

DAVID CAMERON'S YORKSHIRE POST ARTICLE

Nothing does more to wreck the quality of life than crime. But our society is in denial: complaining about crime and anti-social behaviour while leaving the state to do all the work. Tony Blair's 'eye-catching' gimmicks, like banning alcohol on public transport, do little to help. Passing new laws isn't a sign of toughness - it's often a sign of defeat.

A comprehensive anti-crime policy should be optimistic about our society's capacity to change for the better. It must not only strengthen the criminal justice system, but re-civilise our society.

That will only happen if we accept that we're all in this together – that we have a shared responsibility to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. So we have to be clear about those things that government can do, and set out clearly where the responsibilities of others lie.

The values transmitted to children have a huge impact on their behaviour. The writer Clive James has observed that "after the school playground and the influence of parents...children get their principles from popular culture."

He's right. So let's look at the three factors he identifies: parents, the playground and popular culture.

There's a tendency for Conservatives to be hostile to the whole concept of "parenting." It conjures up images of state commissars telling parents how to do their job. Of course government should never usurp the role of parents. But when so much evidence points to the crucial role of the family – and in particular early-years care - in shaping criminal and anti-social behaviour, it would be irresponsible not to engage in this sensitive and complex question.

The voluntary sector provides practical parenting courses that avoid patronising bossiness – so we should change the rules that currently limit their growth and impact, and improve the way that the voluntary sector engages with the Sure Start programme.

Evidence also shows that it's best for children's emotional and intellectual development when two parents are involved in their upbringing. So we should ensure that the tax and benefits systems strengthen families and marriage, and we should help

couples manage the challenges of modern family life – through childcare, flexible working practices, and more widely available relationship counselling from the voluntary sector.

But not all couples either can or should stay together. I hope the days of stigmatising single parents are firmly behind us. This enables us to explore, in supportive rather than judgmental ways, important issues like the desirability of all children having a male role model in their lives. For example, there is huge scope for expanding the positive influence of mentoring programmes.

Support for the family; recognising the importance of good parenting; these priorities don't contradict modern, compassionate Conservatism, they're the essence of it.

A few weeks ago I visited Wandsworth prison. I was moved by the stories of inmates who blamed their criminality in part on their chaotic home environments, and expressed guilt that they were perpetuating the problem with their own irresponsible attitude to fatherhood. As ever with complex social problems, it was a fantastic local charity that offered a practical solution - through an inspiring parenting course for prisoners.

So while government can't bring up children, it can do more to ensure that all children are brought up with the right values. And it can certainly do a lot more to address the second factor identified by Clive James: the playground.

We have to reassert discipline in our schools. This will require not only more freedom for headteachers, but more responsibility from parents to back up what teachers do. And we must end the inclusion dogma which has seen so many special schools for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties closed. These children need to be identified early, and their behaviour challenged.

To fight crime and anti-social behaviour effectively, we also need support from the people and businesses that shape popular culture. The music and games industry has to stop churning out material that celebrates aggression and violence. The drinks and entertainment industries must stop irresponsible alcohol marketing, and stop serving people who are drunk. Those who produce the media that children consume need to think harder about the social impact of their output.

There is also a huge reform agenda for a modern Conservative Party when it comes to more traditional areas of government intervention – like the police, sentencing and prisons.

The police are the last great unreformed public service. Politicians shouldn't treat them with kid gloves just because police officers do such a brave job in protecting us.

We should make the police accountable to local communities through elected police commissioners, and remove the bureaucracy and restrictive practices which prevent the implementation of effective beat-based policing. After two years of probation, police constables are virtually unsackable, even if it's clear they're not up to scratch. This must change. We also need a more flexible system for retiring officers from the force before their thirty years' service is up. Every other organisation in the country has had to modernise its management: it's time the police caught up.

In sentencing, we should learn from the success of mandatory drink-driving sentences in changing behaviour, and set out plans for ensuring that stiff minimum sentences are imposed in areas such as burglary, robbery and sexual offences.

And finally, we must reform our prisons. It's a scandal that some inmates are banged up in their cells for 23 hours a day. What hope is there for rehabilitation when our prisons are so over-crowded? To fight crime and cut re-offending, we need more prison places, more drug treatment, and better prison education and rehabilitation.

It's clear that many of the changes needed to re-civilise our society cannot simply be 'delivered' by government. But they can be stimulated by strong political leadership - so people feel they have the duty and the power to uphold notions of acceptable behaviour. We will never cut crime unless we set ourselves a higher objective: re-civilising our society. And we'll never do that unless we accept our shared responsibility to act.

DAVID DAVIS' YORKSHIRE POST ARTICLE

TWO decades ago, the urban heartlands of Yorkshire were the natural home of the Conservative party.

Back then, we held 21 constituencies across Yorkshire – including seats in Leeds, Bradford, and Sheffield: to our shame that number has declined to just nine.

That has to change. As councillor Les Carter wrote in a recent edition of *Vision* – the journal of the new Yorkshire-based think tank Conservative Vision – the Tories have come to look like a south east regional party ever since.

This leadership contest presents us with an opportunity to change both that image and the reality behind it.

If we are ever to return to government we must reach out beyond the narrow confines of our the South East to the great power centres of northern England, to constituencies north of the border, and west to Wales.

But, how do we do it? I believe we must learn from what has been happening up here on the ground.

In spite of the way the national party has neglected the North, local Tory politicians – a stubborn, resilient breed – are showing us the way back to power.

In Leeds and Bradford, Kirklees and Calderdale, the party is well on the road to recovery. We in Westminster need to listen and learn from their experience – and, in doing so, to help them to expand and consolidate their influence.

We need to bottle this success and transport it south to Sheffield, west across the Pennines to Manchester and Liverpool, and north to Newcastle and Tyneside.

We have seen how, properly harnessed, the Conservative message can be persuasive.

It was the Conservatives who spearheaded the campaign against John Prescott's desire to impose yet another tier of government on the English regions.

It was the Conservatives who inflicted a humiliating defeat on Mr Prescott in the North East referendum, and the Conservatives who led such an effective ‘No’ campaign in Yorkshire that the Deputy Prime Minister had to abandon his idea for regional government in the north.

These campaigns and local election results – in Leeds the Conservatives went from having just eight councillors in 1998 to treble that figure in 2004 - have shown that the Tories are capable of winning in the North.

In Bradford, which I visited again recently, I have seen how a Conservative administration can bring innovative solutions to some of our most deprived inner city areas – reducing the risk of crime by the clever use of urban design. That is the way to win people over to Conservatism.

The task now is to build on this winning ability.

We need to show that when we are at the helm in cities like Leeds and Bradford, we are the stewards of progress.

But there are limits to what we can do. Mr Prescott and his colleagues may have been forced to scuttle their regional government plans, but their centralising ambition remains.

Having failed to persuade the people that they needed a regional assembly, Mr Prescott immediately set about creating an unelected surrogate which he called the Northern Way.

Funded with more than £100 million of taxpayers’ money, the Northern Way is an affront to local democracy and accountability. Even where it might help - in matters of transport, for instance – it is proving worse than useless.

As this newspaper is showing in its Road to Ruin campaign, private sector investment in cities like Leeds is running up against bottlenecks in transport infrastructure.

According to the Northern Way, it is ‘essential’ that Leeds gets a super-tram to alleviate the city’s worsening traffic problems – clearing congestion before it gets to gridlock.

But what did Mr Prescott do when the Department of Transport said ‘No’ to the super-tram earlier this month – he said it was nothing to do with him.

Well, we as Tories should champion the cause of cities like Leeds. They are the engines of growth in the North, and the links between them – road and rail – are in need of major improvement if these engines are run smoothly.

My message to Tories in Yorkshire tonight is that we need a new kind of leadership: a leadership that is prepared to listen and learn from the party in the country; a leadership that cherishes local and regional diversity because it recognises that diversity is the source of renewal.

I also believe that we must move the centre of gravity of the party up from the south towards the Midlands and the North. It would be good to have a permanent campaigning presence in these regions.

That way we can get the message across that modern Conservatism is the real alternative to New Labour: not some watered down, blue-tinged version of Blairism, but a real alternative.

My views on the big issues – reducing the nation’s tax bill by £38 billion to stimulate growth, repatriating powers wrongly handed over to Brussels, championing the victims of state failure, and reaching out to the pushed-about-poor rather than pushy rich – are by now well known.

But what I want the readers of this great paper – and the voters of this great county – to realise, is that Britain is changing.

The era of spin is coming to an end. A whiff of decay is in the air at Westminster. Tony Blair’s rotten government is stumbling through its final days. Let us help him – and New Labour – on their way.

A new Tory leadership, with vision and experience at its core, can win back the cities and suburbs of Yorkshire to the Conservative banner – and, in doing so, speed the party back to power in the country. That is the challenge. Let us face it, and rise to it, together.

