

**“No wonder figures show Brown isn’t tackling poverty - he isn’t getting at the traps of multiple deprivation that cause deep poverty, says IDS”**

*This is the response of the Social Justice Policy Group to the publication of child poverty figures. Further enquiries; please contact Nick Wood, Media Intelligence Partners, on 07889617003*

The figures, published today, showing that child poverty has risen in the past year are deeply worrying;

- 2.8 million, or 22%, of children are living in relative poverty
- The number of children living in relative poverty has increased by 100,000 in the last year alone
- The Government is failing to meet its own anti- poverty targets

We cannot afford to be complacent about what these results mean. These figures – published over eight years after Tony Blair and Gordon Brown pledged to “End child poverty forever” - highlight the dismal record of this government in fighting child poverty. The shocking reality is that life is getting worse for many of the poorest children in our society at a time of unprecedented economic growth. The government has a flawed strategy for dealing with poverty which has led to a failure to meet its anti- poverty strategy.

Today’s announcement comes as no surprise. Indeed it follows recent announcements that we have the lowest levels of child well- being in the Western world, social mobility has fallen in the last 40 years and that life has got worse for those living in deepest poverty in the last decade.

What more evidence is needed that the Labour Government is failing to deliver social justice?

**The Anti- Poverty strategy is failing**

The Conservative Party is committed to the target of ending child poverty by 2020. However, we believe that a radical re-think of the anti- poverty strategy is needed in order to meet our targets.

The problem is that Gordon Brown’s strategy for fighting child poverty is fundamentally flawed; it is all about very expensive State- led, top- down initiatives which are often short- term and highly reactive. The government’s approach does not recognise the realities of contemporary poverty and has done very little to unlock the cycle of deprivation.

**Tackling the causes of poverty, not the symptoms**

What distinguishes the Conservative Party policy is that we believe that we will never reduce poverty unless we tackle the underlying drivers of poverty; family breakdown, drug and alcohol addiction, failed education, serious personal debt.

Over the past 18 months, the Social Justice Policy Group has undertaken a painstaking analysis of the root causes of poverty. Their interim report, Breakdown Britain, highlighted the high levels of social breakdown in the UK;

- No improvement in tackling the deepest poverty in the last ten years
- Over 1.5 million children being brought up by addicts
- The highest levels of family breakdown in Europe
- Over 25,000 children leaving school each year with no GCSEs at all
- Over 9 million people have had a serious debt problem

The figures make sobering reading and show that there has been little progress in addressing these root causes of poverty.

### **The Causes of Poverty are complex and interconnected**

Many people will argue that these are not the root causes of poverty but merely the symptoms of poverty. This argument ignores the reality that the causes of poverty are complex and that many people trapped in poverty have multiple problems which need to be addressed. We must move towards a definition of poverty that captures the real meaning of life for people trapped in poverty and the underlying reasons why people fail to realise their full potential.

We know that the majority of young offenders often come from broken homes, have drug and alcohol problems, the academic age of a child of 11 and, in many cases, mental illness. We cannot, therefore, tackle crime without addressing the problems of family breakdown, educational failure and addictions.

Similarly, how can we expect a child to do well at school if one of his/her parents has a serious drug or alcohol problem or he/she is experiencing serious emotional turmoil at home? We cannot, therefore, improve educational attainment for our most disadvantaged pupils unless we improve parental involvement in education and provide better support to families

In short, the interconnected nature of poverty demands an interconnected response and no anti-poverty strategy will be sustainable if it does not address all of the root causes of poverty in a holistic way.

### **Social Responsibility and Society**

The Conservative Party also has a radically different approach to social justice. To the Labour Party, social justice means equality, guaranteed and implemented by the State. To the Conservative Party, social justice means trusting people and sharing responsibility. In order to do this, we are developing policies which will strengthen, stabilise and re-build society.

Gordon Brown thinks that State intervention and more responsibility to central government responsibility will reduce poverty. Yet we think that this approach not only fails to reduce poverty but also means millions are trapped in dependence.

The only sustainable answer to poverty lies in supporting individuals and society to realise their potential. We are, therefore, developing policies that will strengthen families and marriage and strengthen the communities that people live in.

We will also support the third sector and charitable organisations that do so much good work for those families and those communities. One only needs to visit the

Eastside Young Leaders Academy in Peckham, Black Boys Can in Birmingham or the Lighthouse Group in Bradford to see the inspirational work that is being done by social entrepreneurs, charities and the third sector up and down the country. These groups are picking up the pieces where the State has failed and are doing a fantastic job reaching even the most “hard to reach” families. The Conservative Party will support the 700,000 third sector organisations nation- wide and encourage them to play a greater role in the fight against poverty.

There is, of course, no magic bullet to tackle poverty. Above all, our anti- poverty strategy is both realistic and optimistic. We are realistic about the size of the challenge and the limitations of government action. We need a serious, long- term and sustainable approach that tackles deeply entrenched poverty. But we are also very optimistic about the potential of individuals, families and communities and the endless opportunities and hope that trusting people and sharing responsibility could bring to the fight against poverty.