



ST BENEDICT'S COLLEGE POST

DAVID CAMERON UNVEILS NEW INITIATIVE

Conservative Party leader David Cameron has held talks with leading voluntary organisations to help promote his 'community service' plan for young people, outlined in Parliament earlier this month. While Cameron stopped short of insisting the scheme would be made compulsory, he has nonetheless said that forcing school leavers to do three or four months of community service could help bring the country together, sentiments that evoke the views of Harold Macmillan, a previously prominent Tory, in the late 1950s.

Speaking outside the London studios of YCTV, a charity which helps disadvantaged youngsters gain television production skills, Mr Cameron called on Britain's youth to do something "of value".

He added: "I'm ambitious for this programme. Having more people volunteering, especially young people, is good for Britain."

"In the wake of (the events that occurred on) July 7th, I got to thinking about what we can do to draw people together and I think this would be a very positive way of nurturing that sense of community spirit." Though ostensibly Mr Cameron's latest policy appears to draw on concerns about the disenfranchised youth of today, it also offers an attempt to resolve the current employment issues being faced by the influx of students now leaving university.

"I've long argued that we need to create something in this country that brings young people from different backgrounds together to do something of value and to serve as a rite of passage into adult life."

"Offering every young person in Britain a three-to-four-month programme of activity would be one of the best ways to build greater national cohesion and to offer valuable lessons about our responsibilities to each other as citizens."

More importantly, Cameron has stressed that the programme will be "exciting and inspiring, not a dull, worthy obligation," and will involve charities, private firms and the armed forces.

At present, relatively few school leavers do regular voluntary work, though many gap years are spent travelling and will almost certainly include unpaid work. Last year the percentage of students deferring university courses rose from seven to ten percent, something made possible by the wide range of opportunities made available by charities and governments across the world.

Cameron's opponents have nonetheless argued that with the ever-diminishing sense of patriotism within Britain today, such a scheme will be ineffective at curbing some of the more major societal problems we face, despite the party's best intentions. Furthermore, the proposals have met resistance from student bodies who said many school leavers used the pre-university period to earn a wage so they could alleviate ballooning student



debt, something they argue undeniably places more of a strain upon the country's economy in the long-term.

Gemma Tumelty, the secretary of the National Union of Students, has said Mr Cameron's ideas would pose genuine difficulties for struggling students.

"The massive cost of going to university means that many students may choose to take a gap year in order to save up money before they go. While David Cameron speaks of a universal voluntary scheme, being able to afford to work for free is not an opportunity available to all."

In response to this, Mr Cameron stated: "If community service isn't compulsory or if it isn't universal it could tend to be something else that well-off families do because it's good for their kids. But it would not reach some of the most marginalised families and excluded children who actually would really benefit."

The Tory education spokesman, David Willetts, has said of the scheme that the party wanted to avoid creating a centralised system, and instead wished to build upon the successful work being done with young people already. He also added that participation would not necessarily be restricted to school leavers, and that young people aged anywhere between 15 and their early 20s would theoretically be able to take part.

However, such ideas are not new ones, as an already-successful scheme is in place over the other side of the Atlantic; in 1993, The Corporation for National and Community Service in America was established, created to connect Americans of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to give back to their communities and their nation.

The scheme has been noted to be one of Cameron's most striking consensuses with the Labour Party, as a similar scheme had already been unveiled by Chancellor Gordon Brown a year ago, meant to encourage one million young people into volunteering and reclaim lost national glory; thereby marking a regression of both major parties to post-war political agendas.

Report by *Dominic Wakeford and Nathanael Saunders*

EDITORIAL

BY DOMINIC WAKEFORD AND NATHANAEAL SAUNDERS

In the last ten years, the number of young people who have found themselves in trouble with the law has increased dramatically; some saying that this has resulted from lack of activities for youth.

Therefore, it is a welcome change to see the ideas of David Cameron attempting to rectify this problem, and it marks progression from the Conservative Party's previously archaic schemes targeted towards young people.

Since Cameron became leader of the Tories in December 2005, his policies have so far been met with criticism and amusement from his opponents, who suggest his stance towards youth is ineffective and detracts from more important issues such as terrorism.

However, as Cameron has bucked the trend set by his predecessors, it has inevitably left him open to more disapproval, even if his ideas are in fact moving in the right direction for a modern Conservative Party.

The benefits of the scheme are numerous; the disenfranchised youth of today will be given something to attain and due to the voluntary nature of the project, the resentment currently so prevalent within the education system, should not occur.

Furthermore, Cameron argues that this scheme would lower the number of youths committing offences on our streets. They would be kept out of danger and be given a sense of responsibility, something that arguably they do not have, as they roam around the streets in packs desperate to express their feelings.

Nevertheless, there is some clear regression to the Tory policies of yesteryear; the idea that the community should be served by all, and the idea that servitude should be reinforced amongst young people.

In addition, the majority of the national press has misinterpreted Cameron's sentiments, in that they feel this is one further futile attempt by the new leader at tapping into the impressionable youth of today. Due to the record low number of young voters in the last general election, can the Party be blamed for such cutting-edge initiatives?

Only time will tell how successful Cameron's policies will be, as he tries to challenge the stereotypical image of the Tories held by many in Britain today.

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