'. Chief among the pests was the sparrow, which Mao wanted wiped out. The authorities ordered China's peasants to kill the birds by all available means – principally by running around and scaring them so that they would drop from the skies, dead from exhaustion. It 'worked' insofar as millions of sparrows were killed. And that year the China did record a bumper harvest. But while sparrows eat some grain, they also eat insects. The next year northern China experienced an unprecedented plague of locusts that stripped the fields bare. Between 1959 and 1961 it is estimated that over 30 million people starved to death as a result of the centralising arrogance of the Great Leap Forward. This is an extreme example of what happens when we intervene in a complex system we don't understand. But that doesn't mean that top-down targets can't kill -- even in Britain. By targeting waiting lists for hospital operations, without distinguishing between minor ailments and serious conditions, it is likely that government policy has resulted in the loss of life. A target is simple, it makes for good headlines, but it is no substitute for the judgement of those that shoulder responsibility for others be they doctors, nurses, teachers or parents.

Thirdly, crude intervention damages natural regeneration. Tropical rainforest is the richest and most complex habitat on Earth. The biomass produced per acre of forest greatly exceeds anything that human agriculture can achieve. But it is not the 'right' kind of biomass, so it was assumed that we could do better by planting crops on what was thought to be very rich soil. That assumption is wrong. Tropical rainforests tend to grow on poor soil. The incredible diversity of the system is maintained by the diversity itself – by a complex web of interactions between different species that recycles the limited amounts of nutrients available. Replacing the complexity of the forest with the monoculture of our crops, reduces

once fertile land to little more than desert incapable of supporting either forest or crops. In our own society we speak of the importance of diversity, but we have progressively destroyed it where it matters most of all. No one would deny that family relationships are complicated. By weakening family bonds first of all within the extended family and then within the nuclear family, we may have thought we would make life simpler. But in breaking these links we have made our society less stable and our neighbourhoods a poorer place to raise our children. Thus in many places we are failing to pass on the values of a neighbourly society to the new generation.

Fourthly, there is the idea of 'tipping points'; systems can absorb a limited amount of disruption before suddenly deteriorating irreversibly. When, for example, trees are cleared away from hillsides the result is sometimes soil erosion – an effect which begins more or less immediately and progresses gradually. But this is not always the case. Sometimes we think we can get away with destroying the self-sustaining features of a natural environment. Either there is no erosion or we think it is managea ble. But then we reach a 'tipping point' where the ground becomes soaked with water and the result is a landslide. In the Himalayas whole villages have been wiped out in this way. And one tipping point can trigger others. With Himalayan mountains denuded of trees and soil, monsoon rains result in flash floods that kill thousands of people as far downstream as Bangladesh.

Clearly the lessons from the management of our natural ecology can be applied to social policy. I want to argue that the local, holistic and infinitely varied institutions of society should be the starting point of public policy. Only these institutions – such as the great professions and covenantal institutions like the family – can absorb and process the complexity of the challenges we face. That does not, let me repeat, mean that there is no role for the state. The state should be supporting and protecting society – not least from the excesses of the market economy. But that is not the role Labour has given the state. Labour has invested all of its energies in massive centralised control of health, education and other public services. Such an approach is unsustainable.

Centralised approaches to public service reform are unsustainable

Huge, centralised bureaucracies are simply unable to handle the complexity of life and information that exists in society. Centralised schemes lack the subtlety to respond to the infinitely varied needs of patients and pupils. They increasingly undermine the independence and judgement of the highly-qualified professionals struggling to deliver public services.

When centralised schemes go wrong it takes a long time for Whitehall to notice. Information about results travels slowly up the chain of command. Messages are often confused because a programme can appear

to work well – at least for a time – in some localities but not in others. When it is increasingly obvious that a programme is failing politicians often take great steps to hide the fact. Whereas the chief executive of a company would cut his or her losses and divert resources into profitable projects, a politician will often redouble the effort to make a signature initiative work. This may lead to the diversion of even more resources to the initial misplaced scheme and still greater centralised monitoring.

A vicious circle of intervention is underway. The failure to deliver is unfairly blamed on already disempowered professions and local structures. Desperate bureaucrats shout their orders more loudly at nurses, doctors, teachers and police officers. Patients and parents and victims of crime watching this sorry saga wonder if any they will ever get better public services.

Conservatives will trust the people

The Conservative response is to decentralise – or localise – power. Conservatives trust people and in our public services that means trusting doctors to treat patients, teachers to educate pupils and police officers to catch criminals. The natural inclination of every professional is enthusiasm for their vocation and a commitment to serve. Many leave their training college or university with hope and expectation but find these qualities suffocated by the dead hand of central control. They find that their professionalism is neither trusted nor respected. Instead they are ordered about by a remote bureaucratic apparatus that impatiently pursues artificial targets and is largely ignorant of local needs. That is why Conservatives pair respect for professionalism with local forms of accountability.

The Conservative approach will ensure patterns of accountability operate on a human scale. Real accountability means less central control and stronger relationships between service providers and the people who depend upon those services. When doctors, nurses, teachers and police officers are rooted in local communities they are best placed to understand and manage those diverse communities' needs. The local comm unity is in the best position to hold them responsible for results but currently lacks opportunities to exercise any real influence on public services.

Localisation creates space for relationships – other than the otherwise dominant relationship between frontline providers and the central bureaucracy – to flourish. Because localisation reduces the distance between public service providers and the people intended to benefit from them, it gives parents, patients and local people the opportunity to be involved in shaping the way local services are run. Localisation gives professions the opportunity to be free from remote and often inappropriate centralised regimes and to develop relations with each other. Problems of crime and poor health are, for example, closely linked. GPs in one medical centre in the Midlands have invited police

officers into the surgery to regularly listen to patients' worries about crime and for there to be an exchange of intelligence and crime prevention advice. These sorts of pioneering arrangements are a product of the space for initiative that localisation represents. Localisation establishes far more effective and immediate mechanisms for correcting failure because good relations between service providers and the community ensure a ready interchange of information.

A Rowntree report on hard-pressed housing estates identified the localisation of public services as a vital component of neighbourhood renewal. An active and visible police presence on one particular estate has laid the foundation for a wider improvement in public services – delivered by caretakers and repair staff who, based in the locality, can provide an immediate response to a broken lift or a badly-lit walkway. The author of the Rowntree report identified service level improvements as a 'tipping point issue' for many families deciding whether or not to stay on an increasingly disadvantaged estate.

In Birmingham, neighbourhood wardens regularly escort councillors and public service officials around Balsall Heath. The wardens point out an accident blackspot or the youth club's leaking roof. And they point these things out again – if necessary – on the next escorted tour. Action rates have improved dramatically since this face-to-face form of accountability replaced an often unanswered flow of letters.

Or take the example of Groundwork in Southwark. Groundwork's declared mission – since its 1981 inception – is "to build sustainable communities through joint environmental action". Groundwork ensures that the regeneration of a disadvantaged neighbourhood's environment is undertaken by local people. This approach requires patience but delivers sustainability. Local people receive focused training and support so that they are fully equipped to contribute to the formulation of regeneration projects. Local people are then employed to deliver these projects – developing a range of intermediate skills in the process of, for example, reclaiming contaminated land for a play area or a sports facility. At the same time local schoolchildren are taught about what's going on. Through a diverse range of educational, sports and arts activities, they are invited to develop a full understanding of the interaction between their community and the environment. In a recent Groundwork report, Lord Best wrote: "if improvements are to be sustainable, they must be led and owned by local residents".

Centralised, unsustainable policy hurts the poor most

Britain's poorest estates vividly illustrate the destination of centralisation. No communities have become more dependent upon the state than many of our country's most deprived inner-city and peripheral housing

estates. Many of them have gone over 'tipping points' into serious lawlessness and environmental degradation. The weakness of societal links and the retreat of a police presence has left them vulnerable to malign and oppressive gang cultures.

Shiny new buildi ngs may be built and a little more cash fill people's pockets when – through centralised allocations of public money and bureaucratic intervention – the state forces it way into a hard-pressed community. But because this type of intervention does nothing to rebuild the self-sustaining relationships within the community the products of interventions are easily reversed.

But, sadly, it's much worse than that. Interventions by the centralised state often damage multidimensional relationships and distort a community's sense of values by seeming to reward behaviour that is unsustainable. One principle that guided welfare pioneers was to avoid doing anything that would damage the bonds between people in need and their families and communities. These bonds were correctly recognised as more durable than help from a private or public benefactor. Sometimes these bonds were weak – and sometimes even malign – but the priority was to restore or mend them – rather than disregard them. At their best, these bonds also represented holistic – or 3D – care. One-dimensional state benefits can make up for part of the wage that an absent father would otherwise provide his children. But the state cannot also be a role model for the child or a source of emotional support for the child's mother.

Centralised, one-dimensional approaches to tackling child poverty, for example, can in trampling unthinkingly upon the social ecology be as destructive as an unethical multinational invading the natural ecology. Supporters of big government have learnt nothing from the damage done to the environment by the insensitive application of technology. Over-intensive chemical applications in the 'Third World' can raise crop yields but only at the expense of the long-term degradation of the soil. Insensitive social policy interventions display exactly the same kind of short-term insensitivity. Instead of a patient commitment to help people attain dignity through independent living, centralised initiatives tend only to complicate the bureaucracy around them. The ugly circle of deprivation soon reasserts itself. Graffiti and broken windows disfigure the new buildings and welfare dependency intensifies the demoralisation and erosion of relationships.

Only the building or rebuilding community institutions offers a sustainable possibility of escaping from the cycle of deprivation and renewing the neighbourly society. In a recent report the National Federation of Community Organisations noted how traditional community life had been damaged by "wildly fluctuating housing policies,

successive waves of area based regeneration programmes, the growth of single person households [and] changing work patterns". One member of a London Community Association said: "We are in a culture which increasingly moves people away from community values…. What you end up with is lonely people, violence, danger, fear". The NFCO represents 4,000 community organisations and 50,000 volunteers in some of Britain's hardest-pressed estates. This quote illustrates their capacity for survival:

> Many associations began several decades ago and over the years they have quietly carried on their work, weathering the changes in priority and cuts in funding of successive Governments, to emerge as a strong network and a stable, mature force for change in the 21st century.

The enormous possible contribution of community organisations and a thousand-and-one other local faith and people-sized projects has been ignored for too long. Labour may pay them lip-service but has done nothing serious to support and develop them. For New Labour, I remind you, there is no such thing as society, only the state.

Society is the basis of sustainability

In his Leader's speech to the Scottish Party Conference Iain Duncan Smith got to the heart of this state-society distinction between the Labour and Conservative parties. "While Labour trusts the state, Conservatives trust people," he sa id. "When Labour thinks of community – it thinks of politicians, committees and taskforces. When Conservatives think of community we think of the family, local schools, charities, and places of worship."

The communities referred to by Iain include a wider society. -- a society that encompasses the professions, trade unions and universities. These are associations and institutions that flourish when they enjoy independence from the state. Society is characterised by a complex network of professional, voluntary and involuntary relationships. Professional relationships like a GP's relationship with his or her patients. Voluntary relationships like a mentor's care of an at-risk youth. And then involuntary – or covenantal – relationships like a mother's love for her son.

Society – and the relationships that hold society together – can be sustained by the state or they can be ignored and undermined by the state.

To sustain means to support from below. That is the Conservative vision: government helping to sustain a society that is a rich tapestry of active citizens, families, places of worships, dedicated professions and independent associations. Government must again become the servant of society. Only then will we be able to realise the mission that Iain Duncan Smith has given the Conservative party: the renewal of society.