

Poverty Fighter Geldof to Aid the Tories

Sir Bob Geldof, the anti-poverty campaigner and musician, is to become a consultant to David Cameron's Conservative Party – a move which has attracted considerable controversy.

The Tory leader was “thrilled” to announce that Geldof will be advising a new policy group on globalisation and global party. Explaining, he said “this summer, millions of people took part in the Make Poverty History campaign. A new generation of citizens will want progress for the poor – whether living on the other side of the street or the other side of the world. Modern, compassionate Conservatism will mean responding to their demands.”

However, Geldof has made it clear that he has no intention of joining the party and will remain unpartisan. Questioned about his involvement, he said “I don't care who I have to go to to try and make this agenda work”.

The group will be chaired by Peter Lilley, who before becoming an MP devoted almost ten years working on development projects in Africa. Speaking on Radio Four, Mr. Lilley said that Geldof has “enormous knowledge and expertise working on this area for twenty years”, even adding that “he's got more expertise than anyone else in the world”.

Geldof's recruitment is widely seen as a success for the new Tory leader who has been driving to modernise the party. With this new policy unit, the

Conservative Party look as if they are marching onto issues which have been championed by Gordon Brown and Tony Blair in the past.

However, the appointment has proven to be controversial. Commenting, Nirj Deva – a Conservative MEP – said that, “for years the developed world has been pouring money into Africa but it has done little good. Africa will never make poverty history until its leaders take primary responsibility for the task.” Throughout the year-long Make Poverty History campaign and during the Live8 rock concerts, there was more of an emphasis on pressuring Western governments to hand Africa money rather than pressing for social and political reform.

Many leading economists also disagree with Geldof's views on world poverty, arguing that the problem with Africa's poverty is not due to a lack of resources or exploitation, but rather that the African governments take decisions which make them poor.

“Currently there are many government obstacles to prosperity,” says Sebastian Browning of Cambridge University. “For example, it takes 203 says to register a company in Haiti, but only two in Australia. To register in Ethiopia, one must pay eighteen years worth of the average country's income in fees, whereas Denmark charges nothing. This nightmare of regulation is what keeps the third world poor – it

does not need aid.”

Furthermore, it can be argued that aid only makes the third world dependant on handouts. Many of the east Asian “tiger” economies did not receive a penny in aid, yet are now posing a major economic threat to the USA. Conversely, many parts of Africa have been receiving aid from the West since Victorian times. Thus, Geldof's opponents argue that the appointment is more about image than substance.

Make Poverty History activist Jennifer Harris welcomed the move and dismissed the opposing views. “When people are starving you feed them,” she retorts, “not give them lectures on economic policies they can't follow as they have no money. We in Europe owe Africa everything – can you imagine the arrogance of just walking into a country, planting a flag and saying 'It's ours now savages – work for us or we'll shoot you' and then leaving with the infrastructure and the wealth? When will we pay back that debt?”

“The Tories really have changed”, says a shopper interviewed outside Sainsbury's in Northampton. “They used to be greedy – now it looks as if they've seen the light and want to start treating people humanely.” “Who cares if Geldof's economics isn't quite up to scratch – at least they're not ripping people off, and their actions generate a lot of publicity” says another. “What Africa needs,” says Oxfam volunteer



Geldof is well-known for his influential role in Third World aid.

Esther Fraser “is a helping hand to lift it out of poverty. We must provide aid for sustainable projects that enable communities to empower themselves and no longer be in poverty or dependant. It is not their fault they cannot do this themselves.”

Though it seems that Geldof and Cameron disagree in many issues, such as free trade and “trade justice”, the recruitment seems to have greatly added to Cameron's popularity: for the first time in ten years, the Conservatives are ahead of Labour in the polls.

Javid Lakha

Saving the World Isn't So Easy

KATE McNALLY

November 2, 2005. A little girl, no older than 9 years old, stands outside Westminster, holding an endearingly untidily coloured-in banner, with the words, 'Make Poverty History'. She, like the hundreds surrounding her are waiting to catch their MPs, grill them on their views on trade justice, and persuade them to support the cause. They feel they know the solution, so why won't the government carry it out?

The problem is that the campaigners are not merely telling the government what they want to be done (stop poverty) but *how* to do it ("trade justice"). Unfortunately, the 'solution' they have opted for is dangerously misguided, and would – if implemented – make the situation worse. The name 'fair' trade is misleading, because the fair price for any good is where supply intersects with demand. With 'fair' trade however, the farmers in the third world get a higher price than the market would give them. This means huge misallocation of resources; only the regulation of the free market can ensure neither consumer nor producer surpluses, both of which represent wasted resources and loss in potential profits; it is inherently efficient. Higher prices are merely protectionism, which

will keep them in underproductive, low return activities, which will not allow them to break the poverty cycle and increase their share in world trade.

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To end poverty, huge political and economic reorganisation is required, not least on the part of Africa itself. Assuming Africa is helpless by promoting 'fair trade' and other patronising methods may be self-satisfying, but is not in Africa's interests. In the words of the former Zambian Agriculture Minister Guy Scott, "NGOs flatter themselves into thinking that they save lives, but it is arrogant of the West to think that without whites, without pop stars, Africans would all be dead".