

## A stakeholder society is a riot-proof society

The government's response to August's riots has strong echoes of John Major's famous 1993 call that society should understand a little less and condemn a little more. In reprising his 'broken Britain' argument, David Cameron is clear that what we saw on our streets had nothing to do with poverty and everything to do with criminality and morality.

This is in sharp contrast to what the Cameron of 2006 was saying. His 'hug a hoodie' speech was precisely about understanding a little more and condemning a little less. That same year, David Cameron gave the Scarman Lecture, in which he reminded us that Scarman's conclusion was that poverty was a principal cause of the Brixton riots. Cameron used this to argue that measuring and acting on poverty strengthens society and prevents social unrest.

Instant judgements about the causes of this summer's riots are unwise and, too often, self-serving. Some claim that the disturbances vindicate their long-standing concerns about family breakdown. Or that they are about people not knowing the difference between right or wrong.

It is difficult to draw conclusions without an in-depth inquiry, which is why it is dangerous for ministers to be too hasty to rule out what would be a very inconvenient truth: that poverty and exclusion may make such disturbances more likely to occur and be more dangerous. Tony Blair's riposte to Major's 1993 call is still powerful: 'There is no excuse for the crime, but if you create a group of people who believe they've got no stake in society it's hardly surprising if they behave anti-socially.'

This issue of *Poverty* looks at how our society values and treats three different, though overlapping, groups: young people, struggling families and women.

Danny Dorling suggests that the riots were a predictable and predicted consequence of a divided society. If we want to stop storing up trouble on our streets, he argues, we must make society fairer for what he calls the 'bottom 90 per cent'.

Guy Standing writes that the riots mark the end of a Faustian pact, under which the government has topped up declining wages and moved from a social insurance system of social security to one of means-tested welfare. Standing refers to the growth of a '*precariat*' – people whose lives are marked by short-term periods of low paid, low prospect work interspersed with bouts of unemployment and breadline benefits. Families holding on precariously.

Former CPAG director Fran Bennett warns that the proposed universal credit may harm women by damaging their economic independence. By cutting childcare support and by taking benefits away from second earners in a family (often women) at a faster rate than happens now, universal credit will make it harder for many women to make work pay. She also warns that women not in work will also be disadvantaged. The return of the single breadwinner model seems unsuited to the realities of family life today.

As the economy continues to struggle and families face a collapse in living standards, the impacts of unfairness, poverty and exclusion will be increasingly felt by all of us. ■

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**Poverty** is the policy journal of the Child Poverty Action Group. It aims to carry articles and features that will inform, stimulate and develop the debate on the nature and causes of poverty in its various forms and on the action required, especially by governments, to relieve and ultimately prevent it. Our objective is to publish material that achieves a high standard of analysis, without sacrificing clarity or accessibility, to specialist and non-specialist alike.

### Editorial staff

*Editor:* Gabrielle Preston  
*Production editor:* Alison Key  
*Research review:* Yvonne Kelly  
*Poverty watch:* Robert Joyce  
*Diary:* Caroline Paskell  
*In brief:* Gabrielle Preston  
*Listings:* Eileen Dacey  
*Advertising and circulation:* Liz Dawson

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 Telephone: 020 7837 7979  
 staff@cpag.org.uk  
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*Cover photos:* Justin Tallis/Reportdigital; Jess Hurd/Reportdigital; Paul Box/Reportdigital  
*Design/Page make-up:* studio@deviousdesigns.co.uk  
*Print:* Calverts, info@calverts.coop