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Nick Clegg's disdain for marriage hurts the poor, CSJ warns

Children in deprived areas are the biggest victims of family breakdown

Nick Clegg has betrayed woeful ignorance by maintaining that the promotion of marriage is harking back to the 1950s.

His comments indicate that he has failed to understand that there is now a vast body of independent evidence demonstrating that in the modern world marriage confers great benefits on children and adults.

Strengthening marriage through reforms to the tax and benefits system would be a major step towards rebuilding "Broken Britain" and tackling the fundamental causes of social ills, such as the summer riots.

The majority of the British population support marriage and a recent CSJ poll showed that two thirds of the country want it recognised in the tax system.

The position being taken by the Deputy Prime Minister is out of step with mainstream public opinion and that of young people, the majority of whom aspire to be married.

It has been shown time and again that the most stable family structure to raise children is within marriage. One in eleven married couples split by a child's fifth birthday. One in three cohabiting couples split in the same period. Children growing up in single parent homes are most exposed to the damaging effects of poverty. 97% of couples who stick together throughout childhood are married. The facts speak for themselves.

This effects all sections of society but is most acutely felt in the poorest areas. By attacking marriage, the Deputy Prime Minister is attacking the most vulnerable and poorest in our communities with children's lives outcomes being put further at risk. The poorest areas in society are hit hardest by family breakdown with a marked concentration of fatherless children.

Family breakdown is key determinant in social mobility something that the Deputy Prime Minister is meant to be trying to improve.

Gavin Poole, CSJ Executive Director, says, 'Nick Clegg is playing politics with children's lives. The best chances for a child growing up is within a strong stable family. Repeated reports have shown that married families are the most stable and should be promoted in the UK. Recognising marriage in the tax system is one way but eradicating the couple penalty in the benefits system that perversely rewards family breakdown must be addressed.

'The riots showed just how wrong we are getting family policy at the moment. How our children grow up and in what environment crucial. The Deputy Prime Minister has obviously not understood the significance of the summer.'

For media inquiries, please contact Nick Wood of Media Intelligence Partners Ltd on 07889 617003 or 0203 008 8146 or Alistair Thompson on 07970 162225 or 0203 008 8145.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Five ways in which marriage matters:

- (1) **Marriage brings stability:** just one in 11 married couples split before their child's fifth birthday compared to 1 in 3 unmarried couples.
- (2) **Marriage is directly linked to better mental and physical health amongst adults.** The same benefits are not found amongst co-habiting couples, it is specifically a 'Marriage Effect'
- (3) **Marriage reduces the risk of violence and abuse.** Children growing up in lone parent or broken families are between 3 and 6 times more likely to suffer serious abuse than those growing up with both biological parents, and the risk of domestic violence is significantly increased for co-habiting women than married women
- (4) **Marriage leads to better mental health for children.** Children of lone parents are more than twice as likely to suffer mental health problems than children of married couples, and those of co-habiting couples are 75 per cent more likely to have mental health problems than their peers with married parents
- (5) **Marriage leads to better life outcomes for children.** Children of married parents are more likely to achieve at school, less likely to use drink and drugs and less likely to get involved delinquent or offending behaviour.

Last year's British Household Panel Study found that 75 per cent of those under the age of 35 expected to marry, 80 per cent of those living together want to marry and close to 90% of all young people want to marry.

The CSJ has put forward a number of key recommendations to prevent family breakdown:

- Ministers should speak out about their support for marriage because strong families make for strong societies.
- In line with existing plans, ensure the couple penalty is removed as the welfare reforms are delivered.
- Reinstate reference to marriage on official forms and in state-sponsored social research.
- Reject recommendations from the Norgrove Interim Report on divorce for it to become a purely administrative matter rather than one dealt with by the courts.
- Transform sure start centres into family hubs providing joined-up, family-focused services with a special emphasis on early prevention of behavioural, educational, health and social problems among children.
- Provide extra help with family relationship counselling and with measures to prevent family breakdown.
- Intensive support for the most chaotic families.

The Centre for Social Justice is an independent think tank established, by Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP in 2004, to seek effective solutions to the poverty that blights parts of Britain.

In July 2007 the group published *Breakthrough Britain. Ending the Costs of Social Breakdown*. The paper presented over 190 policy proposals aimed at ending the growing social divide in Britain.

Subsequent reports have put forward proposals for reform of the police, prisons, social housing, the asylum system, isolation and loneliness in older age and family law. Other reports have dealt with street gangs and early intervention to help families with young children.