

Jon Cruddas MP: 'Love and work, these two things only'

Speech to the Relationships Alliance, Thursday, 29 January, 2015.

Introduction

Thank you for inviting me. And Chris [Sherwood], you and your team – Helen Undy and Sarah Milsom – have done a great job organising this event.

I'd also like to say thank you to Susanna Abse. Last year Labour's Policy Review organized a symposium on relationships and the family, and Susanna along with Duncan Fisher provided invaluable support in helping us organize it.

It was a fantastic event that opened up new thinking on family policy, and helped inform the ideas I want to talk about today.

And these ideas also owe something to Danny Kruger who has made a major contribution to the speech. Danny is the chief exec of Only Connect, a charity he set up and runs with his wife - that's love and work together - helping ex-offenders and youth at risk, with a big focus on relationships.

In a former life Danny wrote speeches for David Cameron and gave him some of his best lines - including the ones parodied as 'hug a hoody'.

I share Danny's belief that what's missing in our politics is the idea of fraternity. We hear a lot about liberty and equality but not the third idea – what holds people and society together.

This speech is a plea to put fraternity back into our politics.

What matters?

I grew up in a household whose heroes were the Kennedy brothers.

In March 1968 Bobby Kennedy spoke about a system of government that had lost touch with the people and their daily lives.

The state of our nation, he said, is judged by Gross Domestic Product.

“It counts air pollution and cigarette advertising; ambulances to clear our highways of carnage; special locks for doors and the jails for those who break them. It does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages... It measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning;

neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”

It was 1968. America was at a turning point in its history. Millions of its citizens had lost faith in its system of government.

In 2015 here in Britain we are in a similar crisis. The challenges we face are big, but our politics are small. We have stopped asking ourselves the important question Bobby Kennedy asked. What makes life worthwhile?

At a different time in history, in a similar moment of change and uncertainty, William Morris answered that question. His answer was, “Love and work, these two things only”.

Love, because nothing else matters more in life than secure and loving relationships.

And work that is fairly paid because it gives meaning to our days and supports those we love.

Let me talk about these in turn.

Love

Politicians don't talk enough about love.

After all, it's people's close relationships – the national web of love and dependence – that makes our society strong.

Where those relationships are weak, we are weak.

Where there is a lack of love there is a lot of trouble.

Think of yourself without your loved ones. Think of your loved ones without you.

Babies suffering neglect – with all the impact that brings on the development of the brain, on their emotions and cognitive processes.

Children lacking guidance and encouragement and boundaries.

Adolescents and young adults rootless – liberated into a solipsistic hedonism that seems like maturity but leaves them empty.

Parents, struggling alone or in pairs to bring up kids in a little nuclear unit that can't possibly manage on its own, but somehow has to.

And older people – the rightful heirs of all that family should mean, of all the love and support and honour that the elderly deserve: older people left alone for days and weeks, lonely, abandoned.

Neglect, isolation and indifference.

Not all – not even most – people in Britain live like that. But the fact is that for many families, this sad list is our society.

And my point is this. These problems aren't a failure of public services or even the economy – though both these play their part.

They are a failure of relationships.

So we need to stop making policy as if grandparents, mothers, fathers and children exist in separate silos and not as part of a whole family.

Throughout our lives we are dependent upon others for our wellbeing and sense of identity. Relationships give meaning to our lives. They bind us all together into society and give us our sense of belonging. We are literally nothing without them.

The symposium that Susanna attended called for a 'whole family' approach using the power of relationships to help strengthen the capacity of men, women and children for love, care and resilience.

We need government that helps create the conditions for families and people's relationships to thrive. Not passing judgment nor micro-managing but supporting people to help themselves. Working with people, not doing things to and for them.

Your alliance is pioneering this approach. Putting people and their relationships into policy making.

And of course relationships – love – goes wider than the family. William Morris meant the ordinary love of our family but also a broader understanding – love is the duty we have to others and the sense of self we get by living with and for other people.

People need to live in communities of value and meaning and reciprocity.

Institutions – formal and informal – are the contexts of our freedom, the secure foundation for the diversity and innovation that modern life offers us.

Yes, some institutions become oppressive – especially if they are vehicles for state or corporate power.

But one of the great things about Britain is the extraordinary range of institutions we have created – and are creating all the time – to give individuals a sense of belonging, and to give structure to our society.

And this can include institutions that acts as a surrogate family, supporting individuals – children, or vulnerable adults or older people especially – who don't live in their own family.

In the past these kind of institutions run by the state were devoid of love and relationships, and were pitifully impoverished.

The terrible sadness of those we abandoned in them.

Family life is changing. More and more of us are looking after older or disabled relatives, often battling with different services to get the support we need. One in three carers has to give up work or go on reduced hours. Sons, daughters, husbands wives and partners trying to look after the person they love.

That's why Liz Kendall, Labour's Shadow Minister for Care is arguing for a system of care that puts families first and gives older people choice and control.

And why a new generation of social entrepreneurs like Alex Fox of Shared Lives and Hilary Cottam of Participle are pioneering life sharing communities, putting people's relationships at the heart of public services.

Home Start for example is run in local authorities across the country, matching young single parents with experienced parents from their own community for practical help, and as a source of comfort and reassurance.

We need to shift the focus of public services from crisis intervention with troubled children and families to building their capacity for relationships to break cycles of deprivation.

Frank Field has been championing this approach for years. And Jon Collins and Nottingham Council, together with local MP Graham Allen have been pioneering early intervention.

Labour is at its best when it is pioneering a reform movement, creating models of mutual self-help that give people dignity, power and control over their lives. Whether they be residents in a care home, young people in care, or mothers and fathers using a children's centre.

Relationships thrive when we have time. We need time to be with family and friends, and time to pursue our enjoyment and interests. But time is the scarce commodity of modern capitalism. People either have too much time with no work, no money and nothing to do, or they have too much work and no time for anything else. It was this lack of time to be with family that started the campaign for a Living Wage.

Time is the connection between love and work.

Work

Love and work, said William Morris.

The purpose of life is to employ one's talent to useful, beautiful and meaningful ends.

Work is about relationships. We inherit knowledge from the past and we shape it with others into new forms of value.

Work creates hope.

Morris describes it as worthy work. It carries with it the hope of pleasure in rest, the hope of pleasure in our using what it makes, and the hope of pleasure in our daily creative skill.

All other work he said is mere toiling to live that we may live to toil.

Today the value in work is neglected. We have got to the point where everything other than work generates value: capital, technology, risk taking, innovation, anything other than accomplished work and skillful co-operation with others.

Both the market and the state have undermined the conditions of meaningful work.

The crash of 2008 revealed the problem with relying upon the financial sector and state administration as the drivers of growth. It was not just the private debt and the public deficit. It was the neglect of vocation and virtue that led to an economy too often rewarding vice in the form of cheating and greed, and excessive self-regard.

Labour serves our country best when it reminds itself that work is a value, and that it is carried out by human beings who are not commodities to be exploited.

In an economy that values work and workers the old mentor the young and pass on their wisdom and experience, as well as technical skills to the younger apprentice. Workers associate in order to strengthen their knowledge and skill and where it is valued and upheld by vocational colleges.

That is why I am committed to the restoration of vocational training so that we can fix and mend, innovate and create.

If we win in May, Labour will introduce a gold standard system of vocational education to help drive up productivity for higher wages. We'll transform the best FE colleges into specialist Institutes of Technical Education. And we will create thousands more apprenticeships in the public sector and make sure firms getting a major government contract take on apprentices

In work we will value quality and equality.

We need to ensure employees are represented on the remuneration committees of large companies, with real status within the firm. The labour interest has a constructive role to play in improving business performance and the shaping of strategy. It should not be ignored as peripheral.

Building partnerships and dialogue between management and workforce creates mutual responsibility and accountability. Management would need to justify their bonuses and the workforce would need to understand the realities of the company.

We will deploy the idea of 'skin in the game' to extend accountability into the market. Instead of tying up business in complicated rules and regulations, 'skin in the game' reforms incentives in the market. People who make decisions on behalf of others should share in the risks, not just enjoy the rewards. Only then can we start to truly align power and accountability.

Not all relationships are healthy. There are abusive relationships, where one side dominates the other. The Labour way is based on reciprocity, of a balance of interests that can negotiate a common good.

It's not just the private economy that has become disconnected – and threatens to disconnect society from itself.

Our system of government and our public services are the same.

The state is over-centralised and out of touch. It lacks the trust we need to hold society together. Some of our public services have pursued 'value for money', and 'customer satisfaction', but neglected the human relationships and trust that lie at the heart of public services.

Public sector reform has failed to give front line staff and users a sense of ownership and control. Instead it has transferred power from an unaccountable state to unaccountable big corporations.

Too much power has been concentrated in the market and the state. There is too little accountability. And too little transparency. People are left feeling powerless and often humiliated.

The market and the state have been used as instruments of reform without any transfer of power to people.

Insecurity at work and low pay; falling living standards; high levels of immigration; and for many a sense of loss of belonging.

We need a stronger and more connected society to reform our economy and share our prosperity more fairly. No Whitehall target will create it. People and politics have to make it.

Politics

So let me talk about politics.

When David Cameron became leader of the Conservative Party he argued for a pro-social politics.

Remember hug a hoodie?

He talked about love, empathy and relationships. He said,

“The aim of the Conservative Party is nothing short of building the good society”.

The Big Society was the idea of people feeling free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities – ‘a dramatic redistribution of power from elites to the man and woman in the street.’

To me it looked like a radical renewal of his party. Breaking with its Liberal market orthodoxies and putting Conservatism back where it belongs – in community, in relationships, in tradition. A very interesting compassionate conservatism.

Meanwhile Labour’s traditions are both radical and conservative. Radical in defending the labour interest, and sharing our power, resources and opportunities.

Conservative in our instinct for preserving society and people’s mutual dependence.

Labour is a love of home and the common life and inheritance that belongs to “us”, the people, wherever we have come from.

Our neighbourhoods and the landscapes we live in give us our sense of identity and belonging.

Society cannot be made by government. It is not held together by the transactions of the market or the administrations of the state. It is made and renewed in the daily life of generations; in friendship, family, community and love of place.

This Labour tradition is in keeping with the Conservative tradition of community. That’s because these are British traditions – things we all believe in, things our country is good at.

The difference between us is our response to politics, power, and the money interest.

Confronted by the power of money, the unaccountability of power, and the corrupting effect of institutionalised privilege, Conservatism turns a blind eye.

The response of the best traditions of Labour is democracy. Creating power with people through mutual support and self-help, resisting the power of the market to commodify labour and turn it into a thing valued only by its price.

Labour’s future is as a party of self-determination. Political action based in people’s relationships.

A politics subject to the principle of reciprocity which establishes a sense of justice. Each individual irreplaceable in our mutual dependence. An equality of worth which is the ethical core of justice.

I think the Labour approach is the right one – but I would, wouldn’t I. I also respect those Conservatives – and people in all parties – who, like me, believe that strengthening community and relationships is the great purpose of our politics.

Who believe in the social freedom which is the basis of a settled life? Edmund Burke describes it as “that state of things in which liberty is secured by equality of restraint”.

In the past, we called it fraternity.

Labour built its history organising working people to defend their family life, to struggle for fair wages and a decent home, and to create a better future for their children.

An aspirational politics about bread and butter issues.

It is also about creating power together for individual freedom. Our traditions of English liberty – say what you think, live as you will – run deep in our country. They are conservative and radical in their origins, and this paradox is the source of Labour’s renewal in England.

A new settlement

After all the high ideals, let me end with some reality.

We will not be able to increase public spending to solve all our social problems. Life in many of our communities is going to be tough for a long time – it will take a long time for the economic recovery to reach them.

But many of the major social problems we face do not need more money.

They need radical new ways to use existing resources. Putting relationships centre stage in service design. Helping people to help themselves and each other. Drawing on the assets of local communities to build resilience and break cycles of deprivation.

There will be many who will attempt to make the coming election dirty and depressing enough. I hope we can bring some light and some hope.

Because I believe that, together, we can make a new settlement for our country – one that mobilizes people of all parties and none: a new settlement based on relationship, reciprocity and responsibility.

Thank you