

## **The Guardian and London School of Economics and Political Science conference**

### **Reading the Riots**

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**Leader of the Labour Party**

**London School of Economics and Political Science**

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It is a privilege to be here today and I want to congratulate the LSE and the Guardian for their work on understanding the causes of the riots.

I talked in my Party Conference speech about how we needed a different set of values by which our country should be run.

Since then, I have been talking about what that means for our economy both today and in the future.

Today, I want to say how I think this argument speaks to the issue of our society and the riots.

My argument is this:

If we are to prevent the riots re-occurring, we must understand the causes and act on them.

In your study, half of those who rioted said they would do it again.

And the vast majority - fully 80% - said they thought it proba bly would happen again.

We owe it to the victims of these terrible events, often the poorest and most vulnerable in our society, to make sure that doesn't happen.

But that is not the only thing we must do.

The riots have also been a window on deeper issues facing our country.

Indeed, every place I went to in the aftermath of the riots, people would say why did it take a riot for anyone to come and listen to us?

My big fear was that politics, then media would arrive in a flurry and then move on.

I believe there is still a real danger that that is going to happen.

Last Friday I went to Brixton to meet some people who I'd met straight after the riots.

There I heard from was a young man called Steve, and I want to tell you the story.

He told me about growing up on an estate.

About how many said that nothing good had ever come out of his neighbourhood.

He told me about one of his teachers who told him that he would either end up working in a dead end job, or going to prison.

And for a time he believed it, yet he also used to say to himself:

'What about Ian Wright, the footballer, he came from my area, he went to my school, how did he do it?'

Today, Steve, having been helped by an organisation called XLP dedicated to combating youth violence, having got qualifications, now works with young people on the power of sport to change their lives.

His life has been turned round.

Why do I tell this story?

Because the story of Steve is not the story of someone who rioted.

Even when he felt that he didn't have any hope.

The vast majority of young people like Steve didn't riot in the summer

And it is very important to hold onto that.

It tells us, contrary to what David Cameron says, that Britain is not broken.

The vast majority of people have decent values.

That said, a minority rioted, looted and did the wrong thing.

What should our response be to that?

What people told me time after time in communities affected by the riots is that nothing could excuse or justify what happened.

They said we have to punish those who commit wrongdoing. And they're right.

But they also wanted us to explain.

Now some will give the easy answer: this is criminality pure and simple and it only needs a criminal justice response.

Now it's right to say that we have a responsibility to ensure we have policing that is able to react quickly to sudden outbreaks of widespread disorder.

It is equally right to say, and I know this has been highlighted in your research, that we also need policing which is rooted in local communities, and that recognises the issue of stop and search.

And all these issues will be looked at by the former commissioner Lord Stevens in his independent review over the next year.

But all this is very different to saying that the answer is only to be found in the criminal justice system.

I was never convinced that the answer was as simple as that, and that is why I pressed for a Commission to look at the causes of the riot.

Its interim report and that of the Reading the Riots project tells us that this will address the deeper causes.

That is one simplistic answer we can reject.

But there is another answer which says that this should be an easy problem for governments to fix. It recommends another programme or a new raft of initiatives – targeted at gangs or families who need help.

Again, there is a place for these kinds of measures like Family Intervention Partnerships.

But when you hear people say those things alone are the answer, I believe we need a bigger response.

More comprehensive, and yes more complex.

I reject the arguments of those who say opportunity doesn't matter. And I believe it will take a bigger change in Britain to create the opportunities which our communities need.

And I reject as well the arguments of those who say values don't matter. I believe that as a country we have got to acknowledge that too often the good values that the vast majority of people hold are not the values being rewarded or encouraged.

First, opportunity.

It was David Cameron who said in 2006 that: "of course not everyone who grows up in a deprived neighbourhood turns to crime....But there are connections between circumstances and behaviour."

And both your research, and the Riot Communities and Victims Panel, uncovered the importance of young people having hopes and dreams.

Look through the evidence of the Panel and you don't need to be a rocket scientist or social scientist to see the figures on the background of the young people who rioted: low qualifications, excluded from schools, and two thirds with special educational needs.

Circumstances matter. Opportunity matters.

And when I was talking to those who didn't riot, who came out to join the clean up, whose shops were affected, who were fearful of their safety. They said the same thing. There must be a better way.

Why do we allow these young people to waste their lives and damage their communities?

Too many people felt they had not much to lose and something to gain from doing what they did.

And what struck me visiting different areas affected was that so often the choice between on the one hand going into the gang, into drugs, doing the wrong thing, and on the other, staying on the right path, can seem very narrow.

I was the first to say at the time of the riots that it was far too simplistic to blame Government cuts.

Nothing can excuse what happened, and we should hold those who did the wrong thing responsible.

But your work shows that it is our responsibility to make sure that young people have more to aspire to than nicking a pair of trainers or a widescreen TV.

If we are to do right by our young people we must take opportunity seriously.

Today's unemployment figures show a further rise in youth joblessness.

Still more than 1 million young people out of work, out of hope.

And youth joblessness is just the tip of a bigger iceberg. The bit we see most clearly. Under the surface is a much greater set of problems facing our young people.

For generations parents have been able to raise a family in Britain knowing that they could pass onto their children a better future than they had.

I've talked about it as the promise of Britain.

Today parents can have no such confidence. From getting on the housing ladder to the kind of job available, to the huge level of impending student debt, our children face a more insecure future than we had, with fewer opportunities and finding it tougher to get on.

No wonder we hear our communities asking for big change.

But opportunity is the not the only thing that matters.

In his recent book on the riots, my Labour colleague David Lammy tells the story of a young constituent of his.

On the night of the riots, he found Blackberry messages pouring in, telling him where to go for the next outbreak of looting.

He had a choice.

The same choice faced by tens of thousands that night.

He passed the information to his parents, who passed it to the authorities.

Like the majority, he decided not to get involved.

And the left should not shy away from it: these were individual ethical decisions.

And if we are to stop the riots happening again, we need to care about how these values are learned.

Families matter.

Many young people didn't riot because their mums saw it on TV and made sure they were home.

Male role models matter too

Institutions matter.

Schools, churches, mosques, youth clubs, football clubs, and so on.

Would Steve, the young man I talked about at the beginning, have rioted if his life hadn't taken a different path thanks to the youth group?

Anyone can say they care about values.

The question that politicians need to answer is what are we doing about them.

Clearly we need to support and strengthen families. But I don't think the answer is the marriage tax break that David Cameron talks about.

Equally it's not enough simply to say there should be financial support for children even though I believe passionately in the tax credits and benefits system doing so.

The truth is that the challenges facing many parents are changing and as a country we need to catch up

We have an economy where people work two or three jobs and don't have time to be at home with their kids.

Britain has some of the longest working hours in the world.

If we are serious about parents teaching the right values to their kids, parents need to have time to do it.

We need to build a different economy and one which better reflects the needs of our families.

And when countries like Sweden or Finland have more family friendly working hours, better childcare and higher national income than Britain I challenge anyone to explain why that new economy is not possible in Britain.

It's because values matter that I am a passionate believer in the importance of Britain having world-class schools.

World class not just in teaching and learning but also teaching about the values we want to see in our young people.

Schools and family life are just two areas where I believe we can strengthen our society's ability to encourage and reward the right values which the vast majority of us share.

But it shouldn't stop there. We should be taking every opportunity to demonstrate to our young people that if you work hard and do the right thing the opportunities will be there for you.

It's true in the benefits system – it's why I say if you are a good neighbour and contribute to your community you should be rewarded.

And it's true in the boardroom – which is why I say big payouts can only be justified if they are really in return for jobs created, real business success.

Too often we are guilty as a country of sending a message that something for nothing rewards are OK whilst looking like we don't care about people who work hard and don't get enough out of it.

That can't carry on.

But at the same time as challenging those who don't take values seriously, I want to challenge anyone who wants to spend their time stigmatising the values of poor communities.

Last Friday, in Brixton, one lady shouted out: 'what about the MPs who fiddle their expenses'?

Let's be honest: when people in society see those at the top taking what they can, it has an effect on what people think is right and wrong.

You have bankers selling securities they know are risky, and crashing the global financial system.

You have top executives taking pay rises of 4,000% over the last thirty years.

You have journalists listening to private voicemails, in the hope that they will sell more papers and make more money.

That too is a culture of take what you can.

Everywhere I went after the riots, this was mentioned.



Not just the offences themselves, but the sense that people got away with them.

If we are to take values seriously, we have to take the values of those at the top seriously because it influences the rest of society.

It's no good the powerful just lecturing the powerless.

And this is where we all need to take responsibility for the culture we inhabit and nurture.

And when you have young people looting shops and trying to excuse it by talking about MPs' expenses and bankers' bonuses, it is time to worry about who is setting the standards for society.

The decent majority?

Or an irresponsible minority?

Let me end on this thought:

This is a time of unprecedented challenge.

At times like this, people tend to succumb to pessimism about what is achievable.

Despite the difficulties, we must be optimistic about the power of politics to change things.

The task is this.

To understand that in the last three years we've seen a crisis of our major financial institutions, we've seen a crisis in our economy, and a crisis of faith in Britain's major institutions, from politicians to the press, and this crisis of the riots in our cities.

The values of the vast majority are the right values.

The danger is people lose faith in the power of politics to change these things.

The answer cannot be more of the same.

We must rebuild our economy and society in a different way in the future.

With a different set of values.

Where the young person who works hard knows they can get on.

Where every institution of the country promotes the values of something for something, responsibility and looking after each other.

And those at the top set the right and not the wrong example to everyone else.

If we act not only on opportunity but on the values of our country, we can not only prevent another riot, but build the kind of society we want to see.

**END**