SPHÈRE PUBLIQUE - SPHÈRE PRIVÉE
NOUVEAUX ENJEUX, NOUVEAUX MODÈLES

Royaume-Uni, l'autre modèle ?

par Eudoxe Denis
et Laetitia Strauch

#2 Regards sur la *Big Society*

INSTITUT DE L'ENTREPRISE

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Préambule

Dans le cadre de son étude sur la Big Society, l'Institut de l'entreprise a mené une trentaine d'entretiens au Royaume-Uni au printemps 2013.

Ces entretiens ont été réalisés par Eudoxe Denis et Laetitia Strauch, leur retranscription et leur synthèse coordonnées par cette dernière. Nous remercions à cette occasion Demeter Chanter et Christopher Bland, qui ont réalisé la retranscription des entretiens.

Dix-neuf de ces entretiens sont retranscrits ici :

Tim Bale, Professor of Politics, Queen Mary University

Phillip Blond, Director, ResPublica; author of *Red Tory*

Toby Eccles, Development Director, Social Finance

Jason Edwards, Lecturer in Politics at Birkbeck, University of London ; editor of *Retrieving The Big Society*

David Goodhart, Director, Demos ; founder and former Editor of *Prospect magazine*

Ben Hall, World News Editor, *Financial Times* and former correspondent in Paris

Tim Knox, Director, Center for Policy Studies

Jeremy Jennings, (at the time of interview) Director of the Centre for the Study of Political Thought at Queen Mary, University of London ; (now) Deputy Head of Department & Professor of Political Theory à King's College

Julian Le Grand, Richard Titmuss Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics (LSE) ; Chair of Mutuals Taskforce ; former Health Advisor to Tony Blair from 2003 to 2005

Anne McElvoy, Public Policy Editor, *The Economist*

Ralph Michell, (à l'époque de l'entretien) Director of Policy, Acevo ; (désormais) Head of New Markets, Office for Civil Society

Geoff Mulgan, Chief Executive, Nesta ; former Director of the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and Head of Policy at at 10 Downing Street under Tony Blair

Sarah Neville, Public Policy Editor, *Financial Times*

Jesse Norman, MP for Hereford and South Herefordshire ; member of David Cameron's parliamentary advisory board on policy (until Septembre 2013) and author of *The Big Society, Compassionate conservatism* and *Compassionate economics*

Peter Oborne, Chief Political Commentator, *Daily Telegraph*

Ben Page, Chief Executive, Ipsos MORI, with Anna Beckett, Research Director, Ipsos MORI

Matthew Taylor, Chief executive, RSA ; former Chief Adviser on Political Strategy to the Prime Minister Tony Blair

Toby Young, co-founder of the West London Free School ; Associate Editor, *The Spectator*

Nigel Williams, Statistician, Civitas

Les autres personnes interviewées et dont l'entretien n'est pas retranscrit sont les suivantes:

Helen Disney, Chief Executive, The Stockholm Network

Catherine Fieschi, Director, Counterpoint

Stephen Howard, Chief Executive, Business In The Community

John Loughlin, Director, The Von Hügel Institute, Cambridge

Nicolas Madelaine, Correspondant des *Echos* à Londres

Andrew Mawson, Director, Andrew Mawson Partnerships

Sophie Pedder, Paris Bureau Chief, *The Economist*

Quatre autres personnes (deux fonctionnaires du Cabinet Office, un dirigeant de grande entreprise et un acteur de l'entrepreneuriat social) ont préféré ne pas être directement citées.

La synthèse qui précède les entretiens en retrace les grandes lignes.

Sommaire

Think tanks

Non-profit

Synthèse des entretiens

Les personnes que nous avons interrogées dans le cadre de notre etude sont liées, directement ou indirectement, à la *Big Society*, qu'ils en soient acteurs (Phillip Blond, Toby Eccles, Stephen Howard, Julian Le Grand, Jesse Norman, Toby Young), promoteurs plus ou moins enthousiastes (Jeremy Jennings, John Loughlin, Peter Oborne), opposants ou critiques (Tim Bale, Jason Edwards, Catherine Fieschi) ou observateurs (Helen Disney, David Goodhart, Ben Hall, Tim Knox, Nicolas Madelaine, Anne McElvoy, Ralph Michell, Geoff Mulgan, Sarah Neville, Ben Page, Matthew Taylor, Nigel Williams). Nous synthétisons ici leurs analyses.

LA *BIG SOCIETY*, ENTRE VISION PHILOSOPHIQUE ET PROGRAMME POLITIQUE

L'interprétation de la nature de la *Big Society* varie selon les personnes interrogées. Tantôt vision philosophique, programme politique, état d'esprit à diffuser dans l'opinion, voire ensemble de politiques publiques aux contours variables, voire tout cela à la fois, la plasticité du terme est marquante.

Reste que la plupart y reconnaissent la ligne directrice de la dernière campagne électorale de David Cameron, soit un principe d'organisation visant à (re)donner du pouvoir (« *empower* ») aux individus et institutions intermédiaires face à l'Etat. Ce principe se décline doublement : il s'agit d'une part de redonner du pouvoir aux individus et à la société civile par rapport à l'Etat, et d'autre part de moderniser les services publics en favorisant la participation à ces derniers. La majorité estime également que la *Big Society* prend sa source dans une tentative de renouvellement idéologique du Parti Conservateur. Certains considérant dans ce contexte la *Big* Society comme un outil marketing, la divergence porte donc sur la profondeur et la sincérité de ce renouvellement. Cela n'empêche pas certains de penser que la definition initiale de Cameron a pu manquer de clarté.

Au commencement était Burke

Les origines intellectuelles de la *Big Society* suscitent des jugements divers de la part des personnes interrogées, les promoteurs du concept, en particulier, étant capables de citer des références précises, mais éclectiques.

Les grandes figures de la pensée conservatrice sont d'abord invoquées par nos interlocuteurs. Si Burke reste la première référence philosophique de la *Big Society*, les interprétations varient ensuite selon les personnes interrogées. Il en ressort une double origine, qui correspond dès le départ à une dualité fondamentale de la *Big Society* : d'une part Tocqueville, dans une tradition plus libérale, à laquelle Jesse Norman se rattache ; d'autre part Disraeli – emblématique Premier ministre à l'origine du *One Nation conservatism* [1] – et Carlyle, dans une tradition plus organiciste voire romantique, dont se revendique Phillip Blond. Au XX[e] siècle, c'est le philosophe Michael Oakeshott qui reste la référence principale, compte tenu de sa contribution importante au renouvellement idéologique de la pensée conservatrice, reposant notamment sur la distinction fondamentale mise au jour par ce dernier entre deux formes de collectivités humaines, la *societas*, ou "*civil association*" et l'*universitas* [2], ou "*enterprise association*".

Pour tous ceux qui s'essaient à une généalogie de la *Big Society* au sein du Parti Conservateur, deux autres figures sont citées aussi bien par les observateurs bienveillants que les détracteurs. Il s'agit tout d'abord de Ferdinand Mount, importante figure conservatrice, chef du Policy Unit au 10 Downing Street en 1982-83 du temps de Thatcher puis essayiste, qui a insisté dans ses travaux sur l'importance des institutions intermédiaires – au premier rang desquelles la famille[3] – et la nécessité de préserver ces dernières de l'emprise de l'Etat, ainsi que la lutte contre les inégalités culturelles et non seulement monétaires [4].

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1. Le conservatisme « *One Nation* » tire son origine du roman *Sybil* (1845) de Disraeli ; dans ce dernier, le futur Premier ministre de la Reine Victoria soutient que l'industrialisation et l'accroissement des inégalités qui l'accompagne risquent de conduire la Grande-Bretagne à se diviser en deux « nations », celles des riches et celle des pauvres. Pour parer à cette situation, il promeut une vision organique de la société qui rompt en partie avec l'individualisme de l'époque victorienne et met l'accent sur les obligations morales des plus riches envers les plus pauvres. Ce courant politique, fortement imprégné de paternalisme social, aura une influence durable au XX[e] siècle, jusqu'à l'avènement de la « nouvelle droite » (*New Right*) qui portera Thatcher au pouvoir.

2. La société-entreprise (*universitas*) est toute entière organisée en fonction d'un but collectif (quelle que soit la nature de ce but, religieux, politique, économique) auquel ses membres doivent tous contribuer. Au contraire, la « société civile » (*societas*) définit certains cadres et procédures pour régler la vie en commun de ses membres, sans définir de fins collectives fixées une fois pour toutes.

3. *The subversive family*, 1982.

4. *Mind the gap, The New Class Divide in Britain*, 2006 et *The New Few*, 2012.

Autre ancien conseiller de Thatcher au sein du Policy Unit de 1984 à 1986 et futur *Minister of State for Universities and Science* du Gouvernement Cameron, David Willetts est peut-être celui dont les travaux marqueront la première reformulation du conservatisme du sein du parti après Thatcher, et la première tentative de penser ce qui allait devenir plus tard la *Big Society*. Dans ses essais *Modern Conservatism* (1992) et *Civic Conservatism* (Social Market Foundation, 1994), il prône un conservatisme moderne, défini comme civique, en ce qu'il ambitionne de concilier la défense du marché (*free markets*) avec la reconnaissance de l'importance de la communauté (*community*) [5] et des institutions intermédiaires. Ceux qui citent David Willetts considèrent que ses écrits ont eu une influence certaine sur le positionnement actuel du Parti Conservateur et l'inspiration "libérale" de la *Big Society*.

Enfin, Bale est le seul à voir dans la *Big Society* une inspiration américaine, qu'il résume à la volonté de réduire l'Etat et de le remplacer simplement par la bonne volonté des actions civiques [6].

Plusieurs définitions de la *Big Society* sont ensuite proposées. En conformité avec la tradition burkienne, il s'agit de vivifier les tissus intermédiaires, comme le souligne Jeremy Jennings. Ensuite, il peut s'agir d'une conception de l'Etat et de son action, dont les fins comme les moyens seraient typiquement conservateurs. C'est ce qu'expose David Goodhart, qui rattache la *Big Society* à une convergence entre la vision d'un gouvernement limité, conforme à la tradition conservatrice, face à un renforcement de la centralisation et du rôle de l'Etat soutenu par le *Labour*, et la conscience sociale d'un conservatisme persuadé, au contraire de la gauche, que nombre de réformes sociales peuvent et doivent advenir avec l'aide des citoyens eux-mêmes. Il s'agit donc pour la société de reprendre en main certaines missions dont l'Etat s'est chargé de façon indue. Remarquons au passage que cette conception de la vie en commun a aussi des origines à gauche, avant l'essor du Labour.

Cette nécessité de renouvellement idéologique s'explique sur le long terme, pour répondre à une évolution de l'Etat dans laquelle les Conservateurs ne se retrouvent plus, mais aussi à moyen terme, pour détacher le parti d'une image prétendument hostile à la

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5. « *Modern Conservatism aims to reconcile free markets (which deliver freedom and prosperity) with a recognition of the importance of community (which sustains our values)* ».

6. Toutefois, bien que le titre d'un des essays de Jesse Norman, *Compassionate conservatism*, puisse paraître equivoque, ce dernier a explicitement pris ses distances à l'égard du conservatisme américain et du "*compassionate conservatism*" de G.W. Bush.

société – « *the Conservatives under Mrs Thatcher came to be seen as the nasty party*[7] » (Jeremy Jennings). Le célèbre propos prêté à Thatcher[8] est souvent citée comme le point de départ de la *Big Society*, même si selon certains Conservateurs comme Tim Knox ou Jesse Norman cette phrase est largement mal comprise. En effet, elle devrait plutôt se s'entendre comme le constat qu'il n'existe pas de société au sens abstrait, mais des éléments concrets qui la constituent - individus, familles, communautés. Il est donc faux, selon Jesse Norman, d'en conclure que Thatcher niait l'existence de la société, même si la formule contient en effet une légère contradiction.

Malgré l'ensemble de ces références, la *Big Society*, selon nos interlocuteurs, souffre d'une définition trop floue qui ouvre à des interpretations multiples. Deux versants se dégagent. Le premier peut être qualifié de liberal-conservateur. Dans le sillage de David Cameron et de Jesse Norman, il constitue une sorte de synthèse entre le conservatisme de la *gentry* et la modernité libérale. L'autre versant de la *Big Society* est le développement qu'en fait Phillip Blond, assez éloigné de David Cameron. La perspective de Phillip Blond est davantage communautarienne, inspirée de la doctrine sociale de l'église catholique, donc plutôt sociale-conservatrice, voire anti-libérale. Phillip Blond part du constat que droite et gauche ont toutes deux échoué : la gauche à aider les plus démunis, car elle n'a fait qu'augmenter inutilement les dépenses publiques, ou bien répandre un libéralisme des moeurs destructeur ; la droite à assurer la prospérité, par un libéralisme exacerbé qui a abouti à une trop grande concentration des richesses, à des monopoles et à une hausse des inégalités. La société d'aujourd'hui, selon Phillip Blond, oscille donc entre l'individualisme exacerbé et l'étatisme, l'un étant une réaction à l'autre ; dans les deux cas, c'est la communauté qui se trouve oubliée. Entre les deux, la vision de Jesse Norman semble l'emporter, ayant rencontré davantage d'échos, tandis que Phillip Blond a pris ses distances vis-à-vis de David Cameron.

Mais tous les observateurs ne sont pas convaincus de la sincérité de David Cameron, ou en tout cas de la constance de son intérêt pour l'idée *de Big Society*. Peter Oborne voit certes dans le Premier ministre un fervent partisan du concept dès son origine : « *Cameron is pure Big Society [...] If you look at the construction of David Cameron, of the political*

7. En réalité, l'expression de « *nasty party* » vient d'un discours resté célèbre de Theresa May prononcé en 2002 à l'occasion de la conférence annuelle du Parti Conservateur. La future ministre de l'intérieur de David Cameron y plaidait déjà pour un repositionnement du Parti Conservateur, notamment dans son discours vis-à-vis des plus défavorisés.

8. *"Who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first."*, souvent tronquée comme "*There is no such thing as society."* Interview de Margaret Thatcher pour *Woman's Own*, 1987.

figure, (...) he comes from a very traditional Conservative background in which are embedded certain propositions about duty, loyalty, patriotism, nation, selflessness and a sense of obligation to one's fellow men. » Le premier Cameron serait selon Peter Oborne un politicien banal, influencé par la personnalité de Tony Blair et le rapport aux médias entretenu par ce dernier[9], mais il aurait vécu un « tournant *Big Society* » en 2006. Pour asseoir son projet, David Cameron aurait bénéficié de deux mouvements parallèles : les réflexions de Iain Duncan Smith, au Centre for Social Justice[10], sur la *welfare society* comme remède à la « société brisée », et le mouvement des *academies* instituées par le *Labour*, prolongé par les réflexions sur les *free schools* menées par les *Tories*.

Mais Jeremy Jennings y voit lui un engagement passager ("*I'm not certain just how serious Cameron was about it in the first place. I'm fairly convinced he doesn't really think about it at all now.*"), tandis que Tim Bale estime que Cameron ne peut être défini, au contraire des dires de Peter Oborne, par la *Big Society*. La *Big Society* répondrait donc davantage à la volonté des *Tories*, en réalité plus proches de Tony Blair et du *Third Way* qu'on ne le pense, de se démarquer de ces derniers, d'où cette nouvelle idée pour rendre le parti plus avenant.

Certains s'avèrent même très sévères quant à la profondeur intellectuelle de la *Big Society* : selon Tim Bale l'influence des idées de Phillip Blond et de Jesse Norman au sein du Parti Conservateur aurait été exagérée par les médias, et il est assez fantaisiste de penser que la *Big Society* est issue d'une réflexion philosophique de la part des politiques – ce ne serait qu'une stratégie de relations publiques : « *If you are looking for the brain behind the Big Society it is, for good or ill, Steve Hilton's*[11]*.* »

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9. Dans l'opposition, David Cameron s'était un jour défini comme le véritable héritier de Tony Blair (« *heir to Blair* » partageant avec l'ancien Premier ministre Travailliste un souci de modernisation, à l'opposé d'un Gordon Brown qui aurait succombé aux vieux penchants du Parti Travailliste.

10. Le Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) est un think-tank independant fondé en 2004 par Iain Duncan Smith en 2004, avec comme objectif la luttre contre la pauvreté et la justice sociale.

11. Conseiller et « stratège » de David Cameron jusqu'en mars 2012, Steve Hilton aurait joué un rôle majeur dans le développement de la *Big Society* et l'inscription de cette dernière dans la campagne de 2010.

Un « *big citizen* » face à un « *small State* » (Anne McElvoy), où comment réformer les services publics

Selon nos interlocuteurs, la vision de la *Big Society* vommunément retenue par le public en est l'acception la plus étroite. Celle-ci suppose de confier aux individus davantage de pouvoir pour agir sur leur environnement et développer bénévolat et *charities* – l'attention portée au bénévolat et aux *charities* n'est d'ailleurs pas nouvelle, déjà présente chez le *Labour*. C'est pourtant une vision large de la *Big Society*, bien que mal identifiée par le public, qui prévaut dans l'esprit de nos interlocuteurs. Parmi les thèmes centraux développés par les concepteurs de la *Big Society* se trouve en effet la réforme des services publics et du *welfare*. Selon Peter Oborne, les Conservateurs d'aujourd'hui poursuivraient l'œuvre de Margaret Thatcher en la complétant : cette dernière a réformé l'économie et ses structures, aujourd'hui les *Tories* veulent réformer le *welfare* et l'éducation.

Le constat initial des Conservateurs est partagé par nombre des personnes rencontrées, y compris les plus critiques de la *Big Society*. Il est même chez certains radical : pour Matthew Taylor, l'Etat ne peut plus répondre aux attentes de la population en jouant simplement le rôle de fournisseur de services à des citoyens consommateurs. Selon Phillip Blond, le service public ne fonctionne plus de façon satisfaisante, sa bureaucratie et ses règles excessives nuisant aux initiatives venant de la société, sans parler de son absence d'attention à l'égard de l'usager (« *customer care* ») et son opposition à l'adaptation locale et à la personalisation - si l'on offre la même chose à chacun, on ne lui offre pas ce qui lui est utile. Matthew Taylor défend donc l'idée qu'une réorientation du service public est nécessaire, qui intégrerait la production de ce service par les citoyens et les incitations aux changements de comportement. Il faut, explique Phillip Blond, un service public non centralisé, hyper local, holistique et personnalisé. Il n'est pas nécessaire que l'Etat soit le fournisseur des services ; pour qu'il soit efficace, il doit être une plate-forme facilitatrice permettant d'offrir un service fourni par d'autres entités.

Second constat, pour les promoteurs de la *Big Society*, la dépendance financière des individus vis-à-vis de l'Etat-providence et des diverses aides de celui-ci s'avère trop élevée : « *Britain was 'a nation of shopkeepers' and it was the greatest nation on earth. I think there is a lesson there: if you create a nation where people have stake, they don't become dependent and they don't turn to the welfare state, they can pass their business on to their children, they have security and feel worth.* » (Phillip Blond). Une nation dans laquelle les individus ont une part – au sens materiel et figuré –, leur permet de ne pas être dépendants à l'égard du *welfare state*, tout en se sentant utiles. Pour Phillip Blond, sortir

de la dépendance à l'Etat-providence est une nécessité morale autant qu'économique. Il faut donc repenser le *welfare*, avec comme visée la réappropriation par la société civile des biens que sont les services publics, et non la redistribution des biens matériels comme aujourd'hui. Phillip Blond va plus loin, puisqu'il va jusqu'à préconiser une nouvelle redistribution, celle des vertus : *« We need a new distribution, we need to distribute not welfare but education, culture, excellence and character ».*

Cette acception large est aussi bien philosophique que pratique, puisqu'elle s'est traduite, depuis 2010, par un éventail de projets et mesures lancées par le Gouvernement, dont la ligne directrice est l'introduction de davantage de responsabilité, d'efficacité et de transparence dans un Etat qui se veut plus étroit et moins ambitieux.

Comme le rappelle Geoff Mulgan, la recherche de qualité accrue des services publics implique notamment la diversification des prestataires du service. Vision déjà développée sous le précédent gouvernement, elle est aujourd'hui poursuivie par les Conservateurs au pouvoir : des organismes non publics (privé, tiers secteur) sont incités à répondre aux appels d'offres publics. Dans l'idéal, décrit Toby Eccles, la fourniture du service public serait assurée par un mix de prestataires privés, tendus *a priori* vers l'efficacité, et du tiers secteur, tendus vers la préoccupation des usagers. D'autres mesures doivent contribuer à l'amélioration du service, comme le « *payment by result* » ou encore l'assouplissement des contraintes administratives [12]. Autant que possible, le Gouvernement vise à utiliser des politiques incitatives plutôt que la réglementation. Les services publics voient aussi l'expérimentation de mutuelles instituées par des agents publics pour améliorer le service et le bien-être des employés. Elles peuvent aider à réaliser des économies, mais ce n'est jamais leur objectif premier, rappelle Julian Le Grand.

Parallèlement, l'institution de *free schools* [13] et la poursuite des *academies* introduites par le Labour sont généralement considérées, par la plupart des personnes interrogées, comme partie intégrante de la *Big Society*, même si le Gouvernement ne l'a pas présenté

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12. Le Gouvernement a par exemple lancé le Red Tape Challenge, afin de passer au crible plus de 21 000 réglementations en vue de les améliorer ou les supprimer. Cette initiative s'appuie notamment sur un site web participatif.

13. La proposition d'établir des « *free schools* » figurait dans le programme électoral de 2010 du Parti Conservateur et a été mise en œuvre dès l'arrivée au pouvoir du ministre Michael Gove. Elle consiste à ouvrir aux groupes de parents d'élèves, aux *communities*, aux universités, aux associations caritatives et religieuses le droit de candidater auprès du ministère de l'éducation pour établir une école primaire ou secondaire (cette dernière correspondant en France aux collèges et lycées), en dehors du contrôle de l'autorité locale en matière d'éducation (« Local Education Authority ») et avec une autonomie considérable pour définir son mode de fonctionnement interne, qu'il s'agisse de ses programmes, de sa pédagogie, du recrutement du personnel enseignant et de leur salaire, ainsi que de l'organisation des rythmes scolaires sur l'année et à l'intérieur de la semaine.

explicitement ainsi. Tim Knox est le seul à s'opposer à cette analyse et considère les *free schools* comme indépendantes de la *Big Society*.

A côté de la réforme des services publics, celle de l'Etat-providence est en cours. Parmi les mesures emblématiques, l'institution de l'Universal Credit, qui permet de regrouper et plafonner six allocations[14]. Certains parmi les observateurs recontrés n'y voient pas de transformation massive du rôle de l'Etat, seulement une tentative de réduire légèrement sa taille.

En revanche la réforme du NHS, selon la plupart des personnes interrogées, excède par trop le périmètre de la *Big Society*.

Enfin, la *Big Society* n'a jamais donné lieu à une politique ainsi dénommée et ne s'appuie sur aucune équipe spécifique au sein de l'administration. Le Cabinet Office, par son caractère transversal, y joue néanmoins un rôle particulier, notamment Nick Hurd (Minister for Civil Society), l'Office for Civil Society ou encore la Partnerships Team. Le fait que la *Big Society* soit une vision executée de différentes manières et une forme de rejet du « *command and control* » gouvernemental n'est certainement pas étranger à ce choix.

Quels obstacles initiaux ?

Selon Jesse Norman, le premier obstacle à la *Big Society* réside dans la forte dépendance d'intérêts particuliers à l'égard du soutien financier de l'Etat : il est très difficile dans ces conditions de restreindre cette dernière du jour au lendemain, surtout quand la volonté de réduire les dépenses suscite de fortes réactions, par exemple dans le tiers secteur. C'est aussi parce que le pays est trop endetté pour soutenir financièrement la transition d'un modèle très étatiste à un modèle laissant davantage de place à la société civile.

Autre obstacle, la culture du service public, où les cadres intermédiaires, notamment au niveau local, ont tendance à considérer la sous-traitance et la mutualisation comme une menace pour leurs emplois. Les bureaucraties locales comme nationales se montrent lentes, voire hostiles, selon Toby Young. Parallèlement, certains professionnels du tiers secteur sont réticents devant une initiative issue de la droite.

14. Il s'agit d'allocations sous condition de ressources qui concernent les personnes en âge de travailler (« *working age benefits* »).

ECHEC DU CONCEPT, RÉUSSITE DES RÉFORMES, CONTRADICTIONS ORIGINELLES ?

Si certains estiment que la *Big Society* n'a pas rencontré son succès comme concept, il est reconnu que cette approche a permis de renouveler la conception du service public et d'introduire des réformes importantes. D'autres critiquent le détail de sa mise en place, ni stratégique ni concluante. Il y a ici un paradoxe : si l'état d'esprit de la *Big Society* est plébiscité au-delà des Conservateurs et que les réformes se poursuivent, le terme n'est plus utilisé par ses propres concepteurs. Sa complexité semble empêcher de l'employer, en tout cas dans le contexte des prochaines élections, qui devraient se jouer sur des arguments plus simples et tranchés.

La réussite de la Big Society : apprendre l'*empowerment*

La *Big Society* a rencontré son succès, dans la mesure où l'étatisme exacerbé est devenu assez impopulaire au-delà même des cercles conservateurs. Ben Hall precise que l'idée que l'on peut financer et organiser les services publics de façon moins étatique et moins uniforme gagne du terrain, tout comme l'acceptation que le périmètre de l'Etat, dans de nombreux domaines, doit être réduit. Au fond, l'objectif était simple : réapprendre à organiser la société partir du terrain et permettre aux individus d'exercer leur responsabilité individuelle lorsqu'ils le souhaitent, en sortant de l'alternative stérile entre l'Etat et le marché. Phillip Blond estime à ce propos que les Conservateurs ont réussi, grâce à la *Big Society*, à renouveler leur vision sociale.

Au-delà, la *Big Society* s'est traduite au plan politique par de nombreuses réformes importantes : transparence accrue, diversité dans la fourniture du service public, décentralisation, Universal Credit [15], financement innovant par les Social Impacts Bonds. Mais, constat partagé, il est encore trop tôt pour véritablement évaluer les résultats de ces politiques.

L'Office for Civil Society (OCS) défend quant à lui son bilan : « *We are indeed working as hard, and there is of course less money. But we hope we are working in a smart way, too, so that less money doesn't have to mean less impact.* », rapporte un haut fonctionnaire du Cabinet Office. Les actions engagées par l'OCS consistent par exemple à aider les *charities* à trouver d'autres sources de financement, à faciliter le don de temps par les

15. Le premier pilote a été lancé en mai 2013, mais de premiers obstacles sont apparus, dus notamment au système informatique.

personnes et à favoriser de nouvelles formes de financement, comme l'investissement social. Plusieurs programmes en sont ressortis : Community First, National Citizen Service, Community Organisers, Big Society Capital, Transforming Local Infrastructure[16], Centre for Social Action.

Les *free schools* développées par les *Tories* en amont des élections et aussitôt mises en oeuvre, apparaissent sans aucun doute, selon la majorité des personnes interrogées, comme l'un des succès majeurs de la *Big Society* prise dans son sens large. Les *free schools* viennent s'ajouter aux *academies* déjà instituées par le *Labour* et que le Gouvernement souhaite continuer à développer.

Pour Anne McElvoy, il s'agit d'utiliser les mécanismes du marché, en l'occurrence d'accroître les possibilities de choix d'école pour les parents, pour améliorer le service public qu'est l'éducation face au système actuel des *comprehensive schools*, jugé peu satisfaisant. Peter Oborne y voit une réforme très positive, qui redonne du pouvoir à la société. Penser que l'extension des possibilités de choix dans l'éducation ne bénéficierait qu'aux classes aisées – argument souvent avancé par la gauche –, est *« insulting to low income families who are perfectly capable of exercising choice »* (Toby Young). Et Toby Young d'ajouter *: "at the West London Free School, 30 per cent of our current Year 7s are on free school meals*[17]*, which is almost twice the national average in England."*

Pour Toby Young, l'échec des *comprehensive* tient à leur incapacité à s'occuper des plus faibles comme des meilleurs. A l'inverse, selon ce dernier, le curriculum des *free schools* a l'interêt d'être « *broad and balanced* ». La West London Free School de Toby Young est ainsi définie par son fondateur comme une « *comprehensive grammar* » et une « *grammar school for all* », soit une école avec les standards de la *grammar school*[18] en ce qui concerne les exigences scolaires et le comportement, mais ouverte aux enfants de toutes capacités et origines. Les *free schools* sont louées car on y trouve, selon John Loughlin, un ethos particulier – l'ambiance de l'école, le fait que les élèves deviennent membres d'une communauté – mais aussi parce qu'elles sont source d'innovation et de créativité,

16. Il s'agit d'aider les fédérations d'associations caritatives à accroître leur efficacité, par exemple en mutualisant leurs fonctions support ou même en fusionnant.

17. Un enfant est éligible au *free school meal* si ses parents bénéficient d'un certain type d'allocation.

18. Les *grammar schools* sont des écoles secondaires publiques, mais sélectives, un examen d'entrée sélectionnant les candidats à l'inscription en fonction de leurs capacités. Elles ont vu leur nombre diminuer très fortement depuis l'après- guerre, suite aux initiatives des Travaillistes dans les années 1960 pour en restreindre le nombre, et la loi de 1976, dont le but était de mettre fin à la sélection. Il en existe toutefois encore une centaine (164 en 2012), contre 1 298 en 1964. Leurs défenseurs estiment que les *grammar schools* permettaient aux élèves de recevoir une bonne éducation selon leur mérite, plutôt que selon le niveau de revenu de leurs parents.

selon Phillip Blond. Ce succès s'explique sûrement par le fait que ceux qui s'y investissent, notamment les parents, ont un intérêt direct à gérer des écoles.

S'il existe encore très peu de *free schools* aujourd'hui, leur existence devrait pousser les autres écoles à s'améliorer et se préoccuper davantage des attentes des parents. Toutefois, prix à payer pour la liberté selon Jeremy Jennings, il faudra accepter que certaines écoles puissent échouer.

Certaines analyses sont plus nuancées. Tim Knox estime que la population est indifférente à cette réforme et que les *free schools* ne représentent qu'un nombre marginal d'élèves, tandis que le processus de création d'une *free school* serait très bureaucratique. D'autres sont plus critiques, comme Jason Edwards, qui craint une immixtion des entreprises dans l'éducation. Reste qu'il est encore trop tôt, comme le rappelle la plupart des personnes interrogées, pour évaluer entièrement les résultats de cette réforme.

La *Big Society* a aussi rencontré un succès paradoxal en ce qu'elle a permis de reconfigurer les équilibres entre les Travaillistes d'inspiration fabienne, attachés au rôle prépondérant de l'Etat [19], et les autres composantes du parti. Le *Labour* présente historiquement, en effet, des composantes qui le rapprochent des Conservateurs, remontant au temps où il n'était pas encore converti à l'étatisme : rôle des mutuelles, engagement et responsabilité accrus des citoyens dans leurs « communautés ». A l'heure actuelle, des théories comme l'associationnisme, dont Jason Edwards se réclame, s'inscrivent dans cette voie, tout comme le « *Blue Labour* » [20]. L'intérêt d'une partie du *Labour* pour la *Big Society* n'est donc pas si surprenant, même si le noyau militant du *Labour* n'a aucune sympathie pour les idées du *Blue Labour*. L'influence de la *Big Society* sur le *Labour* va plus loin : en cas de changement de majorité, comme le rappelle Julian Le Grand, certaines mesures seraient sûrement maintenues, comme les mutuelles dans le service public ou les *free schools*. Le risque serait néanmoins dans ce dernier cas que le *Labour* accorde trop de pouvoir sur ces écoles aux autorités locales.

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19. La Société des Fabiens ou Société fabienne est une organisation britannique d'inspiration socialiste réformiste. Elle a fortement contribué à la formation du *Labour* en 1900, de nombreux Fabiens y ayant participé. Attachée à l'Etat, notamment à son rôle de redistribution, la Société des Fabiens a influencé jusqu'à aujourd'hui les politiques travaillistes et défend désormais une ligne social-démocrate.

20. Lancé par le MP Maurice Glasman en 2009 et comptant notamment dans ses rangs le député Jon Cruddas, le *Blue Labour* est une tendance du Labour qui souhaite reconquérir l'électorat populaire en soutenant des mesures socialement conservatrices – notamment dans le domaine de l'immigration, de l'insécurité ou encore de l'Europe –, le rejet du néolibéralisme et enfin un déplacement de la gouvernance vers les « communautés » locales, plutôt que de défendre l'Etat providence à l'ancienne, considéré entre autres comme trop bureaucratique.

Certains analystes sont toutefois plus critiques: Tim Bale voit entre *Tories* et *Labour* une différence fondamentale en ce que que les Travaillistes ne présument pas que le vide créé par le retrait de l'administration soit automatiquement rempli par le tiers secteur. Non seulement l'implication du tiers secteur n'est jamais immédiate, mais l'Etat, pour Tim Bale, joue un rôle clé dans l'animation de la société civile.

« *A classic case of over-promising and under-delivering* » (Matthew Taylor) ?

Au-delà des réussites incontestables du projet, la *Big Society* a montré certaines limites. Si l'état d'esprit a pu s'enraciner peu à peu, le concept lui-même n'a su attirer, selon Tim Bale, ni les médias ni le public, car, explique Andrew Mawson, trop abstrait et trop peu orienté vers la pratique. Le terme même, perçu comme un slogan opportuniste, un outil marketing au nom mal choisi (un « *poor label* » pour Tim Knox), a rencontré assez tôt un certain scepticisme. N'aurait-il pas été plus judicieux de parler de « *small society* » ? , demandent certains. Il faut ajouter à cela une forme d'arrogance dans la communication, les *Tories* semblant soudain découvrir les vertus du tiers secteur. Son utilisation pendant les élections a donc été, selon Anne McElvoy, un « désastre », notamment parce que, rappelle Ralph Michell, le concept n'a pas été rigoureusement développé de façon à rendre cohérentes les différents politiques qui le composait.

Phillip Blond, tout comme Ralph Michell, estime ensuite que sa mise en œuvre n'a pas suivi de véritable stratégie, notamment parce que la vision économique des Conservateurs n'a pas changé *: « The government has gone with an outdated,* laissez-faire*, standard right-wing offer [...] Consequently, the sacrifice of everything to austerity is to increase our debt: it has been the undermining of the whole Big Society offer. »* Ce n'est pas, comme certains le pensent, la coalition qui a empêché les *Tories* de mener leur projet à leur guise, mais la crise et l'émergence de nouvelles problématiques plus économiques qui ont fait passer le projet au second plan. Résultat, pour Anne McElvoy, « la *Big Society* est morte quelque part en 2012 », le Gouvernement n'évoquant plus le sujet. Jeremy Jennings n'est pas plus optimiste : *« My own real conclusion is that I don't really think Cameron takes it too seriously, he just wants to survive politically and he's in such a bad position. »*.

Cette imperfection rejoint une autre limite du projet, un possible manque d'ambitions concrètes. Matthew Taylor y voit là « *a classic case of over-promising and under-delivering* ». Peu d'indicateurs ont été utilisés pour mesurer la performance des services publics, même si dans certains domaines, comme l'ouverture des données de l'administration ou la portée de la décentralisation, l'évaluation quantitative existe. Si la tentative de décen-

tralisation du pouvoir est globalement bien reçue, elle montre encore peu de résultats. Ralph Michell regrette par exemple une ambition insuffisante dans la réforme de l'Etat. Pour d'autres, bien plus minoritaires, comme Tim Knox, le niveau du *welfare* reste insupportable, et le Gouvernement n'est pas allé assez loin dans sa politique d'austérité.

Mais tout ne tient pas à la faiblesse de la mise en oeuvre. C'est aussi que la *Big Society* semble être arrivée à contre-temps, l'austérité lui ayant porté, selon certains, un coup fatal. Si d'un côté la population s'est désintéressée de la *Big Society*, de l'autre les coupes ont touché en premier lieu certaines *charities* et les autorités locales, celles-là mêmes qui étaient en mesure d'accompagner le mouvement de *Big Society*. La situation des *charities* est toutefois à relativiser car, comme l'indique un haut fonctionnaire du Cabinet Office, la majorité d'entre elles n'est pas subventionnée par le secteur public. D'ailleurs, comme le précise Ralph Michell, leur sort a varié selon le secteur envisagé : les associations d'aide au retour à l'emploi ont dû s'adapter au Work Programme, celles du secteur social ont vu leur financement baisser, celles qui travaillent avec les services de santé ont été moins touchées mais ont vu leur environnement bouleversé par les réformes du NHS.

En conséquence, la simultanéité de l'austérité avec le projet a suscité une forte confusion entre le discours sur la *Big Society* et le ressenti des individus, comme si le citoyen devait lui-même pallier le retrait de certains services publics. Pire, la *Big Society* a pu apparaître, selon Jason Edwards, comme un prétexte à la baisse des dépenses publiques, cette méfiance étant abondamment soulignée par le *Labour* et les *Lib-Dem*.

Pourtant, malgré la baisse des dépenses publiques depuis 2010, la satisfaction des citoyens à l'égard des services publics telle que relevée dans les sondages reste inchangée. Seules les personnes très dépendantes des services publics sociaux, les plus âgés par exemple, l'ont ressentie. Après l'augmentation massive des dépenses en 1990-2010, il est normal que leur baisse ne soit pas si douloureuse, rappelle Ben Page. Ce n'est donc pas l'austérité elle-même qui est ici regrettée, mais sa confusion avec la *Big Society*.

Concernant l'engagement des citoyens, aucune hausse significative du bénévolat ni des dons depuis 2010 n'a été observée, ce qui laisse penser, analyse Ralph Michell, que le programme de *Big Society* n'a pas porté ses fruits de ce côté-là et que les habitudes culturelles ne sont pas simples à changer[21]. L'impopularité du concept serait également

21. Il s'agit ici de l'analyse de Ralph Michell, représentant de l'ACEVO. Cette position tranche avec celle du Cabinet Office qui montre que le bénévolat est en hausse en Grande-Bretagne depuis 2010 – même s'il reste encore en deçà du niveau de 2005. La question est de savoir si cette dynamique se maintiendra dans le moyen terme.

due, selon Geoff Mulgan, à l'absence d'envie, de la part du public, de prendre en charge lui-même les services publics, excepté peut-être dans le domaine de la sécurité. Nigel Williams complète l'analyse : le bénévolat et l'implication des citoyens dans la fourniture des services publics et des projets de leurs « communautés » nécessitent un surplus de temps, or cela semble aujourd'hui difficile, alors que les jeunes, les retraités et les femmes au foyer doivent parfois prendre un travail d'appoint pour faire face, respectivement, à la hausse du coût des études supérieures[22], à la faiblesse de certaines retraites et à des difficultés financières dues à la crise.

Par ailleurs, la diversification de la fourniture du service public n'a pas encore fait ses preuves. Certaines *charities* ou entrepreneurs sociaux, incapables de répondre aux appels d'offres – par exemple celles du Work Programme –, se trouvent souvent en situation de sous-traitance à l'égard de grands acteurs privés. Cela tient à plusieurs éléments : la taille importante des contrats passés, la méthode d'appel d'offres favorisant les grosses organisations capables de baisser leurs prix et le fait que les secteurs privé et social n'ont pas le même accès au capital, ce dernier point posant également problème dans l'intégration par les *charities* du « *payment by result* ».

Certains se montrent très sévères, comme Ralph Michell, estimant que le Gouvernement a choisi le service le moins cher pour des résultats rapides mais superficiels – par exemple le prestataire privé ne s'occupera pas de réinsérer les personnes les plus difficiles –, au lieu de s'appuyer sur l'expertise des associations. Pire, pour Tim Knox, on aurait remplacé un monopole public, celui de l'Etat, par un monopole privé, celui des grandes firmes s'étant appropriées la plupart des contrats proposés.

C'est pourquoi, pour les nouveaux contrats en cours (suivi de la liberté conditionnelle), le Gouvernement a cherché à définir la taille optimale des services à confier à ses prestataires en structurant mieux les contrats et en rendant beaucoup plus transparente la nature des risques transférés à l'association sous-traitante. Il est toutefois trop tôt pour évaluer cette mesure.

Plus profondément, comme l'expliquent Ben Page et Julian Le Grand, l'erreur du Gouvernement a été de penser que le public se souciait de la diversité des prestataires possibles

22. Il a été décidé pour la rentrée 2012 une hausse des droits d'inscription en Licence et un plafond pour les droits de l'ensemble des cursus, les droits d'inscription en Licence étant établis au plan national et ceux en Master et Doctorat étant fixés par les universités elles-mêmes. Cette réforme impose une augmentation d'au moins 40% des frais de scolarité, qui sont passés de 3 270 £ à 6.000 £, avec un maximum de 9.000 £ par an.

du service public, alors que son seul souci porte sur la qualité de la prestation. De plus, contrairement à ce que les politiques attendaient, la plupart des personnes n'utilisent pas les informations qui leur sont fournies en ligne sur les prestataires ou l'évaluation des services, notamment pour comparer les prestations des uns et des autres – ils se fient plutôt à leur expérience. Et comme le rappelle Ben Page, même si les individus disent aspirer à plus de liberté au niveau local, ils estiment que les standards des services publics devraient être identiques en tout lieu.

D'autres critiques se font plus globales : Jason Edwards critique un projet selon lui uniquement social et économique, et non politique, ne disant rien du pouvoir que les citoyens peuvent exercer sur la façon dont les services sont fournis.

Si quelques-uns comme Ben Hall voient une possibilité de retour du concept de *Big Society* aux prochaines élections, la plupart, tels Anne McElvoy et Ben Page, restent pessimistes. D'autres thèmes l'auront remplacé : l'éducation, l'emploi, peut-être l'Europe, les *Tories* revenant aux sujets qui leur sont propres, comme la défense du libre marché et la responsabilité individuelle. Pour Bale, l'échec de la *Big Society* n'aura pas d'impact sur la capacité des *Tories* à gagner les prochaines élections, simplement parce que le *Labour* se montre incapable de proposer une alternative suffisamment convaincante.

Des contradictions intrinsèques ?

La *Big Society* s'est montrée inégale dans sa mise en œuvre et ses résultats. Au-delà de ses difficultés de déploiement, elle comportait peut-être en elle-même, dès sa conception, des ambiguïtés qui l'ont rendue imparfaite et expliquent *a posteriori* ses limites. Dès l'origine la *Big Society* a en effet souffert de l'ampleur du projet, du manque de soutien de l'entièreté du Parti Conservateur et de l'absence d'une sociologie suffisamment fine pour fonder une véritable théorie du changement.

La *Big Society* reste une juxtaposition aléatoire de poliques. Son ambiguïté est double : elle est à la fois une vision philosophique et un programme politique ; elle est à la fois étroite et large. Tout ceci en fait, estiment Geoff Mulgan et Ralph Michell, un programme trop ambitieux et donc imprécis. De nombreuses actions très positives se rattachant implicitement à la *Big Society* n'ont pas été reconnues comme telles par ceux qui les ont menées et ceux qui en bénéficient. L'opinion a donc pu se montrer tout à fait favorable au bénévolat ou à une entraide renouvelée au sein des « communautés », tout en éprouvant de l'hostilité à l'égard de l'idée de *Big Society*, volontiers associée aux coupes budgétaires.

Dans tous les cas, le projet s'est montré trop vaste et complexe, selon un haut fonctionnaire du Cabinet Office, pour pouvoir susciter des réactions unilatéralement positives ou négatives.

La conjoncture a certainement joué un rôle dans ce malentendu, mais l'absence de cadrage du projet dès l'origine a empêché ses promoteurs de le mener juqu'au bout.

Deuxième imperfection, la *Big Society* n'a pas réuni l'ensemble du Parti Conservateur, oscillant entre un projet de centre-droit et un projet conservateur. Anne McElvoy pense ainsi que la *Big Society* n'était pas compatible avec la base des *Tories* – tendanciellement plus âgés, investis dans des initiatives locales mais peu attirés par un discours modernisateur en rupture apparente avec l'ère Thatcher, ni avec les partisans du libre-marché, les Conservateurs les plus orthodoxes, hostiles à un projet considéré comme trop léger (« *fluffy* », Sarah Neville). D'autres comme Tim Knox y voient au contraire un dessein à l'origine profondément conservatrice, mais qui n'a pas su convaincre les fidèles de Thatcher, vexés de la mauvaise interprétation de ses propos historiques sur la société. Et même lorsque que la *Big Society* est adoubée par les *Tories*, Eccles rappelle que ceux-ci l'interprètent différemment selon leurs convictions politiques : projet de réduction de la taille de l'Etat pour la droite des *Tories*, attention accrue portée à la société pour leur aile gauche. Ainsi, Remarque Helen Disney, si la *Big Society* a déserté la place publique, ce serait le signe de la victoire idéologique des Conservateurs orthodoxes, et il n'est pas étonnant dans ce cadre que Steve Hilton ait plié bagages en mars 2012…

S'il est bien un domaine où cette divergence a laissé des traces, c'est la politique familiale. La *Big Society* se donnait pour but de renforcer la société civile et notamment la famille, mais, comme le precise John Loughlin, elle n'a pas su donner lieu à des politiques publiques et fiscales adéquates en faveur de celle-ci. Si certains comme Nigel Williams estiment que cette carence tient moins à la coalition qu'au manque de ressources de l'Etat, Peter Oborne y voit le signe de George Osborne, chancelier de l'Échiquier, qui n'est pas un adepte de la *Big Society* et dont les racines idéologiques sont à chercher du côté de la droite libérale américaine.

Enfin, la *Big Society* se serait déployée sans vraiment s'appuyer sur une vision sociologique. Les Conservateurs auraient prôné l'appel au bénévolat sans s'interroger sur sa réalité et ses marges de manoeuvre possibles. Pourtant, il ne faut pas oublier que la Grande-Bretagne reste un pays relativement généreux en don et en bénévolat. Surtout, si la majorité des personnes ne cherche pas à prendre la responsabilité de la fourniture des

services publics, la viabilité de la *Big Society*, comme le fait remarquer Young, ne dépend justement pas de la majorité ! En prenant appui sur ces données, les *Tories* auraient pu s'interroger plus finement sur les véritables ressorts et modalités d'un investissement accru des citoyens. De même, ils auraient pu établir des stratégies différentes selon les catégories sociales. Les défenseurs de la *Big Society* refusent de n'y voir qu'un sujet de « *middle class* », mais force est de constater que dans certains cas c'est bien la classe moyenne qui s'y est le plus investie (*free schools*, bénévolat). Si cela n'est *a priori* pas un obstacle, le fait de ne pas réfléchir en amont à cette question a rendu la stratégie imprécise et fait naître une critique simple et inévitable, à tort ou à raison, sur les inégalités dont serait porteuse cette politique.

L'absence de réflexion sociologique a aussi empêché de penser, comme soubassement, une veritable théorie du changement, une compréhension de la relation entre l'idée et sa mise en œuvre, pour encourager par exemple les citoyens à se comporter de façon responsable. Pour Matthew Taylor, il a manqué à la *Big Society*, comme préalable, une veritable « conversation nationale ».

C'est peut-être en raison de ces manques que la vision et la mise en œuvre de la *Big Society* ont été paradoxalement très centralisées. C'est un commentaire récurrent chez les personnes interrogées : Toby Eccles en fait la remarque, Jason Edwards l'évoque dans le cas de l'éducation, tandis que John Loughlin insiste sur l'imposition des politiques du haut vers le bas. A moins que ce ne soit cette vision centralisée qui ait empêché de penser réellement sa mise en œuvre. La centralisation n'est pas forcément un défaut en soi, mais elle se heurte à la vocation initiale de la *Big Society* : *« The present Secretary of State hasn't abused this power, but a future one might not be so benign. »* (Toby Young).

La communauté perdue

La carence de vision sociologique du projet fait écho à une interrogation plus profonde: s'il manque une vision claire des catégories sociales impliquées dans la société, la *Big Society* ne souffre-t-elle pas d'une méconnaissance de la société telle qu'elle existe aujourd'hui ?

En effet, explique Jeremy Jennings, si l'on conçoit aisément que le modèle de la *Big Society* puisse fonctionner dans une société de type burkien, dotée d'une aristocratie et d'une église actives, quid de sa réussite si ces conditions de possibilité ne sont plus réunies ? A tout le moins, selon John Loughlin, la *Big Society* suppose des individus aux

moeurs fortes et une société imprégnée de religion. On pourrait ainsi définir la *Big Society* comme l'application d'un type particulier d'altruisme, l'altruisme moral (« *conscientious altruism* », Nigel Williams), soit le fait pour une personne de donner quelque chose qu'elle ne recevra pas forcément en retour. Or pour Jeremy Jennings un tel engagement semble de plus en plus difficile à une époque de moins en moins religieuse, tandis que les sociétés occidentales ne se caractérisent plus par un ciment de valeurs uniques partagées, car elles sont multiculturelles et diverses, parfois destructurées, avec de multiples croyances. Espérer un socle de valeurs unique n'est peut-être même pas souhaitable, car on oublie la dimension potentiellement oppressante de toute communauté. Et même si d'autres communautés fondées sur la foi existent voire se développent, elles peuvent comporter des dimensions dérangeantes lorsqu'elles sont trop revendicatives. Il y a donc sans doute dans la *Big Society* une forme d'idéalisation de la communauté.

Si les « communautés de destin » ne sont plus alors le ciment adéquat, on peut s'appuyer selon John Loughlin sur des « communautés de choix », avec le risque qu'elles s'avèrent insuffisamment solides. Jeremy Jennings résume parfaitement la question : l'enjeu est ici de définir le liant adéquat de la société moderne ; en son absence l'individu ne peut s'épanouir, mais s'il est trop fort l'individu s'en trouve oppressé. Une variante plus simple du « *conscientious altruism* » est peut-être possible : Nigel Williams parle d'encourager les individus, même s'ils ne sont pas en mesure de donner, à ne pas prendre à la société davantage que ce qu'ils méritent.

A défaut de réaliser la *Big Society* dans son intégralité, l'investissement de la société civile dans la vie publique reste un enjeu clé qu'il faudra continuer de développer. Les moyens diffèrent très largement selon les interlocuteurs. Certains préconisent un rôle accru de l'éducation par la famille et par l'école pour recréer un système de valeurs fondamentales non relatives, solides, formant un tout cohérent : *« Pour que la société fonctionne, nous avons besoin d'une identité, de valeurs et d'un système de socialisation qui permette de transmettre ces dernières [...] Je ne connais pas la réponse à ces défis, mais la Big Society est une tentative intéressante dans cette perspective. »* (John Loughlin). A l'inverse, pour les plus libéraux comme Tim Knox : *« government should do less, spend less and let people take control over their own lives. That is giving power to people. That is what has happened in the private sector in schools. »*

Ambition plus limitée mais importante, il subsiste la nécessité, pour l'Etat et les « communautés », de savoir attirer et renouveler les bénévoles, ce que rappellent Ralph Michell et Toby Young.

UNE NOUVELLE VISION DE LA SOCIÉTÉ ET DE L'ENTREPRISE ?

L'entreprise, l'impensé de la *Big Society* ?

Il apparaît dès le départ que le monde des affaires n'est pas inclus dans la *Big Society*, la notion étant clairement identifiée aux individus et communautés. Seules quelques initiatives ponctuelles ont montré un souci de la part de l'administration d'impliquer les entreprises. C'est le cas de la Partnerships Team au sein du Cabinet Office, chargée d'identifier les domaines d'intervention communs aux entreprises et administrations, afin qu'elles y travaillent ensemble, le Gouvernement jouant le rôle d'agrégateur d'initiatives fragmentaires, par exemple dans le domaine de l'emploi des jeunes.

Il peut arriver que le Gouvernement se fasse plus directif, bien qu'il préfère toujours l'incitation douce (*nudge*). Ainsi l'administration n'hésite pas à concevoir la réduction des contraintes administratives (Red Tape Challenge, cf. note *supra*) comme un moyen de demander en échange aux entreprises de jouer un rôle positif dans la société.

Sans impulsion particulière, l'implication des entreprises dans la *Big Society* est restée dépendante des initiatives individuelles. Certaines entreprises ont ainsi décidé de lier plus ou moins explicitement certains projets de Responsabilité sociale de l'entreprise (RSE) à la *Big Society*. Dans ce cadre, une entreprise dite responsable aura moins tendance à offrir des financements qu'à avoir des pratiques exemplaires dans la conduite de ses affaires ; elle réfléchira à son engagement dans sa communauté ; elle s'engagera de façon simple, par exemple en aidant le tiers secteur à se structurer : Stephen Howard évoque par exemple le prêt d'espaces de travail, le tutorat et le financement. C'est notamment dans les sujets liés à l'emploi et à l'éducation que les entreprises peuvent apporter une aide précieuse, d'où leur rôle dans les *academies*[23], les entreprises trouvant dans ce dernier cas l'occasion de soustraire la direction des écoles aux autorités locales et aux syndicats, que les entreprises trouvent en général sourdes à leurs besoins en termes de compétences. L'organisation Business in the community (BITC) dirigée par Stephen Howard, qui réunit des entreprises partageant des objectifs de RSE, a saisi l'occasion offerte par la *Big Society* pour lancer, en lien avec l'administration, le projet de « Business Connectors » : les entreprises membres de BITC mettent à disposition d'un quartier, à plein temps, certains de leurs salariés qui y apportent leurs compétences. L'objectif est de fournir d'ici 2015 des Business Connectors à 200 quartiers, avec une cible de 70 Connectors à fin 2013.

23. Les entreprises peuvent sponsoriser ces dernières mais ne peuvent s'en voir confier la gestion, celle-ci n'étant pas ouverte aux acteurs du secteur lucratif.

Si les écoles accueillent favorablement l'aide des enterprises, les enseignants restent en général méfiants. Les grandes enterprises sont bien reçues par le tiers secteur si elles favorisent l'innovation sociale civique. Toutefois, certaines *charities* souhaiteraient que les entreprises aillent plus loin dans leur engagement : Ralph Michell voudrait voir celles-ci repenser leurs *business models* afin d'améliorer la vie de leurs « communautés », ou encore convertir leurs employés au bénévolat au moment de la retraite.

A l'inverse de cette vision, les analystes les plus libéraux critiquent une attente exagérée à l'égard du monde des affaires : pour Anne McElvoy, il est demandé aux entreprises de « donner quelque chose en retour », mais le fait même de mener une activité économique devrait être suffisant. Surtout, les entreprises redoutent de devoir remplacer un gouvernement impécunieux. Ce n'est donc pas le rôle des entreprises que de s'investir particulièrement dans la *Big Society*, d'où la méfiance de certains dirigeants ou leur indifférence face à celle-ci[24]. Et même si certains ont réalisé avec le temps que l'implication du *business* dans le projet pourrait s'avérer intéressante, il était trop tard, la *Big Society* étant devenue entre-temps trop politisée, ce que les entreprises souhaitent à tout prix éviter.

Dépasser l'opposition entre *business* et secteur social

La *Big Society* est aussi l'occasion de l'émergence d'une nouvelle conception de l'action sociale. Si elle n'est pas à l'origine de cette nouvelle vision, l'opposition entre le monde des affaires et le tiers secteur ou secteur social ayant commencé à s'estomper dès Blair, elle marque une étape importante dans son avènement. Les entrepreneurs sociaux – les entrepreneurs qui souhaitent créer du lien social mais en en faisant un *business*, pour éviter les impasses du mode de fonctionnement public ou caritatif – existent depuis un certain temps, mais la *Big Society* a cherché à mettre en valeur leurs actions.

Pourtant, certains comme Geoff Mulgan restent sévères, estimant que la *Big Society* n'a rien proposé de véritablement nouveau au plan économique, alors que de nouveaux modèles émergent comme l'économie collaborative. D'autres insistent sur la nécessité de renforcer la compétitivité des organisations à but social. Pour cela, souligne Toby Eccles, l'Etat doit apprendre à bien acheter : ne pas avoir de fournisseur unique, ne pas prendre le prix comme seul critère d'évaluation, apprendre à disqualifier les mauvais prestataires malgré leur taille.

24. Dans le cadre de notre étude sur la *Big Society,* nous avons cherché à rencontré la CBI (Confederation of British Industry), équivalent du Medef français, sans succès.

Il est cependant un domaine dans lesquel la *Big Society* a contribué à favoriser l'efficacité et donc la légitimité du tiers secteur. Comme l'explique Toby Eccles, l'accès aux financements et au capital des organisations à but social est difficile, car beaucoup d'investisseurs privilégient le court terme, alors que l'action sociale ne se déploie que dans le long terme. C'est notamment la définition de l'entreprise sociale par l'Etat – une organisation qui utilise la plus grande part de son capital pour réaliser sa mission – qui limite son accès au capital privé classique et condamne les entreprises sociales à rester petites et donc à ne pouvoir concurrencer les grandes entreprises privées, d'où un cercle vicieux dommageable.

Pour répondre à cette difficulté, le Gouvernement a décidé de déployer les Social Impact Bonds (SIB) [25], dispositifs conçus il y a quelques années déjà, mais jamais entièrement développés. Les secteurs de prédilection en sont la prévention de la récidive et la réinsertion, la prise en charge des enfants, le traitement de l'addiction, la santé et le soin aux personnes âgées. Si la comparaison est souvent faite de ces instruments avec les partenariats public-privé (PPP), elle est inexacte puisque l'idéal n'en est pas une sous-traitance complète au secteur privé, mais un mix entre le privé et d'autres structures, notamment sociales.

S'il est encore trop tôt pour évaluer l'impact des SIB en place aujourd'hui, il reste indéniable, selon Geoff Mulgan, que tout un champ nouveau émerge, celui de l'innovation sociale, dans la santé, l'emploi et l'éducation, grâce à un outil formidable doté d'un grand potentiel, juge Ralph Michell. L'avantage des SIB est de focaliser le service public sur son résultat et de susciter davantage d'innovation, tout en faisant intervenir des financeurs privés pour un objet social. Quant aux critères d'évaluation des SIB, s'ils ne sont pas scientifiquement parfaits, ils constituent déjà une avancée en cherchant à se distinguer des *targets*, sources d'incitations perverses.

En définitive, explique Toby Eccles, on s'achemine peut-être vers une indistinction croissante entre le financement privé et les autres types de financement, notamment publics, sachant que le financement privé adapté aux missions sociales restera sans doute du « *slow money* ». On peut donc imaginer qu'à l'avenir, une fois qu'un SIB sera considéré comme solide, un appel au capital purement privé puisse être envisagé, même s'il est probable que l'Etat exigera toujours certaines garanties concernant l'investisseur.

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25. « Obligation à impact social » permettant à l'Etat de financer, grâce à des investisseurs privés, certaines actions à caractère social en les confiant à des organisations à but non lucratif. L'Etat s'engage à reverser aux investisseurs une part des économies de long terme réalisées grace à la réussite des actions enterprises.

Il est toutefois trop tôt pour envisager ce type de modèle. L'intérêt du secteur financier pour les SIB est réel, mais doublé de profondes interrogations sur la capacité de l'administration à monétiser les résultats obtenus. Les SIB restent aussi des montages complexes, qui contrastent avec des mécanismes de prêts plus simples qui gagneraient eux aussi à être développés pour le tiers secteur (Ralph Michell).

Alors que la logique privée s'introduit dans l'univers de l'action sociale, c'est la vocation sociale de l'entreprise elle-même, selon Matthew Taylor, qui se trouve mise en valeur par la *Big Society*. C'est ce que montrent, chacun à leur manière, la RSE et l'entreprenariat social, qui cherchent à créer de nouvelles catégories en dehors des missions caritatives classiques ou de l'approche traditionnelle du *business*. Cela fait espérer à certains qu'un jour entreprises et secteur social ne fassent plus qu'un, afin de revenir à l'intention originelle du capitalisme, l'entreprise comme institution sociale. La bonne mesure en serait ce que Taylor nomme la « *social productivity* », soit la capacité pour une institution de permettre aux individus de répondre à leurs propres besoins, qu'elle soit une entreprise sociale, si elle équilibre la génération de revenus et l'impact social, une entreprise traditionnelle, si elle cherche à intégrer dans ses objectifs une dimension sociale, ou encore l'administration, si elle sait responsabiliser intelligemment (« *empower* ») les citoyens.

UNE *BIG SOCIETY* À LA FRANÇAISE ?

Ce tableau des transformations en cours en Grande-Bretagne invite à s'interroger sur leur éventuelle transposition en en France.

Tim Bale estime que les obstacles ne manquent pas, dans notre pays, au développement d'une « *Big Society* à la française ». Norman avance deux arguments dans cette direction. Premièrement, les organisations caritatives y semblent trop peu puissantes. Deuxièmement, on accorde à l'Etat en France un rôle prépondérant dans de nombreux domaines : planification économique, soutien aux industries stratégiques, enseignement supérieur. Pour John Loughlin, la dépendance à l'égard de l'Etat y est bien plus forte qu'en Grande-Bretagne, ce qui étouffe la société civile ; c'est une raison pour vouloir libérer cette dernière, mais aussi une contrainte. Plus généralement, l'idée règne en France que des réponses déterminées existent pour chaque problème et qu'il y aura toujours suffisamment de hauts fonctionnaires pour les trouver. *« In Britain, we believe in ideas, but not in ideology »* (Jesse Norman). Enfin, il manque en France une culture suffisamment développée de l'expertise et de l'évaluation pour pouvoir mener à bien une telle entreprise.

Il faut toutefois relativiser l'idée que la France manquerait d'une véritable société civile, ce que rappelle JeremyJennings en évoquant les travaux de Pierre Rosanvallon. La France pourrait ainsi réfléchir à la façon de développer davantage l'activité de cette dernière. Elle pourrait aussi se pencher sur les *free schools,* mais avec prudence, car celles-ci impliquent de fait une inégalité de traitement qui pourrait être mal perçue dans notre pays. Selon Jesse Norman enfin, certaines caractéristiques de la France la rapproche de la vision prônée par la *Big Society*, comme l'importance de la commune et la forte proximité de ses élus avec la population.

CONCLUSION : LA BIG SOCIETY, CONSENSUS OU NOUVELLE FRONTIÈRE POLITIQUE ?

Il y a beaucoup à apprendre des réformes mais aussi comme des échecs de la *Big Society*. D'ailleurs l'intérêt d'autres pays pour ces dernières est révélateur (*welfare*, education).

Si le concept n'a pas rencontré d'écho immédiat à sa mesure, c'est peut-être, avance Toby Young, qu'il était par trop original ou même, selon Sarah Neville, trop précoce. Mais quand le coût des services publics sera encore moins supportable, la réflexion sur les nouveaux moyens de fourniture des services publics sera de plus en plus nécessaire, et rencontrera une audience plus consciente de ces enjeux. Reste que la transformation la plus radicale, celle du *welfare*, n'en est qu'à ses débuts, et qu'il est encore trop tôt pour savoir dans quelle mesure elle sera acceptée.

Alors que la *Big Society* est un projet de très long terme qui aurait mérité d'être progressivement mis en œuvre, la crise est venue déjouer cet agenda. Mais le concept de *Big Society* a cela d'intéressant qu'il a fait resurgir la société dans un débat public centré sur l'alternative Etat-marché. Il renvoie ainsi à d'autres systèmes, tel le concept allemand d'économie sociale de marché, en ce que la *Big Society* met en regard les rôles respectifs de l'Etat, de la société et du marché. A chaque société de choisir ensuite quel est le rapport de force adéquat entre ces trois acteurs. Aujourd'hui, estime Helen Disney, alors que le marché a dévoilé ses défauts et que l'Etat n'est ni omnipotent ni suffisamment proche des individus, le concept de *Big Society* propose une perspective crédible car il répond aussi bien aux critiques de la droite, pour qui le *welfare state* présente des effets pervers, qu'à celles de la gauche, défavorable à la libéralisation unilatérale.

En pressentant une tendance, celle d'un investissement bénévole de plus en plus simple et de moins en moins coûteux à long terme, la *Big Society* a également permis selon Matthew Taylor d'entrevoir les prochains défis des décennies à venir : la refondation de la hiérarchie par de nouveaux types de *leadership* et celle de la solidarité, deux modèles nécessaires mais dont la forme ne correspond plus à notre époque, ainsi que la nécessité de créer de nouvelles institutions.

Il est à ce titre intéressant de constater que même chez ses détracteurs les plus virulents, la *Big Society* a suscité de l'intérêt et la reconnaissance que les problèmes, à défaut d'être résolus, avaient le mérite d'être posés. Le fait que l'ambition soit reprise au sein d'une partie du *Labour* est révélateur, de même que l'acceptation chez les Conservateurs que le nom importe moins que le projet lui-même, explique Jesse Norman. Il sera difficile pour

le *Labour* de revenir à son ancienne pratique de "*tax and spend*", même si un retour à la centralisation et à un contrôle étatique accru ne sont pas impossibles.

Pour Jesse Norman, un certain nombre des avancées de la *Big Society* ne pourront donc plus être remises en question, en raison de l'attachement des individus à celles-ci, même si elles pourraient faire leur retour sous un autre nom après les prochaines elections, ce que pensent Sarah Neville et Toby Young. Cette dynamique, déjà inscrite dans une certaine mesure dans la lignée des politiques antérieures comme le *Third Way*, a donc toutes les chances de se poursuivre malgré les éventuels changements de majorité. Toutefois comme le rappelle Matthew Taylor, la question politique reste entière : l'avenir appartiendra aux partis susceptible de répondre au besoin des jeunes générations de provoquer elles-mêmes les changements, et non de les confier à d'autres.

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Comme nous l'a montré l'ensemble de ces entretiens, la *Big Society* a suscité dans la société un certain scepticisme, non pas en raison de ses ambitions, mais parce qu'un tel programme, ne pouvant être réalisé du jour au lendemain, nécessite une très forte constance politique pour être mené à bien.

L'austérité a-t-elle mis à mal cette constance, ou bien marque-t-elle seulement un coup d'arrêt dans une dynamique qui ne fait que commencer ? Ainsi, lors de son discours sur la *Big Society* le 15 février 2011, David Cameron faisait la distinction entre son devoir, l'assainissement des finances publiques et l'« *economic recovery* », le redressement de l'économie, et ce qu'il désignait comme sa mission, la « *social recevory* », le rétablissement ou la guérison sociale face à une société brisée. C'est là que résidait selon lui le rôle de la *Big Society*[26]. Reste à savoir si une fois son devoir accompli, D. Cameron retournera à sa mission[27].

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26. *« I know full well that the first task that my government has got to carry out is sorting out the deficit and the debt and an economic recovery. That is – if you like, our duty. […] That is our duty, but if you like, what is my mission? What is it I am really passionate about? It is actually social recovery as well as economic recovery. I think we need a social recovery, because as I have said lots of times in the past, there are too many parts of our society that are broken, whether it is broken families or whether it is some communities breaking down; whether it is the level of crime, the level of gang membership; whether it's problems of people stuck on welfare, unable to work; whether it's the sense that some of our public services don't work for us – we do need a social recovery to mend the broken society. To me, that's what the Big Society is all about.*
PM's speech on Big Society, 15 February 2011.

27. L'appréciation mitigée qui ressort de ces entretiens mérite aussi d'être nuancée, compte tenu du contexte de réalisation de ces derniers, au printemps 2013. Le redémarrage économique, qui signe en apparence le succès de la stratégie économique et budgétaire du gouvernement Cameron, ne sera confirmé qu'à l'automne, après une période de doutes vis-à-vis de cette dernière.

1 Politics

Jesse Norman

Jesse Norman est député (MP) de Hereford and South Herefordshire.

Après des études à Eton et Oxford puis un doctorat en philosophie de University College London, Jesse Norman a dirigé un projet éducatif en Europe de l'est de 1988 à 1991, avant de rejoindre Barclays. En 1997, il devient enseignant-chercheur en philosophie. En 2006, il se présente comme candidat Conservateur aux élections locales (*council*) et est choisi comme candidat aux élections législatives fin 2006.

Conseiller du *Shadow Chancellor* George Osborne et de Boris Johnson, il est élu député (MP) pour Hereford and South Herefordshire en 2010, et devient membre du Treasury Select Committee, structure parlementaire chargée d'examiner les comptes de plusieurs organes publics dont le Trésor. Début 2013, il rejoint le nouveau "*parliamentary advisory board on policy*" créé en avril 2013 par Cameron afin de nourrir le parti en idées dans la perspective de la prochaine élection législative. Il le quitte toutefois en septembre 2013, en raison de divergences concernant l'intervention militaire en Syrie.

Très engagé dans la vie associative de Herefordshire et dans l'amélioration du service public local, Jesse Norman a par exemple accompagné le développement de SchoolsFirst.org.uk, qui aide les *communities* à lutter contre la fermeture des écoles.

Senior Fellow du think tank Policy Exchange avant son élection en 2010, il est considéré comme l'un des inspirateurs de la *Big Society*, conception qu'il développe dans *The Big Society* (2010). Auparavant, son rapport *Compassionate Conservatism* (2006) (Policy exchange) avait été décrit comme "*the guidebook to Cameronism*" par le *Sunday Times* et le suivant, *Compassionate Economics*, très bien reçu par la critique. Revenant aux sources du conservatisme, et renouant avec ses premiers travaux – il a écrit un ouvrage sur Michael Oakeshott [28] - Jesse Norman a publié en 2013 un essai sur Burke [29].

28. *The Achievement of Michael Oakeshott*, Gerald Duckworth & Co, 1993.
29. *Edmund Burke: Philosopher, Politician, Prophet*, William Collins, 2013.

Jesse Norman décrit la *Big Society* comme un principe d'organisation de l'Etat qui consiste à donner davantage de pouvoir (« *empowering* ») aux institutions intermédiaires. Quant à sa réalisation, les obstacles à la *Big Society* ont été nombreux : le pays est notamment trop endetté pour soutenir financièrement la transition d'un modèle centralisé et étatiste à un modèle où l'on redonne du pouvoir aux individus et à la société civile par rapport à l'Etat, notamment pour le fonctionnement des services publics. Malgré tout, la *Big Society* existe, même si le nom lui-même est peu employé aujourd'hui. Elle reste un processus de réformes à long terme.

Une *Big Society* en France serait improbable : malgré certaines caractéristiques favorables comme les collectivités locales, la philanthropie et le bénévolat y sont probablement trop faibles, tandis que l'on accorde à l'Etat un rôle trop prépondérant dans de nombreux domaines. Enfin « *in Britain, we believe in ideas, but not in ideology.* », au contraire de la France.

Institut de l'entreprise: How would you define the "Big Society"? According to you, is it more of a political vision, a state of mind to be aroused among the opinion (in your 2010 book, you wrote about the importance of "changing the viewpoint" about the State and the economy) or a set of clearly circumscribed public policies?

Jesse Norman: The Big Society is originally a phrase, widely believed to have been coined by Samantha Cameron, the Prime Minister's wife. What is the scope of the Big Society? In my view, the Big Society is an organising principle for government. It is not something that is just restricted to some area of policy, it's not just about philanthropy, it's not just about volunteering: it's about a whole variety of aspects of government running across the spectrum from one side to the other. And in particular, the core principles of the Big Society are empowering institutions which lie between the individual state and a rich conception of personal empowerment. The scope of the Big Society therefore is very wide, and we should expect to see a whole variety of areas. I think we have seen a whole variety of those principles, you see them through the proliferation of free schools and academies, through the empowerment of local government, you see them through the reduction in dependency on the welfare system. Those are things which are all found within the idea of the Big Society.

Now my 2006 pamphlet laid out some of the arguments for 'compassionate Conservatism', giving some intellectual theory and backing to some of the language that

the Conservative Party of 2005 had introduced. I regard compassionate Conservatism as a brand or way of thinking about Conservatism, one of whose products is the idea of the Big Society.

Institut de l'entreprise: How do your own ideas depart from those of Phillip Blond?

Jesse Norman: *Red Tory* is a clever and paradoxical phrase. It was written on the back of a lot of work that had been done in the Conservative Party and on the back of compassionate Conservatism. Itadapts and adopts a lot of the ideas, so I wouldn't expect there to be a lot of difference. What Phillip has is a remarkable capacity to create arresting phrases and language, and he's done a very good job with publicising some of these ideas. But as a matter of substance, I don't really understand what the concept of 'Red Tory' is, because 'Red' is a description for a Communist and 'Tories' are the opposite of Communists. Tories believe in Conservatism, in limited state and in human freedom, whereas Communists don't believe in either of those things.

David Cameron's statement that "there is such a thing as society. It's just not the same thing as the state." is an indirect answer to Mrs Thatcher's quote (cf. note n°8 p.10). What Mrs Thatcher was saying was not that – as she is quoted as saying, "there is no such thing as society". What she was saying was "there's no such thing as, inverted commas, 'society'". That is, there's no such thing as something, in her view, called a society over and above the individuals and, she says, the families. Therefore what you shouldn't do is have this trite phrase that was very popular in the 1980s which is: "society demands that this is the case", or "it's in the interest of society that you do this". What she was saying was: "what do we really mean by that, if you're trying to propose something that is contrary to interest of people that are actually living in the society?" She was not saying that society doesn't exist, she was saying that it's not something over and above the individuals which make it up.

Now actually, I think that's a mistake by her. You can see why it's a mistake, because she equivocates in the quotation – you only quote part of the quotation, but she refers in the rest of the quotation to the individuals and families. But by recognising the idea of a family, Mrs Thatcher is implicitly recognising the idea of an institution, and she is therefore implicitly recognising the idea that you can have institutions which are composed of individuals, the interactions between them and the shared practices, traditions and habits that arise in the course of them, given that society may be just one of those.

There's a way of thinking about the quotation in which it's not evil, but slightly self-contradictory.

Institut de l'entreprise: In your 2010 book, you wrote that "Bush's compassionate Conservatism has virtually nothing to do with the ideas [you] are discussing". Nonetheless, with all its emphasis on volunteering, self reliant citizens and an extended role for the charities in the delivery of public services, one could hardly not think about an American import when talking about the Big Society. Isn't Tocqueville the real father of the Big Society, along with Oakeshott and Burke?

Jesse Norman: That's true. And there's no doubt that you have to distinguish between two things in America, as elsewhere. One is a thing called compassionate Conservatism, as it is implemented – a programme called 'Compassionate Conservatism'. And the second is the *idea* of compassionate Conservatism.

The programme called 'Compassionate Conservatism' was, as I described it, a contradiction: it wasn't compassionate, and it wasn't Conservatism. It included the 'No Child Left Behind' Act, which was an enormous extension of federal funding, so it wasn't very Conservative, and it wasn't very compassionate, because it was often contrary to the interests of some of the people whom it was purporting to help. That is the problem with the programme. The idea of compassionate Conservatism in America comes out of Tocqueville, but of course, I regard Tocqueville as very Burkian and very Conservative in an American way. It's a more individualistic kind of Conservatism.

The Big Society has some parentage in Tocqueville. What Tocqueville is really doing is using its extraordinary capacity to observe the Americans to reach conclusions about the nature of society based on his reading of French and American society. That reading of American society is heavily influenced by the British society which gave birth to America in the 18th Century. Now the person who best describes in outline the way that that society works and ought to work is Burke, and not Tocqueville. Although Tocqueville did not, as far as we know, read Burke, outside his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and was very critical of Burke's reading of the French Revolution, in fact Tocqueville and Burke have enormous areas of overlap.

Institut de l'entreprise: The Big Society has often been described by its detractors as a vague ideological concept; as a matter of fact, it can be very variously interpreted. In particular, what do you think of the 'Blue Labour' [30] version of it?

Jesse Norman: Blue Labour is a substantive idea. Red Tory as well is a substantive idea, but it seems more like a slogan because it's so paradoxical. Blue Labour is a substantive idea because Labour as a party have always had historically some rather Conservative strands to it.

If you look at the work of Lansbury in the 1930s, you will see strands of Labour that are highly Conservative – this is before the point at which Labour was taken over by a kind of 'state first' mentality. Blue Labour is an attempt to reconstitute the Conservative insights of Burke within the Labour Party, and that is an intellectually coherent project. Now I don't think it'll work, because I don't think the Labour Party is as a matter of fact too far committed intellectually, institutionally and financially to the 'state first' mentality supported by trade union funding. But it's an intellectually coherent attempt to wrench Labour away from that inheritance.

What isn't intellectually coherent in my view is the idea of One Nation Labour, which is the latest phrase that's come out of the Opposition. 'One Nation Labour' doesn't really have any meaning, because the context of One Nation was the idea of smoothing the relationship between the rich and the poor. Labour's approach historically has been to attack the rich, in other words, to regard the argument exclusively as one about redistribution. Now we're reaching the limits of redistribution in terms of how far you can take money through the tax system away from the rich and give it to the poor, because the rich are mobile. They're more mobile than the poor are. So the notion of 'One Nation' from a Left standpoint is, as matters presently stand, in my view, incoherent.

Institut de l'entreprise: Your idea of a Big Society lies as well in reforming capitalism. In a pamphlet written in 2010, you argued that Britain needs to return to real capitalism after more than a decade of 'crony capitalism'. You also oppose the idea of "conservative free markets" versus "liberal free markets". Do you think you have been as heard on this topic as on the other aspects of the Big Society?

Jesse Norman: I regard the government as understanding that. I don't think it's taking its understanding far enough yet, but it's making excellent progress. If you look at a piece

30. Cf note p. 17.

from my Conservative Home column, you will find a comparison of Labour's record on tax avoidance with the Conservatives' record. Labour made almost no progress on dealing with tax evasion – offshore bank accounts and accounts in Switzerland. We've just signed a tax treaty with Switzerland under a Conservative-led government, with a Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer. Labour were very happy to egg on the banks and to allow leverage in the financial market and the banking system to go up by a factor of 2.5 times in seven years when it had remained stable for 40 years prior to that. The Conservative Party is bringing sense to the financial market and is starting to push the leverage and bank borrowing down. Labour did not pass the general anti-avoidance rule, anti-abuse rule on taxation, but the Conservative Party did. There are lots of things going on at the moment that are not merely rebalancing the economy between finance and the productive manufacturing sector. Now one aspect of that is tax, but there are other aspects that could be taken further. For example, it could be improving corporate governance more than it is at the moment.

Institut de l'entreprise: We have the impression that the Big Society agenda is still effective without being named so - for example, David Cameron doesn't use the word any more.

Jesse Norman: Don't forget, if you think about the ideas of things, you introduce an idea and you talk about it to get the idea into the bloodstream. If you then are engaged in a process of reform and you keep talking about the idea and the process, the long-term process, then you have a long period where everyone says, "hold on a second, why isn't this part of the Big Society?" To which the answer is: it is. And you'll see why it is, but this is a long-term process of reform that will take a long time to operate. The Prime Minister only talks about it strategically. In his conference speech last year, which was a very good speech, he talked about the Big Society, and made it perfectly clear that he wasn't backing off on that concept at all. In general, the Big Society as an idea is a phrase that people in some cases don't particularly care for, but it's an idea that almost everyone likes and admires.

Institut de l'entreprise: So you still believe in it. As for its implementation now, I suppose the Big Society encountered a lot of obstacles. What are the main ones that it has faced?

Jesse Norman: The main obstacle to the Big Society is the idea that you have a country which is so indebted at the moment that the relatively small amounts of money that you need to assist the process of reform and the process of transition do not exist. A classic example: it would have been very nice to be able to say to universities, "we are making

you independent over a period of time; you will have the contracts you bid for from the government for research, you will have funding from student fees and there will be a student loans process in place allowing that to be paid for, and we'll introduce it over five years." But there wasn't any money! So the government was faced with the option of introducing it initially or not at all, and decided to do it quickly. It would have been much better in many ways if it had had a steady process of being able to introduce it and to say to universities, "we will have a five-year process and the amount of money you get from the government will step down in sections, whereas the amount of money you get from student fees will step up". That would have allowed everyone to adjust. After all, human beings are human beings: they require time to adjust to new circumstances. So that's the kind of example of something where it would have been helpful to have some lubricating money.

The other idea is that we still have a politics which is committed to the idea of special interests negotiating money from the government in order to pay themselves. And it's always easier for an interest to group to harass the government and say, "we need more money from you rather than going out and doing the tough business of persuading people who aren't the government to give us money."

A lot of this is about striking a different balance between reliance on the state and the natural spirit of enterprise and energy that should sustain both profit-making activity and charitable and socially cultural activities.

Institut de l'entreprise: Regarding the future of Big Society, do you think that it can survive changes in political majority?

Jesse Norman: I'm sure it will. Say we get the Labour Party at the next election coming to power – of course, in many ways, that would be disastrous. But say we did: could the Labour Party in practice go back to the big state habits of taxing and spending? No. The financial position does not permit that to happen. What's much more worrying and dangerous is that they could go back to classic Labour habits of centralisation and state control. But many of the broader ideas of the Big Society will be quite hard to reverse. When people have tasted freedom for their schools or autonomy, measurable autonomy in local government, it's quite hard for the Labour Party to come in and say "we're taking over schools again and we're going to make local government less independent and more dependent on central government." They could try it, and they might have some success ultimately, but I do think it moves the goalposts quite a bit.

Institut de l'entreprise: You were quite critical of the supremacy of economics in political programmes

Jesse Norman: I still am.

Institut de l'entreprise: If the next General Election is more focused on economic problems and issues, what is going to happen to your ideas?

Jesse Norman: There's a way of thinking about this in which the parties broadly agree about the overall shape of the economy. They have differences of views and of course parties will pretend they disagree, because they're looking for differentiations for the voters, so they will pretend to be more generous, as the Conservatives would see it, feckless and spendthrift in spending public money. But actually, the benefit of spending public money is relatively small. At that point, these other issues start to become more important, not less important, and what's interesting is that you're starting to get within the Labour Party the beginning of the recognition that actually the Party has gone horribly off-course and that there were in the year 1900 traditions on the Left that need to be reopened. For example, in the year 1900, you will have had Anarchism, Communism, different varieties of Unionism, Socialism, co-ops, mutuals, a staggering array of different traditions, many of them about worker self-help, and not about a top-down state telling people what to do. Those traditions are being reopened and reawakened again with Labour, and that's why it does make the next election much more interesting than one might think.

Institut de l'entreprise: The last question would be about the Big Society abroad. Could it be exported, especially to France?

Jesse Norman: That's a very interesting question. In France, you have elements which we would regard as being very Big Society, as the idea of local self-government. The localism of French administration goes far beyond anything we've seen in England or in Britain. On the other hand, you have other things which don't. There's the casual assumption in France, it seems to me, that the state should have a leading role in a whole variety of different areas, including planning the economy, strategic industries or universities. I think all that stuff needs to come under real intellectual questioning and assault. And what is interesting of course is that I don't know how strong French traditions of philanthropy and volunteering are, but I would guess that they are much weaker.

The other intellectually deep question is whether there's a way of emancipating France from what you might call *l'esprit cartésien*. I mean this idea that there are defined answers to things and that enough clever people from the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* might be able to address them, whereas in Britain, we're much more sceptical. In Britain, we believe in ideas, but not in ideology, and there is a deep difference between the two countries on that front. In some respects, I think the French have been right in terms of how to run a country. The British system very often leads to people running in different directions rather than a more consistent thrust of policy. But there are many other areas in which I think France is wrong. It's noticeable at the moment, and I think when you think of this *malaise économique*, you sometimes see in France in part a reaction and reflection of that.

2 Media

Ben Hall

Ben Hall est rédacteur en chef du service international (World News Editor) du *Financial Times* et ancient correspondant du *FT* à Paris.

Après des études d'histoire et de sciences politiques à Cambridge, il devient directeur des études du Center for European Reform, un *think-tank* londonien consacré aux politiques européennes, de 1996 à 2000. Il rejoint ensuite le *Financial Times* comme éditorialiste. Correspondant à Paris sous la présidence de Nicolas Sarkozy, il est ensuite nommé rédacteur en chef du service international. Fin connaisseur des similitudes et disparités entre la France et la Grande-Bretagne, il s'avère un interlocuteur précieux pour évoquer le contexte de la *Big Society* et son application à la France.

Selon Ben Hall, il existe en Grande-Bretagne un consensus politique, de la gauche à la droite, sur la *Big Society*, soit l'idée que l'on peut financer et organiser les services publics de façon moins étatique et uniforme. Toutefois la *Big Society* n'a pas encore véritablement porté ses fruits à cause d'un scepticisme général, et parce que le défi actuel est de transformer radicalement les services publics pour les adapter à des moyens réduits, ce qui excède largement le périmètre de la *Big Society*. Enfin, D. Cameron, à cause de la méfiance de certains *Tories*, a lui-même laissé l'idée s'affaiblir. Certains projets toutefois comme les *free schools*, qui entrent dans le périmètre de la *Big Society*, ont reçu un bon accueil.

Reste que malgré sa volonté de réformer l'Etat-providence, le gouvernement n'a pas touché pour l'instant, pour des raisons électorales, aux allocations universelles des retraités.

Une *Big Society* en France serait difficile, car il y manque des organisations caritatives suffisamment puissantes ainsi qu'une culture solide de l'expertise et de l'évaluation.

Institut de l'entreprise : Nous avons l'impression, et cela s'explique peut-être par les allers-retours fréquents des personnalités britanniques entre la presse, les *think tanks* et la politique, que celle-ci se trouve bien plus influencée par les idées au Royaume-Uni qu'en France, qui se vante pourtant d'être un pays très intellectuel.

Ben Hall : C'est peut-être vrai. On pourrait dire aussi l'inverse, que c'est la politique française qui reste très idéologique. Mais il y a une différence entre idée et idéologie.

Institut de l'entreprise: Effectivement le débat français est assez idéologique et figé. L'idée, c'est le contraire, c'est ce qui permet le débat, comme ici.

B.H. : C'est vrai depuis quinze ans probablement, peut-être plus, mais probablement depuis l'arrivée du *Labour* qui a changé la donne. Les *think tanks* ont fleuri sous le *Labour*, parce que Blair cherchait de nouvelles idées et de nouvelles façons de les exprimer, des « *narratives* » - l'une de ses expressions préférées.

Institut de l'entreprise: Il semble que la configuration actuelle soit proche, avec des idées forgées par des *think tanks* ou provenant de ceux qui en viennent. Les deux grands penseurs de la Big Society, Norman et Blond, mais aussi David Willetts avant qu'il ne devienne ministre. Un récit nouveau de ce que pourrait être l'avenir de l'Etat dans un monde post-crise, dans lequel on sait que les dépenses publiques sont nécessairement contraintes et que les demandes individuelles penchent vers la personnalisation et l'individualisation. Nous nous posons deux questions : le concept de Big Society a-t-il eu un véritable impact au moment des élections ? C'est un point qui paraît très contesté, y compris au sein du Parti Conservateur, puisque cela participe du recentrage du parti *Tory* – et selon certains le parti Tory aurait pu gagner seul s'il avait été plus conservateur. Ensuite, quand on regarde la mise en œuvre de la Big Society, bien des choses ont été mises en place, mais le concept lui-même paraît relativement discrédité.

B.H. : Le consensus politique sur l'idée de *Big Society* en Grande-Bretagne est fort. Ce sont les ailes gauches et droites qui y sont hostiles – à gauche – et sceptiques – à droite –, pour des raisons opposées qui tiennent à la question de la taille de l'Etat et de son rôle. Au centre de l'échiquier politique, il y a probablement un consensus, non pas sur l'expression même *Big Society*, mais sur l'idée que l'on peut financer et organiser les services publics dans un sens moins étatique et uniforme. Evidemment le concept s'est politisé, et le centre-gauche est moins enthousiaste, car l'idée est très associée aux Conservateurs, elle est « cameronesque », mais aussi parce que la gauche est plus dépendante du noyau dur de ses partisans, les fonctionnaires et les syndicats.

Institut de l'entreprise: Qu'en est-il du *Blue Labour* ? Il y a eu une appropriation par une partie du *Labour* de l'idée de Big Society par des gens comme Maurice Glasman. Qu'en est-il aujourd'hui, et Maurice Glasman a-t-il une vraie influence ?

B.H. : Glasman est assez à gauche et représente le *Old Labour*, probablement. Il est très controversé, mais aussi très médiatisé. Surtout, les médias cherchaient une nouvelle manière de présenter Ed Miliband, et son association avec Glasman a fonctionné aussi bien dans la presse conservatrice que dans *le Guardian*. C'était un moyen de faire émarger une nouvelle personnalité à gauche. Ensuite, l'émergence de ce courant correspond à un renouveau conceptuel à la suite des élections. A la fin de l'ère Blair, la réflexion du *Labour* était dans une impasse, faussement réduite à Blair = *modernising*, Brown = *antimodernising*.

Institut de l'entreprise: La Big Society a suscité au départ une grande curiosité de la part des médias. Une phase de profond scepticisme et de critique y a succédé, avec un renvoi systématiquement à une forme de cynisme. Aujourd'hui on n'en parle plus du tout, même David Cameron. Pourtant le *Cabinet Office* continue à monter des projets associés à la Big Society, sans en utiliser l'étiquette. Pensez-vous que le moment Big Society est passé, ou au contraire qu'il est encore trop tôt pour évaluer ses réalisations ?

B.H. : It is too early now. But the Big Society hasn't worked very well until then, for three reasons. First there is general skepticism about what it amounts to. Then the overwhelming issue facing this government is cuts, austerity and the economy, and therefore to sort of establish the Big Society like your big philosophy just seems peripheral. The biggest issue for the country is how it is going to completely transform public services according to the reduced means that it got. Now Big society was not about that.

Institut de l'entreprise: La manière dont vous définissez la Big Society est intéressante : vous n'y incluez pas la réforme du service public.

B.H. : No, I would include it but actually the scale of change in the public sector goes much beyond reform. Actually there are big things we are going to have to stop doing. It is not just about improving efficiency and innovating, and the reason why people don't pay so much attention to the Big Society now is because it is not the big issue.

The third reason is that I suspect Cameron himself, because of the huge distrust there is of his party towards him, doesn't play it up so much.

Coming back to your question, there are in fact more things happening in the Big Society now than there were at the beginning, and on some things the government is getting even more ambitious on Big Society activities. For example they are just putting out the entire probation services for lesser sentences, all of that being put out essentially to the voluntary and the private sector. The public sector will lose responsibility, which is a pretty big change.

Institut de l'entreprise: Pensez-vous que le thème de la Big Society pourra réémerger lors des élections de 2015, par exemple dans le bilan de Cameron?

B.H. : Yes. There is cynicism about it but actually it's a good narrative for Cameron. Cameron still needs to play that modernizing Conservative card. Of course he may not and decide to swing to the right and try and please his party, but I suspect he will not. I would imagine that they would try to provide it, especially if growth comes back.

Institut de l'entreprise: Sans Steve Hilton? Il a pourtant joué un rôle important dans la mise en avant de la Big Society.

B.H. : It goes way beyond Steve Hilton, don't you think?

Institut de l'entreprise: Bien sûr. Mais son départ est quand même un signe, tout comme celui de Nat Wei. Mais effectivement, Jesse Norman, l'un des plus fervents défenseurs de la Big Society, est membre de l'*advisory board* de Cameron. Jo Johnson quant à lui remplace Steve Hilton en quelque sorte. Mais Lynton Crosby, le nouvel election strategist de Cameron, semble préférer un axe plus droitier. L'entourage actuel de Cameron se reconnaît-il dans cette thématique-là?

B.H. : Johnson, probably. Crosby probably not. This is the big question of British politics. Is Cameron going to follow the majority of his party and swing to the right on Europe, on cuts, on drastically reshaping public services, or is he going to try and occupy the center ground on this? It is the same problem you have every election. And I don't think people actually know the answer to that question. For sure I would say that Steve Hilton was probably an important figure in that debate. But he is by no means the only one modernizing Tory. I would have thought that Jo Johnson would have considered himself a modernizing Tory.

Institut de l'entreprise: Les dernières élections ont montré qu'il y avait de très fortes divisions au sein du Parti Conservateur, les résultats de UKIP montrant la tentation de revenir vers une ligne plus orthodoxe et plus proche de la Thatcher de la fin des années 1980 - plus eurosceptique, avec un discours plus musclé sur l'immigration. Comme Cameron conserve une image personnelle meilleure que celle de son propre parti, s'il allait vers la droite ce serait plutôt pour réunir le parti, mais perdre des voix dans l'opinion. La question est donc celle de savoir s'il y a un risque pour lui de rencontrer des challengers au sein de son propre parti.

B.H. : I don't think there will be a challenge to his leadership yet. It is possible that there could be after the European elections, if they lose very badly to UKIP and there is more an assertive programme on some of these things. But it is more likely that he would stay. Therefore the bigger question for him is how he wins the next election. There is some optimism in the Tory ranks because Labour is not doing as well as you might expect and Ed Miliband has his own problems: definition and lack of a personal popularity. But the most important thing is the economy. There are just the beginnings of some signs that things are getting better. If that improves, things will look a lot better for Cameron. And it is very unlikely that he will be challenged. Not least because any challenge would split the party. There is a very strong Eurosceptic mood in the party indeed.

Institut de l'entreprise: Quand on parle de *Big Society*, l'expression récurrente est "*empowering communities*". Pour les Français, le terme de *community* n'est jamais très précis, quand il n'est pas perçu négativement. Parle-t-on ici de communautés de choix – de personnes qui s'associent sur un projet – ou d'une communauté de destin – des personnes qui partagent le même héritage ou la même religion ? Or, et c'est là un paradoxe de la *Big Society*, face à ce discours de responsabilisation des communautés, on peut imaginer que celles qui auront le plus grand intérêt à s'engager de cette façon seront les plus offensives ou les plus exclusives. En France, immédiatement, on penserait aux communautés religieuses.

B.H. : I would say the answer is that it is a very strong Conservative tradition. This is the idea that society can organize itself to provide all sorts of services, all sorts of public goods - think of the Victorian era, the foundations for hospitals, schools, social care, looking after old people, the Rotary Clubs, bowling clubs… It is English, it is British. The British society is full of clubs. You don't have any clubs, but you have *grandes écoles* and *Inspection des finances.* British conservatism has a very strong clubbish feel, I think they instinctively would not see the contradiction and the potentially divisive outcome. That would be a leftist kind of interpretation.

Institut de l'entreprise: Mais aujourd'hui, le nombre de communautés voire de religion au sein de la même société, du même pays, est plus important qu'avant, et il peut devenir plus difficile, même dans une perspective conservatrice, de l'accepter. La question centrale est l'articulation entre la *Big Society* et le multiculturalisme. Depuis une dizaine d'années, ce multiculturalisme semble moins présent au Royaume-Uni, parce qu'on en a vu aussi les limites. La *Big Society* apparaît donc à un moment où l'on est plus mesuré quant au multiculturalisme – on sait que Cameron doit composer avec la droite de son parti et sa méfiance vis-à-vis de l'immigration.

B.H. : Possibly. A lot of people in this country would be very unhappy with the idea of madrasas. But it is all about extent. Having a center for disabled kids or a youth center in a Muslim community is very different from having a school. I suppose the instinctive British response to the question would be that certainly UK has a multicultural model, France an integrationist one. We have different philosophical starting points, but the some practices are similar. You have "*communautarisme*" as well, not as bad as here, but you do. We had a practice of multiculturalism, but there was never really a philosophy in this country. It's just the way it was.

Institut de l'entreprise: Si l'on revient sur les différentes politiques associées à la Big Society, considérez-vous que la réforme de l'éducation, les *free schools,* en fasse partie?

B.H. : I think Cameron would see it as part of the Big Society, as it is a very elastic idea. To me, understanding the Big Society as a way of developing different ways of delivering public services, including some market mechanisms, I would include the free schools in it, as academies or grant-maintained schools are.

Institut de l'entreprise: On trouve des critiques très dures des *free schools.* Je pense par exemple au *Guardian*, avec la rubrique de Melissa Benn. Représentent-elles un véritable mouvement de l'opinion ou celle-ci est-elle soit indifférente soit plutôt favorable à ces réformes ?

B.H. : The idea of parents setting up their own schools, and that there is a flexibility and freedom within the system, would be very popular. The concept is quite an attractive one. But you get a lot of opposition locally when these things happen in practice because they can be quite divisive. On the left - that is the same in France -, the education debate is incredibly ideological. One of the reasons Tony Blair was so unpopular on the left was that his education reform was eating away at local democratic control and uniformity. He pushed it quite far but always within certain boundaries. City academies were divisive

because they seemed to be getting the lion share of money, more than other schools. There were always concerns that when you set up these schools you would harm other schools and pupils, which are often in poorer parts with poorer community services. That debate always existed with city academies, but it is even stronger with free schools.

Institut de l'entreprise: En France, deux obstacles potentiels viennent à l'esprit : d'abord le fait que l'école n'est pas seulement un service public, mais d'abord une institution. Le second, c'est que les enseignants représentent une part importante de la fonction publique et que leur protestations seraient sûrement vives. Y a-t-il eu un mouvement de protestation similaire de la part des enseignants en Grande-Bretagne ?

B.H. : The teachers unions here are strong, very unionized and quite militant. They are also quite intransigent and old-fashioned. But they do not carry a huge amount of popular legitimacy, and do not go on strike so much. We don't have the same reverence for teachers in this country at all, it is probably the opposite in fact. And what is interesting, especially in London, is that there is a reverence for the French education system, which is I think misplaced.

Institut de l'entreprise: I'm not sure that the Lycée Charles-de-Gaulle [31] is very representative!

B.H. : Exactly. But for the last ten years, there has been a difference between personal experience of public services and the broader perception of what they are like, the latter being always a lot more negative. It is probably still true, we still think of the Health services as being bad, but actually we are treated quite well, and I think it is fairly similar with schools. In fact it is probably more acute with schools because we had such a problem for many years with poor quality and there is still an overhang over the state education system generally not being that great. However the statistics show that the state education system in London is pretty good now.

Institut de l'entreprise: Les deux systèmes doivent différer dans la façon dont ils se sont construits historiquement. En France, depuis la Troisième République – il y avait quand même des écoles avant Jules Ferry, on l'oublie souvent –, l'école est un système uniforme, mis en place par l'Etat. Au Royaume-Uni la tradition est très certainement différente.

31. Lycée français de Londres.

B.H. : It's more organic. The pinnacle of our system is the private system, Eton and so on, which is of course a minority but they are some of the oldest schools. We've always had an elitist streak. As you know there was the whole system of grammar schools set up in early 20th century, which were abolished by Labour, because they were deemed elitist and divisive. Then we have had a much more mixed system but always with the same political argument, in the sense that the left has always argued for equality and uniformity and a comprehensive educational ideal. But my impression is that the French have been much better at running the public sector – and among them schools –, at least that used to be the case. The French public sector companies were always better run than other public sector companies. It is a very crude generalization but I still think there is some truth in it, partly because your education system produces good administrators.

Institut de l'entreprise: Une réforme du système de santé été lancée par Cameron en 2010. Quel degré de radicalité y voyez-vous?

B.H. : It is a deep and structural reform, but not necessarily ideoligical. It's all about the relationship between purchasers and providers of healthcare – it has changed so many times that it's almost impossible to understand. But what the Conservatives have done, is put power in the hands of GPs. Here doctors work often in groups, and they collectively themselves purchase treatments on behalf of their patients. Now there is a lot of concern that they do not know what they are doing. The reform hence is a question of efficiency, to make the system less bureaucratic and costly, and more coherent. It's an organisational upheaval rather than a big philosophical one. It is not going to exercise people because they would see it as some sort of privatisation of the health service. If the whole thing went wrong it would be because it would be bungled and badly implemented.

Institut de l'entreprise: Dans le dernier budget présenté par Osborne plusieurs sujets étaient mis en avant : la santé, l'école, les pensions et le développement international – avec pour ce dernier un montant très important - on parle de 6 à 9 milliards de pounds.

B.H. : It has been very controversial indeed. But the government has been changing its definition, including for example military spending.

As for pensions, the system is partly public, partly private, the public one, much smaller than the French one, being perceived by everyone – it's a universal basic pension. Under Labour, one of the big pension reforms was to reinstate the earnings loop, so that pensions rise in line with average earnings. Now the question is to decide whether we reverse that. There is also a question of pensions for public sector employees, which is different.

But there is another question. The government is for now protecting for the pensioners the universal benefits that are not means tested, which is very controversial. For example free audiovisual licence fee, fuel allowances, bus passes, free public transport, which are actually quite considerable, are not means tested, whereas you have a lot of wealthy pensioners. It becomes a generational debate. Surely pensioners have benefited enormously and have indebted the country, so arguably you should be able to tax them.

Institut de l'entreprise: Les retraités ont été finalement assez épargnés par la politique d'austérité de Cameron. Alors que Cameron a beaucoup insisté sur le rôle des jeunes générations dans le bénévolat, ceux qui devraient contribuer et ont du temps pour le faire devraient être les seniors. Il y a une absence de cohérence ici. En contrepartie du fait qu'ils sont plus épargnés, les seniors ne devraient-ils pas être mis à contribution ?

B.H. : They vote Conservative… It's then very difficult for the Tories to be seen to be pressuring pensioners.

Institut de l'entreprise: Le principal domaine sanctuarisé reste le NHS qui en montant absolu ne connaît pas de réduction. Néanmoins, la croissance des dépenses est naturelle parce qu'il y a une demande de soins. Comment le gouvernement peut-il maintenir cet équilibre ?

B.H. : There is no reimbursement here. People have to pay their medicine, receiving for that a small prescription charge. On the contrary they don't pay their GP. In those conditions it is much easier to reform the health system than in France.

There have been some problems with GPs. Whereas in France you can call up your « *médecins* » and see them very quickly, it's true that, because GPs look after more people and are often in big practices, you may never see the same one and have to wait maybe two days to get an appointment. It is not super user-friendly, but it has got easier than it used to be. The problem is as well getting from the GP to the hospital, although that has improved a lot as well.

Whereas the problem of health care in the UK was quantity, the one of education was quality. Today the health care quantity has been improved and access is much easier and quicker. But of course the demand is rising. In the same time there are a lot of cuts and they are having to close a lot of hospitals while making bigger ones, which is very controversial here because people have a quaint idea that a local hospital where they can get to in five minutes is better than a really specialist hospital you can get to in ten minutes.

Institut de l'entreprise: Si l'on compare la France et le Royaume-Uni, pensez-vous que certains éléments des réformes que met en place Cameron pourraient inspirer des réformes françaises?

B.H. : The one thing that I would say is missing in France is the role of charities. You don't have them, we do. They are a mixed bunch, essentially charities and foundations, but there is a lot of innovation and expertise in there. They have excelled in what they do, Greenpeace, Oxfam… But how many globally recognized French charities are there? *Medecins sans Frontière* maybe?

The other thing I was never entirely sure you had was the culture of evaluation, and I think it is much more engrained here in public life, and extended to different areas of public life. It is controversial, but it is being done, there are league tables of schools, rankings of hospitals, really small things, but concrete. If you in France had like us an Institute for Fiscal Studies, the whole political debate would be very different, as it provides clarity over the financial and fiscal implications of political choices. Of course you have la *Cour des Comptes*, but it does not feel very open in itself.

Institut de l'entreprise: La faible culture de l'évaluation en France tient à deux éléments. Premièrement, nous avons en France des intellectuels, mais pas d'experts, contrairement au Royaume-Uni. Deuxièmement, l'esprit républicain français fait que la concurrence y est considérée négativement, d'où notre réticence à imaginer classer les services ou les écoles.

B.H. : That's true, it's cultural. One area where you could is the inverse is health, where you have a competitive and diverse system, whereas we have a system which is changing but which is much more uniform and statist.

Anne McElvoy

Anne McElvoy est journaliste à *The Economist*, spécialiste des politiques publiques britanniques. Elle commence sa carrière au *Times* comme correspondante en Europe de l'est et en Russie. Elle travaille ensuite au *Spectator* et au *Daily Telegraph* avant de rejoindre *The Economist* en 2011 en tant que rédactrice en chef du service Politiques Publiques. Elle présente également le programme Night Waves, consacré aux arts et aux idées, sur la BBC Radio 3.

Nous avons souhaité l'interroger en raison de sa très bonne connaissance des politiques publiques du Royaume-Uni.

Pour Anne McElvoy, la *Big Society* implique un "grand citoyen" face à un "petit Etat", soit le contraire de la situation actuelle. Une acception large en est possible, des *free schools* à la diversification des prestataires du service public.

Mais ses défauts ont vite été apparents. Dès ses débuts, elle comprenait des éléments contradictoires puisque la vision en est à la fois très large et très petite. Elle n'était pas non plus compatible avec la base des *Tories,* peu attirés par un discours modernisateur. L'austérité lui a porté son coup fatal car les financements ont manqué pour soutenir des actions justement du ressort de la *Big Society* (*charities*, autorités locales) et que le temps a manqué pour s'investir dans le bénévolat. D'où une forte confusion entre le discours sur la *Big Society* et le ressenti des personnes, comme si le citoyen devait lui-même pallier le retrait des services publics.

Les *free schools*, explique Anne McElvoy, peuvent être incluses dans la *Big Society* : il s'agit d'utiliser des mécanismes du marché, en l'occurrence le choix, pour améliorer les services publics. Si la réforme est en principe positive, le système actuel des *comprehensive schools* n'étant pas satisfaisant, il est encore tôt pour l'évaluer.

Quant aux entreprises, ce n'était pas à elles, selon Anne McElvoy, de de s'investir particulièrement dans la *Big Society,* leur rôle étant avant tout de créer de la richesse.

Institut de l'entreprise: Our initial interest towards the Big Society comes from the fact that compared to France something seems to be happening here in the UK– not only Big Society, but a radical transformation of the welfare state – as if, like in the 80s, the UK were the new political laboratory for the future of Europe. So we have two questions. The first one is to understand where the Big Society is now; we know that *the Economist* has changed its view on it, and today there are no longer any articles on this topic at all in your paper.

Anne McElvoy: I think it just depends on who's writing it really. I did the last one actually. It died sometime last year.

Institut de l'entreprise: The other question is about the scope of the Big Society, because you can have different views on it – it can only be about volunteering or you can say that it's a very broad philosophy including school and welfare reforms.

A.M.: Yes – so you want to ask if it's big or small first of all? I think that was one of the problems that Cameron really had with it from the start, that it is both very big and very small and granular. If you go back to the election campaign and what did he think or Steve Hilton who persuaded him to put it into the election campaign – pretty disastrously I think, really – was that it was supposed to lay out an approach, as you suggest, to everything. As one politician once said and then realised it didn't come out quite right: "the other side wants the big state and small citizens, and we want big citizens and a small state!", and people thought "how big do you want the citizens…?" But that was the idea, the 'big citizen' and a smaller state, and that would encompass everything from free schools, more local accountability in health services… One could also argue that a lot of these things have already happened. But it's a big ribbon that you can tie around a lot of policies and pull them together, and say, "Look, it's Big Society, didn't we do well?". I think that the problem then in teasing out what that meant other than saying, 'It's a ribbon', was - you could just say that that's modern government, that's what everybody tries to do – was what makes it distinctively Big Society. And the answer to that was that Cameron feels very personally about it, because he comes from a background of volunteering: his mother has been a part-time magistrate, sort of doing good while getting on yourself, but doing good. There was a lot of this potential that could solve other problems and revive communitarianism. And I think that's quite interesting because it came at a time when people were getting more interested in localism – they were into local vegetables, why wouldn't they be into local volunteering? But that gets quite nitty-gritty, because if there's a piece of land that's derelict near where you live, how do you motivate or nudge people to do something about it, rather than phone the local council,

which is the normal British response to anything really and then complain that the councils don't do things very well? To that extent, I think he has put quite an important question; that you have people seeing all sorts of little local problems. Sometimes, obviously, it's just sort of getting on with them, getting together and volunteering in communities, but could you somehow put more energy behind that? Could you also use the technological liberation of the Internet and everybody running around with phones, where they can basically get together very quickly?

I think the idea is, for Cameron, out of a frustration that this potential wasn't fully realised and that the natural tendency of having a centre-feft government for a long time – albeit one that he had admired, he admired Mr Blair, he didn't admire Brown – is to come back to the state and to give the state more power. Various things were tried by Labour to sort of pull you away from the state, the centre and the reliance on local councils and local authorities, but the tendency was there. So I think you have these two kinds of aspirations going on at once, and then along comes austerity, which we might come to separately, which completely changes it, and that's why we don't write about it so much now, because nobody is still interested.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think that the idea of Big Society was really shared among the party?

A.M.: I know what you mean, that's a really good question. This is where – and I will say this a lot of times, and I'm sure other people will say it later, I think Jesse Norman as well – it depends what you mean by it - every answer about the Big Society seems to begin "It depends….". If you say, is there a base to the Conservative Party which is at home with the Burkian idea of little platoons that don't need the state, that get together, solve problems locally, preserve, conserve and sort of sweep up, provide the volunteer work at the church and the hospital? Of course there is, obviously because of the age profile of the Party – average age we now think is 63 – and it is not an unalloyed blessing, but in some ways it is a blessing, because they all vote, and secondly, they often volunteer. They've finished working, or a lot of the women only work part-time, or have stopped. So yes, I think in a way, the base was perfectly comfortable with the idea.

The problem with it was that it was basically run as a message up to the campaign, particularly in the campaign, which was also to do with modernising the party, which was sort of hugging huskies, putting a wind turbine on your roof, which are not things that actually many Conservatives do. Therefore, they thought "Here's another thing we don't

really understand, it's not about us." I think that if you went out and talked to the base, which would be interesting, that's what you would hear. They would go, "what is this new-fangled 'Big Society' thing?" And in fact some of the people asking you that would be people spending Sunday morning making sure the church was locked up, they'd be going to a garden fête in the afternoon, they would be raising money for something or their daughter might be volunteering at the local playgroup, but they wouldn't think themselves that that was the Big Society. And I think they felt very missed out, because they thought it was all about turning the Conservative Party at least into something they didn't understand, and at worst, they thought it was an anti-Thatcher thing. One of the key moments people discuss was when she said "there is no such thing as society, there are individual men and women and there are families" – but nobody remembers that, it's seen as "there is no such thing as society". So if you have a folk memory in your debate, you think "*She* says there's no such thing as society, *he* wants the Big Society: he's setting himself up against her." And in a way, they weren't wrong, because clearly there was this messaging going on, and the modernisers were trying to message: "we are interested in society, but it is not the same thing as the state", which I think is a pretty clear message, and the only clear thing that Cameron's ever said, really, and it's good. And that's what he meant, but they tried to do too many things at once, so I think that idea of it being sort of inspirational quite quickly became "Oh this is just another thing and I don't understand it."

Institut de l'entreprise: Did the death of Margaret Thatcher revive the debate about the Big Society because of this phrase?

A.M.: No, I'm afraid it didn't. And the reason it didn't was partly because by this time, Cameron is worried that it is seen as one of the problem things for him, because he would privately support it and understand it, but it's a slogan that just hasn't worked. And in fairness to him, this hasn't been the first time that this has happened. Blair spent a lot of time in Germany with Gerhard Schröder and started going on about the 'Third Way'. We're not very conceptual about our politics, being Anglo-Saxons, and people said "the Third what?" and they mocked it, they didn't like it.

Institut de l'entreprise: But thinking of 2015, Cameron can't just drop the idea, can he?

A.M.: Yeah, I'm getting there. So yes, when Thatcher died, it didn't really revive because it was a problem for him, this slogan. But he used the death to put out a second message: "*She* said this, *she* was misunderstood, *I*, like her, think that the state is not the

same as society, and there's been a dangerous confusion of the two things." And then he comes along in the last couple of days and wants to take more free schools and academies back under local authority control: that's a classic example where Labour hears the word 'community' and thinks "where's the local council?" and the Conservatives are trying to say, "no, you don't want more politicians: this is all about you and how we can help or nudge you to do it in collectives, little platoons, that are not the same as local councils." Because it's fine if you've got a Tory council, then you're happy, but if you haven't, then you can't change much, you can't change the electoral model, and there are certain parts of the country – large parts of the North – where you will never have a Tory council, so I think it was much more about that.

I think the other reason it didn't change after Thatcher's funeral was that austerity became a big challenge to the Big Society. Take the idea of saying to people: "you're doing pretty well. Can you please be a bit more active in your local communities? How can we help encourage you?" The Big Society was also about penal reform and the treatment of offenders. It is that idea, you know, that you base things very much in communities, and you can do it better sometimes than the people who have come with a lot of intellectual baggage and ideas about dealing with offenders or something. And so you end up with a bit of competition for the state – putting people into work, rehabilitation of offenders, and you get people saying "we did this really well." And they can have money, so it's not only the idea that they all volunteer, these things have to be funded. But the problem was that as austerity began, or at least the idea of it kicked in, even if the cuts had fallen to the next year, that if you've basically got spending falling, the charities lose spending, because a lot of them are funded through local authorities, and charities have also become very close to the state - arguably too close to the state. So you're kind of losing money, then you're asking people to volunteer. And it's not clear if you're asking people to do this because you're saying, "we've got a big gap here, and we need people to fill it, because otherwise there's a real problem with the provision for the homeless in our borough" or whether you're saying, "this is a really good idea, have you thought about doing this? And it'll go on top of your normal work." And everybody's just scared about losing their job, or a lot of people are, they don't have as much time, because when things aren't going that well, everybody just feels more uptight and they tend to retreat into their home and into their work. So you have this big problem which I think has sort of killed it as an election thing.

He will say something about it, but there's no way they will put it at the front of the election campaign. It didn't work the last time around, why would you do it twice? And

certainly because the austerity measure has become, I think, they now have to just run on the economy and they have to show that they can win on the economy. They can do some other things, they can say that they reformed – free schools, even the dreadful health reforms, which were a bit of a mess. But nobody's going to go out there and take "have you got five minutes to listen to us talk about the Big Society?" Because the electorate's in the same place, which is sort of worried, thinking about money all the time, financially, economy-driven. I think that has made a big difference, that sense of "is it just supposed to be a stop-gap?" And then the charities all turn round and say "Oh, we haven't got as much money, how can we do the Big Society?" – the very people you have to carry your message in some cases. And then you have to say to the public, "Oh yes of course, but they're a bit too dependent on the state anyway", and so you appear to attack charities, it's a bloody nightmare, isn't it really? It's not a good way to be positioned. So you won't hear him talk about it too much.

A story about that. Actually, he was worried about it but occasionally he can't stop talking it, so it comes out like Tourette's. One of these stories that you hear as a narrative about how terrible austerity is in some communities, is that people were using food banks, where people can't get through the week with enough to eat and so better-off people deposit tins and things, and you can just go and get some food if you're absolutely desperate - like the sort Victorian soup kitchen. Of course, Labour made a great play of this and said, "the number of people using these has gone up from X to Y" and Cameron said, "this is an example of the Big Society in action, because if you're feeling guilty in your village, you can see that there are people who are losing work or are not well-off, but you don't want to get involved, or think that they would resent it or whatever, but you can give things that are given on to them, and that's an example of the Big Society in action." Perfectly reasonable, but except as far as what comes over by the time it's boiled into a news story is that the Big Society is a Britain of soup kitchens. That's what it comes down to, so there's no win on that. Basically, even as he said it, he must have thought 'Shit!' This is why I would say that the Big Society can sometimes turn quite interestingly as what you're saying is not sometimes what people hear. It's an interesting thing, this history series that the poor laws, which Dickens railed against and said it was a terrible thing making people just work in order to survive, but the poor laws were originally conceived to make sure that people didn't die from starvation at the beginning of the 19th century. You have the same sort of world that you see in *Les Misérables* – someone came up with the poor laws as a progressive measure. They end up, as the country industrialises, looking worse and worse and you've got these women working away to earn a shilling to feed their children. The idea is progressive, but what you end

up with is people saying "shame on the poor laws" and it's very similar with the food bank. It's like – you want to be associated with that as your Big Society? I think it's quite interesting how it tends to slightly fray when you map real situations on to it.

Institut de l'entreprise: Talking about the Third Sector, we have the impression that some people, maybe the younger ones, are more business-oriented than in France.

A.M.: Yes, true. Are they Big Society though, or are they something else? As you say the social entrepreneurs, projects which mix financial nous with charitable endeavour. There has been, for instance, an overall rise in the number of people doing philanthropy at a big level, but a fall in the net amount of donation. Just because the economic situation has squeezed out a lot of the mid-level philanthropists who notice, basically, if things are tougher in their businesses. But at the high end, there are still people doing it, and there are companies involved. So I think you're right, there is a take up in social entrepreneurship and it's seen as quite a cool thing to do. That divide between business and sort of good deeds is kind of gone.

Institut de l'entreprise: As for the business indeed, maybe one of the main flaws of the Big Society is that business hasn't been involved enough in the project, beyond the mere corporate social responsibility (CSR).

A.M.: I think that's quite dangerous. I think what business really wants is to be left alone, to get on with being a business, and they're getting quite pissed off with every government coming along and saying, "I would like business to be this; I would like business to be that; I would quite like business to do a bit of the other" and I think CSR has come on leaps and bounds. Sometimes it's a bit of window-dressing, but reputation is so important in a world where we can go on Twitter and say bad things about a company. So they care about it for their consumers anyway. They know that the perception on tax and things can catch up with them, like Starbucks or Amazon, and they have moved from being seen as really really good companies to "Hmm, question mark." They have a reputational problem.

I think if you try to say that the Big Society needs businesses to change in order to deliver, you start to drift into something which is for a start coming more from the left of centre and would be immediately understood as that and also, just a lot of business-people will simply say no. One argument they often put in *The Economist* is that: there's often a saying the business must give something back. Actually business gives

something by being business. It's not doing something really bad, and then it has to go out and say "I'm really sorry we do business, so here's some money for the environment." Doing business within the bounds of the law and ethical restraint and environmental considerations, up to a reasonable point, fine, but once you start saying, "Oh, you have to be involved in some *grand projet*" which is not something that has shown any sign that it's, going to be able to work, I think you would find that business here would give you quite a short response.

Institut de l'entreprise: And what has been the attitude of the business towards the idea of the Big Society?

A.M.: I think they distrust it. The funny thing is, this week, I've seen two big Tory donors who are big businesspeople. They would see it as a problem. Not like it would do something terrible, but they would think it's a sing of where Cameron started to go wrong and it made Cameron a bit distrusted by business. The one position most business wants from a right-of-centre government here, not so different in France, is they just want to be left alone and not taxed very much – they don't want them to do very much at all. Then there are some businesspeople who like this idea of being involved and they think it enhances them.

Institut de l'entreprise: The editor of the *The Economist* in America, Matthew Bishop, wrote about 'philanthrocapitalism', his argument being that business doesn't have to be like a charity, but can in some areas - for example in higher education - be profitable doing things that have traditionally been the state's or the charities' business.

A.M.: Yes. But that's taking the Big Society wide. But why is that the Big Society? To me, that's technology liberating the benign potential of business. Now, I think that is not the same as the Big Society, otherwise it just means everything that you might put into that basket.

Institut de l'entreprise: Big Society or not, we have the feeling that one of the successes among the current reforms is the education reforms, free schools. What do you think of them?

A.M.: I'm broadly pro-them. I write about them a lot, I read a lot of nuanced criticisms, but if I'm broadly pro- or con-, I'm pro-. Yes, absolutely, because I think that is one of the problems that parents have had in the areas where you've got schools, but the schools

have surplus places where people don't want to go to. It's just like saying: "you didn't like it, here's some more!" So I think it is certainly much easier to set up a school.

Institut de l'entreprise: Is the pace of the reform fast enough?

A.M.: I think it's as fast as the system can bear. Because, as I said, when you get into nuanced criticisms, I can absolutely understand why Michael Gove is running it fast, for the same reason that Andrew Adonis under Labour, who was also pro-reform, expanded academies very fast. The reason you do it is because the music will stop, the other side will come in. And you can see this week, Labour are saying they aren't get rid of free schools because they don't want to annoy the parents who like them, but they won't have any more really. They will call them free schools and give them to the local authority to run, which is not really free. So you need momentum and volume in the system, because if you've only got a few free schools, then when it comes to the voters, they will have no idea what you're talking about. I don't have a free school in Islington, and it's a huge borough stuffed full of liberal parents who want to educate their children, and we've managed two academies, one of which is alright, and one which isn't. And it is very hard to get planning permission, to get councils to have a preference for opening – the way they used to stop it was they could never find the land. So I think there was a resistance to the setting up of autonomous schools, even on the academies programme, so I absolutely think they're right to do it.

On the other hand, I think they're possibly, arguably, slightly too fast. Because one thing that happens is that then things get a bit sloppy, and a chain is allowed to go too fast, and then three of its schools fail, and if you'd only opened nine instead of twelve, maybe you wouldn't have had three bad ones ?

And I think if you are happy to call that the Big Society, that's absolutely fine, that is a good example where you say, "what do parents want?", not "what does this party want?" – you ask the parents what they want. And if there's enough of them, either they can try and commission it themselves, and as most people can't, then other providers will come and they will buy the school's services. I think that's fine. I think it's very good actually.

Institut de l'entreprise: There is a huge controversy about this policy – I am thinking of there was Melissa Benn's book[32].

32. *School Wars: The Battle for Britain's Education*, Verso, 2011.

A.M.: Yes, she has taken the completely opposite position to me and to most other people on this, because I think she really believes in the old comprehensive system. France, also, has a problem with schools. We've both had bad educational outcomes given the history of the country, the progress, the intellectual tradition, and the gap between the elites and the rest of the country is opening too wide. I think this proved to Benn that is precisely the problem, so of course she wouldn't like it.

Institut de l'entreprise: On the other side, someone like Toby Young is saying that the UK should go further, as in Sweden.

A.M.: Oh yes, Toby's just wants more and more. There are absolute opposite ends of the thing. I think the argument in British education is coming down, interestingly, to Sweden versus Finland as a model, because the Finns are coming through too. But the Finnish model appeals more to the centre-left because it's very collective: it effectively has comprehensive schools with some streaming in it, not even much streaming. And it's not externally examined very much –the Finnish system doesn't really examine anyone until they come to university entrance whereas what we decided was that our exams were getting pretty bad, so what we needed was to toughen everything up: if you set the exams, the school performances will follow.

I'm not absolutely sure about this, I have to say, but it's more an education argument than a Big Society one. But I think there are several reasons for that: one is pretty much zero immigration in terms of school population. And it is quite an egalitarian society, people don't particularly like to rise above the other. Or if they do, they keep quiet about it. So you then get towards a position which takes you towards Polly Toynbee, from *The Guardian*, if you read it, who simply wants to change the country; she just wants it to be a different country as opposed to the one she got, and I'm very against reforms that try to do that. I think if you were doing the French school reform, it should work with the grain of the French experience! I don't like the over-centralisation of French schools, but I would happily admit that it's a different thing if you're a French person.

Institut de l'entreprise: I think this very idea of free schools would be impossible in France.

A.M.: Really? I would like to ask you something about schools in France actually, because every time I look at the Pisa tables, or pretty much any tables, I'm always

struck that the French performance has not improved very much. They're not the only measure, but they are, and one has to take them a little bit seriously. So how does that play in the French debate? Because, as you say, one has the sense that it's immovable, the French grip of the state. It's on the schools, all the schools do the same thing. But when they look at the tables, do they not kind of worry that Asia is changing so rapidly, and even we're getting a bit less crap than we were, and that there's a lot of movement there, and then you see the Eastern European countries, particularly on some measures, like fast improvement, Poland, Czech Republic, doing quite well? Does that bother people in the French debate very much?

Institut de l'entreprise: I think people are worried, but rather strangely it's not a central debate, it only regularly comes up and disappears. You have some reforms, but always very tiny compared to the problems we're having. Nicolas Sarkozy projected some reforms for education, had he won. Free schools would have been too radical right now, but he wanted more autonomy, for example, as measures to loosen the rigidities a bit for the salaries of teachers and the recruitment of headmasters.

A.M.: Yes, you have to start it, you have to fight it on your left, and you have to hope… In a way, we had a benign situation on that in that it got going on the left – centre-left – and they were able to do it, and that meant that no one could undo it on the left, and then you got a right-wing government. Otherwise it gets very difficult, because what happens is one lot move one way, one lot move it the other, and you get that awful zigzag where it depends on what time your children were born. So I would be supportive, broadly, of the free schools and academies move, and I think it's a good example where you do listen to what people want.

On a pro-business point, there's a very interesting guy who runs a fantastic chain called Perry Beeches in Birmingham, and he said, "Look, what I'm now thinking is that I'm going to vary teacher pay more." "It wasn't what I wanted to do," he said, "I'm in a union, I actually come from a Labour family, I never really thought that you've just got to have financial rewards to do things" but he said, "actually, thinking about it, I'm running four academies, I appointed all those people who came through with me". He said "There is a point at which we have to lose that statism about, if this thing is being done particularly well, why would you not reward it, because you want other people to do the same good thing?" And I think that will be the next big argument, the variation of teacher pay – which is still very low in the academies, it's symbolic, they give them something like £200, but it's intended to say, "we noticed, here's some money, have a

nice dinner at the weekend." And some people quite like that. But I think there will be a really interesting argument there, coming out of the academies themselves. A lot of these heads don't come from business, but from the centre, or left of centre if anything, but they are saying, "actually, as we've got this power, should we now use it a bit more?" Because, of course, those teachers are going to get taken if they don't pay them! I spent a lot of time talking to private school heads, and they're really interested in people who have come through the academies, so eventually, some of them are going to get lured away, just by the money. So I think there is an interesting point coming where the business case will kick in, where the economists will be supportive, but a lot of people will get cold feet and will say "hang on, it wasn't supposed to be about financial rewards". Some sort of like the fact that the academy heads, the best ones, are paid a lot, but that bothers some other people. But frankly, I think the public takes it very easily as long as the product is successful. And otherwise, like in the rest of life, how do you signal that things are going well or that things could be going better?

Institut de l'entreprise: Are there already some outcomes indicators?

A.M.: It is difficult, and the reason it's difficult is that you've got two stages of the reform: up to 2010 and post-2010. Post-2010, it's quite hard to get actual real-time data because it's too soon.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think it's relevant to look at the Swedish model?

A.M.: I think you will find yourself going off in a lot of directions. The criticism of the free school model in Sweden is that the better-educated parents find the free schools, the other ones don't, and you get a two-tier system, which we tried to avoid here by setting them up a lot in poorer areas. But it is true, and that's why I think that sometimes you just have to be quite common-sensical, that if you have something which is about distribution of social goods, well-motivated, educated people are going to find them. There isn't a system that tells them to keep away. So it's not a reason not to have them.

And the Swedish thing, I can see why it scares. I know Nick Clegg very well, and I know he's very pro-market reform, choice reform, not market reform, he probably wouldn't let in private providers and probably I would, he would say, "look, that's fine, but if you're a Liberal". In the same time, small party, Centre-Left, "you kind of have to be careful that you're doing something all the time for the weakest people." So that's why they brought in the pupil premium. I don't think it will work, because trying to make those pupils do

really well is very very hard: some of them will and some of them won't. But at least you've shown you're addressing the problem. So that, maybe, would be a good example where you do something that brings the users a choice mechanism – market-derived. They wouldd never say that, but it is, where else would they get the idea - the invisible hand pops up and says, "this is a good school, go to it." But at the same time the job of the Left is to say, "but hang on, what about the others?"

That's fine, that's exactly what they should do – but not to hold back the first reform in order to go back to something that didn't work before, or didn't work sufficiently. I guess I'm pretty clearly a supporter on that. You may need to find a clever way of distinguishing between the Big Society and this sort of thing, which I think works much better. This is not the Big Society, it's using the market and choice mechanisms in public service to run the reform, and I'm very keen on that, it's very good.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you have an opinion regarding the public service reform? On the idea of public mutuals introduced by Julian Le Grand for example?

A.M.: Mutuals in the pure public sector, it's already getting a bit narrow… Otherwise people like the John Lewis model because it offers a lot of good things together. It's where the co-operative movement and Labour meets the Burkian Conservatives round the back of the store. Of course the Co-op is very much understood as an early mutual, and a lot of people in working-class communities started work in the Co-op, and it was a different thing to just getting a low-paid job. My mother started working in a Co-op in the North East, and it was seen as your first step to education if you didn't have a family that had gone to university, because they educated their workers, they were decent, there was a culture around it which was very appealing.

Again, I may be disappointing you but I think that there is a problem – and you saw it – when the Co-operative Bank nearly tanked two weeks and had to be propped up like any other rubbish bank at the moment. Now I think John Lewis have managed to sustain that positive culture I described, but John Lewis on the inside is *really* run like a business – I knew one of their former Marketing Directors, brutally sacked… The idea that a mutual is all very very nice is wrong. It's another form of a bit of business, but it's not always necessarily nice. When everything got difficult in 2007, 2008, "oh, let's look at these things!" The Co-op, if it manages the brand carefully, they're doing things like funeral services that don't rip people off – and I think they're all great. But the trouble is that a mutual probably has the same problem that every other company has: it's what should

we do and what should we not do? And the tendency, because you're a mutual, is to say, "Let's do everything the community wants." And I think, again, it gets a bit messy. Although the banking side was just over-extended and badly run, it can't help but damage their image

Institut de l'entreprise: There is this other part of the reforms we are trying to understand, the NHS. What I don't really understand is that some commentators say that it is a huge reform and other ones a failed one – for example Nick Timmins [33]. Where do lie the thruth?

A.M.: I think it probably is a failed reform. But it's very hard to grasp. I think that the problem with health was that Andrew Lansley, the former Secretary of State for Health, wanted more local accountability for commissioning, but it all was too bitty. I'm trying to simplify it. The GPhad this great faith that local doctors should be the gatekeepers of budgets, which they sort of already are, but the problem was that the contracts that they've signed are not very good contracts from the state point of view. They don't have to work out of hours, they're sort of paid to be there but they set the terms on which they're there. And he, probably rightly, thought that if you changed that, you would begin to change the building blocks, the inefficiencies of the NHS. The problem is that it's historically very difficult, because after 1948, in order to get the deal through at all – private doctors didn't want the NHS – they were given a lot of money by successive governments and they were just left to manage themselves. They're contract workers, they're not employed by the NHS. So the NHS can't even get their records – they have to ask nicely, and if you're a good practice, obviously most people give them, but either stroppy doctors or doctors who think they've got something to hide don't give them over. I remember talking to someone about cancer at a seminar, who said, "the point at which you lose people to cancer is between the GP not noticing a problem or being slow with the referral or sending them to the wrong place, and so in the time that that has basically been put right …" We had bad cancer rates, levels are getting better, but we got a shock a few years ago when they seemed to come up very badly and everyone said, "Oh, look at the French system!" I think there is a definite problem there, that some of the referrals are not right, and that some GPs are not that good.

33. Nick Timmins est un ancien journaliste du Financial Times, spécialisé dans la santé. Il est aujourd'hui Senior Fellow sur les politiques de santé au King's Fund. Son rapport sur la dernière réforme du NHS, *Never Again, The story of thre Health and Social care Act 2012* (2012), a été mené pour le King's Fund et l'Institute for government.

Lansley was quite right, he was trying to get into that, but he couldn't quite get into that problem, so he ended up with a slightly fidgety budgetary reform, with an awful lot of upheaval, which I know sometimes is necessary, but I don't think it was worth it on this occasion. And on the bigger picture – trying to say your question, "is it big, is it little?" – I think it allows a bit more private enterprise into the NHS, but at the margins. The system itself is impervious to private providers in the same way that an insurance system is quite happy with them. And I think it's our big problem, and the problem for the next person with the NHS will be how we can get value from this system. It's got a lot of great things about it, but frankly, it just wastes a lot of money, it's too uneven and the disaster stories like Morecambe and Staffordshire [34] are *beginning* to get over to the public, that they might actually get killed in hospital. But it's interesting this institutional attachment of the British people to the NHS – particularly England and Wales. If you still poll them, they will still want the NHS, because it does offer universality, and people think that is the greater good. So as a result, it's hard to change. It's hard to change public sector institutions if the public are scared of a change. Whereas schools – the nice thing about schools is that very few people outside the Melissa Left were wedded to comprehensive schools. A lot of people didn't want them, but parents thought, "they're here, we've got to make the best of them." But in health, people really don't like to change the NHS: you have to make a very very good case with them. And I think that was why it failed.

Institut de l'entreprise: The next spending review is taking place very soon. And the government has decided – it's understandable from a political point of view – not to touch the NHS neither pensions, even if they are the biggest institutions.

A.M.: Let's break those two things down. One is, the NHS in real terms has had a massive cut – when you say that you're not touching it, that's a line, isn't it? The fact is, you've got £20 billion efficiency savings over four years in a system which does not easily save money, because you've got that quest for value. Now Labour are going to have a huge problem, as they want to merge social care and health care – perfectly reasonably, I think everyone does, but there's £20 billion coming out in real terms. Also, the health service has had massive rises between 2000 and 2010, to the order of 87 – 90%, depending on how you measure it. Certainly, then, hospitals ended up with

34. Deux scandales récents, celui de l'hôpital de l'Université de Morecambe Bay Foundation Trust, où plusieurs mères décédèrent avec leurs enfants, et celui de Mid Staffordshire Foundation Trust, où une enquête a montré que des centaines de patients étaient probablement morts suite à une négligence du personnel soignants.

great equipment and in much better condition than they had been in, but they certainly didn't have a 90% rise in productivity.

It depends on how much you want to go into health. I talk a lot to Circle Healthcare who set up the first private hospital within the NHS here. They're interesting on how you drive value. Their management is small-scale and they can always come a cropper and make a mistake at some point, so one should never say "this company is the answer", that's always dangerous. But I think they do manage much better. People talk about too many managers in the NHS, but the management problem is in fact that NHS needs amazing management. A friend of mine runs an amazing ward, where she got an idea of cuttings from the BMW production line. She said, "a BMW car has an error margin of about 0.0 something when it comes off the production line, and that's what the line is there to do." And so she said that the error rate on your average ward is something absurd, like 30%, and so she basically used that BMW dashboard technology so that the nurses just click when the task is done. It's a mixture of the checklist, which we've probably worked on a lot as a policy tool and a slightly dashboard, whizzy thing that makes it look really nice so that the nurses have a little thing that looks like the BMW one – green, amber, red. So you click when a task is done to avoid all the things that can go wrong. The main thing is that nurses give them the wrong drugs all the time. It sounds absolutely horrid to me, but they do! Nurses are always getting the dosages wrong, and they forget when the patients are old or feeble – and you sort of track that against the results and outcomes and their re-admittance to hospital. That's a big sign that's something's wrong: if you're better or should be treated in the community, why are you back? Now the old system didn't really look at those things very much at all. She's not the only one doing this, there are other people with models, but hers is great and she's very good at talking, she's very fun. And she said, "why would you accept an error? Any sort of margin of error on a health ward is wide – why would you do that when it's alright for a car?" Her case is one of my favourites. She's done it really well, she's been made a Dame, everybody knows she's brilliant – partly because she's a nurse and the guy she works with on the other side is a doctor, so you've got that clinical-managerial mix in there from the start. You don't have people going, "It's the management!" or "It's the doctors!", which you get a lot in the system, they're always moaning about the management.

So I think that's a really interesting thing, but it's hard to replicate. There's nothing in the system – which is where I think the market would help. As she said, she was pointing at some hospital she didn't like and she said, "how do I take over that hospital? It has to fail, it has to kill people before I can take it over! And even then, I might not get it,

someone else might." So you've got this thing where you've got really great innovation in the NHS but you cannot easily replicate it, and I'm afraid that we're going to close crap hospitals like the Morecambe and Staffordshire but quite often they get taken over by the hospital next door, because that's sort of 'how the system works'. Nobody says: "right, who's going to run this?" In my view, you don't wait on the High Street, you don't wait until Topshop is *really* bad before H&M take over or vice versa, do you? You just wait till it's not as good as it was, and then somebody says, "your margins are down, I could really make this work better." And I think that in the health service, it really has to fail before anything happens. And frankly, tragically, maybe they don't. The money still goes to them anyway, somehow. It gets a report which says, "oh, could you do that a bit better ? " But the money never flows through the success line. The money flows round – someone said that it's like a washing machine, it just washes round to make sure the hospitals stay open, and I think that's really bad.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think the reforms here will raise some interest in other countries?

A.M.: I hope so! I hope it's not a complete waste of time. I was going to say that health was maybe more of an English problem, but actually, not really, and I think health economies are learning much more from each other, and best practice and value is becoming a very common quest. This is obviously what to do, but the public is still quite wary of it. And on the free schools, I think the idea of the citizen choice allied to a kind of business-inspired model, not necessarily for-profit, is a quite interesting thing. I just genuinely can't imagine that any of the countries I know halfway well like Germany, the Netherlands, France, as well as fast-developing countries which are going to be our competitors and are also beginning to spend a lot on public services, I can't believe that this will not impact on them. You have a lot of people saying, "actually, that parental choice thing is incredibly important", with parents poring over league tables, they're becoming much more active. Students here are much more valued than they were, and choose where to go. And some of the newer universities are doing much better than the older universities at that because they sort of understand the consumer model and in a way, they're less kind of ashamed of it. So it's very funny, if you look at the new universities, it's "86% satisfaction rating! 13th in *The Guardian* 'best entrepreneurial university'!" They're selling themselves, and I think this is a change in the time that I've covered my area. It's almost like that would have been seen, in some places, as just incredibly vulgar. And I can't believe that this won't have some effect in the future.

Institut de l'entreprise: In France, we are rather far from that.

A.M.: I know! And there would be good reasons for that. But one thing I'm fascinated by is this whole globalisation and how we get on with it. You've got all these people that are going back and forwards all the time and you can't really stop them taking these ideas. It was very funny, I was in a hospital in China, a maternity private hospital, and it was very obvious, the briefing about how they run the hospital. They basically got it off the back of a lorry, it had fallen off the back of the Blair health reforms. They had all this language, they sounded like Julian Le Grand. In fact, it really was like meeting Julian Le Grand in the middle of China, and it was all about waiting lists and how you control waiting lists. Because the whole idea of a waiting list doesn't exist in China – they're fascinated by it, they love it, because basically you just turn up and fight your way to the front, or if you have got money you bribe; so a waiting list seems to them like the height of sophistication and civilisation. And so, all that travel of ideas, why would it not continue? I'm going to Africa to look at healthcare, and it will be the same thing. They're doing things their own way, they're good at frugal innovation for example, and I don't know if they will carry them out, and the culture will be different in different societies. But they are listening to the sort of conversation that we're having now. So they're not going to go back to the days of one model: the state gave it to you, and you said, "That's it."

Sarah Neville

Sarah Neville est rédactrice en chef du service Politiques Publiques (Public Policy Editor) au *Financial Times* depuis 2011. Elle a travaillé au FT pendant plus de dix ans, et a notamment occupé les postes de Analysis Editor et UK News Editor.

Sarah Neville a commencé sa carrière comme reporter au *Rochdale Observer*, bimensuel du nord de l'Angleterre. Elle rejoint ensuite le *Western Mail*, quotidien national du Pays-de-Galles, où elle écrit sur la santé et les arts. Après un passage à *Pulse*, magazine sur la santé, elle devient correspondante politique à Westminster, puis rédactrice en chef du service Politique pour le *Yorkshire Post*, avant de rejoindre le *FT*.

Spécialiste des politiques publiques, Sarah Neville apporte un éclairage très pertinent sur les réformes du service public et de l'Etat-providence lancées par D. Cameron.

La Big Society, explique Sarah Neville, ne fait plus partie des thèmes d'actualité. Il est possible que l'idée soit venue trop tôt. Mais à mesure que l'austérité s'accentuera, la réflexion sur les nouveaux moyens de fourniture des services publics sera de plus en plus nécessaire. Reste que la présentation initiale du projet était plutôt vague et que la *Big Society* n'a jamais été un agenda typiquement *Tory*. Deux ans avant la *General Election*, les *Tories* reviennent à des sujets plus naturels pour eux comme la défense du libre marché et la responsabilité individuelle.

La mise en œuvre de la *Big Society* est mitigée. La fourniture des services publics par d'autres acteurs que l'Etat ne se développe pas de façon entièrement satisfaisante. Dans certains cas par exemple, les contrats passés entre l'Etat et le secteur privé aboutissent à une sous-traitance inconfortable au tiers secteur. Le gouvernement essaie à l'heure actuelle de corriger ces erreurs.

Sarah Neville ajoute que l'austérité semble rencontrer un surprenant consensus dans la population. En revanche, la transformation la plus radicale, celle du *welfare*, n'en est qu'à ses débuts, et il est trop tôt pour savoir dans quelle mesure elle sera acceptée.

Reste que les inégalités en Grande-Bretagne deviennent préoccupantes, le gouvernement pensant à tort que la baisse réelle des allocations de solidarité fera préférer le travail à l'inactivité, alors que trop peu d'emplois ne se créent. Autre inégalité, l'écart entre Londres et le reste du pays s'accroît.

Institut de l'entreprise: We are curious about having your general opinion on the Big Society, because we've heard very different views on it: for some of them, the Big Society is a slogan, others say that it's a good idea, but badly implemented, and others are seeing a radical revolution happening now in the UK.

Sarah Neville: I certainly don't think that it has developed very much at the moment, but I think you could argue that it is an idea that almost came too early. But it will increasingly be a sort of necessity as austerity becomes more and more prominent, and that the public, perhaps, in these few years since 2010, perhaps the public wasn't yet quite aware of the need to find different ways of delivering public services. That need is going to become very obvious and pressing in the years after 2015, and even beyond 2020. It could be that the whole idea, which hasn't really taken off – it may be too early to write it off, because it's something that we're kind of feeling our way on, I think.

I think it has suffered from a rather nebulous sort of initial presentation. It wasn't really clear what it meant. A lot of people interpret it as having the Third Sector, the voluntary sector deliver public services and I think that is certainly one of the ways that the government does interpret it. But what has happened there is the way in which the contracts have been structured, with the private and Third Sectors to deliver some services like, notably, this big welfare-to-work scheme called The Work Programme, wasn't satisfying. The rhetoric was around using charities, but what happened was – because charities aren't experienced at commissioning and striking deals - most of them wound up as secondary providers, subcontractors to a primary provider, which was a private company. And a lot of them have got really bad deals – they have had a lot of risk passed down to them for not very much of the rewards. And the government, to be fair, is trying to address that now, because there's a whole new frontier for Third Sector and private companies delivering services, which is contracts to rehabilitate prisoners when they come out of jail. And there, they are actively looking to structure the contracts, I was talking to the civil society minister, Nick Hurd, a couple of weeks ago and he was saying that the level of risk which is being passed down is going to be absolutely transparent. So it will still be possible for the private companies to pass a lot of risk to the charities,

but it will have to be made plain. And the government is also trying very actively to build up the capability within charities to bid, to make sure that they don't get a bad end of the deal, sort of thing. So I thought that was all quite interesting, what Nick Hurd was telling me.

The other aspect is just the idea of having more people volunteer, of course, and I think that one of the issues there is that, in the UK, and I'm sure it's the same in France, everybody is seeing their disposable income reduced, and a lot of lower-income people are having to work two jobs and that sort of thing. And if you're having to work two jobs, you haven't really got time to be a very active member in your own community and volunteer. So it's another way in which you could say that the idea was an idea that might have had a better chance of success ten years ago, when the money was plentiful. But then the other side of that, if you don't mind me saying, is that as austerity bites more and more, it might make a stronger case for this kind of service delivery.

Institut de l'entreprise: What about elderly people in that context?

S.N.: In general, elderly people have been quite well-protected actually, so certainly, elderly people can volunteer, but the problem is, I think it becomes a bit class-specific, and that in turn creates imbalance in the country. There is some evidence that - there's some research being done about that - that there were many more volunteers in prosperous areas than in poorer areas. And the government is, again, trying to do something about that, because they have set up these networks of community organisers, a bit like Obama, and the idea is that the community organisers go into the poorer areas of the country, and they do help mobilise and facilitate. But still I think that class aspect to it is quite an issue there.

Institut de l'entreprise: Would you say that welfare and school reform too are related to the Big Society?

S.N.: I would say definitely welfare, in respect of the Work Programme that I mentioned earlier, which is the big welfare-to-work scheme. The free schools movement, I think it is a sort of subset of the Big Society idea. But again, that is a case in point where most of the schools have been set up in very middle-class areas, because it's one of these situations where it tends to be more middle-class people who have the time on their hands to be an active parent, so I think again, you have that class-based imbalance.

Institut de l'entreprise: How strong is the debate about inequality in the UK?

S.N.: I think it's a growing debate actually, because I think a few things are playing into it. One is that the government has taken the decision to raise the value of benefits for working-age people by only 1%[35], so they're actually now below inflation. So for the first time, as a sort of active policy, this government has chosen to make the poorest people poorer, and I think, as a result, we're starting to see things in Britain that we have never seen before, like food banks - which of course are in themselves evidence of the Big Society, it's fair to say.

Institut de l'entreprise: Some commentators say still that Labour haven't really reduced inequality. Don't you need to have a different approach to inequality?

S.N.: The Big Society could be a means for that, yes. I think my concern would be more that it would go the other way: for the reasons I have said, that it is actually going to widen the imbalance. I think the story of inequality in the UK was certainly that it widened massively after Thatcher became prime minister. But the real phenomenon of the welfare state in the Labour years, which had never happened before, was that a lot of money was being thrown at increasing amounts of people who were actually in jobs. And a lot of that is still there – some of it's been unwound in terms of value of the tax credits.

Institut de l'entreprise: One of the main sources of inequality is the disintegration of the family – you can't just tackle it with money.

S.N.: No, that's absolutely true. I think a lot of that debate has been reframed in this country, under Iain Duncan Smith actually, our Work and Pensions Secretary, who is quite interesting and thoughtful on this. I think you're right that now, quite a lot of money is being thrown at these troubled families schemes, I suppose it's a small amount in the great scheme of things, but certainly it is something that ministers talk about a lot. And I think that the problem with those sorts of initiatives is that they're immensely expensive per family helped. I visited one actually, in Nottingham, but I don't think it involved volunteers at all, I think they were all paid professionals.

35. Il s'agit des *working-age benefits*, allocations regroupant les allocations chômage et l'équivalent de nos allocations de solidarité, aussi bien pour les chômeurs que les actifs en emploi.

Institut de l'entreprise: And you could relate that to the Big Society, which is as you said about strengthening the intermediate institutions.

S.N.: It's true actually, you could make the case under that definition. But I think most families are seeing their incomes going down... You're 100% right that the scope of a family is not necessarily measurable in money, but the trouble is the lack of money, which puts such strain on relationships, doesn't it?

Institut de l'entreprise: You wrote about the effect of the austerity in the FT. Some commentators say on the contrary that austerity is not happening. Where is the truth?

S.N.: The big project that we did, yes, good. What did they mean by austerity is not happening? No, I think public spending is falling. It's falling back to where it was in the early 2000s I think that probably understates the change, because the way spending is being allocated has changed so much. Paul Johnson at the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows very dramatically how the share being taken by health and pensions has risen inexorably.

But then I think austerity absolutely is happening. I think one of the things that is happening, which is quite unusual in an international context, is that the capital is departing more and more from the rest of the country in terms of things like the direction of house prices, average income, or tax receipts. If you go to a place like Blackpool, you will feel as if you're in a different country. I think that's why there's a lot of policy focus on finding ways of growing the regions and building up through specific funding the economy and the skills base in the region. If you just look at things like the unemployment rate, you can see, I think, that things are not good for a lot of people, and they are going to get worse because of this reduction in the value of benefits which isn't being matched by the level of job creation necessary. Obviously the government's thinking behind all of this, which is very laudable, is "we will cut the value of benefits and that will help push people into the labour market, which is clearly where anybody should be if they're capable of working". But if you look at the rates of job creation, they're not sufficient to take everybody who's getting their benefits reduced into work. And I remember, I went to Barnsley in South Yorkshire, and it was actually Barnsley that gave me the entire idea for that austerity project actually, because they were talking to me about how worried they were about how much the welfare changes were going to take out of the local economy and spending power, and getting into a sort of vicious loop where if you take money out, then there are even fewer jobs, and businesses and shops close. Because in areas like that, the money from welfare-dependent people is quite a significant part of overall spending

power. And the point they were making to me was that they already had, I think, 10% unemployment, and they were saying to me: "All these people are being pushed off sickness benefit". Sickness benefit is now time limited under the new reforms, so you get it for a year. Then, after a year, it's means-tested – so if you've got a partner who's working, you're almost certainly going to lose it. And the people in the local authority and the welfare rights people were saying to me, "given that there's 1 in 10 people unemployed already, why would you take a sickness benefit person, who maybe hasn't worked at all for 10 or 11 years, into work?" So this wonderful idea of Iain Duncan Smith that they will go into work, I think it just won't happen, because there's not enough economic growth to take up the slack of all those additional people coming on to the labour market.

Institut de l'entreprise: There is a new spending review at the end of the month. Until now they have ring-fenced health and pensions, but do you think they will have to cut health[36]?

S.N.: At the moment, the big debate that is going, which of course will be resolved soon, is that a lot of the other Whitehall departments are trying, in a rather funny, almost amusing way to reclassify or redefine their own spending as being health spending. So the Defence Secretary is trying to say that his spending on rehabilitation for soldiers who get wounded in Afghanistan or Iraq, that that is really health spending, so the Health Department should pay for it. And this is going on all the way up to Whitehall – it's almost comical. So the ringfence will remain, but arguably, more will have to be accommodated within that ringfence. But the Health story is that they're under enormous pressure to make savings because even though they are technically going to keep their inflation-protected budget, when you look at the way that demand is rising, it's rising up 4% a year I think. And yet, they're having to make 4% savings every year, so the inflation protection is being wiped out by the additional demands.

Institut de l'entreprise: What is the public's perception of the Big Society and Cameron's reforms? Are they in favour of them? And of austerity?

S.N.: I'm trying to remember what the latest opinion poll is. I think it shows that, broadly, there's a surprisingly strong consensus around deficit reduction. I think the number feeling that it's not being done in a fair way has been creeping upwards, but is still relatively small.

36. En effet, la dernière *Spending Review*, en juin 2013, a confirmé la sanctuarisation des dépenses de retraite et de santé.

Institut de l'entreprise: We have the impression that the cuts are higher than in other European countries, if you look at the major ones: France, Germany, Italy, Spain. So it seems to us that actually a radical transformation is happening here, but without any protests.

S.N.: I think the most radical transformation it's yet to form and take effect, because actually the big welfare changes, which, it seems to me, are by far the most radical of what the government's doing, actually only started in April – or most of them only started in April. There was this reduction in the value of benefits that I mentioned earlier - the low-inflation upgrade, and the means-testing of sickness starting. So I think it's too early to say that there won't be protests down the line. And universal credit doesn't properly start until October, if indeed it starts there, as I think it's in enormous difficulties.

The other point to make, probably is that so far, changes are mostly affecting the poorest and not the people with the loudest voices. If, arguably, we started to see the quality of schools and hospitals massively deteriorating, then the middle-class would come into the picture. You have probably peripherally noticed this big story that has been running this weekend about the NHS [37]. So there certainly have been an array of incidents in the last year or so that have challenged the conventional view that the NHS delivers high quality care. And there's also a huge row going on about Accident and Emergency departments and how overwhelmed they are with patients. The issues there, I think, pre-date austerity in my mind. They have their roots in a kind of progressive underfunding of hospitals over the last few years..

Institut de l'entreprise: The Prime Minister's speeches are no longer mentioning the Big Society, are they?

S.N.: I think that's right. Funnily enough, I asked Nick Hurd, the Civil Society Minister – I said I was talking to him a couple of weeks ago about this. He said, "Oh, he still mentions it whenever he's asked about it." But that's rather different from actually leading from the front and I think you're right. I can't remember the last time I heard him spontaneously utter the words, and I think the feeling is that the Big Society agenda was never an agenda that was a core Tory Party policy and that the Conservative Party saw

37. En juin 2013 la Care Quality Commission, organisme de contôle dépendant du NHS, est accusée d'avoir échoué à détecter de graves dysfonctionnements dans les hôpitaux de la Morecambe Bay Foundation Trust, où l'on vient de découvrir des morts suspectes de mères et d'enfants. Les commentateurs lient ce scandale à celui de deux hôpitaux du Mid Staffordshire, entre 2005 et 2009, où des centaines de patients sont morts pour cause de mauvais traitements et de négligence. Ces scandales successifs ont créé à l'époque un vif débat sur le NHS, ses standards et surtout son absence de contrôle et de transparence.

it as a sort of fluffy thing that was more like a Lib-Dem policy than a Tory policy. Now, in the final two years before our General Election, everything is refocusing on the parties differentiating themselves, and obviously, if you're trying to differentiate yourself and say, "we are the Conservative Party, blue in tooth and claw" kind of thing, then you don't want to talk about the Big Society. You want to talk about the free market and responsibility. The Prime Minister has now got a new election strategist, Lynton Crosby, an Australian, who has got an amazing reputation for helping clients win elections. I think the rumour is that he said, "Stop talking about the Big Society – it's not going to win us the election."

Coming back to the point I made initially, I think it will actually genuinely be interesting to see if some of the Big Society agenda does come back after the election in a slightly different guise. I was recently talking actually to some of the guys at Policy Exchange about the development of family welfare, the model that exists in Southern European countries, and we were chatting a bit about the extent to which family welfare is coming much more to the fore in the UK, and there's much more of a premium on people being able to help their children or their grandchildren with a deposit on their house or with university fees. And one of the Policy Exchange people said to me, "I think this is going to become one of the big themes of 2015." And he said it was not so much the Big Society, but the 'Responsible Society'. I think it is a really interesting concept, the need to take responsibility for your own family, so far as you're able to do so - not the wider, more nebulous responsibility of the Big Society. In a way it is the usual model of the male breadwinner. It is not really working in Spain or Greece because the male breadwinner is losing his job! Maybe it's not working there, but it has been the way it's worked for decades – the whole welfare system is structured around that.

Institut de l'entreprise: The main problem with the welfare state is a demographic one. You need to have incentives to have a family. In France there are such incentives, even if they are being reduced by the current government.

S.N.: There's a really big recognition of the family there, that the state supports your personal choice to have a big family. That's really interesting.

Maybe there is some theme linking this a little bit, about a clearer focus on family responsibility, on the parents taking responsibility for their own choices, and not getting subventions from the state because they choose to have four children, and possibly an all-round greater expectation that families will help. I remember actually, I was in the

North East of England doing some reporting about how Nick Hurd feels he can counter the middle-class bias of volunteering. I was up there, and I was talking to someone, her and her husband, and one of them mentioned that they, and other members of their family had clubbed together to pay the fees for their grandson to go to some sort of specialist drama, theatre school in London. What struck me was that they were not wealthy people at all, they were sort of middle-class, I think the woman was a teacher, the man was something manual actually; but what struck me was, in a rather snobbish way, I would always assumed that people who were helping their kids or grandkids in that way was because they had loads of money, but here was a family, none of whom were individually rich, who were all putting money into a pot to give the grandson his chance at a career in theatre, I suppose. And that again made me think about the way in which this family welfare model should be evolving – under the pressure, I suppose, of rising university tuition fees. Of course, as you probably know, university used to be free in this country in regards to the tuition, and then the first fees came in in 1998. So we're still relatively new to this whole landscape of having to raise money to actually send our children to university.

Institut de l'entreprise: But you can repay after.

S.N.: You absolutely can, of course. But a lot of families, if they have the money to do so, like to wipe out their childrens' debts when they graduate, that is pay their fees. But again, it creates an enormous growing inequality because if you come from a family wealthy enough to do that, to wipe out £30 000, then that's great. But if you haven't, and most people haven't, you then have a higher marginal tax rate for the following 20 or 30 years.

Peter Oborne

Peter Oborne est Chief Political Commentator au *Daily Telegraph* et Associate Editor au *Spectator*. Il intervient régulièrement sur Channel 4 et la BBC. Il était auparavant éditorialiste politique au *Daily Mail* et a été élu "Columnist of the Year" lors des Press Award de 2013.

Peter Oborne a publié de nombreux livres comme *The Rise of Political Lying* et T*he Triumph of the Political Class* [38], ainsi que des essais en collaboration avec le *think tank* Center for Politcy Studies (CPS) (*Guilty Men*) ou le groupe d'influence Liberty (*Churchill's Legacy: the Conservative case for the Human Rights Act*, avec Jesse Norman).

Parmi ses sujets de prédilection, la sincérité des hommes politiques, la corruption des partis et leur mainmise sur les médias indépendants.

Fin connaisseur de la classe politique et des enjeux actuels du Royaume-Uni, proche de la pensée conservatrice, Peter Oborne offre un éclairage pertinent sur les origines et le devenir de la *Big Society*.

Pour Peter Oborne, l'origine intellectuelle directe de la *Big Society* est à chercher chez Jesse Norman, dans son ouvrage du même nom et dans son inspiration burkienne, inspiration que l'on retrouve chez Michael Oakeshott malgré les divergences entre ces auteurs et qui fait l'éloge de la société civile et de ses institutions. Peter Oborne établit également une généalogie de la *Big Society* au sein du Parti Conservateur, avec deux figures emblématiques ayant comme point commun d'avoir travaillé avec Margaret Thatcher. Il s'agit de l'essayiste Ferdinand Mount, qui a insisté dans ses travaux sur l'importance des institutions intermédiaires – au premier rang desquelles la famille [39] – et la nécessité de préserver ces dernières de l'emprise de l'Etat. Il s'agit ensuite de David Willetts,

38. Le texte est paru en français en février 2014 aux Editions Michalon, sous le *titre Le triomphe de la classe politique anglaise*.

39. *The subversive family*, 1982.

l'actuel *Minister of State for Universities and Science*, dont les travaux marquent la première tentative de penser ce qui allait devenir plus tard la *Big Society* [40].

Quant aux médias, même si la proximité avec la *Big Society* en est moins certaine, on peut noter la mention par Peter Oborne de T.E. Utley, l'un de ses prédecesseurs au *Daily Telegraph*, dont Margaret Thatcher avait dit un jour qu'il était "*the most distinguished Tory thinker of our time*" [41].

Le premier Cameron, explique Peter Oborne, était un politicien classique, influencé par la personnalité de Tony Blair, mais il a connu un « tournant *Big Society* » en 2006. Son objectif était alors de redorer l'image du Parti Conservateur en refondant ce dernier sur l'importance de la société civile, délaissée voire mise à mal par le *Labour*. Mais aujourd'hui, si les réformes se succèdent, le terme n'est plus utilisé, à tort, par les Conservateurs. En même temps sa complexité empêche de l'employer, en tout cas dans le contexte des prochaines élections, qui se joueront sur des arguments plus simples.

En contradiction avec le projet de *Big Society,* l'absence de réformes fiscales en faveur des familles ne tient pas tant aux Lib-Dems qu'au Trésor. Selon Peter Oborne, cela s'explique par la méfiance de George Osborne, Chancelier de l'Echiquier, à l'égard de la *Big Society* : les racines idéologiques de ce dernier sont d'ailleurs à chercher du côté de la droite libérale américaine.

Parmi les résultats positifs de la *Big Society*, l'introduction des *free schools*, car elles visent à redonner du pouvoir à la société civile. Si l'emprise des communautés religieuses sur ces écoles est peu plausible, il faudra toutefois accepter que certaines écoles échouent.

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40. Dans ses essais *Modern Conservatism* (1992) et *Civic Conservatism* (Social Market Foundation, 1994), il prône un conservatisme moderne, défini comme civique, en ce qu'il ambitionne de concilier la défense du marché (*free markets*) avec la reconnaissance de l'importance de la communauté (*community*) et des institutions intermédiaires. Ses écrits ont eu une influence certaine sur le positionnement actuel du Parti Conservateur et l'inspiration "libérale" de la *Big Society*.

41. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/2164034/Margaret-Thatcher-presents-Utley-Awards.html

Institut de l'entreprise: As a journalist and political commentator, you know the Conservative Party and his intellectual roots very well. What are the intellectual origins of the concept of Big Society?

Peter Oborne: Jesse Norman wrote a pamphlet on Big Society. He would say, wouldn't he, that his book on Burke is about that too: the "little platoons". The way I understand Jesse, the nearest thing there is to an ideologist for David Cameron is that this Burkian analysis is what Cameron is all about. For me, Cameron is pure Big Society and the only thing that justifies him is the Big Society. If you look at the construction of David Cameron, of the political figure, the first thing to say about him is that he comes from a very traditional Conservative background in which are embedded certain propositions about duty, loyalty, patriotism, nation, selflessness and a sense of obligation to one's fellow men. Cameron gets hold of this sort of shire conservatism with this patriarchal almost semi-feudal proposition... Marc Bloch, the notion of duty - the Catholic church expresses this in France - to the lower orders. This is all part of the Conservative Party proposition and these are very rarely articulated very well. Burke articulated them. I think to some extent you get a version of it in Oakeshott and it's sort of there in parts of Thatcher. Gertrude Himmelfarb is very interesting in this way[42]. The idea that there is a civil society separate from the state is the beginning of Cameron. Cameron obviously joins the Conservative central office in the late eighties and Thatcher is still there, and then you go into the Major period where David Willetts wrote *Modern Conservatism*.

Institut de l'entreprise: And what about Ferdinand Mount?

P.O.: Yes, Ferdinand Mount, *Subversive Family*. These are the key texts. Then you have, T.S. Eliot's *Notes towards the Definition of Culture.* These are the key Conservative texts. Willetts, it's a brilliant work of destruction against the New Labour thinkers [43]. It's an attack on New Labour and it explains why New Labour failed even before it started. And then there is one other book edited by my predecessor as political commentator, Charles Moore. This book, *A Tory Seer: The Selected Journalism of T.E. Utley*, is crucial. T. E. Utley is a very important Conservative figure, he was a Conservative writer on the

42. Gertrude Himmelfarb est une historienne américaine spécialiste de la Grande-Bretagne et de l'ère victorienne. Dans *Victorian Minds* (1968) et *The Moral Imagination* (2006), elle étudie des figures dites "proto-victoiennes", victoriennes, et à l'éthos victorien, de Burke au XX° siècle. Elle insiste souvent sur la qualité des "vertus victoriennes" : prudence, tempérance, ardeur au travail, décence, responsabilité.

43. Autre ancien conseiller de Thatcher au sein du Policy Unit de 1984 à 1986, David Willetts est peut-être celui dont les travaux marqueront le première reformulation du conservatisme du sein du parti après Thatcher, et la première tentative de penser ce qui allait devenir la Big Society. Dans ses essais *Modern Conservatism* (1992) et *Civic Conservatism* (Social Market Foundation, 1994), il prône un conservatisme moderne, défini comme civique, en ce qu'il ambitionne de concilier la défense du marché (*free markets*) avec la reconnaissance de l'importance de la communauté (*community*).

Telegraph long before me in the sixties and seventies. He was blind and a great inspiration of Margaret Thatcher. I think I am right in saying that he died whilst she was Prime Minister, and she came back from her European summit and she arrived an hour early, and she sat at the front of the church an hour early for his funeral. There's this great phrase he says (*reading*) "social democracy may be defined as an arrangement under which we all largely cease to be responsible for our own behaviour and in return become responsible for everyone else's". That is a sort way of getting at the Big Society, "collectivism is full of built-in excuses for the evasion of responsibility", it's so good... "constant exposure to the spectacle of synthetic anger and fraudulent congratulation", it's just marvellous on this scale, "anesthetise the moral sense of ordinary people", it's marvellous, it's a constant attack on the collectivist idea... It's very, very good. And finally you have W.H Greenleaf's book, *The British Political Tradition*. So those are the intellectual origins of the Big Society. Willetts really sets it all out very clearly in the nineties. It's completely unnoticed because all intellectual fashion and political fashion and power is in the hands of New Labour.

Institut de l'entreprise: How would you define the "Big Society"? According to you, is it more of a political vision, a state of mind to be aroused among the opinion or of a set of clearly circumscribed public policies?

P.O.: In my view Cameron, during the New Labour era, falls under the influence of the New Labour which prioritises the state and the media, really - I wrote a book about it, *The triumph of the political class.* And so then Cameron becomes a creature, Cameron and the people around him... Osborne for example doesn't understand or like the Big Society. So Cameron rather sort of faded. I think he had. But when he became Tory leader, he made a speech to Demos, I think, which set it all out. I remember, I went there to this speech and it explained to me what Cameron was about, what he was trying... I think there was a political strategy in which he was trying to redeem Conservartism from the way it had been analysed and structured and sort of put by New Labour. New Labour had turned it into a manufactured Conservatism, into a nasty idea and Cameron was trying to redeem it as an attractive idea. And this idea was society – I think there is a lot of truth in it that New Labour was an attack on society, it represented the state against society or the political class against society – so he was trying to rebuild the notion of society which is full of independence, institution, families... I think Ferdinand Mount's *Subversive Family* is superb... institutions like the Rotary Club or the Women's Institute, charities... Labour had captured the charity sector and turned it into a state sector... Although Cameron said these things, the roots of what he said were quite shallow. He didn't have any real machinery to make it happen.

By chance, at the same time, you had two things happening. Most important of all is Duncan Smith's work in the Centre for Social Justice on welfare, which is really interesting. Welfare had been used by Gordon Brown and New Labour as a means of creating an army of political clients which were dependent on the state for their existence and funding and indeed, they found it impossible to escape from the state. The state was paying, was subsidising people up to 50-60,000 pounds at the end of Brown, and Labour deliberately created a client base among the electorate. It was a very wicked abuse of the welfare system and Ian Duncan Smith has set about trying to change that; to return it to the original notion that the state should rescue people when they fell on disasters of one kind or another - employment, illness - and create a basic source of lifestyle and income. So the aim was to return to the original notion and to redeem the charity, to set free the charities with their own independent non-state ethos... Anyway that's what he's trying to do, and it's very Big Society, for me, that whole welfare thing is. But what puzzles me is that they don't use the word Big Society around welfare, because I think they should.

It happened similarly with Gove and education. Education had been captured by what Gove - Michael Gove is a most interesting figure in government - called the Blob [44]. You know the state educational apparatus tries and creates these free schools, these academies, and clearly their funding comes from the state, but they are given a very significant independence. Again, this is pure Big Society; return to parents rather than bureaucrats... pure Big Society. To some extent the health reforms which are about giving control of the NHS to local doctors rather than to local authorities is another example. So are some of the justice reforms too: redemption of prisoners, handing it over to charities which will transform lives often through religious motivation. Again, non-secular motivations which often threaten the statist ideologies.

So I think the Big Society is very strong, but they never use the language of it now as far as I can think, and it is the one thing which makes sense of what this government is doing – that's what I really think about the Big Society.

44. Le terme de "Blob" est entré dans le vocabulaire politique au milieu des années 1980s. Utilisé par William Bennett, chargé de l'éducation dans l'administration Reagan, et emprunté à un film de science-fiction mettant en scène un monstre à la croissance exponentielle et destructrice, il désigne la coalition d'une bureaucratie éducative hypertrophiée, des syndicats d'enseignants et du milieu de la recherche en education, qui selon Bennett n'avait de cesse de s'opposer aux réformes scolaires. Le terme s'exporte au Royaume-Uni il y a une quinzaine d'années, repris par l'ancien directeur de l'Ofsted Chris Woodhead, avant d'être adopté par Michael Gove.

Institut de l'entreprise: Our impression is that, as in the eighties, the UK is currently the new laboratory in Europe to experiment what could be the new role for the state. Do you think that the action of D. Cameron could be compared to some extent with what happened in the eighties with M. Thatcher?

P.O.: What Thatcher did was to challenge the economic structure. She challenged the role of the State in managing the economy and she challenged the role of the trade unions in determining economic policy. And those were the two things which Thatcher did which were of enormous significance. What Thatcher failed to do, as far as I can see it, was to challenge, to restructure welfare and education. That's what they are trying to do right now. There are huge issues about whether they will succeed; it just may be that they will fail. The criticism of the Gove reforms is that they are tiny so far, and the criticism of the welfare reforms of Duncan Smith is that they just aren't going to work.

Institut de l'entreprise: Why?

P.O.: Why not? Because they say that it's creating a new model for paying people, the Universal Credit, because you pay a lump sum to everyone. It is an incredible, very complex set of payments which are almost impossible for clients and people to understand, but are also tied to how much you are earning. Quite a lot of people appear to think it's certain to fail because it is too complicated, and because of the enormous computer system too. The Treasury thinks it's certain to fail, Mr Osborne is doing his best to stop it all the time.

Institut de l'entreprise: Is Osborne the one who is threatening the Big Society in the government?

P.O.: Osborne, as far as I can tell, he is a manifestation of what in this country would be far right economy. In America, it's the right wing of the Republican party and it's the very form of naked capitalism which he seems to admire. Low tax, minimum standards of social obligation, and he simply believes that if you cut taxes and let the economy run itself that will produce prosperity. And it's an American model. I don't think there is any denial that it has worked in the USA; but it's not the British Conservative. It's the US Republican form of economics. One needs to understand the intellectual construction of George Osborne. Osborne is an incredibly uninteresting figure I think but obviously quite good at manipulating the current political system. Cameron I think emerges from a richer political tradition. The most interesting person in this government is Willetts. He's the one I like most; the other one is Letwin. They are both intellectuals.

Institut de l'entreprise: Phillip Blond and Jesse Norman talk about the role of the family and the necessity to implement fiscal incentives for married couples. Now that is something which has been abandoned by the government, and our impression is that it is so because of the coalition with the Lib-dems.

P.O.: It's because of Osborne. It's the Treasury; maybe it's the Dems too. It's the combination of the Lib-Dems and the Treasury... The Treasury I am told has a doctrinal opposition to fiscal incentives, especially for the family. The Lib-Dems have different reasons.

Institut de l'entreprise: The other thing we were thinking about is the articulation of the Big Society with the fact that British Society is more plural than before. So there is a kind of a paradox for a Conservative. If you think that it is the state which had a bad effect on the social cohesion and you want to empower communities, the problems is that in a country - and France is the same - which is more pluralist and multicultural, you will deepen the divide because the strongest communities are the new religious groups.

P.O.: You mean Islam? I am well in favour of that; I am not worried about Islam. I know you are very secular in France, but I don't see Islam as a threat or menace to anyone. I think it has many great virtues, particularly to a Conservative, someone who is social Conservative. Muslim schools are fine and wonderful even, but Gove will not encourage them as he has the same reservations. As a whole, religious schools work, and Gove realises that and will allow those schools. He won't allow Muslim schools because they are deemed to be, they don't entirely conform to something or another. I think this is mad personally. Of course, the whole point of pluralism is that you are taking away the power of the straights. There are all kinds of paradoxes. You have to allow institutions to fail too: if you allow schools to be run locally you have to accept that there are going to be better schools in one part of the country than another. But if you believe that the state is incapable of running education systems, as we have learnt over the last fifty years... The journalist Simon Jenkins is very articulate about that. He will say that they don't have the guts to do the Big Society because it means taking away so much of the power of the centre, and actually that they talk the language of it sometimes but they never do it because it means giving away too many powers from the centre.

Institut de l'entreprise: How has been education reform perceived by the population?

P.O.: I don't know how it is perceived. I just don't have any knowledge of that. Probably people perceive that they want their children to go to the best school as a whole, but I don't know how it works out locally. Very positively I would have thought, because you

want your children to go to a good school, as a whole, I think it does. I don't think there is much evidence about, I think it's quite new, the last two or three years...

Institut de l'entreprise: How do you see the Big Society agenda evolving in the next years?

P.O.: I think it's evolving really well. They are going to be unrolling the welfare reforms this year; they have already started to do it. Gove is constantly pressing forward with the free schools and so forth. I don't know enough about the charity sector. It would be interesting to see what they think, as well as the social entrepreneurs. I can see lots of stuff they are doing, which fits in with the Big Society proposition. If I was Cameron I would make a speech about the Big Society, actually.

Institut de l'entreprise: But he doesn't speak about it.

P.O.: I don't know why not, actually. But I would do so.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think that for the next election the Big Society agenda will come back?

P.O.: No. Some Conservatives like Jo Johnson and Jesse Norman want to reconstruct the Big Society because it appears to have fallen. But they certainly don't use the language of the Big Society.

As for the next elections, there is this new man, Lynton Crosby, the new political consultant, an Australian. As I understand it they like elements of what is happening, but they want to have raw political messages targeted at the key swing political groups, and I think that the Big Society is too conceptual a proposition. It doesn't mean anything to ordinary voters, or much. What I see is something that changes the relationship between the state and the individual and that's good, but that doesn't mean anything to most of people... In other words, they will talk instead about welfare reforms. What Lynton Crosby says is we hit welfare scroungers. He saw a raw political message which can be used on the doorstep of elections.

Institut de l'entreprise: Isn't it a kind of a failure of politics if you can't use such ideas as Big Society because it's too complicated and conceptual?

P.O.: It's the way it is, I think. Socialist was an abstract idea and it produced slogans; *Big Society* is an abstract political idea, but which doesn't give you slogans. It is part of the people but it's too complicated; it doesn't give you concrete slogans and that's one of its weaknesses. But it articulates very clearly.

Institut de l'entreprise: What is amazing for us is that French intellectuals and commentators have no idea or interest for the UK. The UK is not a model because in France when you talk about the UK, it's too liberal. More broadly in France right wing politicians are not interested in ideas. Intellectuals are completely separated. Left is a bit different, the left wing intellectual are maybe closer to politicians. On the right you can't find any intellectual in France who dares to call himself a Conservative.

P.O.: So much more fun actually to be intellectually against the grain, anyway.

Ipsos MORI - Ben Page/Anna Beckett

Ben Page est directeur général de la société d'études de marché Ipsos MORI, qu'il a rejointe en 1987 à la fin de ses études à Oxford. Il siège à plusieurs conseils consultatifs, comme ceux de la Confederation of British Industry (CBI) ou de l'Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR). Il est considéré par le *Guardian* comme l'une des cent personnalités les plus influentes dans la sphère publique.

Anna Beckett est Directrice de la Rercherche d'Ipsos Mori.

L'objet de cet entretien était de mieux comprendre l'état d'esprit de la société britannique face à l'Etat-providence et aux services publics, deux dimensions des réformes du gouvernement Cameron.

Pour Ben Page et Anna Beckett, les réformes de la *Big Society* ne visent pas à une transformation massive du rôle de l'Etat, mais à réduire légèrement sa taille, tendance commune aux pays occidentaux. On peut retenir de la *Big Society* une vision fondatrice : transparence, responsabilité, efficacité, un Etat moins ambitieux. Etroitement entendue, la *Big Society* consiste à developer le bénévolat et les organisations caritatives ; au sens large, c'est une incitation à ce que les individus prennent davantage de responsabilité pour la fourniture des services publics. Le concept a toutefois échoué : trop abstrait, il a été vu comme un prétexte à la baisse de dépenses engagée suite à la crise.

Tout comme le *Labour* avant lui, les Conservateurs considèrent que les services publics peuvent s'améliorer grace à la mise en concurrence du public et du privé. Mais l'opinion est peu sensible à cette démarche, à partir du moment où la prestation rendue est de bonne qualité, car l'opinion se préoccupe davantage de l'accessibilité des services. En tout cas, les Conservateurs n'ont pas su susciter davantage d'implication de la citoyens dans la fourniture des services publics et des projets de leurs « communautés », peut-être parce que l'Etat est encore suffisamment efficace.

Elément intéressant, malgré la baisse des dépenses publiques depuis 2010, la satisfaction des citoyens à l'égard du service public reste inchangée. Seules les personnes très dépendantes des services sociaux, les personnes âgées par exemple, l'ont ressentie. Après l'augmentation massive des dépenses en 1990-2010, il était normal que leur baisse ne soit pas si douloureuse. Toutefois on ne connaît pas encore l'effet de cette baisse à long terme.

Institut de l'entreprise: We think that the UK is currently leading a massive transformation in the role of the state. What do you think yourself?

Ipsos MORI: That's the theory. The reality is a bit more complicated. We're making an attempt to reduce the overall size of the state slightly – it gets very complicated whether you count benefits, expenditure, debt as opposed to the actual delivery of services. But we have made around a 28% reduction in local government spending, very roughly. Central government department spending is a bit more complicated, because both health and education have been ring-fenced, although both of those face rising demands, which means that ring-fencing is equivalent to cuts.

Anyway, there is a general sort of idea – a sort of proto-vision of the Big Society: transparency, accountability, efficiency, and a smaller, less ambitious state. So there's both a narrow vision, more volunteering and charities, and that's probably the most popular one. The broader one, where we're saying that people need to take more responsibility for their health or welfare, is much more diffuse. People still want the National Health Service provide everything free of charge basically, they haven't really made huge amounts of progress in shifting that perception. Of course people understand now that public services are under financial pressure, for whatever reason, and therefore one will need to re-prioritise them more vigorously. But it's arguable whether there has been a fundamental change in people's mental architecture.

Institut de l'entreprise: Why didn't they manage to?

IM: It's a number of things. One is that you have to look at where they're starting from. The general perception is that the Conservatives are good at looking after the money and being rational with the economy, and good at running the economy, but they're cold-hearted when it comes to public services. They have this story that actually public services are often inefficient. They portray local government as unfair and cruel, stating

that leaving millions of people to live on benefits is very cruel. So their plan is to cut all benefits so that people can go and get a job. Now unfortunately there may not be any jobs, but that's the rhetoric. Big Society wasn't rebranding them from 'the nasty party' so much. Even if it does have some cross-party appeal, it hasn't cut through. And views of the Big Society very strongly correlate with party views – if you're a Conservative voter, you tend to like it; if you're a Labour or Liberal-Democrat voter, you tend to think it's a trick to try and shift responsibility for public services.

IM: And as a brand itself, Big Society, I don't think it's been seen in the national press for a good 18 months now.

IM: Yes, you could do some social media analysis and look at mentions of it over the last year – it's mentioned probably in a more negative than positive sense in terms of media coverage.

IM: I guess the key point to link with that then is that actually the flagship programmes of the Big Society do exist and are still very much underway. I am thinking of three examples of them. First the National Citizens Service, which is the programme for 16- and 17-year-olds, designed to get them volunteering. We're now evaluating the national rollout of that programme. There's also Community First: they're funding local panels - designed for local people to put money out to local causes. And then you have the Community Organisers programme. They're looking at 500 full-time paid organisers supplemented by 4 500 volunteers which are recruited by those core 500 - the evaluation is due to report in the middle of 2015, so it's obviously quite a long way off.

Institut de l'entreprise: The impression we have is that the Big Society itself has been ignored or mocked by people, but some of the policies, like free schools, public service reforms, or Social Impact Bonds (SIB), have been rather well received. Is that correct?

IM: Education is not seen as a problem by the public in Britain, and the main concern that people have is around discipline, not exam standards, which is what much of Michael Gove, the Education Secretary's reforms, are directed at. Now you may be right or wrong in being interested in that, but the public is less interested than he is. On the free schools initiative – I mean, in terms of people's ideology around the involvement of different players providing schools – the public is pretty agnostic, but is prejudiced against religious groups, for example, having more involvement. And it's complicated, because religious groups already run a lot of schools. I think the answer is that people

aren't keen – we asked people, "which of the following should not run state schools?", and the most popular one was religious organisations, 35%, private companies, 34%, and interestingly, groups of parents, 32%. Actually, people were most likely to say that they think that local government should run local schools. And we asked, "who should be the most appropriate group to run state-funded schools?", top of the list is local councils, which of course the government is trying to stop running schools, and bottom of the list is private companies and business organisations.

The vision that the government has of a much greater diversity of provision is not the same among the people – even though it's fair to say that the public generally would like to send their children to private schools if they could afford to do so, mainly by that, they mean things like Eton, Winchester or some of the great British private schools. Generally, when you ask people in a local area, there is no enthusiasm for massively extending the diversity of who is delivering what. So free schools may or may not be successful, and you know, they are, in a way, by opening, and they almost answer the argument of the Conservatives that there is more diversity, but it's not yet clear that they are providing better capacity costs effectively. There is some evidence that resources are being taken from existing schools to go into them, there is a high degree of self-selection, and a sense that more motivated parents will tend to choose them.

And more broadly, free schools, public service reforms, Social impact bonds (SIB) as part of the Big Society, this is all deeply nuanced, but people don't use the Big Society as a catch-all phrase for this sort of overall government programme reform. The Big Society tends to refer very specifically to, basically community volunteering and organisation, and maybe some local ownership of assets. It doesn't extend to broader changes to welfare.

Institut de l'entreprise: Is the diversity of public service provision greater today than before?

IM: It's exactly as under the Labour government. One of the common premises on public service reform, which is common to both the Blairites in the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, is that choice and competition from the private sector improve the delivery of public services.

Institut de l'entreprise: And what do citizens think about it?

IM: They don't care. The public want good schools and good hospitals near their house, and feel that competition and choice are effectively means to an end, but they are not a social good in their own right. So for twenty years, parents have been told that students had a huge choice of schools – the reality is that the choice is virtually non-existent, because all the good ones are over-subscribed. If you ask the public to choose choice on a list on options between quality, fast access and choice, choice on its own is going to be a long way down the list.

IM: If you ask them how they made their decision, they say "I chose the one that was closest", or "I chose the one that could see me first" when it comes to the health service, but they're not making choices based on quality, which is what the policy would want them to do potentially.

IM: Also, they listen to other parents' recommendation rather than detailed evaluation. Most people don't use statistics to make judgements about public services, they rely on anecdotes.

IM: It makes people very uncomfortable to think that one hospital might be better or worse than another hospital.

IM: Because they take the principles of the NHS as being that it is sacred and that generally, it is very good quality, and that the issue has always been about access. So the ideal is that making all services digital and putting all information online will lead to better and more informed choices, which will then lead to driving up standards in delivery of public services. The problem is that most people don't use that sort of information to make decisions. Yes, there are groups of people who are digitally empowered, particularly in health services, but most people are not behaving in that way.

Institut de l'entreprise: Have you realised some specific research about different groups of people involved?

IM: There was a project we did, a survey for Zurich Municipal, where we've asked hundreds of public service managers based in central government, in the health service, in local authorities, in communes how likely they believe government reforms are to have worked, and what their concerns are. And the point is that the public sector is not massively enthusiastic about government reforms. But it's also true to say that they

were not that enthusiastic about a lot of Labour's reforms. This is part of a broader trend of removing professional judgement and putting more measurements on professionals in every sense and building more personal accountability on to the professions, which of course was a trend across the Western world, and the professions, are generally resisting it.

Institut de l'entreprise: And as for the spending cuts, how are they received among the population? Mr Page, you often say that "British people want Swedish welfare on American tax rates".

IM: That is something I usually say, and that is one of the central challenges we have. The British would like to have public services like the French, but we don't want to pay French rates of taxation. What that has led to is constant pressures, and in a sense, you know, constant pressures to save money, do things more efficiently and trying to avoid putting up taxes to pay for these services. But at the same time, demand for services and expectations tend to rise with living standards. So in terms of the cuts so far, it's a very mixed picture. But at the same time satisfaction with local government is often either the same or even higher than in 2010. Despite the various scandals around the health service[45] – and they are not particularly connected with funding cuts – satisfaction with the health service is holding up. The proportion of people who say that the biggest problem facing the NHS is underfunding is the same as people five years ago, very roughly. And we have the lowest rate of crime since 1981 despite the cuts in police numbers. Of course some of these are global trends in Western democracy. So broadly, for most people who are not highly dependent, most people haven't noticed too many changes so far.

The group of people who tend to report noticing cuts are the minority of the population who are heavy users of social services: the elderly and particularly disabled people. They do tend to report having noticed cuts, and of course, that is often where the squeeze is the greatest because the cut programme in local government which is delivering these services is the deepest cut across the public sector, and it's combined with rising demand, with our aging population, which at this precise point is rising rapidly.

If you look at the state expenditure on public services – the percentage of GDP, compared to France, Germany, America and Japan - what you will see over the period 1990-2010

45. Cf. note p.81.

is a massive rise in the United Kingdom, whereas in France, it was always high, in Japan always relatively low. So we ended up in 2010, by historic standards in Britain, at what we would call fully funded. So one of the arguments is that the first few years of austerity took away things that were nice to have, but were not essential. The issue here is really the effects of hysteresis, the long-term human effects of some of these changes. Because we have cut capital expenditure in the public sector very markedly, that is perhaps one of the reasons why the return to growth has been slow compared to America and other places. We don't know yet what the long-term effects are. But in local government, people will say, "we've done the easy things, we've laid off 20% of the staff, we've cut everything to the bone, but now as we go on making cuts, we will hit this tipping point."

Connected to that, certainly, as expenditure rose in public services during the first part of the 21st century, what we would see is a non-linear relationship between experience or public satisfaction with services and actual output delivered. Let's take the health service. We had at one time over 1 million people waiting over 12 months for an operation, and as they reduced the number of people waiting, first of all from 12 months to 9 months, and then from 9 months to 6 months, there was a notable rise in satisfaction. When they cut it from 6 months to 3 months, it made no difference at all, and it was only in the last period when they reduced the time down to an average 8 weeks that suddenly public satisfaction and confidence in the NHS rose.

The other thing – do you remember that the Chinese Communist leader Zhou Enlai, when asked what the impact of the 1789 French Revolution had been on human affairs, replied: "it's too soon to tell." It is the same in terms of austerity in Britain, there are two scenarios. One is: actually, the Conservative hypothesis was right, public services were overfunded and inefficient; therefore they have become more inventive and creative, and Big Society is filling some of the gaps. The other scenario is that we will hit a tipping point, that you will see rising public dissatisfaction and that the Conservatives will be kicked out of office in 2015. At the moment it is not clear.

Institut de l'entreprise: As for community involvement, people often say that they are personally interested in being more involved, but only few of them are actually doing so. Has the government action helped improve community involvement?

IM: Indeed the general pattern is that people express a general interest in being involved, but the numbers who actually get involved are very small. We did for example opinion

polls in large Brazilian cities like Porto Allegre and looked at communities and participatory budgeting. We found that even in Porto Allegre, most people were unaware that they were a global centre of brilliance and community budgeting. They all thought it was a nice idea, but they were unaware that that was available in their city.

Labour were very keen on moving this, but we have no evidence that they achieved any change between 2000 and 2010 when they spent millions of pounds on initiatives of this type. If anything, people became crosser with some elements of public services, particularly claims - claims of abilities to influence when they found that actually, in practice, they still felt powerless. But it's too soon to tell.

I think, to be honest, the position isn't really changing, and one of the reasons for that is because the state is relatively effective, and most people don't feel the need. We know that people get involved when services go wrong or don't work, in the same way that people often get involved in politics to stop things happening or to protest about things rather than for positive reasons. So we don't believe that there is any massive surge in community engagement or involvement.

Institut de l'entreprise: What have been the consequences of the policies led by the government on inequalities? We are thinking less of the actual measure of them, but more of the public attitude towards them.

IM: Officially, measures of income inequality have fallen. The question of the attitude of the public is an interesting one. There is a longer-term trend in Britain towards less sympathy for the poor. We traditionally would have said that in theory, Britons love the idea of equality, but of course compared to France and Germany, our society is much more like America, and we are willing to tolerate – subconsciously, perhaps, rather than consciously – very high levels of inequality. Coupled with that is the fact that over the last 25 years the general trend has been towards greater acceptance, or certainly greater unwillingness to spend money on the poor, which obviously is one way of reducing inequality. Although people still say that the government should fight inequality, when you ask them directly if the government should raise taxes in order to spend more money on the poor, support for that has fallen from 50 or 60% down to 27% over the last 20 years. And in particular, there is a generational shift happening, where the young at the bottom of the pile, who are most likely to be suffering the consequences of the recession are least likely to be sympathetic to the idea of state action to assist the poor.

IM: One of the interesting aspects of this question is the following: are people ready to accept more inequality for the sake of increased choice and community empowerment? And in that case I'm not sure there's any demand for increased choice or community empowerment...

The great paradox in all this is that people will say in surveys that they want much more local control and determination of, say, outcomes in public services - that's localism. But the trouble is they simultaneously believe that standards for the delivery of public services should be identical everywhere, even to how often the grass is cut in local parks. And so, you know, particularly in relation to services like health, they believe that services in the South West of England must be the same as in Northern Scotland, and that it's unfair to have one service available in one place and not available in another - they would rather have it not available anywhere than only have it available in one place.

Institut de l'entreprise: Are they against personalising public services?

IM: They like the idea of it. When it comes down to "would you like one lump of sugar in your tea?" or "would you like halal food in your hospital or roast beef and Yorkshire pudding?" Then yes, of course, they like the ability to choose that. But again, it cuts against these conceptions of fairness when people get radically different bundles of services in one part of the country compared to another.

Institut de l'entreprise: In that context, what do you think the main themes for the next General Election will be? Could the Big Society be one of them?

IM: I think it's unlikely, because it is a very technical-type thing. It interests public services but it doesn't interest the public. It's a bit like ideas about choice and reform, it's another rather abstract idea, and the Big Society isn't really an end in itself particularly, they're not saying they want to promote community parties or people knowing their neighbours, which is how the public might like it. The public would complain that people aren't polite to each other and that there's too much anti-social behaviour, but the Big Society is a form of delivering services, and people don't want this, this is a technical means to an end. They just want to know that all hospitals will be providing brilliant services at weekends, fully staffed with consultants everywhere – that's the sort of promise they want, not that you can go and organise your own hospital if you care to do so.

Institut de l'entreprise: More generally, do you think that the Big Society concept and the British reforms could have some impact abroad? We are thinking of France especially.

IM: It's interesting how much governments copy each other all the time anyway. Lots of our ideas come from America, Sweden, Canada, New Zealand, Australia. The general current in the delivery of public services is about, you know, privatisation, choice, competition, diversity, pluralism in provision. You know the phrase by Angela Merkel, that Europe is 7% of the world's population, 25% of the world's economy, and around 50% of the world's welfare spending, meaning that Europe has to cut its expenditure. Britain has, I think, historically been further along that curve than France, because you do have less marketisation in it than ours does, as far as I can see. But it seems that the trajectory is basically the same, with some local variations.

The one thing about Britain that is unique and that we never realise is how centralised we were – we are. So you have much more decentralised public services than we do, your departments are much stronger, some of your administrations are much stronger. We have had decades of centralisation – a lot of our centralisation, though, has been about efficiency and fairness and so in the end, efficiency and fairness seem, in Britain at least, to have beaten localism.

Institut de l'entreprise: In France, decentralisation is perceived by the administration as a way of wasting money.

IM: Wasting money? Sure, and that's *de facto*, it's why units of local government in Britain in successive reforms since the 1960s have been getting larger and larger, because the general view is that you need a population of about 1 million, for example, to really run, for examples, child protection services effectively – you need certain economies of scale. So that's the general trend.

Since 2010 local authorities have had their budgets cut and some of the regimes that were designed to drive service improvement taken away. They have no freedom to raise taxes and money for example – locally determined budgets, which obviously is what localism would ultimately really be about. That's deemed too politically toxic.

3 Academics

Tim Bale

Tim Bale est professeur de sciences politiques à Queen Mary University.

Après des études à Cambridge et un doctorat en sciences politiques à l'Université de Sheffield, il enseigne en Nouvelle-Zélande jusqu'en 2003 puis à l'université de Sussex en Angleterre. Il est nommé à la chaire de sciences politiques de la Queen Mary University en 2012 et est co-fondateur du groupe « Conservatives and Conservatism » de la Political Studies Association, qui étudie l'évolution de la pensée et des politiques du Parti Conservateur. Il a publié plusieurs ouvrages, parmi lesquels *The Conservative Party from Thatcher to Cameron*, récompensé par le prix W.J.M. Mackenzie de la Political Studies Association, et plus récemment *The Conservatives since 1945: the Drivers of Party Change*.

Sa grande connaissance du Parti Conservateur le désignait comme un interlocuteur de premier plan pour comprendre le lien entre la *Big Society* et le parti lui-même.

Tim Bale voit dans la *Big Society* un projet aux racines américaines, soutenant que l'Etat prend trop de services en charge et empêche la société civile de s'en saisir, alors que cette dernière y réussirait peut-être mieux que l'Etat.

Quant à l'origine intellectuelle de la *Big Society*, Tim Bale estime que Phillip Blond et Jesse Norman n'ont pas, au sein du Parti Conservateur, l'influence que les médias leur ont attribuée. La *Big Society* n'est pas non plus le produit d'une réflexion philosophique de la part des politiques, mais celui de conseillers en communication.

Pour Tim Bale, la *Big Society* n'a pas fonctionné car l'idée en a été introduite trop tardivement et n'a pas rencontré l'adhésion des *Tories*, ni celle des médias ou du public. La principale cause de son échec réside dans la baisse du soutien public aux associations, notamment au niveau des autorités locales.

Il est peu probable enfin que la *Big Society* ait une quelconque influence en Europe continentale.

Institut de l'entreprise: How would you define the "Big Society"? According to you, is it more of a political vision, a state of mind to be aroused among the opinion or of a set of clearly circumscribed public policies? Or is it just a slogan aimed to "detoxify" the Tory party?

Tim Bale: The Big Society is part and parcel of a belief that the State not only does too much in the UK but, in so doing, effectively 'crowds out' voluntary and Third Sector activity which might actually stand a better chance than centralised government agencies of helping to solve entrenched social problems. It had some relevance to the attempt to detoxify the Tory brand in the sense that it was the institutional expression of Cameron's insistence that "there is such a thing as society, it's just not the same as the state." But it came very late on in the piece – too late to resonate with the public before the election. There is also an extent to which Cameron and co., by talking about it, were trying to make it real.

Institut de l'entreprise: In what extent can these ideas be described as Conservative? Among its promoters, what has been the effective political influence of Phillip Blond and Jesse Norman? In what extent are their ideas shared by the Conservative Party/ the government?

T. B.: Neither Phillip Blond nor Jesse Norman were anything like as prominent in the higher counsels of the Party as some in the media liked to suggest. Blond – a very effective ideas-entrepreneur with some admittedly striking corporatist ideas – was never really a guru, nor that close to Cameron. Norman, also a very bright guy, probably had more weight in Tory circles – he is a Conservative MP, after all. It may have suited Cameron and those around them to give the impression that they were capable, too, of thinking such deep thoughts but the ideas that the Big Society emerged from communing with philosophers is utterly fanciful. Most politicians have neither the time nor the inclination to engage with ideas in that way. If you are looking for the brain behind the Big Society it is, for good or ill, Steve Hilton's.

Institut de l'entreprise: Many Conservatives have complained that the Big Society message flopped during the election campaign and contributed to the party's failure to win a majority. What is your opinion on that topic? Conversely, would the policies implemented by the current coalition have been really different if the Conservative Party has been the only party in charge?

T. B.: It did flop: it was introduced too late, had no 'buy-in' from Conservative MPs and candidates, nor any resonance with journalists or the public. But it didn't lose the party the election: it was never going to win it, especially once its talk of an age of austerity seemed to confirm many worried voters' concerns about what the Conservatives would do to public spending and the economy after the election. As for the coalition making much difference compared to a purely Conservative government, I think there would have been only marginal differences: the Lib-Dems completely underplayed their hand and are anyway run by a bunch of centrist-cum centre-right leaders who every day give the lie to the centre-left image their party had prior to 2010 – hence their massive loss of support since then.

Institut de l'entreprise: The Big Society has often been described by its detractors as a vague ideological concept; as a matter of fact, it can be very variously interpreted. Could it be said that there is a Conservative version of it, as well as a liberal or a progressive one (cf. Blue Labour)?

T. B.: There is clearly some commonality with Blue Labour ideas of community action, but the difference is that Labour Party people do not automatically assume that if you deliberately create a vacuum by withdrawing government assistance then the Third Sector will come rushing in to fill it. As for Liberalism – yes: it is a liberal, Victorian or Gladstonian ideal, so inevitably there's some similarity.

Institut de l'entreprise: The Big Society seems today not to be mentioned anymore in the Prime Minister's speeches. Meanwhile, it would be too severe to dismiss it as superficial campaign rhetoric, due to the significant legislative and policy initiatives which have been implemented so far. What is your opinion on that topic? Is the Big Society agenda still effective, even without being branded as such?

T. B.: It's effectively dead – there's no enthusiasm for it in the Party at large and the evidence suggests that it hasn't worked because all the voluntary associations pretty much relied on state support from local authorities, which has shrunk. I doubt we will hear anything of it at the next election.

Institut de l'entreprise: Political commentator Peter Oborne told us that "David Cameron is pure Big Society and the only thing that justifies him is the Big Society". What do you think of such a statement? Would a failure of Big Society be lethal to David Cameron's ability to do a second term?

T. B.: It is a nice soundbite but David Cameron isn't defined by it – one could equally call him a social liberal. The failure of the Big Society will have no bearing on his ability to win the next election – that's all about the economy and Labour's failure so far to come up with a convincing alternative.

Institut de l'entreprise: Would you say that the Big Society concept could be exported abroad, or is it deeply rooted in British tradition and culture? Have you heard of any interest in that policy from other countries?

T. B.: It is an American idea – in the sense that it is all about Thatcherites (including Cameron) wanting to make the UK more like the USA. It cannot and will not be transplanted to Britain and I doubt it will have any bearing on politics in continental Europe.

Jason Edwards

Jason Edwards est maître de conférences (lecturer) en sciences politiques à Birkbeck, University of London. Il étudie l'histoire de la pensée politique ainsi que les théories politiques contemporaines, avec un intérêt particulier pour la théorie de la démocratie et notamment l'associationnisme. Jason Edwards est éditeur et contributeur de *Retrieving The Big Society* [46], un ouvrage collectif étudiant le projet de *Big Society*, sa portée et ses limites.

Selon Jason Edwards, la *Big Society* n'est pas un concept vraiment nouveau: il existe chez les Conservateurs une longue tradition de réflexion sur la société civile (Burke, Oakeshott), avec une résurgence dès les années 1970. Au moins deux versions de la *Big Society* sont possibles, l'une conservatrice (Blond) et l'autre plus libérale (Norman), avec comme point commun l'importance de la société civile.

Pour D. Cameron, il s'agit d'une volonté de repositionner le parti comme plus généreux et attentif à l'autonomie de l'individu par rapport à l'Etat. En réalité c'est un prétexte à la baisse des dépenses publiques et à la privatisation des services. Rien d'efficace n'a été fait pour dynamiser véritablement la société civile.

Les *free schools* de leur côté ouvrent la porte à l'immixtion des entreprises dans l'éducation. Dans les quartiers défavorisés par ailleurs, les parents ne seront sûrement pas capables de s'investir dans ces projets. Enfin il s'agit d'une vision centralisée de l'éducation.

Edwards préfère à la *Big Society* l'« associationnisme », consistant à définir une troisième voie entre l'Etat et le marché, l'Etat délaissant une partie de son pouvoir en faveur d'associations de citoyens pour délivrer les services publics et le secteur privé voyant l'apparition de mutuelles et de cooperatives.

46. *The Political Quarterly, "Retrieving The Big Society"*, Septembre 2011.

Institut de l'entreprise: We are peculiarly interested in understanding the intellectual origins of the Big Society as well as its coherence

Jason Edwards: It depends who you read to understand this. I suppose Phillip Blond's line would be that there is a long tradition of thinking about the importance of civil association in conservatism. So for him, it goes back to at least Edmund Burke in the late 18th century. You get people like Blond and also Jesse Norman who make these claims. Norman talks of Aristotle as an intellectual progenitor. I'm not sure that David Cameron and his colleagues actually take that part of it seriously. But what they might take more seriously is the kind of thinking about a Tory civil society which had a revival from, I would say, the mid-1970s through to the 1980s. So even in the time when Thatcherism was dominant in the Conservative Party, there were still people who believed very strongly in a civic Conservatism. Indeed, in some her rhetoric, Margaret Thatcher talked about the importance of a kind of civil society, a civil kind of politics, though I don't think that played out at all in Thatcherism in government, which was very much about centralising things. But there were Tories who wrote about the importance of civil association. Ferdinand Mount is probably the best known example.

Institut de l'entreprise: Yes, he is one of the real fathers of the Big Society along with David Willetts.

J.E.: Yes, that's right, and the idea been there in a way for a relatively long time. There is nothing particularly new in Conservative thinking about civil society; it was kind of drowned out by Thatchersim in the 80s and to an extent in the 90s. And of course, Cameron's whole political strategy was to reposition the Conservative Party as being nicer than it was under Margaret Thatcher and to think about ways in which you might liberate people. The problem with Thatcherism is that she talked about the individual and the importance of the individual, but massive amounts of new laws and regulations about how people could conduct themselves came into place. So Cameron really was looking for that kind of tradition, I think, as a kind of hook, as something to put his conservatism on. Again, I don't think he is a great intellectual nor is somebody like Steve Hilton. To them, it's more about the policies, and part of that as well is I think, conveniently, and my position is a very critical one on this, it's been a means of justifying cuts in public expenditure, and policies of privatisation, marketisation that have taken place since 2010.

Institut de l'entreprise: But David Cameron was talking about the Big Society even before he won the leadership, so before the austerity.

J.E.: That's true. I don't think it was designed as a justification for austerity but it has become so since 2010. The Liberal-Democrats in the coalition were quite happy to dress themselves up in this Big Society talk as well. It's become a sort of means of selling the message, "we can reduce the size of the state and we can reduce public expenditure, because we're meeting the goals of creating a Big Society". Strategically I think it helps in putting that message across.

Institut de l'entreprise: The ideas of Norman and Blond are very different. For example, Norman is more market-oriented than Blond. Is Norman is more influential within the Conservative Party than Blond?

J.E.: Yes, that's true, he has just been appointed as Cameron's adviser, and he is more of an influence. In part the way to think about the difference between them is that the key thinker for Blond is Edmund Burke, and for Norman it would be more Michael Oakeshott, who I am writing about at the moment. Jesse like Phillip would say that they are against the big corporations, they believe there should be regulations and that companies like Google should pay their tax. It's not a kind of *laissez-faire* view that Jesse has. But it's true that he is not socially illiberal, whereas Phillip is more socially Conservative.

Institut de l'entreprise: Is Blond more critical of Thatcher?

J.E.: Yes, he is more critical and dismissive, I think. Jesse would say that the ideology of Thatcherism which was about the small state and liberating people from dependencies from the state, was right but executed wrongly at various points.

Institut de l'entreprise: If we want to analyse the gap between the thought and the policies implemented, the first issue is to look at the people who are implementing them. Cameron is not an intellectual and Steve Hilton was more of a PR man. There is also the question of the coalition. The work of the Centre for Social Justice was quite influential in the Conservative thought, with this vision of a 'broken Britain' and a strong emphasis on the role of the family. Now if you look at the policies that have been implemented, the moral dimension of the family has been abandoned. Is it because the Liberal-Democrats are more liberal on societal issues?

J.E.: True, but Cameron was very much flagging up his liberal credentials on social policies and social issues, even if he wasn't taking the whole of his party with him. And

he was doing that right from his campaign to be elected leader of the Conservative Party. So I think in a way Cameron and Clegg get on very well, probably on a number of levels, because they share that kind of liberal social outlook. It's the rest of the Conservative Party that Cameron can't take with him. But I'm not sure that really ties in with the Big Society, for the reason that I think you can have a Conservative and a liberal version of the Big Society, if by conservatism and liberalism you mean something about general social attitudes. I think again that's probably a right characterisation to say that the Big Society is more Conservative than Jesse Norman's idea of it, but actually what's at the core of it, or at least should be at the core of it, is this idea of the importance of civil society, civil associations as forms of social and economic governance. I think that's really what appears to be at the centre of it, and I think that policies in practice, that the coalition have put into place, don't do anything to enhance civil society in that way.

If you look at what you might call the Big Society policies which are about giving voluntary organisations power to deliver public services, there's very little of that. There's some talk and action about involving charities. But the social enterprises that are involved in things like putting people back to work and finding them jobs, and so on, are effectively big private corporations; something like A4e (*Action for Employment*) is a private company basically. They get huge amounts of money from the government. They lobby the government to get funds and they make profits out of them. The evidence on the whole tends to show that they are not that effective at what they are supposed to do, which is to put people back to work. What you see is effectively an extension of privatisation, the marketisation of public services, not the creation of active citizen-led associations that can be responsible for social and economic governance.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think that it is always incompatible to have big firms involved in public services and in the same time more people volunteering or even involved themselves in the public services delivery?

J.E.: I don't see how you can. It's an old problem which is about how the state 'delivers' public services. Does it deliver itself from the centre or does it employ agents to do this? But it's still 'delivery' of those services, it says nothing about the power that citizens have over how those services are governed. The Big Society is really about achieving substantive social and economic goals that have a moral overtone. For Cameron it's all about creating a responsible society where individuals are responsible. But in fact what 'responsibility' refers to is people playing loud music and waking up their neighbours at all hours, or it's about getting people to get off their backsides and into work, or about making better managers and executives of public and private corporations. The Big So-

ciety is a social and economic project first and foremost, and social enterprises are part of the vehicle for this, but it's not a political project in the sense that it's about giving power to citizens to run public services and hold government to account. The big companies and social entrepreneurs who are now 'delivering' public services are not accountable to people, and most people don't even know what these companies are and what they do.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do the thinkers of the Big society speak a republican language without fully understanding its consequences?

J.E.: Understanding what is required in terms of the civil or political conditions for a Big Society, which is where citizens participate more, that's what is, I think, just completely ignored in the Conservative vision of the Big Society. Ultimately it boils down to saying, "we want people to volunteer to help others in a paternalistic way, on the one hand, and on the other its about having street parties." In other words it's about shifting the burden of public services onto the voluntary sector *and* encouraging some stronger sense of social identity. But it doesn't really take seriously how institutions and politics work to achieve these ends, or even the extent of public backing required to promote that kind of volunteering society. The great achievement of volunteerism in recent times is the Olympics of last year - all of these people who were really helpful and friendly and weren't being paid a penny to do this.

Institut de l'entreprise: It's a festal vision of the Big Society?

J.E.: But this event was paid out of public money! 94% of Olympic spending came from the state. It is just too limited to encourage people to volunteer to run their local library – which people are having to do because of course local authorities are having their budget cuts and cannot afford to keep the libraries open. And the only people who can do it in those circumstances are local people. That's where my scepticism lies because I think it's a means of running public services on the cheap and not doing them very well.

Institut de l'entreprise: Let's take the example of education – free schools and academies, which seem to be one of the best successes of the government and one of the worse examples for its detractors. Do you think there is something new here?

J.E.: Labour bought the academies in. But the principle of free schools is something I could agree with. The principle that teachers and parents are given public money to go

create and govern their own schools, as long as those schools abide by minimum standards and don't discriminate against children on religious grounds, that's a very good idea. But then there are problems that come with it, and in the way Michael Gove and the government have approached it. They are gradually giving a licence for private companies to come in and effectively run the schools. Companies cannot make profit from the schools, but Gove has talked about that possibility in the future, and you can see the direction they are going in. The problem is the following: when you set something up, there's always energy and a desire of people to participate, but five years down the line, if you have these free schools established and working ok, parents will take less and less of an interest [see essay by Adam Leeder and Deborah Mabbett in *Retrieving the* Big Society]. They will send their kids to these schools, but they are not going to be that centrally concerned with how it is governed. Increasingly they will be relying on private education companies which come in and at some point, as Gove sees it, gradually will make a profit out of this. That makes somebody like me uncomfortable because then that is public money turned into private gains.

The second problem is that there is the idea with the free schools and academies, which I think is a good one, that parents and teachers should be allowed to create schools and govern them directly. The difficulty though is that lots of schools will not be capable of being governed in this way in poor and inner city areas, where the parents don't have the social and educational capital to be involved them. And who is going to run them? The Gove position is that the state should do it. But in reality they are forcing people down the road to academies, a situation that is not going to be good for their children.

Institut de l'entreprise: Not all of the schools are supposed to become free schools or academies. Some of them will stay public-run schools, controlled by the local authorities.

J.E.: Indeed. But then there are as I said also lots of them which are being forced into taking academy status. OFSTED [47] goes in, notices that the school is failing, and will find a sponsor to come in and run it, having taken it out of local authority control.

Institut de l'entreprise: What is the specific role of sponsoring in academy?

J.E.: To set up the governance of the school: the board which governs the school. In that frame the local authority has no say in how the school is actually governed. This was

47. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills is the official body for inspecting schools.

introduced by Labour but Gove sees it as another kind of vehicle for his vision of education. I'm sorry to say that, but there's never been such a centralised dictatorial view of how the education system should be run as under Gove. He pretty much wants to impose his educational philosophy concerning how schools should be organised, and is pretty bad at listening to those with alternative and perhaps sounder views.

Institut de l'entreprise: The system is very centralised indeed. However we read some examples of successful academies in some very poor areas, where it really helped the children, especially as for the discipline and the quality of teaching. Cannot free schools help in some cases? Shouldn't it be implemented on a case by case basis?

J.E.: I'm not saying that local authorities are brilliant either...

Institut de l'entreprise: In France, such an idea could never be possible because school is an institution. Has school the same place in the UK? How have people reacted in front of the free schools?

J.E.: The reactions were mixed. To be honest it is primarily the middle-class which is interested in them, as they have the social capital to be involved in such programmes. Most of the schools have been set up by them. Then there has been a lot of resistance from the teachers unions and the left for the reasons that I was talking about: the encroachment of the private sector into these schools in the long run, perhaps to make profit from them.

Institut de l'entreprise: We were wondering if there weren't another type of risk with free schools. Some communities – which is a very ambiguous term in the Big Society agenda - could take over these schools. In a French republican perspective, we would immediately be thinking of schools run by religious communities, even Islamist ones.

J.E.: That's a distinctive kind of difference. Part of the justification of free schools is actually that religious groups can set up their own free schools as long as they teach a certain a kind of core curriculum. There are critics of this view. There was criticism of Labour's policy where 'faith schools' were encouraged [48]. And actually there is an interesting debate about the freedom of association in society and the limits of toleration. What would be wrong with a group of Muslims setting up a Muslim school where part of

48. Until 1997, the UK funded only Christian or Jewish faith schools. Muslim schools existed but were privately funded. The Labour government 1997-2007 expanded this to other religions, and began using the term 'faith school'.

what the children did was to learn about Islam, if they were also teaching the kids English, maths and history, meeting the demands of the curriculum, occasionally inspected and seemed to be meeting standards? Now of course there's a certain kind of republican argument that what's wrong with this is that the public sphere should be a secular one and public money should not be given to religious groups to propagate their ideas and values.

Institut de l'entreprise: From a French perspective, there would this question of articulating the Big Society with multiculturalism. As you said, one can have various interpretations for the Big Society. There is the Conservative one, maybe a Labour one and also a progressive one with some people like Maurice Glasman. There should be some criterions to distinguish those three visions. In one of your articles, you talk about the difference of communities by faith and communities by choice. Maybe the first ones fit with the Conservative vision of the Big Society. Another criterion would be the place given to the market and correlatively the Third Sector.

J.E.: That's right. You have to accept the reality of modern pluralism and individualism and find a way of dealing with that. For me the best model is some kind of associationalism. Are you familiar with the work of Paul Hirst? *Associative Democracy*, Hirst's book, is the most practically oriented about what an associative society might look like. There's also a selection of essays in *From Statism to Pluralism*. Hirst also edited a book on the English political pluralists like GDH Cole and Harold Laski, who in some respects resemble thinkers like Durkheim and Proudhon.

Associative Democracy gives us an idea what an associative society might look like. Hirst wasn't just thinking about the UK, but primarily about western societies defined by pluralism and individualism and how you might find a third way between the state and the market. It's kind of utopian, but he realised the political difficulties and problems there would be in moving towards something like that. In any case, it's difficult to see how you can move towards it without having a government actually committed to reforming in that way. It would involve the state empowering associations of citizens in the delivery of public services, but also - and this never gets talked about in the Conservative vision of the Big Society – in the private sector on the model of mutuals and cooperative associations, and things like giving workers real representation and real power on boards of directors.

Institut de l'entreprise: What difference then with social democracy? In this vision these associations would be also political, like unions.

J.E.: It's more like syndicalism, but it's not about the trade unions at all. You have to think about associations in very wide terms. A self-governing school could appear as an association, as could a self-governing hospital. In that case it's an association of the patients, the doctors, the nurses and the consultants. I am here thinking of an association in a broader sense, more like what Durkheim meant by a professional association. I don't think it's a blueprint, a political program that could be implemented as such, but it's a way of thinking of a more democratic economic system and the governance of public services.

Institut de l'entreprise: Thinking of the French version of the Big Society, we were thinking about Durkheim and the solidarism - which is close to this vision. Historically the doctrine of solidarism has partially led to the welfare state, but there could have been other ways.

J.E.: That's right. From Proudhon onwards, I think it's very much worth going back to this pre-state version of socialism. But that kind of gets wiped out in the UK in 1945. In 1945, the creation of the welfare state was very centralised. The government did wonderful things to give opportunities to working class people, who never had them before. But the mind-set of 'delivering' was very centralised. "We are at the centre here, we are giving you these benefits, be grateful for what you are getting". They did little to think about how they would involve citizens in deciding how welfare and public services would operate on the ground.

Part of the problem in the UK is the NHS. Everyone knows the NHS and is proud of it: we have this wonderful system and anybody can use it, regardless of background or work. In fact it's not a very wonderful system, and the problem is the attitude towards it, that we have to have *one* health service and *one* health system. But it doesn't match the reality of the situation which, of course, is that healthcare is about all kinds of different things. It's not just about treatment but also prevention or living a healthy life. It takes place through all kinds of institutions and practices, and the idea that you have it in one national health service run by somebody sitting in Whitehall is just crazy. But that's the kind of mind set you have to deal with in British politics.

So, if there's a progressive left view of the Big Society, one of the things that it has to do I think is actually say it doesn't want people dependent on the state, and in a sense this is where the Thatcherite Right , the New Right, had something worthwhile to say. It was

wrong in its policies and implementation, but you have to be against the big state, which is not to say that you are against the state doing the right kind of things, and being quite extensive in the way it regulates associations and the relationship between them. It's no good to have the state managing your health. It's no good to have the state providing and delivering welfare benefits or trying to run sectors of the economy. That's something that the left has to face up to in Britain and perhaps even more so In France.

Institut de l'entreprise: Whatever one think about the Big Society, something is happening there. The UK may be the new laboratory for the post-crisis welfare state. What is very striking for us is that in France, there is no debate at all about the role of the society, neither some interest for the UK.

J.E.: That's interesting to hear. The case for the state being active in doing something about the financial crisis is probably a good one, given the circumstances that we are facing and have been facing. This is what the government here have got completely wrong; we needed some stimulus. But for the long term that can't be the answer any more, because of the extent of pluralism, the extent of the decline in trust about what the state does and what politicians do, and the way that political parties are increasingly strongly disliked by citizens. You have to think about alternative kinds of solutions and the one that, of course, has been so squarely on the table for the last 30 years is the neo-liberal one. It's about the market and privatisation and it fails on all kinds of counts. It fails to achieve its own outcomes which is greater economic growth and a more prosperous economy. That's why associational thinking, as I would call it, has to be taken more and more seriously. Here on the left, you're right about people like Maurice Glasman in the Labour. John Cruddas as well is having an important influence on the Miliband party.

Institut de l'entreprise: Cruddas is responsible for the program of the party. It's not a marginal group within the party.

J.E.: Cruddas has a real influence and you may see that reflected in the manifesto. But it's still for me far too restrained and not radical enough, particularly in its political implications. I think that's the great problem in Britain is that we don't realise the extent of political reform that we need. We have far too many vested interests in keeping the system the way that it is; it gives power to lobbyists and big corporate interests who exercise influence over the government, and that is something which I think needs to be addressed more. But in terms of social and economic governance, associationalism is kind of on the agenda of the left here.

Institut de l'entreprise: Another stake of this debate is to emphasize again the idea of common good.

J.E.: To me it's more about the quality of public life than the common good. I think this is where Tocqueville is really relevant. It's the quality of the public life, the capacity of citizens to participate, to have their voice heard in the public arena which is of great importance. And again that part of the debate is not being taken seriously. Nevertheless it raises all kinds of interesting questions about the character of public space, where people can gather and come together as citizens who have a political interest. I guess that it deals with the alienation of people from politics, and it's about how you address that. I don't know because I am not a politician, but that's the kind of thing they should be addressing more seriously. They pay some lip service to it but it's really much empty rhetoric.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think the left has more to say about how to make the public debate more effective?

J.E.: I don't think they are really thinking about it that seriously. In a sense, what's been a real block on this is the internet and social media - twitter and facebook. Using that as a vehicle for political campaigning involves a very narrow objective, which is to get people elected. We now have a permanent election campaign, parties are forever in election mode, and candidates always thinking about the next election. There is no real thinking about how social media might be used, if it can be, for a more deliberative kind of politics, which involves citizens more. And where it's used outside of established political and political parties, it's very oppositional. Think about the Arab Spring and other opposition movements in the West, it's all about opposing, protesting, it's not really about the creation of what you might call a 'public sphere'. I know a lot of people saying that you get liberation from the internet; I don't think you do. It's a very good source for mobilisation and opposition. The power of the Arab Spring was to move people around quickly through texts and emails. But it neither creates a public sphere, nor the basis for a civil kind of politics. What has happened in Egypt is a very good example of that.

That's why the physical space of assembly is so important. The Big Society has to be a society where there are physical spaces of assembly and engagement, and part of the problem with neo-liberalism is that it has closed down more and more those public spaces.

In Paris you have those huge open spaces which are really interesting and look like they might be spaces of a Big Society. But historically it's all about showing off its imperial space. How to transform such spaces is a serious consideration. To me the character of public space is part of the Big Society and is really significant, but unfortunately not discussed, except in the academic kind of literature.

Jeremy Jennings

Jeremy Jennings est Deputy Head of Department et Professor of Political Theory à King's College.

Docteur en sciences politiques de l'université d'Oxford, Jeremy Jennings a enseigné dans de nombreuses universités. Avant de rejoindre King's College, il était directeur du Centre for the Study of Political Thought de la Queen Mary University, de 2005 à 2013.

L'enseignement et la recherche de Jeremy Jennings portent sur l'histoire de la pensée politique depuis la Renaissance. Il a notamment publié un ouvrage sur le syndicalisme en France, une collection d'essais sur le socialisme, ou encore des écrits de Tocqueville.

Fin connaisseur de l'histoire politique de la France et de Tocqueville, il publie en 2011 *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century*. Il est également professeur invité de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, et a été décoré Chevalier de l'Ordre des Palmes Academiques pour services rendus à la culture française.

Sa connaissance de l'histoire des idées en Grande-Bretagne et en France permet d'éclairer l'origine et les enjeux de la *Big Society*.

Pour Jeremy Jennings, les origines intellectuelles de la *Big Society* sont à rechercher chez Burke, et également chez Michael Oakeshott. Pour Burke, pour qu'une société permette la liberté, il faut qu'elle dispose de corps intermédiaires entre l'Etat et l'individu, deux institutions étant fondamentales dans ce contexte, l'aristocratie et l'église.

Politiquement, la *Big Society* naît de la volonté des *Tories* proches de Cameron de se démarquer du *New Labour*. David Cameron semble également renouer, par son éducation et son attitude, avec la tradition aristocratique. De façon intéressante, l'idée de *Big Society* est reprise par Phillip Blond, qui n'a rien à voir avec Cameron. Mais il est difficile

de voir dans quelle mesure Cameron était sérieux à propos de la *Big Society* à l'origine, et il est probable qu'il n'y pense plus aujourd'hui.

Le modèle de la *Big Society* pourrait fonctionner dans une société qui s'entendrait sur des valeurs et des principes communs. Si autrefois l'aristocratie et l'Église pouvaient jouer ce rôle, le fait qu'aucun ciment de valeurs partagées n'ait pris leur place dans une société multiculturelle rend la réalisation de la *Big Society* plus incertaine. Toutefois, ajoute Jeremy Jennings, espérer la réapparition d'un socle de valeurs unique et très contraignant n'est peut-être pas souhaitable, car les sociétés de ce type peuvent être oppressantes pour l'individu. L'enjeu est donc de définir le bon liant de la société en trouvant un juste milieu entre de trop fortes contraintes et l'absence totale de valeurs communes..

Institut de l'entreprise: We are trying to understand the concept of the Big Society from a philosophical point of view and its articulation within British political history. What is really interesting for us is that you have a deep knowledge of the French cultural history, and we are as well wondering if there can be some lessons for the current French situation.

Jeremy Jennings: In terms of one way of looking at it, it's to look at it from a French perspective, and as you well know the French tradition from the *Ancien Régime* onwards has tended to emphasize the state and the individual, and this is of course the case that is brought to the fore in the revolution, it's a sort of attempt to eradicate all intermediary groups. So you just have the relation between all these individuals who are equal and the state which represents the general good, whatever it might be. And of course, someone like Edmund Burke responded immediately to this French philosophy and saw what he thought were its dangers. Burke opposed the French revolutionary tradition at a variety of levels, and one of course was what he saw as its rationalism, the whole idea of rights and so on. One of the other ways in which he opposed that French revolutionary tradition was precisely to say, if you are going to have a society which works and values freedom, you have to have something between the state and the individual. You need an intermediary between the state and the individual and famously, in the case of Burke, and if you read Jesse Norman's book on Burke you will see this, and everyone cites this, it's Burke's argument about the 'little platoons'. This idea that the loyalties we have to those around us are not, or should not be abstract ones. The notion that I have a loyalty to the state is an abstract entity and as you probably know, we in Britain have great difficulty talking about the state. I guess you can take any 18 year-old in

Paris and ask what is the state and if they are moderately educated they will know; but that would not be the case in Britain. One of the British references about the history of the notion of state is The British Political Tradition by a man called W.H Greenleaf. And incidentally the reason I think why the British have difficulty talking about the state is partly the monarchy. It confuses people in Britain. The head of state is the monarch, and if I ask my students what is the state, they get confused. If I ask what the government is they will know, they will say yes that is David Cameron and so on. But the actual concept of the state as some sort of abstract entity which embodies a national will is one the British in general find really difficult to grapple with. We just don't speak that way, we don't think that way. And of course that's partly because we have the concept of government and opposition and these sorts of things. But if you start from that idea of the state and the individual, where does the Big Society thing fit it? It is the idea that there should be something in-between. In Burke's phrase it's the little platoons, and as I said it is the idea that in terms of our loyalties, they are not to some abstract entity, they are to our families, to the community around us, the localities, possibly our region and it tends to thin down as we go out from there. Our most intense loyalties are to our family and friends, the people around us and so on and that is a meaningful community for us. The notion that the state provides some sort of sense of community, or even of belonging is one that the British find difficult to grapple with. And so I think that's the core of it is the idea.

Now there are very important dimensions to this. One is, that it is thought to be psychologically accurate in terms of a description of actually how human beings really do relate to those around them. Our closest affinities are to people we know, it's all in Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Smith has this marvellous example. Imagine if I said to you, and this is of course in the eighteenth century, there's been an earthquake in China and 10,000 people have died and that you would have your little finger cut off, you would be more preoccupied about having your little finger cut off.

Institut de l'entreprise: Like David Hume.

J.J.: Yes, Hume has the same idea. But, by the same token, if 10.000 people down the road were killed, you would react differently. Only yesterday, not far from here, just the other side of the river, a man was hacked to death, well on this account you react in a stronger way to the man across the river than you do to the man in China. So it's thought to be psychologically true, it's also thought to be sociologically accurate in the sense that's how our society works. But I think it's also thought to be, and this of course is an

argument which French liberals developed – Constant, Tocqueville and so on – that a society where you have got those intermediary groups and that sense of belonging is not only one where the freedom of the individual will be protected but also where the freedom of the individual will flourish. The idea that the lone individual, the atomised individual can protect himself, herself against the state is a nonsense, you cannot do this on your own and this is in Constant - Constant saw this in the context of Bonapartism. He has this description of France as a level plane; in which all these atoms exist and above it is the state. It's in Montesquieu as well with the notion of despotism. Remember Montesquieu is a great admirer of England for this reason, remember he says that the only constitution in the world which has liberty for its end is that of England.

So there is a long French tradition of admiration of the English conception of what freedom means and how freedom is protected but it doesn't have much purchase to call yourself a liberal in France, it's not on the whole a smart move either politically or probably socially, which is not the case in Britain. So that's the idea, I think; the core of the idea is that through those local organisations you will have a thriving civic life and it will be one in which individuals are able to develop, but also to extend their freedom. After all, this is what Tocqueville admired about America; what Tocqueville saw in America, which was such a contrast to France, was that in America if some individuals want something, a school, a church, a shop, a road, a canal, the individuals get together. In France they go to the state, and ask the state to build a school, and that is the big contrast. And of course Tocqueville saw America as simply an extension at that level of England, which was true. It's also interesting, and I think this is the case, that the word 'self-government' was brought into the French language because there wasn't an actual word for such activities.

If you look at Burke there are two further important elements, and this is the difficulty to know whether they are still relevant today. He's saying we need our little platoons and those local networks and all those sort of things but he identifies two very important institutions which he thinks are absolutely vital in this regard. Institution number one is the aristocracy and now again if you look at all these French writers like Constant and Tocqueville, one of the things they wrote is that the big difference between France and England was that in France from the *Ancien Régime* onwards the aristocracy had been turned into an ornament; they were useless, a matter of display and the thing that struck French writers coming to Britain well into the 19th century was that the aristocracy in this country was still tied to the land, to the locality where they performed a series of functions. The difficulty there, and I'm trying to develop this argument, is roughly spea-

king by the time you get to the end of the 19th century, there is a major crisis in the aristocracy in this country partly because it's becomes bankrupt and they have to start marrying all these rich American ladies. So you have the difficulty that the aristocratic world effectively hit the buffers and comes to an end around the First World War and it's not an accident that at the moment when the British aristocracy really goes into serious decline is the very moment when we start in this country to build the welfare state. So you know, let's say the aristocracy, it starts its decline at the end of the 19th century but the 20th century is when we start to build the welfare state because the functions performed by the aristocracy of caring for the poor and so on, employing the poor, are declining. The state starts to fill that gap. The footnote to this is that one of the things we are seeing at the moment, which is a big source of controversy, is the apparent re-emergence of this class in politics in the form of David Cameron. Lots of our prime ministers, - Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home - were all old Etonians but we thought that was all finished, and then we have Cameron. Cameron is old-fashioned and in some respect an aristocrat and I think that is one of the reasons why Big Society appeals to him. So that's one of the problems.

The second big institution mentioned by Burke was the Church of England, so he looks to the spirit of a gentleman, the aristocracy and the spirit of religion which effectively means the Church of England. As you know, there is no separation of church and state in the United Kingdom and the Queen is head of state and she is head of the church: it's a complicated story. The church was a national church, and it performed a very important function in this country as a sort of institution which would bind people together. I'm a practising Anglican and I very much feel part of that tradition. But of course the problem there is the really dramatic decline of the church. The Church of England is still an important institution because it's still the established church. In the House of Lords, our second chamber, we still have around 30 bishops who sit there as of right; this is inconceivable in France. Imagine the notion of the archbishop of Paris should sit in the senate as a matter of right; it's inconceivable. But it exists in this country, and many people see no problem with it.

I can tell you the figure for regular churchgoers among the Anglicans is very low, but of course what is very interesting in this country is that we have a major increase in the number of Catholics due to immigration. We have had half a million Poles come to this country in the last five or ten years. Because we don't have the separation of church and state, one of the big problems facing the British government is to build more Catholic schools as we don't have enough of them. You know the British state funds church

schools - and I love these things about Britain, and it doesn't just fund Anglican schools, it funds Catholic schools, it funds Muslim schools, it funds Jewish schools.

The point is that, in general, religious observance is in decline in this country. So that goes and - and this is the difficulty with the Big Society - the decline of the aristocracy and the church is met by the growth of the welfare state: so rather than the church and the aristocracy being involved, it falls to the state. We have seen in this country, probably not as much as you have in France, a really massive increase in the size of the state. I think the figures for France are that the state spends about 57% of GDP, it is a lot, the highest in Europe. Britain is about 46/47 % and that's probably because of the crisis. So we have the rise of the state and then I think what you are getting, and this is bringing us much more up to date, if we go back a little bit before you were born, Britain in the seventies was catastrophic. Why did Britain join the EU? It joined because Britain thought it was one of the ways we would save ourselves from massive unemployment, inflation, deindustrialisation. Of course another political response was the election of Mrs Thatcher in 1979.

I think the stuff about the Big Society, it's very important to see it partly as a response from the Conservatives to Mrs Thatcher and what is perceived as Thatcherism. What you had was almost wholesale privatisation of previously nationalised industries and the complete endorsement of the market. Personally, I don't think this is true as an assessment of Thatcherism and you probably know that there is still to this day controversy about Mrs Thatcher famous phrase "there is no such thing as society". So we have Mrs Thatcher saying "there is no such thing as society". Now I don't know if you saw her funeral but the Bishop of London who was a friend of hers, in his address went back to that quotation and correctly pointed out that it's actually taken out of context. Because in actual fact what she says is entirely Burkean. What she really meant was that there is no such thing as society in the abstract, there are individuals, there are families, communities. It was perceived that she wanted to roll back the frontiers of the state as she famously said, to hand things over to the market and to individuals and that is, for example, why it is usually said and I think incorrectly, that the book by Friedrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty,* was a kind of guideline for her. On the back of the edition it says "at a meeting in 1975, Margaret Thatcher reached into her briefcase and pulled out a book, she held the book for all to see, this she said sternly is what we believe". And I actually asked Nigel Lawson who was the Chancellor of the Exchequer if that was true and he said no. Nonetheless, this is how it's perceived and one of the debates about Mrs Thatcher is was she a Conservative or was she a Liberal. You probably know that at the end of Hayek's book there is a famous essay by Hayek "Why I am not

a Conservative". And the perception was that Mrs Thatcher believed in markets and believed in individuals and believed in the minimal state. And I think there's a lot of truth in that but it's not entirely accurate.

Tony Blair was very, very clever about this because effectively what was Blairism, what was New Labour? It was effectively saying, we are not going to go back to the seventies, we aren't going to abandon the reforms that Mrs Thatcher carried out but we are going to give it something else, and what we're going to give it is greater emphasis upon the social. So Thatcherism has done its work but it produces this individualistic and materialistic society where greed is the only thing that matters. Blair saw very cleverly that the British people wanted the freedom Mrs Thatcher had given them, but they were unhappy about the materialistic element. There was a comedian called Henry Enfield and he used to take out a big wad of banknotes, 50 pound notes and his catchphrase was "loads of money" and he was taken to be the symbol of what Thatcherism produced. This was a very effective critique of that Thatcherite world. But Blair saw that no one wanted to go back to the strong state but, on the other hand, they didn't just want the market, they wanted something else and this, I think, was what the Third Way was supposed to be. The trouble was of course, and this is getting to where the Big Society fits in, Labour and Blair were in power for over ten years, and then we had the financial crash. Again the United Kingdom hit terrible trouble. But David Cameron, and Cameron is quite clear about this, sees himself as the follower of Blair. There is this story that the bible of the present government, of Cameron and his senior ministers, is Tony Blair's autobiography. This, it is said, is famously what they have under their pillow in bed. Blair is their man, and indeed Michael Gove who is the minister of Education and who is clearly positioning himself to take over from Cameron, only the other day said, that he was the true inheritor of Tony Blair. Blair might have gone but he had a major impact. Now the trouble for the Conservatives if you're David Cameron is that you can't say what we stand for is the Third Way, because it's politically discredited. But on the other hand Cameron cannot say we only believe in the free market, because no one likes that either. So Cameron needed a big idea. And the way he phrased it was precisely as the Big Society. I think it's first and foremost a sort of political slogan which is meant to answer this thing about how the Conservatives under Mrs Thatcher came to be seen as the nasty party. And Cameron thought as long as people see the Conservative Party as the nasty party they don't have a chance of winning so they need to stand for something else. And his idea was the Big Society, an idea, which as I have tried to illustrate to you, does actually have roots deep within Conservative philosophy, and that's why people like Jesse Norman go back to Burke. So I think that's what it was or that's what it is.

I think that's what Cameron was doing. But if you look at Conservatism, there's what's called the Conservative Philosophy Group. It used to exist years ago and recently has been re-established. I was invited to join but when I went to the first meeting it was the same old story. There were about fifty people there, and you had the great divide between the traditional Conservatives, i.e. the Burkeans, and the free-marketeers, the libertarians. It's a great divide and as you will see in Greenleaf's book, British Conservatism has always had that dimension. That's what destroyed the Conservative Party in the 1840's under Peel with the Corn Laws. The traditional Tories were in favour of them and the free-marketeers opposed them, and it was the same in other economic matters later on in the 1890's and later. So you have always got these two dimensions of Conservatism and sometimes one appears to be more prominent than the other. So I think Cameron needed a big idea, after the Third Way, he couldn't just say "the market, the market, the market", because people weren't going to buy that.

The question then becomes is there really any substance to what Cameron was coming up with? Now, the first time I met Phillip Blond was actually when I came to talk about my article in a book on the Big Society [49] and although in one way I wouldn't say I'm intellectually against the Big Society, I'm not convinced by Cameron and the Big Society. And Phillip gave me a real roasting, he came in and bang bang bang, it was great fun and we were fine afterwards but he was saying to me you can't give up on this, it's really important. If someone like you doesn't believe in it well you know we're in trouble, come on, believe in it and we'll try and do it. But I'm not certain just how serious Cameron was about it in the first place. I'm fairly convinced he doesn't really think about it at all now and the problem I have is the following, and this is again going back to my original saying about the Burkean vision as being psychologically and sociologically true as a description: I wonder if that is the case now because it might have worked in the society where you had an aristocracy, where you had a powerful established church, but you don't have those things now. The building blocks of the Big Society strike me as largely gone. We might regret this, and I'm coming more and more to regret it, but the character of British society has changed. We are now a diverse and multiethnic society.

I used to live in Birmingham and in Birmingham the ethnic minority population is over 30%, in London it's over 50% - London of course is unusual, it is a world city. What worries me here is that the concept of the Big Society rests upon a fairly thick sense of shared values and I'm not certain they exist any longer, and I'm not certain that we

49. Jeremy Jennings, "Tocqueville and the Big Society", *The Political Quarterly, "Retrieving The Big Society", op. cit.*

might want them to exist. I might want Britain to go back to being the 1950's when I was a boy, when crime rates were low and people didn't lock their doors at night and children played on the street, but I don't think that's going to happen, I might regret it but it's not the case anymore and, therefore, what worries me is that what you have with the Big Society is that it seems to me very much some backward looking project and I think expecting to reverse the tide on multiculturalism is broadly unrealistic. We simply have to accept the liberal notion that people embrace lots of different lifestyles and that might be in religious terms, or sexual behaviour or whatever it might be. Now if that's the case, it strikes me you might have to thin out what you think the shared values of the society are going to be Talking about a Big Society, with all that comes with it, can then start to look pretty oppressive if you're not careful because it's very, very conservative, and family oriented; but a modern society isn't necessarily like that. A modern society is one where family patterns now are incredibly diverse – I know you have got this debate in France now as we are having – but it's not just gay marriage, it's what would come with it. A Big Society supporter like Cameron incidentally is in favour of gay marriage, not despite the fact that he is a Conservative but, as he said, because he is a Conservative. Of course traditional conservatives don't buy into that. The more I think about it, I think that probably the best you can do is to have markets and the rule of law, but then we face the fundamental problem of what is the glue that binds society together? Every political philosopher, grapples with that question. And there are various answers, Rousseau thinks that it's the general will. Thomas Hobbes says it's Leviathan, it's the sword.

Institut de l'entreprise: I think that there are several paradoxes. Maybe the first one is that the word 'community' is twofold – from a conservative point of view it's the community of faith and for the progressive it's the community of choice. There is another paradox in the fact that the original diagnosis was a broken society, a broken England. So you want to strengthen the society in empowering the communities, but the risk is that in a multicultural society the communities which will have the strongest interest to be involved might be the emerging religious groups, and it is not always a cohesion factor. And the third one is that you want to empower individuals and communities but you want the state to do it.

J. J.: Well of course the difficulty is that with a religion like Islam we do have a richer community of faith, as you quite rightly observed. The other dimension is of course that community needs to be a natural creation and you can't make them live again

once they are gone. Most of us live in big cities which are very amorphous, changing and people move around.

Institut de l'entreprise: It makes me think of *The Quest for Community* by Robert Nisbet, the American sociologist. And about the aristocracy, there is this book by Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960–2010*, where there is an interesting thinking about the role of the elite right now and the fact that the Americans, the liberals in the American meaning, don't want to be an example for the others anymore and that it has a deep impact on the society.

J. J.: Well the aristocracy is still important in certain parts of this country and they are out in the countryside. I think that's the problem, you can't create an homogenous society in a multicultural society, in a moving society. Britain is an immensely mobile society, and there's this problem that the Big Society is a reflection of a hierarchical static society, and I am sure that the new supporters of it would say well no that is not true but it just doesn't seem to fit for me. It just doesn't seem to have much purchase on what British society is now like. And that's why when they came up with the idea of the Big Society there was the sense that it is a good idea but show us how it is actually going to work, and we just don't see that.

Saying that made me think about something else that is a problem in Britain. It is about the idea that there is something between the individual and the state. And I said that there was the aristocracy, the church and also one thing to complicate the picture a little bit. What you have in Britain through the aristocracy is a tradition of local government, decentralised government and that used to be very important in Britain. But again if you look over time, local government has declined. Mrs Thatcher was terrible on this. She displayed the typical reaction of the person at the centre who wants radical change and who therefore distrusts the forces against them. So one of the things that Mrs Thatcher did was to try, and I think quite seriously, to weaken local government in this country. We used to have what was called the Greater London Council. This was abolished. In other words it took London back to what Paris was like after the Commune, when the Parisians weren't trusted to govern themselves. Well Mrs Thatcher had the view of London that Londoners couldn't be trusted to govern themselves. Now local government if you read people like John Stuart Mill, it's in Tocqueville as well, is the mother of democracy and freedom. One of the things that Cameron and his friends have done is talk about reinvigorating local government, but I don't really see any evidence that that's what they are doing.

There is another point I haven't mentioned, an obstacle, modern technology, you know a lot of young people their communities are purely virtual. How can we fit that into this vision? I don't know if we can.

And there is something else. The point about those communities is of course famously that there has to be the right to exit. But I guess there is today this intensive over-romanticised idea of what the past was like. A little example: a few years ago there was a terrible murder of two young girls, they were about seven or eight years old. They were close friends, they went to play one Sunday afternoon, they went out in what was portrayed as a small village and they were murdered, rather brutally murdered. It was very interesting the way that before the murderer was known, the press and people started talking about what had happened and who might be the murderer and of course everyone bought into this little country town, this sort of little garden of Eden, with a great sense of neighbourhood, where everyone knows everybody else, everyone was friendly and kind and therefore the murderer must come from outside, he must be alien to this, this must be a force which has come in from the outside. There was also great talk about how apparently these two little girls used to go on the internet and in all probability someone had managed to trap them, managed to get in contact with them and to come down from the big city. But the person who killed them was a man who they knew and who worked in the local school. It was someone they knew and he brutally murdered them. But what really struck me was that again the British fell for the image of the small community, where everyone is kind and you can let your children out and nothing is ever going to happen to them, therefore it must come from outside. No it wasn't, it was from this community. And I think the Big Society has for me a smell of that, because communities can be good but they can be oppressive too.

Another example, there used to be a British comedy program and one of the characters in it was a homosexual and he was for ever complaining that he was "the only gay in the village" and how he was terribly oppressed in this village. The joke was that his parents weren't at all conservative, and he wanted them to be offended and they weren't. If I say to my gay friends "would you like to live in the Big Society?", most of them would say "no I wouldn't!" Because the Big Society comes with a thick sense of community. It comes with lots of values and those values tend to be around family and the idea of a closed community. Where do gays move to? This is a generalisation but they don't usually choose to live in the countryside, they live in big cities. Why? Because it's anonymous, they can live a life they want to lead without people watching over them. And the Big

Society has that feel to me of, you know, we all agree the same things don't we? But in large, modern societies, people differ in what they want.

But Big Society is a sort of good proportion of things, a good Big Society would be a society that is not too oppressive, but where you try as much as possible to maintain some shared values as well.

And actually that's exactly what I think. I think you are right and therefore I think it's a case of how much can we expect of this. If we don't have anything at all then we are in deep trouble, that's the glue question; but then, on the other hand, there mustn't be so much glue that we can't escape. Families are good when they are good, but when they are bad they are... very bad.

Institut de l'entreprise: If we tried to adopt a different point of view, could it be said that even if the concept of the Big Society is not very solid, there are new policies put in place, and some of these are interesting? And what could France learn from them?

J.J.: What can you learn? It is interesting because you will know that there are lot of French writers who have been thinking about this for a long time. Someone who has had an enormous influence on me is Pierre Rosanvallon, a lot of the way I see France is through Rosanvallon's eyes. His book [50] on the civil society in France has basically been to show that the image of France as having no civil society is not really true, there's a lot going on out there, more than we thought. And again we have the stereotypical image of Britain, it's all civil society and no state and in France it's no civil society and all the state. Well Rosanvallon has shown in fact that is not true. So you know, I would be inclined to say that I'm not certain that there is much France can learn from us in this regard, But you know I would say that measures to increase civil society activity and local organisations would be a good thing.

One of the things that strikes me, although I wouldn't be certain about this, is the example of charities in Britain. I don't know how you describe them in France. But I think they play a far larger role than they are doing in French life and that would be an example of something interesting to develop. A charity should be an example of individuals who come together, raise the money, decide what to do collectively. The only thing there is that, unfortunately the money going into charities in this country is decli-

50. *Le Modèle politique français : La société civile contre le jacobinisme de 1789 à nos jours*, Points Histoire, 2006.

ning dramatically and one of the things that happened under New Labour was that New Labour had this idea that the Third Sector, the charity sector would be really important. But I can tell you what happened, the Labour government effectively tried and was rather successful in turning these charities into arms of the state.

Institut de l'entreprise: In France we have a strong Third Sector as well with charities, and they are really the arm of the state, as they are totally publically funded.

J.J.: That wasn't the case in Britain, and of course it's very easy to see what happened with these charities. Suddenly there was all this money, forget about raising the money yourself, the government will give us the money and of course it's very seductive. And then suddenly they control the agenda, you are effectively performing what the state wants you to perform. Something like that would strike me the sort of thing France could do... But at the same time sadly in Britain it's declining.

Of course another area but again this is the subject of massive debate in this country, is schooling. As you probably know, the government is encouraging the setting up of a lot of so-called free schools. Under Labour it was academy schools which are growing all the time in number now. The government gives them the money, and largely allows the school to decide upon the curriculum. The idea is to draw up the resources and skills of the community. It's famously said of Michael Gove that he will consider himself successful when he closes down the Ministry of Education. When there's no longer a need for a Ministry of National Education, the sort of thing which France is only too familiar with, he will have succeeded. And I'm in favour of the free schools but again you have to look closely at what is going on. One thing that the free schools are doing is again taking power from the local government and curiously giving more power to the state.

But anyway, in schooling, removing the state as far as possible seems in France virtually inconceivable.

Institut de l'entreprise: Because the schools in France are not just like public service, they are an institution.

J.J.: It's an institution. And the other reason why I think this poses a particular problem for France and actually for Britain too is the following. You know I try and tell my students that you cannot have everything, politics is about choice and the big choice is whether you want liberty or you want equality and there is a trade-off between the two. I would

go for liberty, and if you go for liberty you have got to accept a certain amount of inequality. If you go down the Big Society route, you are explicitly prioritising liberty over equality, and this for France would be a major hurdle, it's effectively saying we understand that this will involve inequality of treatment and provision. That will come with it, it's got to come with it; because what the French schooling has is so state controlled, you can effectively say all children will, although you know this is not true but you can say, all children will have sort of equal resources and so on, be it in the lycée in Montpellier or the lycée in Nancy, they are going to get effectively the same and that's fair. But once you start to remove the state out of it and you start getting other organisations involved, the lycée in Montpellier is going to have more money per pupil than your one in Nancy and someone is going to get worked up about that. But you can say it's a price worth paying. But my sense is that France is far from being willing to pay that price..

So some of these free schools will fail, they will close and children as a consequence, their education will suffer but again if you say what matters is freedom, is liberty, you have got to accept that. Traditionally Britain wasn't worried about that, you know, we always put liberty before equality. But one of the things I think is a Trojan horse in terms of legislation, the last major piece of legislation that the last Labour government passed was an Equality Act (2010) and I think you will see it will just keep working its way through, the implications will be really substantial. We're seeing it for example right through education, that the principle that you have to abide by is equality not liberty so there's no way this government, the Conservative government would dare repeal that law. I think they should repeal it, but I don't think they will because they would have to stand up and say that they are giving up on equality – for minorities, for women – so they won't. So I think selling the free schools to France would be very, very difficult, but I think that selling it to Britain is not that easy either.

Institut de l'entreprise: You talked about Burke, and there is another big thinker who could be mentioned, Michael Oakeshott. What are the differences between both of them?

J.J.: The blessed Michael as he is sometimes named... Are there big differences? I think there are a lot of similarities. There is an essay by Burke which people tend not to know, called *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*, and if you read Michael Oakeshott's essay "The Political Economy of Freedom" [51], then you see how even on economics the two of them are pretty close I think. Obviously what you got in Oakeshott and Burke is

51. "The Political Economy of Freedom", Cambridge Journal, 2 (1948-9).

an opposition to rationalism in politics. I've not talked about Oakeshott because he tends not to be cited too often now, but again personally that's partly where I come from. Greenleaf is a disciple of Michael Oakeshott and he was my professor and I'm a sort of third generation of Oakeshott. My book *Revolution and the Republic* [52] is dedicated to Greenleaf, so you can see a sort of intellectual link which runs through that.

Institut de l'entreprise: Oakshott is not very known in France, there are very few translations of his books.

J.J.: Some of his ideas do not travel well. One of the things about Michael Oakeshott is that he and the people around him, like Kenneth Minogue, loved life. Life was the pursuit of intimations and that could not be done dogmatically. What I find interesting is that there are not too many Oakeshotteans left in this country, but when Oakeshott travels to America so to speak, when the Americans read Oakeshott, they turn him into an ideologue with really rigid patterns of thinking. When the American neo-cons get hold of Oakeshott they turned him into this rigorous right-wing thinker which Oakeshott wasn't really. Oakeshott was a very English thinker. I don't know if you have read "On Being Conservative" which is a beautiful essay and presents such an English view of the world.

Institut de l'entreprise: France doesn't have any liberal or conservative tradition. Conservatives are seen as reactionaries whereas it's not the same at all, and it's immediately seen in the perspective of the French revolution.

J.J.: It's very interesting, if you look at the history of French political parties, even if they aren't radical they are radical in the title. You have to be radical, you can't describe yourself as conservative or liberal for that reason.

I don't know who would be the liberals. I was at a conference lunch once in France, I was sitting next to a woman who was then the president of the Mont-Pèlerin Society, and I'm not making this up, she turned to me at one point – and there was this group of liberals around us – and she said "oh I feel so sorry for them", I said "why?", she said "because they are so few of them". They just had this look of a persecuted minority whereas in Britain traditionally to call yourself a liberal was to say "I am on the side of civilisation". But liberals are not the same as conservatives.

52. *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

And of course Mrs Thatcher thought that was wrong because she wanted a bit of rigour and a bit of principle, but it doesn't really work that way. Anyway in the 20th century the British Conservative Party was the most successful political party in the world. It was in power for something like 65 years out of 100 and part of that was because it was not dogmatic, it carried its ideology quite lightly, the wisdom of conservatism was to adapt to circumstances. The British Prime Minister in the late fifties and sixties was Harold Macmillan who wrote a famous book called *The Middle Way* and this is what conservatism was meant to be, not an extreme, but the middle. Now you know Mrs Thatcher said of course the trouble with that was that was actually happening; over time there was this left-wing movement, the right had just been dragged leftwards. The Conservatives would lose power, Labour would get in, Labour would nationalise whole industries and when the Conservatives would get back in they would say ok we will accept that. And the big idea with Mrs Thatcher was to roll back the frontiers of the state, to reverse this process.

But as for the first French liberals people have always read Tocqueville but no one read Constant, and you know I can remember the first time I came across Constant's political writings I can remember being there in Paris and buying the edition presented by Marcel Gauchet. And I read that book and thought wow, and Constant is one of my great heroes and then that started that whole revival in interest in Constant. I have written a book on Tocqueville and Constant, but if there seemed to be another group of people who were sort of wanting to look at things this way in France, it was on the left, so at first the only people I could really find were people like Proudhon and Georges Sorel. Deep down they were ambiguous figures, and their disciples, some are on the left and some are on the right, because you can do with their ideas a lot.

Institut de l'entreprise: There is a point where Conservatives and Left encounter indeed. Georges Orwell was saying "I'm an anarchist tory", Phillip blond speaks of a 'Red Tory', in so far as they oppose both statism and liberalism.

J.J.: I am a big fan of Orwell as well, I have Orwell's "Why I write" by my bed; he's a very important figure. There are other traditions in Britain as well, but again, very interestingly a lot of them were subterranean forms of Catholicism, often subterranean in the sense that because there was such a strong anti-Catholic feeling in this country, a person wouldn't necessarily disclose himself as a Catholic but actually deep in there, there was Catholicism.

One of the features about Britain is that anti-Catholic sentiment is very, very deep, but far less so now. This is again sometimes difficult for French people to understand. In France, if you want to understand which way someone is going to vote, you will ask if that person is a Catholic. If yes, they will vote right. In this country if a person is a Catholic they will vote left and that is because they were a persecuted minority and they sided with the anti-establishment forces. The history of what occurred in Ireland is a large part of it. I will give you a little example if I may. In the 19th century when the Anglican church was very corrupt, there was this attempt to revive the Church of England. The threat posed by someone like Cardinal Newman who became a Catholic was huge. Legislation was passed, which Queen Victoria was absolutely insistent upon, which effectively forbade the Church of England resorting to any kind of Catholic ritual.

But my own real conclusion is that I don't really think Cameron takes the idea of the Big Society too seriously. He just wants to survive politically and he's in a bad position. But I think that intellectually the idea of the Big Society is interesting, and, for all my doubts, like Phillip Blond I am in favour of thinking about how it might work in practice.

Julian Le Grand

Docteur en économie, **Julian Le Grand** est *Professor of Social Policy* (Richard Titmuss Professor of Social Policy) à la London School of Economics depuis 1993. Conseiller (*Senior Policy Adviser*) de l'ancien Premier ministre Tony Blair de 2003 à 2005, il a été notamment commissaire à la Commission for Health Improvement ainsi qu'administrateur de nombreuses autorités sanitaires. Il est l'un des principaux architectes des réformes des services publics qui ont abouti à la mise en place des quasi-marchés dans l'éducation et la santé. Il est ainsi l'auteur en 2003 de *Motivation, Agency and Public Policy: of Knights and Knaves, Pawns and Queens*, dans lequel il prône. la mise en place de quasi-marchés, qui combinent les mécanismes du marché – choix et concurrence – et ceux plus traditionnels du service public, notamment dans l'éducation et la santé, afin d'améliorer l'efficacité, la qualité et l'équité des services publics.

En février 2011, il est nommé à la tête de la Mutuals Taskforce, entité placée sous la responsabilité de Francis Maude, Minister for the Cabinet Office, qui soutient la création et le développement des mutuelles dans le service public.

Par leurs principles et leurs objectifs, les travaux de la Mutuals Taskforce se rattachent à la *Big Society.*

En 2006, Julian Le Grand était considéré par le magazine *Prospect* comme l'un des 100 plus grands intellectuels ("*public intellectuals*") britanniques.

Les mutuelles d'employés, explique Julian Le Grand, permettent un engagement plus fort que les mutuelles d'usagers car les employés y ont un intérêt plus direct. L'objectif de la mutuelle d'employés est d'améliorer le service en libérant l'énergie des individus de la bureaucratie hiérarchique.

La petite taille des mutuelles ne pose pas de véritable problème de taille critique car les services publics sont en général de faible intensité en capital. Dans certains cas

toutefois, il est plus efficace de maintenir de grandes organisations – inévitablement des monopoles.

Certains obstacles, liés à la culture du service public, ont été rencontrés dans la mise en oeuvre de ces mutuelles. Les fonctionnaires ont pu être de prime abord désarçonnés, avant de se montrer enthousiastes, même si certains sont restés inquiets. Les syndicats ont été plutôt hostiles ou méfiants, avec souvent une divergence entre leur direction, critique, et leur base, plus favorable. Les usagers ne semblent pas prêter attention à ces changements, même s'ils remarquent parfois une amélioration du service.

Pour Julian Le Grand, il est trop tôt pour évaluer cette politique. Mais en cas de changement de majorité, les mutuelles seront maintenues car le *Labour* y est semble-t-il favorable.

Institut de l'entreprise: Our first questions deal with the definition, scope and objectives of the public mutuals. In a Mutuals Task Force report [53], you mentioned three types of mutuals: employee-owned, user-owned and community-owned, and we were wondering why you chose to focus on the first ones for the public sector.

Julian Le Grand: It's partly because of the history as to why I got involved in the first place. I was originally involved because I had an idea about social workers. Particularly, that social workers could operate more effectively as a mutual, employee-owned enterprise than as the employees of government, which is what they were and they currently are. I wrote a report on this for the previous government, and the new government came in and liked the idea and asked me if I would chair a task force that was promoting the idea of employee ownership across the public sector. That was our initial focus: employee ownership was the kind of mutual with which we were concerned. I might also argue, although I don't think that this will necessarily be the view of all the members of the task force, that it is an important area on which to focus because, in contrast with a user-owned co-operative or a community-owned co-operative, the people who are working on the service, spend a lot of time on it, being employed by it, and their engagement is that much greater. So actually, to get the engagement of the owners is probably greater with an employee-owned co-operative than with a user-owned co-operative or with a community-owned one.

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53. *Our Mutual Friends, Making the Case for Public Service Mutuals*, A Mutuals Taskforce Briefing Paper, 2011 ; **https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61778/Our-Mutual-Friends.pdf**

Institut de l'entreprise: Concerning their objectives, are mutuals aimed at delivering a better service and lowering costs?

JLG: The aim is not to lower costs. Most of us thought, and indeed still think, that mutualisation would not necessarily cut, or reduce costs, or reduce spending on public services. But the aim is twofold: it is certainly to improve the service, but also to provide better working conditions and to liberate, in some sense, the workers, who are the people who are actually working in the service. So the idea is to improve the well-being, the welfare of the people who work in the service *and* to improve the welfare and well-being of those who use the service.

Institut de l'entreprise: But could mutuals help to achieve lower costs in the long term, even if it is not the main goal, because they are more efficient?

JLG: Maybe. And yes, the evidence indeed is that, certainly compared with some private sector operators, that mutuals can provide lower costs – higher quality at lower cost. But that wasn't the principle objective.

Institut de l'entreprise: What kind of disadvantages there could result from mutuals? For example, one could imagine a possible capture of the value of the service, if employees managing the service put their own goals forward rather than the goals of the user.

JLG: There clearly is a risk that employees put their own self-interested concerns above the concerns of the users, and for that reason, it's quite important, in my view, that they actually operate in a competitive environment. In other words, they're not in a monopoly. To hand over an organisation that has a monopoly to the employees has risks attached to it, and it's exactly these risks that you have mentioned: that they might capture the value for themselves. So either the mutuals should be operated in a competitive environment or, if that's impossible and you have to have a monopoly, you need either some heavy regulation of the mutual, or you could have a different kind of mutual, a multiple stake-holder mutual with users or community representatives on the board.

Institut de l'entreprise: How do you create competition between different mutuals in public service?

It's very easy: you set up several organisations instead of one. For example, you have a local authority, a local government which then employ some 400 social workers. You then set up 10 mutuals with 40 persons in them, in each of them.

Institut de l'entreprise: But in that case, you could reach to a problem of critical size, if the mutual is too small.

JLG: There are possible problems of size. But, most of the time we're talking about public services, and public services are on the whole not very capital-intensive, and it's capital-intensive services that tend to benefit from economies of scale and that need rather bigger organisations than smaller service organisations. However, there are going to be occasion when it would be much more efficient to have a larger organisation, and if that organisation is a monopoly, you would have to have what I described before (regulation or multiple stake-holders)

Institut de l'entreprise: In education, there doesn't seem to be any promotion of employee-owned mutuals for schools. Is it because free schools are more user-owned mutuals?

JLG: Yes, there are one or two teachers' mutuals, but yes, you're right. On the whole, free schools tend to be more driven by users, by parents. Why is that? I don't think there's any easy answer to that question! I think it's just history really, the free schools movement developed separately from the mutuals idea. There's a different minister and it originated, I think, from Sweden. The experience where parents set up schools or helped set up schools was thought to have been rather successful, and that was taken up by the minister concerned when he came into power, Michael Gove, and he took it forward from there. Do you know the phrase 'path dependency'? It's the historical paths that have led to this direction, rather than it being sort of a conscious political decision.

Institut de l'entreprise: But would you say – maybe it's a bit of a caricature - that free schools are like a Tory version of the Big Society whereas employee-owned mutuals would be more like a Labour one?

JLG: It's possible. There are two strands of socialism. One is the Marxist strand that puts forward that the interests of labour and the interests of capital are opposed, fundamentally opposed, and that history is a question of class war between them. The other strand of socialism is more a kind of Christian socialism, which is the development of cooperatives and those kinds of organisations. So there definitely is a particular kind of socialism in the cooperative movement. Whether that influences the minister's concern, I'm not sure. Certainly the minister in charge of the mutual programme, the Cabinet Office minister, Francis Maude, he's a very straightforward Conservative, and I don't think anyone would think of him as a kind of socialist. But he's very committed to the idea – he really perceives the development of mutuals, employee-owned mutuals as

a real transformation. They're transforming public services. So I think it would be hard to say that he's been influenced much by the socialist tradition, but he nonetheless believes very strongly in mutuals.

Institut de l'entreprise: You wrote that mutuals in public service had two aims. One is instrumental, and the other is intrinsic. Do you think that legal changes are always necessary to achieve such objectives? Because they could be achieved in other ways.

JLG: There are enlightened employers who treat their workforce really well and who liberate the energies and enthusiasms of their workforce very effectively. Maybe some of the big computer or the social media companies like Google and so on. It's very possible for that to happen. But I think our experience is that, in the public sector particularly, there is often a culture of conservatism with a small 'c' – a reluctance to innovate, a more hierarchical system of management. So it seems to us that the best way to liberate the energy and enthusiasm of the people who work in the public sector is often to take them out of the large-scale bureaucratic managerial hierarchies and give them an organisation of their own that they can operate in a free-er, more innovative fashion. So it's not that it's impossible to do it in any other way, clearly there are occasions where we have some very advanced private and public sector organisations. But in general, it seems to us that the best way to liberate workers' energy and enthusiasm is via this mutual route.

Institut de l'entreprise: Concerning the implementation of mutuals, where are you now? What are your results and how do you measure them quantitatively and qualitatively?

JLG: We have in the order of around 60 public service mutuals actually live and we have another 40 or so in the pipeline, so we anticipate the number of them running at about 100. I'm afraid I don't know the exact number of actual employees involved. Some of them are quite small. I think I would describe it as a linear growth: every month, we have a certain number of mutuals, or ideas from mutuals coming forward from the employees. They approach the Mutuals Information Service, which is the telephone line and website that we have, and if they are considered appropriate by the people they talk to, they will refer them to the Mutuals Support Programme, and the Mutuals Support Programme meets every month to decide what support to offer to the applicants, and I'm on that board. We usually get, I suppose, about three to seven applications every month. We aren't seeing necessarily a very fast growth, it's just a pretty steady number every month that it comes forward.

Institut de l'entreprise: Can you measure the results of a mutual compared to the outcomes of the classical public service it replaced or to privatisation?

JLG: We have commissioned a survey of mutuals that were operational, the existing mutuals, that's due to report fairly soon on the performance of those mutuals in comparison with public sector or private sector organisations. It's quite early days yet, so I don't, I'm afraid, have any data from that, but we are trying to assemble data so that we can make the kind of comparison that you're talking about.

Institut de l'entreprise: I'm quoting you, you said in 2011 that "mutualisation in the public sector [would] have enormous resonance in 6 years' time" [54]. What would you like to have achieved by the next term of office?

JLG: I would like to see a significant proportion of the public sector mutualised. As I say, I suspect that in 6 years' time, they will not be massive, the numbers, but I would like to see a significant proportion mutualised by that time, so 10%, 15%?

Institut de l'entreprise: We read [55] that there were four main obstacles to the implementation of mutuals: assessment and transfer of employment rights; assessment of transferability and options for the future provision of pensions; assessment of the VAT cuts and other existing and new tax liabilities; assessment of the option for the use and transfer of sets that may be currently publicly owned. Do you have now some more answers today about that?

JLG: A general point that I would make is that many of the problems have not turned out to be as significant as we thought. On the whole, the pensions issue is pretty much resolved: it proved possible to transfer over pension commitments and pension schemes that were set up in the public sector. It looks as though the mutuals employees can still benefit from those pension schemes. The VAT – there are a range of technical issues around that can be resolved

I think the problems encountered in terms of mutualisation have had more to do with the cultural aspects of it. The senior managers in local governments have had a tendency to see the whole mutualisation agenda as a threat to their own jobs – at best, it willl change their jobs; and at worst, they will lose them. They will stop managing services

54. *The Big Society, Seventeenth Report of Session 2010–12*, House of Commons, Public Administration Select Committee, 2011.

55. *The Big Society, Seventeenth Report of Session 2010–12,, op. cit.*

and become the contractor of services: managing contracts rather than people directly. And also, in some respects, they see it as a criticism of the organisation they have managed. If we argue that we can transform public services by creating mutuals and replacing the local authorities' bureaucracies by these new mutuals, they would see that as a criticism of the local authority, understandably, and so they are often very unsympathetic to the idea of employees becoming mutuals. And I think that problem has been our biggest problem, rather than the more technical issues concerning VAT and pensions.

Institut de l'entreprise: What's the view of the employees themselves?

JLG: We try and publicise the idea, and there are various what we call 'roadshows', where people from the Cabinet Office go round and talk to local governments and their employees. The employees themselves – first of all, they are puzzled by the idea, they often don't understand it. Secondly, when they do understand it, some of them are very enthused about the idea precisely because of the kind of liberation that we've been talking about – that at last they might be able to put into practice some of their more interesting and innovative ideas. Others are worried about the job security involved, because they see it as a more insecure employment – and correctly, they should see it as that, it is more insecure, and that causes them a worry. Yet others are concerned about the pay and the conditions of work. Usually, they conceive the pay and the conditions of work as relatively rather better than they've got under their present employment. And at a time of fiscal austerity, when there are substantial cuts being made in local government spending, some employees in local government are fearful for their jobs if they remain in local government, and they see setting up a mutual as a way of trying to escape from those cuts in public spending, as a kind of alternative to losing their job. That's a difficult one to handle because if there are cuts in public spending, then the cuts will affect the new mutuals as much as if they were not mutualised, because the income stream from the new mutual will be cut off. So we try to discourage the idea that setting up a mutual is an answer to cuts in public spending, though it's not always easy to do that.

Institut de l'entreprise: What about the public service trade unions? Have they got an opinion about it?

JLG: They are ambivalent. There are certainly elements of the public sector unions who are distinctly hostile to the idea. I think that comes from a number of reasons: one of

the reasons is what I was mentioning earlier, the socialist traditions. There is this Marxist socialist tradition which views the interests of labour and capital as irreconcilable, and their view is that in some sense, labour goes over to the side of capital by becoming an owner of an enterprise – that is almost a betrayal. The second reason for the hostility is that they view it as a stepping stone to privatisation. They think that the mutuals will be taken over in the short run or in the long run by private sector organisations and they're particularly worried about large corporations taking them over, and so the fear of privatisation is a major factor. There are other members of the trade unions, who come from a more cooperative tradition, who see it as a fulfilment of that tradition in many ways. Often – it's quite interesting – there seems to be a divergence between the management at the top of the trade union, which is usually rather hostile, and the trade union organisers on the ground who are more sympathetic to the idea of cooperatives and mutualisation.

Institut de l'entreprise: And what about the public service users themselves?

JLG: They don't seem to care. They don't mind who provides the service, provided they get a good service. They don't have any particular loyalty either to the public sector or to mutuals – or indeed to the private sector. They don't mind if the service is provided privately, by a private organisation, provided they get a good service. They may sometimes see a difference in the way the service is done, but this is irrelevant to the general question about their attitude towards ownership, whether they have different attitudes towards ownerships regardless of what sort of happens with the service. We have been able to collect some data that show that satisfaction among users has increased after the process of mutualisation.

Institut de l'entreprise: Are some areas more adapted to mutuals than others, like social care, reoffending support, health?

JLG: We can see that on the whole, service areas or areas including public services that are fairly low on capital requirement are better for mutualisation. There's quite a lot of evidence from the 1970s and 1980s, and the experience of mutuals there, in comparison with private sector firms. The private sector firms that had a higher rate of technological innovation were often better run by conventional for-profit organisations, private sector organisations, and workers' co-operatives tend to be more resistant to innovation, technological innovation. Understandably, if you think about it, because innovation, they feel, is threatening their jobs and so on. So on the whole, our view is

that public services that do not require a great deal of capital, that are mostly dependent upon labour, are more likely to be successful mutuals than those that are not.

Institut de l'entreprise: Are public service mutuals more efficient than the mutuals that could exist and existed in the past in the financial sector?

JLG: Yes and no. Firstly, they were a different kind of mutual. They were user-run mutuals, as Nationwide. Yes, in the 1990s, most of them got transformed into banks, into more conventional public sector banks. It has to be said that since that, those conversions have usually done very badly and the organisations that have remained as mutuals, and Nationwide is one of them, have not suffered nearly so badly in the financial crisis as the ones that converted. But this is a different kind of mutual, not the employee-owned mutuals that we've been talking about so far.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think that mutualisation in public service will be pursued in the future, even if the government changes?

JLG: I'm an ex-advisor to the Labour government, so I obviously talk to the Opposition parties.. And there's certainly an interest in mutuals, a feeling that this is an important way to go and indeed there's a certain amount of irritation about the fact that the lead seems to have been taken by the Libera-Democrats and the Conservatives. There is a certain hostility to the idea coming from the trade unions that we talked about earlier, and they of course have an influence in the Labour Party. But I think that there is a perfectly reasonable chance that, if and when there is a change of government, that the policy will be continued. It may have tweaks here and there, but the basic thrust of it, both in public services, and also, I have to say, probably in the private sector, I suspect will carry on.

4 Think tanks

Phillip Blond

Phillip Blond est directeur du *think tank* ResPublica et auteur de *Red Tory: How the Left and Right Have Broken Britain and How We Can Fix It*.

Avant de se consacrer aux idées politiques, Phillip Blond était maître de conférences en philosophie et théologie. En 2009, il dirige le Progressive Conservatism Project au sein du *think tank* Demos, avant de fonder son propre *think tank* centré sur les politiques publiques, ResPublica.

Red Tory est publié en 2010, et vise à definir un conservatisme social qui dépasse les deux écueils de l'individualisme et du marché d'une part et de l'étatisme d'autre part; Phillip Blond y souligne en particulier l'importance de la société civile. Par cet ouvrage et l'ensemble de ses réflexions, Phillip Blond est l'un des premiers originels de la *Big Society*.

Phillip Blond rappelled que *Red Tory* développe une pensée qui trouve ses racines dans le conservatisme originel du XIX^{e}, avec des origines éclectiques (Disraeli, Carlyle, Ruskin, Cobbett). Blond fait le constat que droite et gauche ont toutes deux échoué, la gauche à aider les plus démunis, la droite à assurer la prospérité. La *Big Society* veut donc répondre à ce constat, et notamment au fait que le service public d'aujourd'hui ne fonctionne plus de façon optimale. Si l'on offre le même service à chacun, on ne lui offre pas ce qui lui est nécessaire. Le service public devrait donc être non centralisé, hyper local et holistique.

Dans ce contexte, si l'Etat est le seul bien collectif de long terme, il n'est pas nécessaire qu'il soit le fournisseur des services. Pour être efficace, l'Etat doit se transformer en une plate-forme facilitatrice distribuant un service fourni par d'autres entités, comme les entreprises et les associations. Pour que la diversité des prestataires donne tous ses effets, l'Etat doit faire en sorte que les PME et associations puissent être en concurrence avec les grandes entreprises, et les *business models* traditionnels avec les nouveaux *social businesses*.

Enfin, selon Phillip Blond, sortir de la dépendance à l'Etat-providence est une nécessité morale, autant qu'économique.

Que dire de la mise en oeuvre de la *Big Society*? Certes, explique Phillip Blond, les Conservateurs ont pu renouveler leur vision sociale, et en ce sens c'est un succès ; mais c'est un échec en ce que la mise en oeuvre n'a pas suivi de véritable stratégie.

Institut de l'entreprise: Phillip Blond, in *Red Tory*, the book you published in April 2010, you advocated a bottom-up civic renewal of British society. The British Society was broken – you said – because both the state and the market were no longer functioning. Paradoxically, Thatcherite Conservatives and Third Way New Labour policies were equally responsible for this situation, as they ignored the critical role of civil society and progressively eliminated the intermediate institutions between the State and the Individual. According to you, « Margaret Thatcher's market revolution created an underclass subjected to unprecedented levels of inequality, while New Labour's managerial state has only made this condition permanent by depressing wages at the bottom and by denying assets, educational excellence and social mobility to the poorest ».

That is why, in order to address Britain main economic and social issues, you argued for a new brand of radical conservatism, in which you ally social and relational conservatism to a transformative Tory political economy. You called for a radical political vision that challenges the conventions of both left and right. To name this vision, you coined the term « Red Toryism », that you defined as « a commitment to the progressive merits of tradition and social conservatism and the need to build ethos-driven institutions, and a new Tory economics that distributed property, market access and educational excellence to all ».

These principles – re-localising the economy, re-capitalising the poor and re-moralising the market – were echoed in David Cameron's speeches and policy ideas during the electoral campaign in 2010. In fact, *The Telegraph* called you "a driving force behind David Cameron's '*Big Society*' agenda" – a whole package of measures to add to community empowerment, civic life and community businesses launched by the new government in 2010.

At the Institut de l'entreprise, we have watched with the greatest interest these new decentralisation methods that are being implemented across the Channel, as well as

recognizing the new opportunities for a more decentralised management of public services through the new role assigned to the Third Sector and small businesses.

The empowerment of citizens to monitor the delivery of services, as well as the pioneering innovations in social investment that are currently being developed in the UK, have also caught our attention.

Although a direct transposition of these policies seems difficult and not even desirable, due to the highly different political cultures in both our countries, we believe that French political debate should consider intermediate institutions and civil society as a third pillar of our society, capable of solving the state's financial problems and the market's regulatory failures.

In fact, civil society has been historically weak in France, and based on social spending amounts our welfare state is one of the biggest in Europe. In a certain sense, although our country has not seen the steep rise of inequalities as with other OECD countries, French society seems broken too, if you observe the high level of distrust between the government and its citizens, and the social status anxiety among the population.

That is why we think that France may need a Big Society agenda of its own.

Beforehand, we would be glad to know more about your intellectual and political commitments.

First, how would you define the principles or the intellectual origins of "Red Toryism"? What is the link between your ideas and David Cameron's Big Society agenda?

Phillip Blond: Thank you. I would like to thank the Institute as well. It seems to be very incredibly innovative and I want an Institute like you in London. Thanks for bringing us together.

The first question was: what is Red Toryism? I am not a Marxist, but I am quite impressed by Adorno, I remember reading Adorno when I was a student and he argued for the decisive role of the negative. I'm unable to think except by thinking: "what's wrong?" I begin all my thinking about "what's wrong". And I'm also a phenomenologist, and I read and deeply admire the French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, who taught me to engage with reality, to think from reality. And I am a terrible British patriot, and when

you love your country, and when you look at what is wrong with it, it forces you to think and think deeply.

The difficulty with my country is that both the right and the left have gone wrong. Both have failed on their own terms. Broadly speaking, the left have failed to save the poor from being poor, and the right have failed to create mass prosperity. And I thought this was very interesting. Britain is a kind of social innovation lab, we are like Maoists as we seem to always be in a state of permanent revolution, we see a revolution every ten years and this is in some way bad but in some way very interesting because it creates new forms of thinking incredibly rapidly.

First of all on the social side, we seem to have destroyed the extended family and made a successful assault on the nuclear family. We have created a world in which permanent commitment between men and women is bourgeois and somehow fascist, and raising children is an optional and disposable luxury, and where there is no particular responsibility owed by men to women, neither from women to men, as if men and women were the same and mutually inter-changeable.

The cost of this to our society was lethal: wherever I went to working-class areas or poor areas in the UK, I saw unmarried mothers suffering dreadfully, with children often from different fathers, children who grow up in utterly un-parented ways. And the women told me that the level of pressure and the extremism of their situation rob them of a prosperous and fulfilled life, while the unsuccessful men who fathered these children went bounced up and down at the bottom moving from unemployment, to low-skilled jobs back to unemployment again. That struck me as awful.

And then again, looking at my society, even during Tony Blair's era, billions and billions of pounds were pumped into the state, but inequality rose and rose massively, even under the one of the greatest increases in public expenditure in post war British history. Free marketers came along. I believe in free markets, but the only thing they ever seemed to create was cartels and monopolies, and enormous concentration of wealth. There are more indications of this in America: the top 1% of families in 1974 had just under 9% of GDP; in 2007, they had 23.5% of GDP. So what we see is a massive capture of wealth by the top 1% and over the last 20 years, after adjusting for inflation, the bottom 90% of the US population has benefited from growth by only 59 $!

So what I wanted to say is that something is evidently and profoundly wrong. We are wrong in our left-wing traditions and wrong in our right-wing traditions. Each produces the correlate of the other, and I tried to work out what it was. And I realized, after reading Carlyle, Ruskin and Burke, that both versions of right and left are the same, they are both liberal.

We have social liberalism on the left, that promotes almost anything it can promote, because any idea of permanent tie, or even love between human beings is viewed as somehow to do with power and that is somehow illegitimate, and therefore the left pursued for society autonomy and choice above all things. The left were social libertarians, and everywhere they tried to subsidize and reward choices that took apart established social structures and eliminated societal infrastructures.

And the right were economic liberals and everywhere they argued for deregulation, liberalization, lower taxation. And this was all with the aim creating a world where there are multiple sources of wealth, and entrepreneurships and energy, but all they did was concentrate wealth, strip entrepreneurship from the masses and create a world in which Karl Marx would be very happy, because all they end offering the majority of people is low-paid and insecure work. This is strange and suggests to me that what we are living under is not a left or right wing regime but an extreme liberalism of left and right.

Philosophically it all stems from Rousseau through Bentham, and just as Rousseau woke up, and said “I am born from my own activity, I am an extreme individualist first”, and then wandered into a local village and saw other minds and then produced the general will that said “everybody must think like me”. That relationship between extreme individualism and extreme collectivism is repeated again across and along the standard left-right axis. So the left is always collectivist, because it assumes that there are no real distinctions between people that cannot be solved by further aggregation; and the right is individualist because it assumes there is no decisive social aspect of the human person, so collectivism and individualism move into one another. For example, if you create a political economy where individuals compete against one other, the outcome is that very few individuals win everything. And when very few individuals win everything, everybody else is a loser. Then what do they do? The winners if they wish to avoid revolution have to create a welfare state in order to secure social peace. Following these thoughts, you come up with the idea that there is a conspiracy of ideas, and these ideas have destroyed the genuine left wing tradition and the genuine right wing. No Conservatives conserve anything now, Conservatives in this sense are the new

Maoists. Anyone who stands in the way of anything is immediately condemned. And the same on the left, but obviously on the left the target is different: all workers are victims, no workers have ever acted badly or done anything wrong , all bosses are evil, the story is both very weird and crippling, and very wrong.

Red Toryism is a sort of "No" to it-all. I am a red Tory, and in some ways, this buys into high toryism of the 19th century, of Disraeli, Carlyle, Ruskin, William Cobbett. The great Tory radicals who in the 19th century were against slavery, remember it was Conservative religious Christians who opposed slavery and it was the Whigs, the Liberals in Britain who wanted men, women and children to work 18 hours a day. There was a great conflict in the 19th century with the Whigs, who wanted white working-class slavery, whereas the Tories wanted a reduction of work hours, like the Ten Hour bill led by Salisbury. Then radical conservatism changed in the 20th century, and largely, a radical conservatism lost its way; it bought into socialism, and socialism lost its way with Marx. Before Marx, socialism was civic, religious, local, after Marx, it was atheist, statist and centralist. So we are looking at our two most profound traditions essentially losing their way with each gradually becoming absorbed by liberalism in either its collectivist or individualist mode. What Red Toryism is trying to do is name "what's wrong"? I cannot begin from anywhere else; I'm a thinker who works with a mixture of phenomenology, intuition and conceptual history. In politics, I think the most decisive move is creating concepts or intuitions that people already have and then people recognize themselves in what you say.

Red Toryism is an attempt to be Conservative about institutions, about relationships, about what fosters commitment and reciprocity between people. It is a restoration of our institutions that liberalism has destroyed. Because another thing that liberalism does is it destroys any intermediate institution, it only believes in individuals or collectives, it does not believe in associations. Because the fundamental belief is that of untrammeled individual will, whereas institutions shape will, institutions tell you what you should choose, they don't just privilege the act of choosing. For me Conservatism is not Maoism, it believes in the achievements of the past – it recognizes that human activity has something to teach us we're living on the legacy of human beings, to paraphrase Newton, "we all stand on the shoulders of giants", so tradition has something to teach us, and we learn from tradition about the future we should inhabit.

Red Toryism is red in the sense that we profoundly need a new offer for everybody. Our economic model today is creating workers who benefit less and less from the GDP

cake even if it doubles in size. So the returns to labor have been falling since 1968, and for men it is disastrous and for women their wages as a share of GDP are stagnant. People are not benefiting. Even if the cake has doubled from the 1960's, the people get a slice that is smaller than in it was in the 60's. We need a new distribution, we need to distribute not welfare but education, culture, excellence and character. For instance character is now a class-based issue, the poorer you are the less character you have, by character I mean discipline, resilience, ability to get up; I have been beaten for most my life, my life has been a series of disasters punctuated now and then by something glorious; this is what life is. Now they know that the poorer you are you can't get up from disaster. You notice when you visit poor kids and one bad thing happens, they can't do anything again, whereas kids from wealthy background just keep building despite setbacks.

We need a new economic, social and political settlement. And it's going to be paradoxically far more left-wing than people realize, but so left-wing it is actually capitalist. I don't believe as Keynes believes, that capital is a restricted good, and only the wealthy will ever own it, and therefore we invent the state to tax the transactions of the rich. I want to create a fully endowed polity where all citizens own and all citizens trade, because it seems to me that the true source of wealth are markets and trade and ownership, and there is no reason to restrict that to one class of persons. But that's what the welfare state does, it separates consumption form production, and those who receive cannot own, and if you do own you are penalized so you do not receive. So for me the real issue is how we rethink the state and welfare, and how we reframe the market, I want to move the state and welfare from income supplementation to creating a capital effect. I proposed and worked a lot of things that found their way into law in England, for example the Localism Act, the Social Value Act and broadly speaking I want communities from the bottom up to capture all the money spent on them and group it together so they capitalize their income streams, they capitalize their problems, and if they own, which they have never done before, they get a massive return because they eliminate bureaucracy, but by doing this you also create a delivery system that is much closer to people, that can be holistic and group together all the siloed and separated expenditure that you have from the state.

Then when you have that, for the first time you create mass ownership. Previously you have only had mass ownership through property and you can potentially have mass ownership through different stakes in businesses but nowhere in the west perhaps with the exception of Australia have we created a society that has wider stakes than

residential property. I also propose mass mutualisation of the state, and perhaps our greatest victory in the UK is the Social Value Act (all public expenditure now has to consider public procurement using to local businesses, social businesses, and new businesses). So public procurement and outsourcing, instead of going to four companies as it did under Tony Blair, now hopefully will go to thousands of communities to endow new SME and create a small and medium size business culture. Then we move to social infrastructure, and this becomes a way in which the economy and the social can come together, you can build an economic and social system that reinforces one another, because of course if you group people you create social as well as economic capital. This was the vision of Big Society, to create a world in which small and medium sized businesses can compete with large, and business models themselves can compete with for example new social businesses which do public work but in a more effective and cheaper way than the state, and can charge the state for the difference. This could be the way we run welfare now, instead of running it through the old broken model.

Institut de l'entreprise: About the implementation of Big Society, you were initially a strong advocate of Big Society and you may have revised your judgment upon its implementation. Do you think David Cameron has betrayed his initial principles or do you blame instead the implementation of his policy?

P.B.: When you are a leader, you cannot endorse mutually contradictory positions. The Conservatives have renewed their social vision, but not their economic vision. If they do not produce a new economics, then any new social will fail because the old economics will strangle the new social baby. That indeed is what has happened. The government has gone with an outdated, *laissez-faire*, standard right-wing offer; it offered a retread of Thatcherism and it has completely failed to achieve economic growth. It is the worst performance by any chancellor since the Second World War. Consequently, the sacrifice of everything to austerity is to increase our debt: it has been the undermining of the whole Big Society offer. Before the Localism Act even passed, local communities were being cut dramatically. In addition to the philosophical undermining, there was no delivery mechanism. There was a type of laissez-faire approach, that said we're going to see what works, and what works will just self-define itself. But the trouble is, when you are trying to do something new and you have no delivery mechanism, you create the idea that "this is a program which has no center"; if we created in every town and village, a place where you could go, an intermediate institution, it could have gone to a popular scale quite quickly. And it does not need 100% of the population, only 5% to buy into it, but everywhere, to run things differently, in a way that works. I think that was doable

but that was not done. So it succeeded and then it failed. It succeeded because it created the completely new Conservative offer, but it failed because they tried to deliver it in the same old Conservative way. And this has proved fatal – but not to the ideas because the Labour Party has now adopted the ideas, Jon Cruddas is a great man and he is doing Big Society on the left, saying "I'm just going to make Big Society work", and they will probably win on that in my view.

Institut de l'entreprise: You seem to have a grim picture of the UK, of course the UK is living difficult days, on the economical level, but still if you look at the broader picture, if you go back only five years ago, it seems that the UK has done better than France in terms of GDP, and I would bet that a vast majority of the British households have benefited from the growth of the past years.

Then I am preoccupied by the low level of interest for these kinds of policies among the public. How is it in the UK ? Can few people change the world, and the rest of it just watch? I doubt it.

P.B.: It is a completely legitimate question: am I too pessimistic, hasn't the UK made great gains? Yes and no. We have made gains on the back of bubbles, so the recession has wiped about 3% of UK GDP, people now think in Britain we may never recover that, that might be a permanent loss. Secondly, the benefits from growth have been uneven, a part of the population has benefited from the growth, but if you go to parts of the North or Scotland, it is worse than ever. Inequality has risen. Some people are static and other people have accelerated; the other thing that needs to be said, which is a cultural point, is that economists understand the economy by looking backwards. They look back and say I'm better than my grand-father and better than my father. He had a TV, I have ten TVs. But human beings don't look backwards, they look alongside or sideways. You know the phrase, "happiness is earning 5% more than your brother-in-law". This is unfortunately true. People are comparative, they are not secular in the sense that they don't look back long term. That has done two things: it centralises status and says "this is how it is to succeed". In a recent survey of teenagers, there were five careers that they wanted to have, among them football players, actresses, talent-scout for the *X Factor*. What this produces is an enormous amount of unhappiness when those goals are not realized, we know it is fake, we are all educated, all successful, we all can feel very good about ourselves, but this is not the norm; an anthropologic study of status (which may sound horrific actually), has been done on apes: when they denied status to high-status males, those males died incredibly quickly. Status matters. For

example, here is a difference between those who are nominated for Oscars and those who win Oscars: five years. Oscar winners live about five years longer than people who are just nominated for an Oscar. Status has that much of a social impact. And if we look alongside, and if wealth has increased for some groups and not for others, it creates a world in which nobody feels they are doing well, even though by certain measures, they are clearly doing well, but that feeling of not doing well is not fake, it is completely foundational and fatal. So what is undeniable in our societies, particularly during Tony Blair's era, the growth years, the rewards from growth had been massively unevenly distributed, and people who have less and less a share of growth have debts and the massive take-up by debt in consumer households has eliminated any growth that they had experienced.

And if you think of households, women did not use to work. So with the entry of women into the workforce in the 1970's, working hours per household have doubled and with globalization beating down the price of consumer durables, for the access to consumption, globalization did work. But when that hit a peak (roughly this was in the 80's), they could not meet the living standards demanded by the general population, and there was an enormous taking on of debt by households. Some indebted themselves for 20 or 30 years; it's terrifying the level of debt that has been taken on. In that sense I think it is legitimate and right to be pessimistic, because the deleveraging that is taking place is remarkable in its cost and impact.

About a year and a half ago, McKinsey did an analysis of the proportion of the total debt in the UK economy, that is public, private and corporate, and it was 500% of GDP, if memory serves me correctly. And you all know that public sector debt is rising in Britain. It is not getting any lower, so we're experiencing deleveraging without deleveraging, that's where we are. In that sense I think it is right to be pessimistic, but I'm not stupidly pessimistic it is not a *modus operandi*, I think there are alternatives, I think there are things we can do, Britain has massive assets, culturally and intellectually, and I want us to use them. I think human history tells us that a creative minority are the game changers in any situation, because even if only 5% people do something differently, it can affect 70 or 80% of the population, and this can be completely transformative. For prisoners reoffending, if you put offenders with a social group rather than on probation with the state, often that social group is religious, they get offending down from 66% to 15%. Let me give you another example. Sandwell community caring trust (which houses vulnerable adults and teenagers) spun out of the local council as a cooperative a few years ago. They now charge £328 per person per bed. For those remaining in council

care, it's £658. You would think they destroyed the workers' settlement and pensions, but actually the gain was primarily because workers went from taking 23 days off a year when they worked for the state, to 0.3 days per year when working for the co-operative. The percentage spent on frontline services rose from just over 60 to around 86%, and it created massive surplus.

I'm not a revolutionary. Incremental change has a compound effect both culturally and in practice, as a policy person, if I try to fight for a total victory I'm going to lose. If I say we must abandon and change everything, I'm going to lose, I'll never win. As a policy person, I would like to create this possibility; I would like to see if it works and run alongside existing programs: people then won't fight me as hard, and I may win. In five years this model would have compete the other model. This is how you do change in governments. If you spend your capital in trying to eliminate somebody, it is not going to work. You have to allow for alternatives and let them become successful themselves.

Institut de l'entreprise: One of the solutions you suggest is to have public services transferred to the local scale and money given to local associations or citizens. Don't you fear this might create something even worse, that is local populism, power being illimited in the hands of a limited number of persons?

P.B.: When you have local capture, you have local vested interest capturing a universal public service. My answer to that is that we have it already, but we have a general rather than a specific capture of universal service, and we produce something that does not work for anyone. Take the example of health in Britain: we have a kind of French revolutionary account of how we should run our public services, which is "we must produce equality everywhere". If we deliver a universal healthcare, we have to deliver the same thing everywhere, to people regardless of what they want, as the assumption is we are absolutely standard and the same. And the whole effort by the center is to insure standardization everywhere. Then you think it would be marvelous, that this would really work, but if you look at health inequalities in Britain, they are shocking: in Britain life expectancy in certain areas is lower than Sub-Saharan Africa. Life expectancy in Britain can vary by 35 years depending where you live. Now here is another statistic: what is the best indicator of a person's income in Britain? The postcode where you were born, it is still the best indicator of what will happen to you. The rhetoric of liberalism, freedom, social mobility, that is what it has delivered. So if you get the same thing to everybody everywhere, you will give the wrong thing to everybody everywhere, because everybody is different and everybody varies in what they need. If you have children and your son or

daughter have problems in English, you won't deliver the same kind of level tuition to them as you would to those who do not have problems in English. Everything we know about bringing up children is about recognizing the differential needs they have; then why don't we think every human being's needs will be different? Why, since we vary? Even twins vary! We have public services designed to meet people's needs that are designed not to meet people's needs. We need public services to deliver what people need and that would differ per person.

So for me the task is to do something different. First, services have to be non-centralized. They have to be not just local, but hyper local, as close to people as we can get without being inappropriate. Not only do they have to strip away bureaucracy, but they have to be "holistic", and that is because the way the state works is that different parts of the state conspire against other parts of the state.

For example social services often run counter to the needs of the police and the local authorities operate in a way that is hostile to the needs of the environment; the environment agencies and the police run counter to the need of the health services. We need "holistic" care, we need a way of grouping all these services around on holistic outcome.

When you go to a good doctor or a good hospital because of obesity, it means you have lots of problems, with your heart, circulation, liver, etc. The doctors will try to find first the cause of the problem, the hegemonic problem that is causing the issue. Can you imagine the state doing that? The state cannot help anyone in real need, because their needs are at such a level and such a crisis, that they can only be helped by people who take a kind of human familial responsibility for them. That's what we have to do if we really want to help people. If we are comfortable with mass inequality, with people in need, who die thirty years earlier than they should, fine, don't do anything. However I believe we should face our problems and not deny them, but I think there is no alternative if we want the services to actually help us, for them to be hyper local and constructed in a personalized manner.

Technology used to be anti-social and is now pro-social: we are entering a world in which things that did not matter now matter such as reputation. Reputation is now market permission: eBay allows you to buy things from people you have never met, which is remarkable, because the value of the transaction is worth less than the value of your on-line reputation. There are also via websites, people sleeping on each other's couches

across the globe, and you have never met them! I have not done that, and would not in a million years! But thousands of people do that and it is actually successful.

So the idea that we cannot create a form of technology which is accountable to hyper local services is not true. The British government puts every single contract on the internet; so if you do that for the government you can do that at a hyper local level. Also the evidence of hyper local websites is that they can have an enormous level of penetration: 70, 80, 90% of the population may be involved in a town and what is going on there. If things are close to you, they matter to you and people will join in. And I want to produce public services that are close to people that matter to them so that they may join in, because I want public services to work and they don't work. The world would be far worse without them and I don't deny it, but the idea we cannot improve them is wrong.

Institut de l'entreprise: There is an on-going feeling among economists like Tyler Cowen that productivity gains are declining, even in a very strong period of innovation; in this context, do you think there is something better and achievable than very small gains for most of the people and huge gains for the wealthiest ones?

I also remember someone – she was actually famous in your country – who said that "there is no such thing as a society": how do you match this statement with your Big Society concept?

P.B.: I don't have a full answer to the question of productivity. I'm still reading about it, it is quite complex and difficult, so I enjoy it and will try to read more to give you a fuller response.

But this is my feeling so far: I think we have reached the limit of a certain management model. The management models that we have been following destroy company value, and we have not replaced our management theory with something new and fit for purpose. Successful companies in the future will have to abide by the ethical and social standards of the society in which they operate, because increasingly customers are going to select for them, increasingly governments are going to ban companies that don't pay a proper share of tax, don't price in 'externality' and so they will be effectively banned from trading in that country. The obvious answer to GE and Starbucks not paying tax is: don't let them trade. Have a turnover and tax trade deal; otherwise tax burden will fall on individuals and small businesses, which will keep them crushed. What we have going

on in our society is massive rent extraction, all our banks are *rentier* institutions, or at least have been. We have capitalism that is completely perverted now: why do we not invest in small businesses? Because we cannot assess the risk, and we cannot assess the risk because all the people who have asymmetric knowledge, people who are or were closest to the businesses and say that is a good business or that is a bad business, have been let go by centralized and standardized banks. And now we can't tell what a good or bad small business is, so we aggregate them together as group, we take the average and say that is not worth lending to the average, so we don't fund them and they don't grow.

So we need to create an asymmetrical knowledge system whereby we are able to discriminate between good and bad small businesses, that will produce returns to that will be more than sufficient to generate proper investor interest. We have not even created a world in which ordinary wealthy people invest in businesses. If people are wealthy, they buy a property, but virtually nobody invests in a start up or a small business and yet it is exactly what we should be doing.

Let's create a state that can help create the outcomes we want. If a start-up is founded by family or friends give them a 100% tax break: if they make any money they keep it all. Let's have this kind of policy that can really foster jobs growth and innovation. Let's get capitalism to work properly and see why they are unproductive. This is completely unanalyzed, as far as I am concerned. We have a *rentier* economy, and I think that takes a massive amount of productivity out our nations.

In my country they poured lots of money to educating people from 4 or 5 to 21 and nothing afterwards. If somebody wants to be educated after 30, there is no way they can, because it is too expensive. We need a through-life education offer. I want to break up undergraduate degrees, so we only have two year degrees. You finish when you are 20, and then you have 2 or 3 years left of education that you can take when you are 30 or 40 or 50. And then when you are in a job and you can specialize in your expertise, your employer will see the clear self-interest in helping you with the loan you used to fund your education, so you're borrowing less, over a shorter period of time, and the state can save hundreds and hundreds of millions on the loans it currently gurantees, and you can apply this to the tax credit for companies to enable through life education to be funded.

This simple move would address one of the structural weaknesses of the West. Our educational attainment has been deteriorating and if you look at the USA, educational

attainment has been stagnating for 40 years; people no longer go to university, because there are no jobs, after all why would you build up an $80 000 debt?

But the real gain is about producing a different unit of value, and the unit of value is one that I think is already here. For example, if I pay my local taxes and my street is dirty, I am making an investment and I am not getting any social return. If I am making an investment in a social business, and I get a return and the street is cleaned, I also get a social return. I get what I want. I'm always in the supermarket in my country though I dislike the supermarket model. I would love to shop locally but all my local shops are either closed or they're charity shops or they are very poor in terms of quality and range. I cannot select the outcome I want, but I would love my money to go to small businesses and families; but I can't select it, so if I have a unit of value that actually produce the social return that I expect and that really works, it would be the new unit of currency.

The social problem we are creating is so extreme that society won't be able to maintain itself. In America for instance, the amount of people who rely on government assistance to get by has passed the 50% mark; the healthcare system is 18% of GDP and rising. This is not sustainable, this will break. So let's price in social value, creating in effect a new unit of currency that prices in the externalities. In one sense it sounds silly, because we do not necessarily know what this social value is, but in another sense, if we can make it part of the offer, everyone will select for it, and it will be realized by our own activity, and I think social value is where real productivity has to come from. The externalities that businesses produce are what holds back productivity, real educational gain, real ownership this is what delivers a transformative gain.

When you go to America, in most ugly places, in Michigan for example, where there were endless groundscrapers, or worse, Holland, with the most disgusting public architecture, you see it depresses people, but they cannot select for beauty. If you produce a kind of unit of exchange, a way you could select for those socially added extra, which in some ways we have achieved in Britain with some of the laws we are bringing out, this is where real productivity gain is, because there you produce economic activity that does not produce externalities. This is just an intuition I would like to share with you: we must price in real productivity gain in some transformative way.

Concerning big business, I'm not anti-big business at all and I think we need big business because they have the resources and reach to help us innovate, but for me there is a win-win between small and big businesses that has never been explored. For example

I lived in Shoreditch in London, which is quite trendy. And there is this beautiful market, Spitalfield's Market, that has been redone by Norman Foster. Every single business you find there is a standard business you will find on every high street, so it is completely empty the whole week. On the week-end when they let in small stallholders that sell weird stuff, it gets half the population of London there and this is the economic lifeline for all the standard enterprises. This is emblematic of the win-win: big companies are not really innovators; they are aggregators, systemic aggregators. The innovators, the ones who provide the future jobs are the ones we need to encourage so if we can create win-wins, in terms of retails but also in terms of investment, spinoffs, if you can create rewards for hybridity between small and big businesses in terms of investment, then I think you can create win-wins, because what no big business can insure against is obsolescence, over investing in a model and then it is suddenly knocked-out. If you could create a system in which big business could train and mentor and facilitate small businesses, it would be an insurance for them against obsolescence, and insure resilience of the supply chain. This is how red I am: I want a capitalism that really benefits people, where we have multiple ownership and multiple sites of innovation.

Institut de l'entreprise: Don't you think you go to the supermarket because maybe you have no choice, but also because it is cheaper than the small boutiques? It is because there is some form of efficiency that people go to the supermarket.

P.B.: In terms of consumer welfare, modern competition law has a consumer welfare standard. This comes from the Chicago school, with Richard Posner and Milton Friedman etc, who argued that the only thing that mattered was low prices. And therefore we don't need a complex European or ordo-liberal competition law. We just need low prices. Low prices, they argued, will break monopolies. Unfortunately the reverse is the case: under the watch of Chicago competition style law, the number of companies in a market has gone from ten or eleven down to three, or sometimes even two, and in many cases it's effectively one. It means that consumer welfare stands proxy for total welfare, but consumer welfare is not total welfare. Even total welfare economists say it does not work. I don't believe in total welfare, because I think people are producers as well, not only consumers. So even the total welfare model is wrong.

You are right to say supermarkets are cheaper, but there is no reason why networks and small shops cannot deliver the same efficiency at their scale, with a variation that makes them attractive. We have a lot of poor and unorganized local shops in Britain, but what they give is another route for working-class people to autonomy and ownership.

Britain was a 'nation of shopkeepers' and it was the greatest nation on earth. I think there is a lesson there: if you create a nation where people have stake, they don't become dependent and they don't turn to the welfare state, they can pass their business on to their children, they have security and feel worth. The cost of the state for a person who does not have that is enormous.

I don't think there is a necessary benefit that supermarket has that a network system of local retail outlets can't have in principle. I would like to create piggyback, I would like local town center being able to piggyback on the distribution system and the logistic infrastructures of the larger players.

Concerning this economy of scale, everything you see in the supermarket is standardized, all the wines taste the same, and the cheese tastes the same: it is awful because they can't deliver variation as they need massive volume. If you have multiple sources that can cope with the variation and the networks, I think you might get a better service and higher quality.

Plus I am not sure supermarket is that cheap because if you add it all up, it would probably be too expensive for us to continue with the present model, if you look to what it has done to food production. There is something shocking, we throw away about 30% of the food we produce. One of the reasons is that we can't vary our daily purchase. What I like about Paris is that when you go back home after work you go pass your four or five shops so you can manage your daily purchase, but in Britain, you have to drive out, to go to the big shop, but sometimes you are not coming back for dinner so you throw your food away and so the centralization of food production is inefficient because we cannot meet our varying needs.

Institut de l'entreprise: There is a strong issue with this dream related to small businesses: one of the goals is to make sure people are « growing up » in their work, and it is very difficult for a young person to grow up while staying in a small organization. That's why I think there is a new way between large groups, big and centralized companies and this dream of a world made of small and mid-sized organizations, which are big groups made of a large number of small companies. The idea is to implement your decentralization concept (in which local organization has to deal with other inhabitants of the local businesses), but while keeping a real link with this small and mid-sized organizations, making sure they are part of a bigger organization, to make sure that people who work there will have the possibility to grow up.

P.B.: First of all, let me take on the pejorative “dream”. It is not a dream. It is demonstrable, it is factual; you have Catalonia, Lombardy, and Ruhr: these are the great successes of Europe and they are only successful through small businesses and the right relationship with large businesses. Small businesses are the source of innovation; for the top one percent of all performing patents, small businesses are twice as representative as large businesses. They are an answer to our unemployment problems; they take on jobs whereas larger businesses tend to lose them per unit of production. But what you said is right. I’m not anti-big business at all, rather I am arguing for a system that is better for all businesses both big and small, I believe in a mixed economy and ecosystem, and what you say about how big businesses should operate is completely right. It creates a network effect. What I would like to see is partnerships between small and large businesses, and I think lots of people who start up want to keep ownership, but not all people are like that. Some would like to work in a larger business and we could second people from large businesses to small businesses to help them grow, and move people from small business to large businesses to help them learn. I want to create a government program that incentivizes and rewards such behavior, so that the general gain is reflected in specific gain.

The interesting question is “why there are companies at all ?” If you go with standard market theory, individuals should be able to do it all and the price system should sort out everything else. Companies are exchange systems, they are trusted exchange systems, and they exchange knowledge, responsibility and capital. That is all what a company really is. When you forget that and you subject this network system to an essentially false account of what a company is for (like shareholder value), you destroy the company. If a big successful company is just a network, what I would like to see is encouraging small businesses to create a network for itself and basically it would be the same. Really successful businesses form supply chains and do supply chain competition. Small businesses, where there is network, are more innovative that big businesses and that has been demonstrated, because they do the knowledge sharing more effectively, because they are niche experts who link and big companies find that very difficult. I deeply agree with the central point you make: on a national basis we should conduct our macroeconomic strategy, around links, relationships, networks, pool skills, pool education, pool training, reward linkage, create trust platforms, like the Chamber of commerce I was speaking in yesterday, whose main roles is to link and create relationships between big and small businesses, because all really can benefit.

Institut de l'entreprise: Your project has to do with a kind of restoration of traditional values. How would you do that? What do you think of free schools?

P.B.: Human beings are in the past, in the present and in the future. That is how we are. Human beings are a processional species. We look back, we look alongside and we look ahead. The group is what enables human beings to survive, the evolution theory now established by biologists, is the out of African thesis. All human beings outside of African are the descendent of one group. There were about 150 to 170 persons who crossed from Africa into Arabia. This group is the foundation of all modern human beings so much so that the optimal size for companies or management structures is thought to be the size of this original evolutionary group. What groups do is that they create knowledge for future generations. What human beings do is that they create taboos for future generations. Taboos are the signs of danger they are ways they are telling people this is dangerous activity, "don't do this, do that". The incest taboo is almost a universal taboo and it is right; a lot of taboos have to do with the maintenance of the group. The costs of not having a group, of individualizing, and destroying group relationships, are truly massive. All the benefits are the benefits of having a group. There is a good book on this, called *The European Economy since 1945* by Barry Eichengreen, in which he describes how Europe from 1945 to the early 1970s, catered a golden age, (Italy was growing 6% GDP a year) and they achieved this through essentially engaging in group activity. The private and the public sectors were aligned to the same goal and they created a group systemic activity.

Someone told me last night, France is like a successful Soviet Union: everyone is a socialist, everyone is a Marxist, everyone is a victim, and I said to him: why is it so good then? Why if this is such a disaster your productivity per capita is still higher than ours? France does not feel like a disaster. The French have an implicit communitarian system. You're trading on a group legacy that you do not know or cannot recognize anymore. In Britain we destroy the group. And the cost to Britain of destroying the group is fatal. How do you preserve a group? You preserve the group through having an account of the past and take that account of the past into the future. If you don't have an account of the past you can't preserve a group. If there is no identity over time, then there is no group, because you cannot preserve it over time. The preservation of the group over time is the most successful systemic thing you can do. If you are a leader of a country, the most important thing is group culture and group identity. It is your foundational role. Group culture and group identity eat strategy for breakfast every time. That's why conservatism is vital. Without conservatism there is no future, because only conservatism can articulate the defense of a group.

As to free schools I am very much in favor; but not for the same reasons that Michael Gove gave for free schools. Most schools are controlled by the local educational authority, and the government said it was going to create free schools, not controlled by the local educational authority but directly related to the center. My brother is probably the most successful headmaster in the country, he runs a state school called the Henrietta Barnet School, which is top the league, selective and one of the most successful British schools. He says local authorities are fine, but I support Michael Gove's free schools because he says "don't copy, create your own institution, your own ethos, your own value system", and if you do that you actually create a group. What is important is valuing academic excellence and academic culture, and my brother tells me the most important thing to do is to create an academic culture in which a child can sit down and read a book and not be laughed at. That's the sign of a successful school. It is very difficult to attain that unless you have selective culture. But what a free school is supposed to do is to think and innovate. It is actually a nationalization of schools, because they all rely now on the state rather than on local authority, but I support it because it creates entrepreneurship and innovation and people love it because they are not subject to external pressure and feel they are being creative.

Institut de l'entreprise: As for your theory of Big Society, which is about having more people involved in public services, I have two questions: is it feasible, and if so, how easily? You write about collaborative processes that make it possible for people to contribute: how can you build something collective out of everybody's contribution? And how do you motivate people to do that?

Then you talked about alternative currencies to monetize the value that people will create. So far we have 4 000 alternatives currencies in Europe in local communities: is it something that you were thinking of in your concept of Big Society?

P.B.: I've never been particularly sympathetic with the concept of alternative currency. I think they never go big enough. You can't buy a house through alternative currency. They can never get the macro effect that you want. But if you take time banking, where people say I am a retired accountant, I'm doing an account for you; someone else in the time bank system will do gardening for me. If you just do that straight, exchange time banking is not successful, it needs very stable communities, and everybody thinks someone is going to move away so they will never be paid in kind. But if the local authority said if you give time to other people, we will let you in our leisure centers for free, it is hugely successful, with lots of people volunteering in doing things. If you can

give people direct outcomes to what they want, almost any tradable thing works. But what I am really interested in is changing the unit of value, because the bad capitalism that we live under is essentially abstract value, it is not real value. So if it is abstract value, real value should be worth more, philosophically. Because abstract value will always have to exchange itself back into real value. If we can create a macro currency that does not just give you abstract value that would be a millennial shift. Of course that sounds a dream but we are already doing it, most human beings are already operating like this. This is something I am really sensitive to and would like to explore further because for me that is the great goal. If we could tie real value to real value, that would be very good indeed.

Institut de l'entreprise: Don't you think it would be the end of the state?

P.B.: I don't think the state is an effective mechanism for meeting the needs it wants to meet, and I can demonstrate that. The state has been necessary because it created the universal platform that would not exist otherwise, but its means to deliver it are now too damaged, too atrophied, and when we sell them off in standard privatization, it does not work well either, we often just create monopolies. We split things that we should not split like the rail track in Britain from the carriages, which make it more costly. But the state can be really effective for example the healthcare service in Britain, not as good as the French, but still quite effective: it is only 9% of GDP, while in the American system is 18% of GDP. The state is a long-term collective good, that no one else can reach; but the state does not have to be the deliverer. I view the state as a trust platform, a guarantee platform and a permissive platform. I would like to see the state as something you enter, and other people provide the services to you, more effectively, with less cost and better results. And that for me is a better model for the state: when people enter that trading platform, they pay the price of admission, they sign up to price in all the externalities, and if they don't want they don't get in. But the state has failed the poor in my country, massively. If we keep the universality, the end the state was created for, but creates different means, that might be the way the 21st century should go.

Institut de l'entreprise: I was fascinated by the Big Society idea and the way you contributed to the renewal of debate of ideas in the UK, and I would like to ask you a question about its future. It seems that a few left-wing intellectuals are interested in the idea, and as you were disappointed by the way the Big Society was implemented by the Conservatives, do you think there is any future for the concept on the left? How do you relate to thinkers such as John Cruddas or Maurice Glasman?

P.B.: I don't think left-wing people are evil, I think they are trying to do the good as they see it just as those on the right. So my task is not to be rude to them, my task is to argue. In that sense, I am a good friend of John Cruddas and Maurice Glasman. I am the only right-wing thinker that has been asked to contribute to the Labour party's work on the One Nation approach and I have been invited to some of their conferences, and in my view this is the success of my ideas. If my ideas go across to the left and they become followers, that is the greatest victory and I want them to be successful. I am disappointed with the Conservative Party, but just because they are doing the same old offer and will fail again. Just as I hate the statism of the left, I hate the neo-liberalism of the right. I criticize both but I try to do it politely, and in good spirits.

David Goodhart

David Goodhart est directeur du *think tank* Demos.

David Goodhart a commencé sa carrière au *Financial Times*, pour lequel il a été correspondant durant 12 ans. En 1995, il créé *Prospect*, une revue d'actualité mensuelle dont il est rédacteur en chef jusqu'en 2010, date à laquelle il cède sa place tout en restant contributeur indépendant. En 2011, il est nommé directeur du *think tank* Demos, proche du Parti Travailliste.

David Goodhart a récemment publié *The British Dream* [56], qui traite des questions d'immigration et d'identité nationale au Royaume-Uni.

L'intérêt de son témoignage sur la *Big Society* se justifie par son parcours, les thèmes qu'il a développés et sa proximité avec le *Labour*.

Selon David Goodhart, la *Big Society* est le fruit de la convergence entre la vision conservatrice traditionnelle d'un gouvernement limité et la conscience sociale d'un conservatisme persuadé que nombre de réformes doivent advenir avec l'aide des citoyens eux-mêmes. L' idée a joué un rôle positif dans la campagne de 2010, mais le gouvernement a aujourd'hui cessé d'en parler. Toutefois la *Big Society* a rencontré son succès, dans la mesure ou l'étatisme exacerbé est devenu assez impopulaire.

Après les élections, l'objectif des Conservateurs était de réduire le périmètre de l'Etat, ce qui était légitime dans un sens mais a fait paraître la *Big Society* comme un simple prétexte à la baisse des dépenses. A noter que la recherche d'efficience accrue des services publics, soutenue par les Conservateurs, n'est pas une problématique nouvelle et a été introduite par le *Labour*. Elle implique notamment la fourniture du service public par des organismes non publics.

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56. David Goodhart,*The British Dream: Successes and Failures of Post-war Immigration*, Atlantic Books, 2013.

Enfin, explique explique David Goodhart, le coeur du *Labour,* à la difference de nombreux électeurs travaillistes, n'a aucune sympathie pour les idées du *Blue Labour*, courant proche des idées de la *Big Society*. Cela s'explique par une composition nouvelle de la base du parti, très diplômée et issue de la classe moyenne.

Institut de l'entreprise: How would you describe the Big Society?

David Goodhart: I would have thought in some ways that the idea of the Big Society is more relevant to France than it is to Britain because the idea of a good society in France is so connected to the state since the Revolution. When either the left or the right think about social, doing things for poorer people or whatever, you only usually think of the state. And that's obviously been true to a large extent of the left in Britain, historically – obviously the right have been more sceptical about state power. But the Big Society seems to be a sort of marriage between a traditional, limited government, smaller state conservatism and the social conscience of conservatism, and saying, "unlike the left, we think that there is a huge amount of social reform that can and should come through people organising themselves." Through civil society, or whatever term you want to use, and not always thinking of the state as the agent of benign social change. So I think it was a very good and useful idea for them; I think it did play some sort of role in the run-up to the last election. I don't say that cynically, that they invented it just for election reasons, but it certainly was a helpful idea. Partly because it did combine both the more traditional Conservative concerns with the modern, liberal, progressive Conservatives in a way – it sort of welded the two together. The problem for it has been that people are pretty cynical about it now, and the government doesn't really talk about it very often.

Institut de l'entreprise: It may depend on how you define the Big Society – it is one of our interrogations indeed. You can have a very narrow definition all about volunteering and you can have a broader scope if you say that it includes the welfare reform.

D.G.: Or you can do both. The way I described it was the big story that social doesn't need to, or indeed shouldn't always come through the state. But then when you talk about what that means in practice, what the policy implications of the Big Society are,

you very quickly start talking about voluntary organisations. But voluntary organisations and the state are a very old story. Even before New Labour, but particularly under New Labour. New Labour had its own version of the Big Society too, although they didn't use the term, in the sense that any sensible people can see the limits of the effectiveness of the state, they know the state is often bureaucratic, slow and inefficient. They were very creative in some ways about how they thought about the delivery of state services not always by the state.

It was quite controversial in some ways. Part of the reform of the NHS was about contracting out the delivery of services to commercial or voluntary organisations; they introduced, similarly, lots of voluntary organisations into the delivery of various work and unemployment-related programmes. The voluntary sector itself had got very sort of 'statified'. I feel sometimes a lot of anguish being expressed by people in the voluntary sector. They had sort of been co-opted by the state in some ways. Most people in the voluntary sector tend to be on the left, so they were brought into the state under a Labour government; they now remain very central in some areas, very important in the deliveries of public services, but under a government they don't like so much, and feel that they're compromised in some ways.

The problem with the Big Society of course is, politically, that although the phrase did say something, although it wasn't just a phrase, after the election, the primary goal of the Conservatives was to reduce the size of the state, so it became very easy for Labour to caricature it as "we're reducing the state, we're stopping all this public spending, and we're giving it all to the voluntary, the charity sector". And there was some truth in that.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think it is the case?

D.G.: I think it's more than that. At least part of the phrase is saying that the state is too big and should do fewer things, even in the area of social progress. There are other things like free schools for example.

Institut de l'entreprise: We got the impression that free schools are one of the best successes of the government. Education is quite a specific field though, as people really have an interest in being involved with the free schools.

D.G.: It will be dominated by middle-class people. There's nothing wrong with that - it's sort of what the middle classes are for, in some ways. But one of the left-wing criticisms

is that you just get less of this kind of activity in very working-class parts of the country. You need to have quite a big professional middle-class for that – particularly middle-class women who used to be absolutely crucial to the voluntary service. There's a quite interesting issue relating to that, in some ways, one of the hidden costs of gender equality at least in this country – I don't know what the story is in France – is that with the removal of the 'glass ceiling' for talented women, there may be more talented women in politics and the corporate sector, but fewer in the voluntary sector. But when brilliant women were sitting at home having children, they were also often running voluntary organisations. Alison Wolf, an educationalist, has actually written a book partly about this, *The XX Factor*. It's a quite interesting aspect. It's partly about class differences among women, and how professional middle-class women want different things from working-class women, who still place the greatest emphasis on family life. You can't have a huge movement of women into the workforce, as we have had in our countries in the last thirty or forty years, without some things not happening.

Institut de l'entreprise: Another thing related to volunteering is that with Big Society, people are incited to volunteer more, but as students have to pay more for their higher education, they have to work at the same time and they can't volunteer.

D.G.: No, that's not true, they don't have to work while they study. Yes, fees have increased, but it's like a graduate tax - I don't know why they're not calling it so. You go to a good university, you pay £9 000 a year, so that's £27 000 you owe the state when you graduate, and you only start paying it back when you earn above £25 000 a year or something. You start paying a little bit of it back, like an extra little tax, which seems to be perfectly fair. People who go to good universities earn more money, why should they be subsidised by poorer people whose children don't go to university?

Institut de l'entreprise: Talking about free schools, we are seeing two main critics that could be aroused in France – often stated when talked about Anglo-Saxon countries. It would be said that the first risk is that if you have free schools, you emphasise the idea of choice and choice is inequality. The second is that in France, as you may know, the idea of the Republic is associated with school as an institution. As we are a very secularised country, if you had free schools, you would undermine social cohesion.

D.G.: There isn't a huge amount of social cohesion in France. But I do understand – much more of the ideology of the state is transmitted through the education system in France.

Republicanism has its heart in the education system, in some ways. And in the idea of creating citizens, you create citizens in schools, and then there's the ethnicity question obviously, the fact that everybody is equal in theory, everybody is taught the same syllabus from Calais to Marseille. I do understand that, and we have similar sorts of issues. Education is hugely important for the creation of citizens in any country that has a long period of compulsory education, whatever it is. That's an issue here too, and we argue about whether we should teach more British history in schools – we always say, "the French seem to know their own history !" You probably don't, in fact, but we will use these stereotypes of each other. We're indeed increasing the proportion of British history in the history syllabus from 25% to 40%.

Institut de l'entreprise: What is interesting is that today, the founding fathers of the republic schools in France – Jules Ferry and others - should embrace the free schools movement, because the state educational system is kind of undermining the very idea of republican-style schooling, like excellence!

D.G.: That's probably true. But I'm not a great fan of free schools. They're fine, but we've got more bread-and-butter improvement to our educational system to focus on. Free schools are like slightly fancy academies that are kind of freelance, and that groups of people get together. They're publicly funded, but they're outside the main state system, just like academies. But academies, which were started under Labour and which focus mainly on the really bad schools in the poorer areas of the country, have done a pretty good job of raising the floor. Free schools get a lot of publicity, but it's sort of almost a distraction.

Institut de l'entreprise: If you look at the figures, the real revolution is that now, more than half of all the schools are academies, and there are only 100 free schools in the whole country[57].

D.G.: They're almost doing that too fast as well. I almost preferred it when Labour were focusing much more on poorer schools, and now I think almost any school can become an academy. I think they would probably say to that, "we've slightly adjusted the funding formula so that poorer pupils get more money whatever form of state school it is, so it's ok if the academies are going into the more middle-class areas." But I'm not really sure about that.

57. C'était le chiffre approximatif au moment de l'entretien, en mai 2013. On compte 174 *free schools* à la rentrée 2013.

I think the interesting thing is going to be whether the Tories try to bring the Big Society back. They will need to have something else in the next election campaign, because people are going to say, "you made a lot of noise about this five years ago, now you're not talking about it at all – what's happened ?" They will either need to bring it back in some way or to have another story or phrase around which you can build a story.

Institut de l'entreprise: If you look at the composition of David Cameron's parliamentary advisory board on policy, there is Jesse Norman, one of the main thinkers of the Big Society. We can assume that Big Society will not come back as the same, but maybe differently, as a lot of people told us that it's a good idea with a really bad slogan.

D.G.: I think it's rather a good slogan and quite a good idea, it's just difficult to pin it down and give it application, particularly when you're trying to cut the size of the state quite sharply. It also has appeal on parts of the left, particularly the Blue Labour left: the Fabian statism is very unattractive in some ways, and to go back to this more self-organising mutuals is something both left and right can agree on.

Public choice theory is a good example for that – it used to be a rather eccentric right-wing policy. It may not be accepted in France, but even people on the left in Britain would say today, "obviously, the state itself has interests; bureaucracies are not neutral." This is essentially what public choice theory is saying. Through the thirteen years of Labour government, there was the idea of "reinventing the state". There was a whole fad, which was essentially a response to public choice theory – the inherent inflexibility of the state, the fact that there is an impulse for the bureaucracies to just grow and grow and that the state is not just a neutral vessel through which policies and money flow, but has its own interests. I think a lot of those theories were picked up by the centre-left when Labour was in power, there was lots of interest in that, and we did a quite a lot on it too here at Demos in the late 1990s and early 2000s. As I say, it's partly a slightly separate story how you reform the state and make it more effective, and that includes bringing in non-state actors to deliver things and mimicking the private sector in some ways.

Institut de l'entreprise: But when you read Jesse Norman's book on the Big Society, he has very sharp criticisms of the idea that the state has to mimic the private sector. He's in favour of the idea of state reform, but he says that all the ideas of targets and managerialism within the state have gone wrong.

D.G.: Yes and no. I think that is quite a narrow party political point. I think he wrote it when Labour was in power and targets were very unpopular in some ways. But the truth is, targets can also be very effective. I think, again, it's a separate issue about the reform of state and welfare and it's not so much to do with the Big Society. They're now removing a lot of targets and the performance of the state is getting worse – not necessarily just because they're removing the targets, but it's probably one of the factors. It does concentrate peoples' minds in an organisation if you have targets. Obviously it then produces odd outcomes and unintended consequences, and targets are notoriously difficult to control, but I think you should have better targets rather than no targets.

Obviously, you don't want and you can't completely mimic the private sector in the public sector. But people are now used to being treated very well by the private sector. As consumers, you have choice, and obviously the state cannot offer you the same kinds of choices and in some cases, doesn't want to offer you the same kinds of choices that the private sector can. The state has to treat everything equally, whereas the private sector obviously is differentiating like mad. We actually, many years ago, pioneered some of the work on personal budgets in the welfare state. If you're disabled, say, instead of just being delivered a certain form of help, you are given a certain lump of money every year – £15 000 or whatever – andspend it as you like. It's like vouchers. That's actually been very effective and it's very very popular.

Institut de l'entreprise: You were talking about Blue Labour. I remember you wrote in *Prospect Magazine* - I think in late 2011 or maybe last year – about this idea of post-liberalism and the rising influence of Maurice Glasman. What is the real clout of Maurice Glasman in the Labour Party?

D.G.: I really don't know. There is Jon Cruddas too, obviously, being the coordinator of the policy review, he has to seem to be not too partisan in terms of the internal party debate, but he certainly lets it be known that he is quite sympathetic to some of the Blue Labour ideas. There is Jonathan Rutherford too, who works with him. All of them are very close. I find many of these ideas quite attractive, and I'm certainly a sympathiser, but the trouble is that if you say to the average MP or Labour Party activist, "shouldn't we have more respect for social conservatism?" and "the Fabian 1945 settlement was a bit of a disaster", it won't be very effective. You have to find better ways of putting it, but Maurice tends to go all guns blazing and says things like that, whereas the core of the Labour Party has no sympathy at all for those ideas. A lot of

Labour voters have an enormous amount of sympathy for it, but there's now a mainly liberal, graduate, middle-class activist base, as there is in all socialist parties in Europe, mainly teachers, and they have much less sympathy for it. The debate about immigration has become more realistic, I think, and less free market – there was a sort of merger, free market economic liberalism and left-wing anti-racism combined to create this rather enthusiastic belief that somehow allowing millions of people into the country and driving down the wages of poorer people was somehow a socialist policy. A lot of Labour people convinced themselves of that in the late 1990s and early 2000s – I think it was a mistake. And they sort of half-apologised for it, shifting their policies on that. The idea that they would come into office and roll back some of the more restrictive immigration policies of this government is wrong. So there are sort of Bluish Labour things happening in areas like that, there's more of an interest in stories around national identity. I think it's probably made least progress in some ways in the area of the state and the kind of things we've been talking about - the Big Society, social reform through society rather than always through the state.

There's also the economics of Blue Labour, which recently has become very Germanic – The interest in Germany, probably like in France, goes through cycles – more patient capital, more local banking. Something Maurice is very keen on is regional banks.

Institut de l'entreprise: You published a book about immigration, *The British Dream*[58]. There will be a political debate in the French Parliament about that topic, and we're interested in having a foreign point of view on it.

D.G.: I know the French story a bit through arguments about republican equality, and the fact that you don't count what happens to minorities, which I think is a terrible error. You simply don't know who's succeeding and failing. It's an ideological blindness, and it's very damaging, I think, to minorities. And it's also copied – because you're a big influential country – other countries have taken your path. Sweden, for example, doesn't count its minorities. Many countries have taken our path – it's not *our* path particularly, but they do count their minorities and have more open debates about success and failure of different minorities and the reasons for them.. This whole subject is very interesting, andwe should have a debate about the European dimension of this and just look at what different countries do by way of analysing and collecting data on minority performance. Not necessarily a neutral debate – I hope to try and persuade the countries like France

58. David Goodhart, *The British Dream, op. cit.*

that don't count that they should. We should actually bring in minority leaders in this debate or people who come from minority backgrounds themselves to say, "don't worry!" The idea that this is unpopular amongst minorities is complete nonsense. It's quite the opposite, it's very popular because it gives them the ability to see what's happening and to lobby local authorities or governments to say, "there's a discrepancy here that may be the result of discrimination, or it may not be." Without the numbers, you can't really have a debate. You just say, "we're all French Republicans, it's all fine", and then you have riots every five years.

Institut de l'entreprise: The idea of diversity is a really interesting point. What is the future of the welfare state in a more diverse country that is aging?

D.G.: I know the German story quite well because I worked in Germany for the *Financial Times*, as well as the Swedish and the Dutch story. I have even been interviewed on my book by one of the main Danish newspapers, and there's been a bit in the German press. There is a kind of Northern European interest. But I have had very little interest from France. That's often the case – we tend to be more closed to each other's worlds with Northern Europeans, partly because of language.

I'm actually following Paul Scheffer, an academic who did a similar thing in the Netherlands. I hadn't heard of him when I wrote my original essay in 2004 . He's sort of on the left. Some people blame him for the whole kind of Dutch switch in the early 2000s because some of his work said similar things to mine, about progressive dilemmas and the limits of multiculturalism, particularly for the left [59]. That created quite a storm on the Left, Pim Fortuyn emerged a few months later, thenVan Gogh... Obviously, there's no direct link. Paul Scheffer then wrote another book, which has been translated into English, *Immigrant Nations*.

Institut de l'entreprise: A book has been written in the 1990s on the same theme, the author, Paul Yonnet, was on the centre-left, but it was a huge controversy at the time, it is *Voyage au coeur du malaise français*, , and it was a sharp criticism of politicisation of anti-racism. It was connected to the idea that during the 1960s and 1970s the two main parties were the Gaullist Party and the Communist Party, and the disappearance of the latter has created a void which has been filled afterwards by the *Front National*.

59. Paul Scheffer, auteur et universitaire danois, provoqua les premiers débats sur le sujet en publiant en 2000 dans le NRC Handelsblad un article , "Le désastre multiculturel".

D.G.: Of course, some of the Communist voters have now become *Front National* voters. In a sense, they should be. It's logical in some ways for the most introverted parties, the parties that place the most emphasis on protection and the exclusive rights of citizenship, citizen preference. One of the things that I'm interested in, because I'm sort of vaguely on the left, is trying to get the Labour Party and other social democratic parties in Europe to look again at free movement. Now free movement is part of the religion of the European Union, so you're never going to stop free movement, and I'm not saying you should stop free movement – although obviously it was a very stupid thing to do it with very poor countries. We should have had a 75% per capita GDP threshold or something. It's our fault, because we opened our door in 2004, seven years before we had to. But it's had a huge impact at the bottom of the labour market.

Now, what's the point of Labour Party? It's partly to reduce competition in the labour market,. That's what they were created for in the 19th century, and New Labour did the opposite. Now, I'm not saying that one should become a more or less overtly xenophobic party like the *Front National*, but there are genuine issues, I think, about how you do give preference to your own poorest and least well-educated people. And I think there are ways that you can do it. You don't stop free movement, but you make it legitimate and legal for countries to favour their own citizens when it comes to special training or assistance in the labour market. You might want to give employers special financial incentives to take on long-term unemployed young people, and you don't give those incentives for employing Polish people or Slovakians for example. It must be possible to do that. If that is against the European Union's spirit, then no wonder that Europe is incredibly unpopular. You can't stop citizen preference. Fellow citizen favouritism is still what most people think of as what it is to be a French person or a British person.

Institut de l'entreprise: There was a pamphlet by a progressive French think tank, Terra Nova, "*Gauche : quelle majorité électorale pour 2012 ?*" which was very influential. It said that Socialist parties are no longer the party of the workers, but the party of the minorities. It is as if the problem with the working class were that they were conservative...

D.G.: So let's abolish them! It's like Brecht, "Abolish the working classes, they don't vote for us anymore."

Institut de l'entreprise: The idea that you have another voice on the left is really interesting.

D.G.: When I was in the Netherlands, I spoke to Lodewijk Asscher, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Labour Minister of Social Affairs and Employment. He was very keen on the idea that, obviously, you can't remove free movement, but you can build in preferences for your own citizens. Or you ought to be able to. The Labour Shadow Minister for Borders and Immigration here, Chris Bryant, told me that there has been a long-standing debate about this, and the British, the Swedes and the Dutch were all very much in favour of making it legal to allow citizen preference in the labour market, whereas the French were particularly strongly against it. I don't know whether that's true.

Institut de l'entreprise: I assume.

D.G.: Both the French big parties, centre-left and centre-right? That's why it's the kind of thing that's now become associated with the *Front National*, andit makes it impossible for the other parties to stand for it… It's ridiculous, isn't it?

Anyway, every time there's a riot here, there's a brief flurry of interest, then it all dies down again. But actually, learning from each other's successes and failures in these areas across Europe would be a really good example of the European spirit working well. Of course, all countries are different, we all have our own histories, our multiculturalism comes out of our colonial story, your equal French citizen comes out of your story. But the lived experience of the average non-European immigrant in the banlieues of Paris, Bradford, or Bochum in Germany, is probably rather similarin all three places. There will be slight variations, but actually we're all quite similar societies, and the way we do or don't integrate our minorities are really quite similar - covered, as I say, by these historical narratives that we tell each other.

Institut de l'entreprise: But in Britain, you give political rights to minorities.

D.G.: We give political rights to minorities as citizens, but also because in the multicultural tradition, we have allowed them to organise collectively. That's because your immigrants came mainly from North Africa, where you were the superior civilisation, that you implanted upon them. We were multicultural in the Empire, partly because our empire was bigger, so we couldn't, sort of, "civilise" the nations in the way that you did. When they came to France, they were already French people, in effect, whereas a

very large proportion of our immigrants are South Asian Muslims, Sikhs, or Hindus from very conservative religious-dominated cultures.

Like so much of the stories, what do the immigrants actually bring with them? You often have the feeling that we're just bystanders face to the various cultural dynamics of the different groups that play itself out in the classrooms and workplaces of France or Britain. That's partly what my book was about. It can be quite a sensitive area, but there are such things as ethnic cultures and traditions, obviously. That's not to say that we shouldn't have a culture of political equality as you do in France and as we do here – you treat everyone equally on a political and legal level – but it's just not looking at reality to say everybody is the same. Obviously they're not. They think differently, believe differently, have different patterns of life and marriage. Some groups are very pro-education and work very hard, some aren't. We have got to talk about these things in the same way we have no qualms talking about social class – it's exactly the same thing. There are patterns of behaviour – it's not destiny, you can throw them off, but most people don't on the whole. That's what social science teaches us. But much work in this area is just crap, mainly for perfectly honourable reasons: they often come out of a tradition of really politicised academic advocacy, back in the 1960s and 1970s, when there was a lot of racism in our societies. Back then they were rightly on the side of minorities, but they haven't grown up.

Tim Knox

Après un master d'histoire à Edimbourg, **Tim Knox** travaille comme consultant au Strategic Consulting Group à Budapest jusqu'en 1996. En 1997, il devient responsable de la publication du Center for Policy Studies (CPS), *think tank* fondé par Margaret Tchatcher et Keith Joseph, proche du Parti Conservateur. Il en devient directeur en 2011.

Pour Tim Knox, la *Big Society* est une très bonne idée, à l'origine profondément conservatrice: il s'agit de donner du pouvoir aux individus, organisations et institutions afin qu'ils puissent vivre à l'écart de l'Etat. Mais le programme a été un échec dès son origine et dans sa mise en oeuvre. La *Big Society* était en grande partie un outil marketing. Ensuite le volet concernant la fourniture des services publics a été un échec, les grandes enterprises étant favorisées dans les appels d'offre. Enfin, le niveau du *welfare state* reste insupportable.

Même si elles ont selon lui peu à voir avec la *Big Society*, les réformes de l'éducation (*free schools*) sont particulièrement réussies, notamment parce qu'elles ont été préparées avant la formation du gouvernement. Leur existence doit pousser les autres écoles à s'améliorer. Toutefois leur processus de création reste très bureaucratique. Enfin, il serait souhaitable qu'à l'avenir les *free schools* puissent réaliser des profits.

Institut de l'entreprise : How would you describe the Big Society?

Tim Knox : The Big Society is a profoundly Conservative idea, with a very poor label. It should be about enabling individuals, organisations or institutions to arrange their lives outside of the state. As such, it's a fantastic idea. The principle of the Big Society, if one has to use that term, is great. But it has also been a badly handled concept. I think it's fair to say that the Prime Minister hasn't used those words in the last year or so. It's quite clear that it's been pushed to one side. It was initially very attractive to the Cameron wing of the Conservative Party, as they saw it as their new philosophy. They came to power with a determination to "modernise" the Conservative Party, and Big

Society was going to be the philosophy to show that they had changed. They came up with this name, which means nothing to anyone in Britain – it's now a joke, if you say "Big Society", people will laugh. Critics would say that it has been used as a marketing gimmick when it should have been the basis of a real political philosophy.

But, it remains true that the welfare state is insupportable in Britain. We published some research last October, *The progressivity of UK taxes and transfers*, which showed that 53% of British households now receive more from the state than they pay in taxes, which is extraordinary. When I say receiving more, that also includes the value of health and education. In 2000, that figure was just 43%, so there's a huge increase, and it's only going to get worse because of demographics.

Institut de l'entreprise : From abroad, there seems to currently be a huge restructuration of the welfare state in the UK. Do you think that the scope of the Big Society could include, for example, the welfare reforms, and the NHS one?

T.N.: It's being talked about, but little has actually happened. The UK has the largest deficit of any European country. Spending in Britain is going up – in real terms, the government is spending more money every year – the debt is going up. The deficit has fallen, it was £180 billion in 2010, but it is still £120 billion a year, higher than Greece, and it's forecast to remain at £100 billion for the next few years. Britain has amazingly got away with this belief that we're okay, but we're not.

There is a worry that the return to growth is being sustained by quantitative easing, a housing bubble and consumer spending.

The government is trying to reform welfare to some degree, and there are some good ideas, but the bill remains unsustainably high. Education is fantastic, the schools policy is brilliant, but this is not the Big Society. These are individual initiatives by individual departments which are more or less going in the right direction.

Institut de l'entreprise: How do you explain that the detractors of Big Society say that it is only a cover for cuts?

T.N.: There are no cuts. Labour spending plans are identical to Conservative ones. You are listening to the rhetoric, you are not looking at what is happening. There is the new spending review at the end of the month. How much will it cut? Will it cut £120 billion? No.

Institut de l'entreprise: Isn't the problem that they have decided not to make cuts for pensioners neither the NHS?

T.N.: Yes, of course.

Institut de l'entreprise: I think that is a problem, because there have been cuts in other departments.

T.N.: After a huge increase in spending before that. Spending increased by 63% in real terms from 2000 to 2010. The departmental spending that you're talking about has fallen by 2% since then. So you're talking about 2% cuts versus 63% of spending increases. That's not cutting spending. That's tinkering.

Institut de l'entreprise: In your opinion, what would be the best policies to implement to tackle the challenge of the deficit?

T.N.: Real pension reform, real increases in the pension age, real caps on welfare spending, far tougher conditions on new entrants to welfare, an end to ring-fencing, an end to overseas aid. How on earth can they justify doubling the overseas aid budget? It is extraordinary that, effectively, disabled families here are being made to pay to fund Indian space programmes. There is plenty of room for cuts.

Institut de l'entreprise: Let's try to investigate the genesis of the Big Society. It has been introduced as an answer to the famous but sometimes misunderstood phrase of Margaret Thatcher, "There is no such thing as society." What do you think?

T.N.: I will tell you an anecdote. One of my predecessors at the Centre for Policy Studies was working on the proofs of a pamphlet, and in the pamphlet, it said: "society thinks something". That person said "there is no such *thing* as society.", where you put the emphasis on "thing". Somebody heard him say that, and he happened to see Mrs Thatcher a little later at Downing Street where the same conversation happened, and he said, again stressing the word , "there is no such *thing* as society", as an abstract. That is all that phrase is about. Don't forget it was not a recorded interview from Mrs Thatcher, but a magazine interview, and there's no tape of it. But it is absolutely right, you cannot argue, there is no such *thing* as society.

Now, that has been misinterpreted to suggest that Mrs Thatcher was somehow heartless and didn't care about community, but it is wrong. If you read the interview

carefully, she said, "*there is no such thing as society; there are individual men and women and there are families*" - she was talking about the Big Society. That is the Big Society.

Institut de l'entreprise: Even if it may be a marketing tool, there are some true believers in the idea, as Jesse Norman.

T.N.: That's true, Jesse would profoundly believe in the philosophy of it. As I said at the beginning, the Big Society is a fantastic idea. It is about what all Conservatives truly believe, that it is the individual and small institutions, which are profoundly Conservative.

Institut de l'entreprise: You have as well people in government or associations who are very committed to the Big Society initiatives they are trying to set up.

T.N.: It has not all been successful. Let us look at drug policy and rehabilitation. At the moment drug rehabilitation is funded very badly, but there are thousands of tiny organisations, normally run by former drug addicts, which try and help people get better, and are funded very badly, getting money from anywhere and everywhere– some money coming from local government and from the Department of Health, some from private sources. Now the government says "We believe in the Big Society, and we also believe in this thing called payment by results. So we're going to put them out to tender, so that people, the Big Society people, can come and run them." Now that, you might say, is Big Society being perfect, but it has fallen prey to unforeseen consequences. When the government puts something out to tender, you get a huge document, full of legal technicalities and guarantees which need to be made by the other party, and only about three companies ended up bidding, all vast corporations. What is happening is that all too often the tiny little drug organisations are being destroyed, as they can't go through that bidding process.

Institut de l'entreprise: Have they done everything wrong?

T.N.: In some areas, they have done fantastic stuff. In the way that the government uses technology, they've really turned it round. When they came to power, there were 7 huge computer companies which were all subcontracted by the government's IT department, and they've completely turned that around, where I think something like 70% of all IT goes through tiny companies. But that's not Big Society, that's good management.

Institut de l'entreprise: How do you explain the fact that the Conservative Party and the government have had difficulties to wholly understand or implement the philosophy of the Big Society? Is it because they have various convictions about it? Peter Oborne sees for example David Cameron as 'pure Big Society', but George Osborne as very against it.

T.N.: Certainly the Big Society is a pet phrase of David Cameron. I think Peter is being too rational. It is more of a marketing tool which was created as a means of 'decontamination'. People's support fell when they hear that a policy is a Conservative one. The clever people in the Conservative Party said that there is a problem with the Conservative Party in that it damages policies which would otherwise be popular. Then they made this extraordinary jump, which I cannot begin to understand: we will keep the same people in place, but we will use a new language.

Institut de l'entreprise: Is it just branding?

T.N.: This is all an attempt to change the perception of the Conservative Party, although the Conservative Party's policies were undeniably popular with the public. It is very strange.

Institut de l'entreprise: In your view, what would be a good way to empower people? Do they really want it?

T.N.: government should do less, spend less and let people take control over their own lives. That is giving power to people. That is what has happened in the private sector in schools. British private schools are the best in the world, or among the best in the world. Why not do the same for state schools? Why not do the same for health? Yes, of course, you will have difficulties: lots of special cases, people with chronic diseases, who need to be handled separately. Health spending is £200 billion a year – £4 000 per person. I can buy private health insurance for £1 000. Why do I have to spend four times as much?

Institut de l'entreprise: Regarding the public service reforms, what do you think of the public mutuals introduced by Julian Le Grand?

T.N.: It's a gimmick. Look at the numbers. Has it really happened? Is it really happening?

Institut de l'entreprise: But the aim is to come out of the welfare state as we know it. It has existed since the post-war period, so it will take the same time to exit it. In that perspective, can we really assess all those policies only three years after they have been implemented?

T.N.: Fair point. In Britain, we have the John Lewis chain of department stores and Waitrose, and every middle-class person thinks that they're marvellous, very good shops and well-run. There's this huge sentimental attraction for it, and politicians of every party, every time before there's an election, will go on about John Lewis and how wonderful it is – whether left-wing or right-wing, it's exactly the same thing – saying that they want to see more of this kind of employee-sharing of ownership and that mutuals are nice, not like those horrible capitalist companies who go and screw every single penny out of the people. It's all absolute nonsense. The profit motive is essential for nearly all business. There are always going to be exceptions, like John Lewis, but it's true in the public and the private sector: if we want to have public sector reform, we have to accept that the private sector is normally run far more efficiently, and is better for customers, than most public businesses. We've just had another appalling scandal in the National Health Service today[60]. If that happened with a private sector organisation, it would have been a scandal. But this is all just seen to be a one-off managerial failure. You read the reports of what was happening in those hospitals, and it's absolutely revolting. The British state is appalling at running things. We don't need to talk about mutual assets, we need to talk about giving people back power so that they can be in charge, so that they can manage their money - it's their money, the state has no money of its own. They should have the right to take their money and use it as they see fit, and not be sent to these places where they kill you in deeply horrible and ghastly circumstances.

Institut de l'entreprise: From a French point of view – sorry to be caricatural, the UK is an very liberal country, but when we look at the NHS, it's a very socialist system. Margaret Thatcher's brought in a lot of reforms for the economy, but it seems to be an unfinished work for the state, where some services are still very centralised. The NHS, despite the Blair reforms, seems to me quite archaic. How do you explain that?

T.N.: That's absolutely right. Mrs Thatcher did want to reform the healthcare service, but she was fighting many battles on many fronts, and I think in her memoirs, she acknowledges her failure to take on the National Health Service.

60. Cf.note p.81.

Institut de l'entreprise: David Cameron is reforming the NHS at the moment. Some are talking about a huge transformation, but I don't really see what is changing.

T.N.: Some services are being devolved and there's more private sector involvement, but again, people cannot compete with the private sector. Is it going to be the small brilliant doctor who's got a fantastic idea who will implement it or the vast corporations which can bid for these incredibly complex contracts? You're just replacing the public monopoly with a private monopoly, which is not much of an improvement. In some areas, it is a bit of an improvement, in the sense in which the commissioning bodies are slightly changing, but this is managerial. It's sort of government by management consultant.

Institut de l'entreprise: It is in line with Tony Blair's reforms in a sense.

T.N.: Absolutely.

Institut de l'entreprise: Close to the Big Society movement, the idea of 'Blue Labour' has been gaining momentum within the Labour, where you have both a statist tradition and a more decentralized one. Could the attitude of the Labour towards the state change?

T.N.: It's meaningless. They will talk about it and I guess that in a manifesto in 2015, they will talk about John Lewis, mutualisation and devolving power to individuals. But the lesson from history is that exactly the opposite will happen, whichever party wins.

Institut de l'entreprise: Are you disappointed with politics?

T.N.: I'm very amused by politics.

Institut de l'entreprise: With the Conservatives?

T.N.: Sometimes they're brilliant – what they have done in education is brilliant, what they've done in IT is utterly fantastic, yet they don't talk about it.

Institut de l'entreprise: You said that the education reforms were better than the other ones. How do you explain that?

T.N.: In education, they knew what they wanted to do. We came up with the idea of free schools a long time ago and we worked with them quite a lot on that. The bill that went

through Parliament was written before they got into office. They had been totally open about it, they knew they were taking on a department which is very hostile to Conservatives, they knew they had a battle, and they were completely prepared. Also, very importantly, the minister, Michael Gove, is fantastic. He really believes in it, passionately, and he's incredibly clever and tough. But this isn't Big Society, this is just education reform. There's still only 200 of these new free schools out of 20 000 in the country, so that's only 1%, statistically unimportant.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think they have gone far enough? One of their inspirations is Sweden, but the free schools there are more numerous and some of them are for-profit.

T.N.: As I say, only 1% of schools in Britain are free schools so far, but there will be another 100 later. But even with free schools there are problems. We have helped some free schools open, and I can tell you that the bureaucratic process is unbelievable. So even with the most brilliant minister, the bureaucracy does everything possible to stop these brilliant things happening. But they have happened, and it's fantastic. Should they be profit-making? Yes, and it's very sad that Michael Gove said a week ago at an event that we had that he didn't want to make them profit-making. If you get a bunch of parents who are fed up with their local school and make the effort to make their own school, it is brilliant. But they're not going to do it again. After you've been through that process, why on earth would you want to go through the nightmare again? Running one school is hard enough. Without profit motives, there's no reason to expand and open more schools.

Institut de l'entreprise: Is the obstacle the coalition with the Lib Dems?

T.N.: I don't know. The Tories could put it in their next manifesto, but certainly, it would be difficult for them to do that.

Institut de l'entreprise: You mentioned the figure of 1%. In your opinion, what should be the tipping point of free schools openings to change the whole educational ecosystem?

T.N.: In addition to free schools, there are academies, which have some of the same freedoms. I think it's very wrong to have a target - that would be artificial, not real. What really matters is: are children getting a better education than they do at the moment, and particularly children from poorer backgrounds? Targets are always misleading. I think one of the interesting things from Sweden is that the numbers are still pretty small,

10% I think, but the existence of free schools forces the other schools to improve and be more attentive to parent's concerns. That certainly has happened in Sweden, and it's too early to say if that's happening in Britain, but I would be amazed if it doesn't.

Institut de l'entreprise: What has been the attitude and perception of the public towards free schools?

T.N.: It's not a huge issue here. In politics it's a big thing, but the Conservatives have failed to tell the story properly to the wider public. People can see that it's a good, being done by local people, but nothing more.

Institut de l'entreprise: If the Conservatives win in 2015, could they be more coherent about their policies? The coalition doesn't help.

T.N.: It's a very convenient excuse. Let's step back one step: should politics be ideological? Or is it just a case of managing the system a little bit better and having clever ideas which you can do here or there? I profoundly believe that it should be ideological, that people will respect political leaders who are able to explain why they believe certain things, whether it's left or right, I don't care, but who can then develop a coherent programme which has a set of principles which are explained and which are, as we say, coherent. It is not something which you dream up a year before an election and give a clever name to. If you've got a label, forget it; if you've got a real conviction and real belief in something – in liberty, individual responsibility, self-determination or a strong nation state, whatever it is - that is leadership. All the rest is just management consultancy.

Institut de l'entreprise: It's true that lot of politicians in Britain are currently professional ones.

T.N.: On both the left and the right. You know Peter Oborne's book, *The triumph of the political class*. In the last twenty years, we have had professional politicians who believe in nothing. They all come from the same background, they have all been to the same universities, and they're all very good friends behind the scenes, live in the same places, and have the same hobbies...

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think that business people should be more involved in politics?

T.N.: No. Definitely not – that's more technocracy or management consultancy. This idea that there's a problem which technocrats can find the solution to is wrong. You need ideology, you need conviction, you need a sense of belief in what is good for society. You need competent people, but you need people who believe in something, who will fight for something and take on vested interests. If he happens to be a businessman, fine, if he happens to be a milkman, fine, it doesn't matter, but as long as they believe in something and can lead. And you need to convince. Mrs Thatcher was always brilliant at talking about conviction in phrases that people could understand. And instead of saying: "We have a deficit of £120 billion", that doesn't have a meaning, you should say: "Every year, the government is spending £5 000 more per household. Have you been asked? Are you happy about that?" That's the way of convincing people.

Institut de l'entreprise: But British people seem to be more in favour of cuts than in France.

T.N.: Yes, the public is well ahead of the politicians.

Ralph Michell

Ralph Michell est aujourd'hui Head of New Markets au sein de l'Office for Civil Society.

Ralph Michell a occupé les fonctions de directeur de la stratégie puis directeur du département Politiques de l'Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO), qui représente les directeurs généraux des institutions du tiers secteur. ACEVO étant l'un des partenaires stratégiques de l'Office for Civil Society du Cabinet Office, Ralph Michell a participé en 2013 à une commission de travail organisée par le ministre de la société civile Nick Hurd, avant de rejoindre l'Office for Civil Society.

Nous l'avons rencontré alors qu'il était encore à ACEVO, afin de mieux comprendre le point de vue des organisations caritatives sur la *Big Society*.

Pour Ralph Michell, la *Big Society* vise à ce que les personnes et "communautés" prennent davantage de responsabilités, avec comme conséquence un secteur caritatif florissant, le developpement du bénévolat mais aussi une réforme du service public. Toutefois le gouvernement s'est montré incapable de véritablement définir la *Big Society* ni de la traduire dans un programme cohérent. D'ailleurs nous n'avons pas observé de hausse du bénévolat ni des dons depuis l'arrivée de D. Cameron, même si la Grande-Bretagne est à l'origine un pays relativement généreux.

Autre élément important pour Ralph Michell, les promoteurs de la *Big Society* n'ont pas inclus dans leur projet de réflexion sur le rôle des entreprises. Aujourd'hui, la plupart d'entre elles ne pensent pas devoir sinvestir au-delà du financement caricatif ou du bénévolat de leurs employés.

Reste que le changement le plus important, pour Ralph Michell, et qui n'a rien à voir avec la *Big Society*, est la baisse des dépenses publiques, les associations étant touchées mais de façon inégale.

Institut de l'entreprise: We are trying to understand the role of the Third Sector within the Big Society and its perception of it. First of all, what would be your definition of the Big Society? Is it a vague concept, a broad one (welfare reform) or a small one (volunteering)?

Ralph Michell: I think the Big Society is very vague and that has been a problem. When you take what David Cameron has said about it, you can boil it down to ensuring that people and communities have the power to have more influence over their own lives and that we all take more responsibility for ourselves and for others. And that then translates into things like having a more thriving charity sector because people rather than just paying their taxes take responsibility for what they see around them by giving to charity or volunteering their time. It also translates in business taking more responsibility for what they see around them in all kinds of different ways and it translates into public service reform where that public service reform is aimed at supporting people to deal with their own problems rather than just relying on the state. I think, early on, that one of the big reasons it hasn't led to more change was because the government was so bad at defining and therefore has not driven it through a program of policy in any meaningful way because it starts with no definition.

Institut de l'entreprise: When you say it hasn't led to more change, what are you thinking of?

R.M.: I suppose, primarily I am thinking of charities because it hasn't led to a huge change in the health of the charity sector. It hasn't led to giving going up dramatically, it hasn't led to volunteering going up dramatically partly because Britain is already a relatively generous country both in terms of people giving time and money and it's very difficult to change those kind of cultural habits, very difficult for a government to do that. Actually the most substantive thing they can do is use tax reliefs and actually there is a lot of debate about whether that changes or influences behaviour.

It's very difficult for them to change that bit, it's much easier for them to change the way the state works and I don't think that even though they have changed the way the state works in lots of ways, I don't think all of that comes from and is driven by a desire to give people more power over their own lives and get them to take more responsability for themselves. For instance if you said that was you goal, that I want in public services for people to have more power to sort it out themselves and to take more responsability, I think you would then approach health service in a very different way. So you would be trying to get people to look after their own health and take responsibility for each other

and that would be central to the reforms you carry out which it hasn't been. If you look to education, again you would say we want people in local communities to do more with schools and take more responsibility for kids in the local community and we want parents to take more responsibility for kids. Again that is not what the government school reforms have been centred around.

Institut de l'entreprise: But free schools are supposed to get parents involved in the education, aren't they?

R. M.: Yes, but I think the situation we have got is that the government can say we have done that and can use free schools to justify, to say we have done it but actually that's not really where it came from. The government schools reforms are about increasing choice and so having more free schools, more academies, more liberalised market economy where schools have more independence, greater ability to compete with each other and attract parents, and I'm not saying there is anything wrong with that, but the driving force behind the school reforms has not been to get parents and other people in the local community to take on more responsability for the progress of kids. And if you look at what charities in that area do it gives you a sense of the practical things that I mean. There will be loads of charities in this country who get volunteers who come into schools and help kids to learn how to read, so in particular helping kids who are struggling or whose first language isn't English, and they are acting as a vehicle for people in the community to take responsability for that issues instead of paying more teachers to do that. Or you get charities who will, say if there's a child who is really struggling at school and it's partly because they have a very difficult life at home, you get charities where a volunteer will make sure that that child is picked up from home and gets to school on time, make sure that that child has eaten breakfast before they get to school, make sure that they have clean clothes, because their parents don't wash the clothes and so they get bullied and don't like school... It's that kind of thing when you get charities kind of activating people to take responsibility for those children. The reforms have not been designed around making sure more of that happen. If the Prime Minister's passion as he puts it is Big Society, although he doesn't really say that anymore, our view would be that he should be ensuring that the reforms of all his different departments do have that goal central to the reforms, and I don't think they have.

Institut de l'entreprise: How do you activate people to take more responsibilities then? How can you empower them?

R. M.: I think it's partly about funding, partly about the attitudes of different professionals like teachers or doctors and partly about where the money is spent really more that what the total budget is, how it's spent.

Institut de l'entreprise: You mean how you incentive people to do certain things?

R. M.: Exactly. So if you take another example in health where the government spends billions on people with long term conditions like diabetes, or other cardio-vascular or breathing problems, at the moment the government pays for individual episodes of care, so that person goes to hospital, the government pays the hospital, they go to the GP, the government pays the GP but the whole payment system doesn't incentivise for instance a charity that would help that person to manage their own condition so that they don't end up going to hospital. So there in the NHS, it's the payment system which the government is now looking at reforming but the payment system incentivises things to stay as they are and doesn't incentivise the money to go to organisations that can help the people to look after themselves.

Institut de l'entreprise: How has the Big Society impacted the Third Sector - traditional charities, social enterprises?

R. M.: The biggest change is in reality, is the government's spending cuts which have really nothing to do with Big Society. So that's the biggest change. So lots of our members are seeing their money being cut so they have less money. That is the big change and then the different reforms that the government is pursuing have had different effects depending on what area you are talking about. Charities who help people get back to work have had to adapt to the Work Program which is the government's big scheme there, so they have had to deal with very large contracts where the payments is by results and lots of competition with the private sector. And then charities wich provide social care broadly have seen no reform, just less money. And charities wich work with the health services have seen maybe less of a cut in their funding but the people who they deal with have all switched around because the government has taken this organisation and split it into two and taken that one and dropped it and turned it into a new one and so for them there's this kind of institutional whirlwind. So the experience of charities is very varied depending on the field they are operating in. And also where they are based because different local authorities are doing very different things.

Institut de l'entreprise: The previous government had increased the public funding for charities. Isn't just going back to the pre-Blair era or is it harder than that?

R. M.: So good question. I don't know to be honest. There was definitely huge growth under the last Labour government mainly because spending on public services went up by the most incredible amount. The NHS is now bigger than it was. Partly it was about the reforms the Labour government pursued, and increasing competition and use of the Third Sector to deliver services more but partly it was because there was so much money going into these public services. So you did see enormous growth in the income the charities got from the state and now I wouldn't expect it to go back all the way because there are big cuts going on in some places but in other places the Third Sector is being used more to deliver services. For instance the government is now reforming the prisoner probation service and at the moment the Third Sector delivers 2% of the value of probation services maybe, a tiny proportion, and we would certainly be extremely disappointed if that didn't go up so we expect to be some growth there. At the same time as in other areas like social care the money is just getting tighter and tighter and tighter.

Institut de l'entreprise: New tools of financing have appeared, as Social Impact Bonds (SIB). What do you think of them? What perspectives may they offer?

R. M.: I think that they are very exciting and there's a lot of potential. They could enable people to do things quite differently and I think they also help charities that operate in a different and maybe more business like way which can also be a good thing. They are still at a very early stage so the joke is that social investment is like sex at the secondary school, everybody is talking about it, no one is doing it and the people who are doing it don't really know how to do it so there is a lot more talk than there is actually happening, but that doesn't take away from the fact that it is very exciting and that there is a lot of potential.

I think within that there is at the moment a bit of an imbalance between a very kind of complicated mechanism such as SIB and just straight forward lending. We leap from grants giving money to these extremely complicated SIB that involve all sorts of intermediaries. Inbetween there are straightforward loans which actually are relatively well established in the sector even if they are at quite a low level and more supply of that kind of thing would be not that difficult to achieve and quite helpful.

Institut de l'entreprise: Big Society capital bank will have up to £600 million in capital to invest, included 200 from banks. You have to compare this to the billion(s) they were refunded during the crisis, but on the other hand if you poured too much money in this bank, you would have to have some projects to finance. What do you think?

R. M.: First of all it's a very good thing to have got that much money that can go into this. And I think you're right that you have to have several projects to finance but that relates to the point I was making earlier that if you insist on very complicated things then yes, there aren't that many people who want that. Would it be possible to spend that money on low interest loans? Yes, there is the demand for that. So I suspect that it is probably right, and we would be churlish to be asking for more than 600 million at this stage. At the same time I think Big Society capital are being a bit too risk averse and a bit too clever, and they could just encourage greater supply of vanilla social investment.

Institut de l'entreprise: In France the strongest foundations are more financed by large firms than individuals because culturally individuals don't give so much. How are the donors distributed in the UK between individual, corporate and state giving?

R. M.: So if you look at the charity sector in Britain as a whole, by far the two most important sources of funding are government and individual donors and then, miniscule in comparison, is what companies give. So there's the traditional relationship where the big companies give out grants and their employees do some volunteering which is pretty weak to be honest... It's probably around about 13 billion from government, 13 billion from individuals, one from companies.

Institut de l'entreprise: Have these figures evolved since 2010?

R. M.: It's pretty flat and in fact the other thing, as soon as there's a recession, the company giving is gone.

Institut de l'entreprise: Are there fiscal incentives for the companies?

R. M.: There are various ones, there is corporate Gift Aid and I'm not entirely sure how it works but essentially the company pays less tax but it's losing money because it's giving more away that it gets back. There are payroll giving incentives but again that doesn't really benefit the company so the tax incentives aren't particularly strong for it. The comparison is always made with America where corporate giving is much bigger than in the UK and I don't think that is really about the tax incentives but about

culture probably. One of the criticism we made of the government Big Society agenda is that it kind of forgot companies. And the Labour Party would be much more interested in how business become more responsible.

Institut de l'entreprise: Isn't it a paradox in there, as Conservatives are traditionally closer to business. So you heard that Labour is thinking about involving more the businesses?

R. M.: One of the Labour party's big slogan is 'responsible capitalism' by which they would mean companies investing in their staff, having apprentices but also caring about the community that they are based in more. So in a sense it's a contradiction. But on the other hand people here are a bit cynical about companies involvement with charities and it's very often kind of marketing, and I think that's true of the way companies have responded to the Big Society agenda. CBI for example responded to our report [61], because we said that businesses should be more involved in this, that business is not a piggy bank for charities. So generally companies have responded to this agenda by saying why have you left us out, but they don't mean by that that they want to be more responsible corporate citizens. That's generalising but it is my perception.

Institut de l'entreprise: Are they some prominent CEOs who have backed David Cameron Big Society agenda?

R. M.: So the organisation who is most keen on this kind of thing is called Business In The Community. I don't think anyone has done anything hugely different in that space since David Cameron started talking about Big Society and maybe this is the only way to do it but their approach is very kind of voluntary, so celebrating the great stuff that some companies do. It is all fine but our basic argument would be that companies could do a lot more and play a much bigger role in tackling social issues...

Institut de l'entreprise: Which kind of role are you thinking of, beyond funding and volunteering?

R. M.: It should be about their core business and the way they operate. For example we talked to a bank that wants to send their bankers paint scout huts, have a day off to go and paint a school fence, or give some money to sponsor a cancer charity... But what you should be doing is looking at social investment, thinking about how your core

61. *Power ful People, Responsible Society, The report of the Commission on Big Society*, Acevo, Mai 2011, http://www.acevo.org.uk/document.doc?id=1515

function of banking can support the charity sector, and you should be, as banks based in the East end of London, which is pretty poor, thinking about how you help the communities around you. Some of which they are doing of course, but not enough.

Institut de l'entreprise: The idea is that business should not mimic charities, they have to do their jobs...

R. M.: With a conscience...

Institut de l'entreprise: There are two very different views on business indeed: either businesses do their business and in plus have a corporate social responsibility, and of course it is part of their PR; either they think of another model but it's complicated when you have you own proven business model.

R. M.: Yes and actually I think it's totally fine for business to say it's not my fault to sort out the social problems, my job is to do this. But I think it is also fine for government to say we think business could do more so we are going to do things to do more and incentivise them and make it harder for them not to do it. I think that's a perfectly legitimate policy to pursue and the government hasn't done that with the Big Society. I think that's a kind of missed opportunity and a bit of a gap.

Institut de l'entreprise: Look at volunteering, are there more people volunteering now than before, especially since 2010?

R. M.: The figures are basically flat, it fluctuates a little bit year on year. There was a survey recently that suggested it had gone up slightly and the government hailed it as a great success but if you look at it over two decades, it's basically a flat one.

Institut de l'entreprise: Have you identified measures that could help strengthen volunteering?

R. M.: I can give you a list. But it's one of those things that is very difficult, like getting people to give, it's very difficult to change people's behaviour. First of all charities need the money to be able to manage volunteers, train them, make sure it's a good experience, attract them and that doesn't come free. So there's a kind of volunteering infrastructure that you need to have in place. I think you could make it more prominent both in schools and in companies in terms of how politicians and others talk about it,

and you could make it slightly easier to have the time to do it. One of the things we suggested was at the moment employees have the right to ask to become a magistrate, or a school governor, or a local councillor and ask for that time off your employers so you could give people a kind of similar right to work for a charity. I think that would send a message and therefore make it more prominent, and I suspect that if you did all of those things, you still wouldn't make a huge difference to the number of people who volunteer. It's quite high already. Two thirds of adults in Britain volunteer at least once a year and one third volunteer at least once a month, so it's not you're starting from a low base.

Institut de l'entreprise: But you have young people, and an increasing proportion of older people that have some free time. Does that have an impact on volunteering?

R. M.: Yes it's true, it could. I don't know that it has yet but you're right that it could and to take advantage of that you might well need more investment in the volunteering infrastructure for people to go out and reach out to get these people.

Institut de l'entreprise: Could companies help charities train people, either volunteers or permanent staff? Running a charity is sometimes similar to running a firm in many aspects.

R. M.: Yes, I think so. Companies could have a role there and you do get a lot of people doing a lot of pro-bono free work but yes, that is exactly the kind of things that companies could do more of. And of course companies, both companies and the government could help to try and capitalise on that demographic change because at the point that you retire, you say goodbye to a business and you get your state pension, and there is an opportunity for a conversation there. And actually that is also in the interest of the government because we know that people staying active and engaged once they retire is good for their health. This takes you back I think to, if government had a clearer definition of the Big Society and had taken this from principles and drive it right the way through the way government works, then you would get to that kind of thing quite quickly. I think the fact that they haven't is probably a result of that lack of that kind of drive and prioritising.

Institut de l'entreprise: You mentioned that the government didn't do much to help the charities. I am thinking of the probation reform, where government wants to make possible for charities and business to take responsibility for some policies. Now big businesses are more successful in bidding for that contracts whereas some charities were not able to take part in. How then improve the role of charities in this market?

R. M.: I think the most important thing is for government to make sure that it is buying the right thing. If in the probation reforms what they really want is for offenders to be rehabilitated so that they don't offend again and they want it to happen to all offenders whether they are men or women, from an ethnic minority or not, have a drug problem or not, live in the middle of nowhere or central London, if that's what they want then they need to make sure that the contracts and the money reflect that. Whereas if what they want is for this service to be much cheaper than what they currently spend and actually don't mind whether you don't rehabilitate young black men because they're really hard and it takes a lot of money to do that, if what they want is just to bring the level of offenders who reoffend down from 70 to 60%, and you don't care who they are and you can park women because there is only 10% of offenders who are women and you can park young black men and just deal with the easy ones, you end up with totally different programs. And in the first one the charities will have a lot to offer because they are very good at working with women offenders and knowing what different kind of support they need, and they are very good with young black offenders and making sure they get the support they need. In the second program, charities will have a much smaller role because what you really want and what you are really paying for is something quite different which is not playing to charities strengths. So the first key thing is to be really clear what you want, design the program around that and pay for it.

And then there are all kinds of other more complicated things like making sure that, if you take the Work Program, large private companies don't sub-contract to charities improperly. You want to make sure you have rules around how those relationships work and you can communicate your plans to the charity sector well so that they can be prepared.

But fundamentally if you don't get that first bit right, everything else is a kind of helpful add-on but it doesn't deal with the fundamental problem. So with the Work Program, fundamentally for instance, there isn't really the money and the contracts, and the payments system isn't structured, so that for instance it's not worth helping someone who is homeless and been homeless for 10 years and never worked and got an alcohol

problem. There isn't the money to help them and so the charities that are really good at that aren't going to get involved.

Institut de l'entreprise: Of course it's politics, you have the Coalition, you have George Osborne who has other goals and it's always complicated. But don't you think that David Cameron was sincere still? I was wondering, charities were financially related to Labour, but aren't they related to them ideologically as well, so that this Conservative program, so nice may it be, was not well received?

R. M.: Definitely if you take the charity sector as a whole they are probably a bit left-wing and they know that, and the government knows that there's a bit of colour in the background. I think that probably meant that when things don't go so well, the two kind of part company quicker, so charities are quicker to criticise and the government probably thinks "bloody lefties!". But I don't think that's why it didn't work. I think mainly it didn't work because it always remained a good idea that wasn't very well articulated and was never turned into a program driven by the Prime Minister. So yes, I agree, I get the impression he sincerely believed it but he didn't drive it beyond a few kind of individual projects.

Geoff Mulgan

Geoff Mulgan est Chief Executive de Nesta et ancien conseiller de Tony Blair.

Après des études universitaires en télécommunications, Geoff Mulgan devient chercheur et maître de conférences jusqu'en 1990. Il est ensuite le conseiller principal de Gordon Brown au Parlement, jusqu'en 1992, puis fondateur et directeur du *think tank* Demos (1993-1997).

Il travaille ensuite pour le gouvernement britannique de 1997 à 2004, en tant que membre du Policy Unit durant trois ans, directeur de la Strategy Unit jusqu'en 2003, et Head of Policy sous le Premier ministre Tony Blair.

De 2004 à 2011 il préside la Young Foundation, une organisation caritative travaillant sur l'innovation sociale, de la réflexion au lancement de structures. Il est actuellement président de Nesta, ancien organisme public devenu organisation caritative en 2012, qui mène des recherches sur l'innovation pour les services publics et privés, tout en gérant un fond d'investissement dans différents secteurs de l'économie sociale.

Geoff Mulgan est l'auteur d'ouvrages sur les télécommunications et les politiques publiques. Ses reflexions rencontrent certaines problématiques posées par la Big Society, comme l'innovation sociale.

Selon Geoff Mulgan, la Big Society est un label rhétorique correspondant à une certaine phase du Parti Conservateur soucieux de se démarquer du thatchérisme. Il y a tout de même, des gouvernements *New Labour* aux *Tories*, une continuité quant à l'appel au tiers secteur pour la fourniture des services publics. Mais le programme des Conservateurs était trop ambitieux, donc imprécis, et s'est avéré impopulaire.

Pour accroître la performance dans le service public, il est indispensable de travailler avec les agents publics et non à leur place. Il faut introduire des méthodes d'évaluation rigoureuses car cela permet, dans une économie mixte, de pouvoir décider à chaque fois quel est le meilleur prestataire – public, privé, ou tiers secteur.

Concernant les Social Impact Bonds, il faut être prudent quant à leur impact dans le court terme, même si l'on peut être optimiste sur le long terme. De façon générale, explique Geoff Mulgan, c'est tout un champ qui émerge depuis moins de dix ans, celui de l'innovation sociale, dans la santé, l'emploi et d'éducation.

Institut de l'entreprise: We are trying to understand the scope of the Big Society and the role of the Third Sector within it. As you are well aware of the Third Sector issues, the first question we have is whether there is some continuity between what's taking place today and what Labour did in that filed. Then we would like to have your point of view on the Big Society, and in the first place on its definition, because we have the impression that it is very broad.

Geoff Mulgan: In Britain, certainly for twenty years, all the main political parties have moved to a common ground of wanting to grow to grow the Third Sector, social entrepreneurship, and social enterprise, albeit for slightly different reasons. For Labour it was retreating from a statist ideology of traditional social democracy; for the Conservatives it was about moving away from a sort of Thatcherism where business is the answer to everything. For the Liberal-Democrats, it was always fairly close to them but they didn't articulate it. So that's why there has been continuity, I would say, over at least three governments on a series of headings. The Big Society is just a rhetorical label for a particular phase of the Conservative Party trying to emphazise its non Thatcherite-ness. It was performing a political positioning function.

Under that, there are different headings which overlap. One was support for social enterprise – trying to grow that as a field – as a way of doing business which has been underway from successive governments by creating funds, new legal structures, support arrangements and government backing umbrella bodies. All of that has steadily continued and social enterprise is a fairly large sector here. Related to that is opening up the state and government procurement for social enterprises. A lot happened under the Labour government on dealing with the details of contractual barriers for social enterprises. I used to chair the umbrella body for the Health Department on this where we had 34.000 different charities and social enterprises providing services under contract to the government. It was on a pretty big scale and the current government has continued in that, and encouraging parts of the state to become mutual and spin themselves out and so on, but straight forward continuity. On volunteering, there were government-run volunteering programs under successive governments. I can talk in

detail about those but they are not very different under different governments. The Conservatives introduced the National Citizen Service but similar things were developed under previous governments, and that is not particularly new.

The only final thing to say is that the political rhetoric of the Big Society in some ways worked for David Cameron in that it did signal a Conservative Party that was more human and socially aware. It meant that the Third Sector was willing to talk to the Conservatives and didn't see them as the enemy. But the Conservatives got the positioning wrong in important ways, in particular, it appeared to the public that this was about the public having to run public services themselves which was never popular. So in some ways it worked at a very high level but at the next level down it didn't work as political rhetoric.

Institut de l'entreprise: You are a specialist for social innovation. Social performance is certainly a key point of the Big Society. How can you measure it?

G.M.: We recently launched the Centre for Social Action which is a joint team between Nesta and the Cabinet office. Its innovation fund is run from here and that's particularly about trying to find and fund models of mobilising community capacity as volunteering, and to support public services by working with professionals in public services not as an alternative to them. So where the Big Society two years ago might have implied a group of parents who replaced the teachers or you might have to run a hospital yourself, this is about getting the right partnership between volunteers and paid for professionals which is a much more sustainable position, and much more realistic about what delivers value.

This then relates to precision on what is value in public services, what is impact, what is good performance. Are you aware of the alliance for useful evidence? So that is a thing that we started here and we persuaded the government earlier this year to set up a network of what will now be six "what works" centres and part of their job is in different fields to bring greater precision to the evidence base of what is effective in policing or local economic growth or schools. One of the reasons it matters is that if you believe in a mixed economy of provision so that schools could be provided by public bodies, by charities or by private firms, you need rigorous ways of comparing how well they do. So this whole movement on evidence and data and measurement links in to the broader goal of opening up all these fields of public value to make them more open, more contestable and more innovative.

Each of the Centres of Social Action projects bumps into measurement problems. In some cases it is quite straight forward: eg at the level of a school there is a fair amount of evidence about how different kinds of parental involvement affects school performance. There is a big project on volunteers in hospitals too which can be measured in terms of the effects on health outcomes for patients in hospitals. More of its effect is probably on their wellbeing which isn't part of the core health measure, but it also turns out that a big impact on the volunteers is on their future employability which doesn't matter to the hospital but is creating public value. So with all of these, there is an issue about direct and indirect value creation and we are trying to get away from some of the mistakes of the previous generation or targets, performance measurements, nineteen seventies New Public Management which is still alive in the consultancies. The consultancies are still back there, but the world is trying to move on to these more holistic approaches.

I see the Centre for Social Action simply trying to say that for public services to be effective they have always depended on voluntary commitment from the public; our NHS always had half a million volunteers in it ever since it started. Every good school has lots of volunteering around it. So in some ways both sides of the political debate got this wrong; there was a traditional left view that said that public services must be fully professional paid jobs, which has never been accurate at all, and a version of the Big Society sided with the opposite that you don't need anyone paid and professional and that it can be done by anybody. Which might just be true for running a park, but isn't true for brain surgery or something like that. So we're trying to get a more balanced position.

Institut de l'entreprise: The UK seems to us as the new laboratory for a post-crisis society, with a new role for the state and maybe a new conception for the market. You have just released a new book [62] about the post-crisis economy, what is your perception about what's currently missing in the Big Society related to the market reform? What could be the role of the companies in the Big Society?

G.M.: So a lot of the Big Society and the Third Sector discussions have mainly been on the social side and the delivery of public services and not about the economy. And the critique I made of the Big Society rhetoric was that it had nothing to say about the economy, although we are in a period of fairly radical innovation around forms of

62. *The Locust and the Bee: Predators and Creators in Capitalism's Future*, Princeton University Press, 2013.

economic life. I write about this a lot in my new book and actually quite a lot of our work here at Nesta is about backing specific projects which embody a different kind of economy and it is maybe easier to talk about this through specifics.

So one specific is the field of collaborative consumption which is quite quickly becoming a large part of the economy, and is using methods which are very much rooted in civil society, as sharing platforms for time or cars or houses or whatever it may be but with viable business models. We also fund a lot of projects, but we also support the main global website which brings together everything from experiences and business models and venture capital around collaborative consumptions with a woman called Rachel Botsman. There is a whole other strand around money, alternative kinds of money and currencies. We fund a few projects in the UK around complimentary currencies and time banks and different kinds of credit. We are launching a big pan-European project with some French, Spanish and Finnish partners. So we are in a period of great experimentation around very different kinds of money. Another strand we looked at is a new kind of finance. So we back quite a lot of large experiments in peer to peer finance and crowdfunding whether for equity or arts or social projects, and we are advocating some quite radical ways of changing banking which may or may not happen. There's a field of open innovation of companies trying to reinvent their relationship with creating entrepreneurs of different kinds. Again we have supported quite a few of those and they point towards a different kind of future economy.

In my book I argue that the big shift of capitalism in the next twenty, thirty years, will be the rise of what I called 'a relational economy' where value added resides more in relationships than in commodities. This is already to some extent obviously true of companies like Facebook, but it's also true in fields like care for the elderly, environmental maintenance and other sectors. And indeed, there is probably a larger share of GDP than commodity production, and is certain to rise. I think business, a lot of businesses, are being quite slow to understand even the facts of this, of a future economy where the biggest sectors are healthcare, education, care for the elderly, which have elements which are about commodity sale but most of the value is not in selling stuff. So anyway, there's a whole set of things, as you say, about experimenting with the post-crisis economy. I think that none of these new forms is strong enough yet. The old economy models are not weak enough to die but nor are they strong enough to recover so they sort of continue, and indeed the stock markets are doing very well now and the new economy models are still too young to displace. They are still in the margins so we are in this strange twilight period.

Institut de l'entreprise: Talking about new financing models, what do you think of the Social Impact Bonds (SIB)? What is their place within the Big Society project?

G.M.: Social investment has steadily grown as a field, and in terms of institutions the idea of creating a new bank for social investment using unclaimed assets was first really crystallised about ten years ago. I actually came up with the phrase "SIB", but the idea is not new. Serious social investment took a very long time to happen but it does now exist with Big Society Capital and that is now issuing investments to intermediaries backing social enterprises of all kinds. There are also now 25 or so SIB in the UK, and a few in the US, Australia and elsewhere. To me it's an interesting idea; I'm almost worried about how much is expected of them, that they moved from no one interested in to being very fashionable and they probably only work in quite limited conditions. I wrote about it three or four years ago to try and bring a bit more realism about where they might or might not work, because a lot of the debate in other parts of the world has been very simplistic and almost certainly a failure if you design these in the wrong way.

And I would argue that more recently there is an emerging field of social innovation which was not so much part of the discussion ten years ago. So in the nineties it was all about social entrepreneurship and enterprise, and there is a sort of parallel story about moving beyond the limitations of those towards more sophisticated ideas about social innovation and its role in fields such as healthcare, jobs, and education. I would argue it is still not quite embedded in the policy framework here, or indeed anywhere in the world, but that it is the direction of travel.

Institut de l'entreprise: Is there any interest from the traditional financial institutions for the SIB? All the more as you wrote in a report by the Young Foundation [63] that SIB could be in the future the equivalent in the social field of the private finance initiative (PFI) in infrastructure.

G.M.: The City is very interested, as is Wall Street. we also said in that report that it would probably take ten years before there were actual genuine commercial investments. That was in about 2008, and I still think that it is probably true. There will be 'pretend' commercial investment by big banks doing it for essentially reputational reasons, like Goldman Sachs who invest in the SIB. But that's better understood as part of their PR budget, it's not their investment budget. For the next three or four years it will be part of the CSR

63. The Young Foundation, Social Impact Investment: the challenge and opportunity of Social Impact Bonds, revised March 2011 http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Social-Impact-Investment-The-opportunity-and-challenge-of-Social-Impact-Bonds-March-2011.pdf

side but that's only because you need a track record, you need data, you need enough volume to analyse risk return patterns before it can become an asset class. So I am cautious in the short term, but quite optimistic in the long term that there will be new asset classes for social outcomes. But they will work in some fields and they will not work at all in other fields, and some care will be needed.

Institut de l'entreprise: The Peterborough experience is often talked about. We are looking for other successful examples, and we were wondering if you had some.

G.M.: There aren't any successful examples yet, and Peterborough is promising but also very young - we won't know for another five years if that's worked or not. The experience in New-York is very early as well. Peterborough was set up as a pilot, and as sometimes happens with pilots people said it's a success far too early. These things take a long time and almost certainly Peterborough will end up looking like it had rather high transaction costs. It didn't actually involve much innovation, but it had some other good strengths; it will be a mixed story. We need patience, and I would advise other countries to experiment, try things on a small scale but don't believe this is the answer to anything until there is real evidence.

Institut de l'entreprise: You wrote in that report that SIB might be as well just a transition between an old way of financing programs and a new way.

G.M.: They are many other ways of solving the same problem. If you had good capital markets for NGO's you wouldn't have SIB and the NGO's would have contracts, payment by result contracts and then they would get capital from banks. We don't yet know what the most efficient way of solving the capital problem is. That's why you experiment and discover and that's why I have been keen in the UK that we have quite a lot of experiments with different models, and there are now 25 or so. Many of them will fail, hopefully a few will succeed. PFI mainly failed. Although the industry pretends it was a great success, most PFI projects were uneconomic. When I was in government, I commissioned a very detailed analysis of PFI which was pretty devastating on the real economic assessment. But the PFI was partly set up with no evaluation, no measurement, whereas there is some serious research on SIB.

Institut de l'entreprise: Last, would you have any relevant examples of interesting experimentations in the social enterprise filed?

G.M.: Are you aware of Social Innovation Exchange? It's a global network which links the most interesting social innovation programs. It also runs Social Innovation Europe which is the Europe network and has done policy proposals for the European Commission.

Matthew Taylor

Matthew Taylor est Chief executive de la Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) et ancien conseiller de Tony Blair.

Matthew Taylor commence sa carrière politique comme *county councillor* pour le gouvernement local de Warwickshire. En 1994, il est nommé au Parti Travailliste et occupe plusieurs fonctions, dont celle de secrétaire général adjoint qu'il quitte en 1998. Il est ensuite directeur de l'IPPR (Institute for Public Policy Research, *think tank* de gauche) entre 1999 et 2003.

En 2005, il est nommé par Tony Blair à la tête de la Policy Unit, un groupe de décideurs publics chargés de conseiller le Premier ministre, tout en étant en charge du programme (*manifesto*) pour les élections de 2005. Après la réélection du *Labour*, il devient Chief Adviser on Political Strategy pour le Premier ministre, et engage jusqu'en 2006 plusieurs projets de consultation de la population dont le forum de discussion « Big Conversation », date à laquelle il devient directeur général de la RSA, organisation caritative qui travaille à l'amélioration des services publics et réfléchit au rôle des *communities*.

Le parcours et l'orientation politique de Matthew Taylor lui permettent de porter un regard pertinent sur la *Big Society*, son intéret et ses limites.

Pour Matthew Taylor, la *Big Society* répond au constat que le *welfare state* ne peut plus répondre aux attentes de la population en jouant le simple rôle de fournisseur de services à des citoyens consommateurs. Si le constat initial est correct, l'échec de la *Big Society* tient à ce que D. Cameron n'a su articuler ni une vision intellectuellement cohérente ni une stratégie de mise en oeuvre. L'erreur commise dans le même temps était de réduire les dépenses publiques dans les domaines susceptibles de valoriser la *Big Society.*

Aujourd'hui, explique Matthew Taylor, deux visions de la société s'opposent : si le *Labour* peut tout à fait envisager que l'Etat contribute à la responsabilisation de l'individu, les Conservateurs voient dans l'Etat un ennemi à cette libération. Or pour Matthew Taylor il

est préférable de restructurer l'Etat par une dévolution radicale du pouvoir, en cherchant à estomper les frontières entre l'action publique et l'action civique et en utilisant la "productivité sociale" comme critère d'évaluation.

Autres défis majeurs des décennies à venir, il faudra repenser la nature de la hiérarchie et de la solidarité et inventer de nouvelles institutions.

Institut de l'entreprise: The first question we have is about the concept of the Big Society. There are different definitions of it, and we wanted to understand how you see the scope and the origins of the idea.

Matthew Taylor: I think you can trace the idea from various starting points: the sense that welfare states, the public sectors could not meet the needs of the population if citizen simply sat back and received services has, I think, been growing for some time. Of course, many people from both the left and right would have been critical of that rather statist, rather bureaucratic hierarchical model anyway. There's also been a growing awareness of problems, social problems that seem to be the result of the behaviour of citizens - public health issues like obesity or smoking would be examples where it was clear that the state was intervening in order to address the actions of people themselves. Or another one would be anti-social behaviour, dysfunctional families. So the Labour government, for whom I was an adviser, developed the first piece of work, and I think this should be seen as an antecedent of the Big Society on the topic of behaviour change. There was a report commissioned by Tony Blair from his Strategy Unit. This was looking at how you could encourage citizens to behave in ways which seemed more aligned with, on the one hand, what citizens themselves say they want – generally, they want to be healthier and they want to be law-abiding and they want to live in strong communities – and on the other hand, what the government needs them to do. So I think in many ways, the Big Society is the Conservative version, the Conservative answer to that problem. But it springs from the same sense, which is the state is only able to reach a certain number of needs; the state ought to be focusing on those things which citizens cannot do for themselves. Therefore, we need to find ways of encouraging citizens to do more things for themselves and for the good of society, so it's an incredibly simple idea. But as a whole, it represents a reorientation in government away from the idea that the government is there to meet your needs, to give you what you want – instead government should enable you to meet your own needs. In that regard, I was very supportive of the concept, because I emerged from government

feeling very strongly that we needed to move from what I would call a government-centric view of social change to a citizen-centric of social change. We had to understand that the fundamental problems we had in society were to do with the lack of alignment between people's aspirations and their behaviours rather than simply a failure of government to meet their needs.

Institut de l'entreprise: We have the impression that from a certain point of view, some of the policies under the umbrella of the Big Society are continuing the action of Tony Blair. Do you think that there are strong differences between Brown's policies and Blair's policies, between Blair's policies and Camerons's policies, and their attitudes towards the state?

M. T.: To an extent. But I think both Blair and Brown were actually, in their different ways, statist. Blair was more interested in the use of market mechanisms. There were people around Labour, people like David Blunkett who were more communitarian in their perspective. I think the fundamental difference between Labour and the Conservatives, and this is of course then amplified by austerity, is that Labour sees no problem with the state as an agency to empower the individual and the community, whereas the Conservatives tend to cleave to a view that the state is inimical – that the state drives out individual and community effort and that it's good for the state to withdraw because people will then step forward to take responsibility. I think they're both wrong, by the way, I think it is very hard for the state to empower people because the very logic of the state around planning, equality, procedures, regulations, is difficult to reconcile with bottom-up community action. But I also think the Conservatives are wrong: if you simply withdraw the state, you withdraw support. Nothing flourishes – or many of the things that flourish tend to be bad. Instead, I think, you have to move towards a restructuring of the state, a radical devolution of power, for example, where what you're seeking to do is blur the boundaries between state action and civic action.

Institut de l'entreprise: And do you think that this restructuring of the state is being put in place now?

M. T.: No, I think that David Cameron failed to articulate and develop a vision of the Big Society which was intellectually coherent and he also failed to get the buy-in from his government. So what happened was that one had a whole variety of different policies corralled under the heading of the Big Society at the same time as massive reductions in public spending in precisely some of those areas which were most impor-

tant to the Big Society. It was bad political communication in two ways. First of all, it failed to engage with all those people who were already doing this stuff, so the implication was "we're going to come along and create a Big Society!" There are actually already millions of people doing the right thing already. And then secondly, it implied 'we'll do it overnight', when actually this is a shift in expectations, norms and capabilities that would take twenty or thirty years. But there was also suspicion within the Conservative Party – the very idea of Big Society does not sound like a very Conservative idea. So there have been some things that have been good, but it's really not provided a strong frame for government action. Yet I don't think that the issue has gone away, because we still face this large and growing gap between public aspirations and the trajectory that current public behaviours and attitudes set us upon.

Institut de l'entreprise: We have the impression that the Big Society is now more supported by some Labour figures, as Jon Cruddas. Jon Cruddas is used to saying for example that the Big Society is a Labour idea.

M. T.: There's two Big Societies: there's David Cameron's Big Society, capital B, capital S and what he did – and that's not deemed to be very successful. But there's also the underlying idea is that we need to have a model of change which is much more around strengthening civil society rather than expanding the state. And yes, Cruddas is right. There's a split on the right and the left between liberals and communitarians. So right-wing liberals aren't interested in this agenda and left-wing liberals aren't really interested in this agenda. So there is congruence between various varieties of communitarianism, and you've probably heard the phrases 'Red Tory' and 'Blue Labour', and this is all around that. This is really crude, but the right has the market, the left has the state, both argue over civil society.

Institut de l'entreprise: One of the real failures of the Big Society isn't that the media mocked the idea from the beginning?

M. T.: Kind of… the left attacked it, but don't forget – it was the centrepiece of David Cameron's election campaign, and it was not a successful election campaign. So it was holed below the waterline almost immediately. When the Conservatives launched it in the middle of the election campaign, people thought the Conservatives were going to win that election, and in the end, although they ended up being the government with the Liberal Democrats, they did much less well than people thought. So the general idea is that this didn't capture public imagination, and it's not an idea which helped them win votes. So that was very damaging.

Institut de l'entreprise: If we look at the other obstacles to the implementation, there may be the administration. So as a former policy advisor in Whitehall, do you think that the administration can withdraw itself? How to convince the middle manager in the administration that they have to empower people?

M. T.: OK, so a concept that we use here at the RSA, which I think is a Big Society concept – it's our own concept – is 'social productivity'. What we mean by social productivity is that you judge public interventions by the degree to which they enable people to meet their own needs, individually and collectively. Now, that principle has not been embedded across public services. It's not been used as a way of judging whether interventions work or not. I sometimes talk about the missing middle, and what I mean is: if you have a set of ideas, at the top of the set of the ideas, the pyramid, you have a set of values, probably freedom, justice, fairness motherhood and apple pie. And at the bottom of the pyramid you have series of individual interventions, like David Cameron might talk about the Citizen Service or you might talk about community organisers or mutuals or whatever – these are practices. The often missing middle is: what is the theory of change, what is your understanding of society? The French are better at this than the English, but what is your understanding of the relationship, what's your theory? Why is it these interventions will lead to these higher level goals? What David Cameron never really articulated was that middle bit. He had an aspiration, a society of citizens who were more responsible, who were more engaged, a state which facilitated and enabled rather than did for people and to people. And then he has a set of interventions, but there's no coherent account of what this actually involved for public services. For example, if you went to people in the Health Service, or in education, or social work, probation, and you said to them, "What's the Big Society?" they would have no idea, or they would give you completely different practices. Some would say, "it's about hiving public services off", and others would say, "It's about volunteers", and someone else might say something else.

Institut de l'entreprise: One of the flagship policies in the Big Society agenda is education reform. And there is a continuity with the Labour policies – the academies.

M. T.: Yeah, but you see, that's where it all, for me, that's where it all goes wrong. So if you start from a kind of social productivity perspective, the kinds of policies that I would want to pursue on an educational level would be: how can we – metaphorically speaking – pull the walls down from around schools? So if you look at schools, through my Big Society lens, the thing that hits you is: here are these institutions, they've got a lot of money, they are run by professionals. In many communities, in poor communities,

they're the best-resourced facility, but they have high barriers around them. Few outside them, particularly working-class people, really knows what goes on inside, they speak a separate language of pedagogy they are massively more accountable upwards to government inspectors than outwards to the community. How can we pull down those school walls so that schools feel like they're fully part of the local community? The RSA takes this stuff seriously, and one of the pieces of work that we've done is called the 'Area-Based Curriculum', which is around how the community gets involved in designing and delivering the child's curriculum. So for example, we worked in a city called Peterborough, with institutions within that city and with schools to say: how can we co-design and co-deliver the curriculum so that young people's learning is based in the place in which they live and is enlivened by thinking about the place in which they live and which draws on the resources in the place in which they live? Now, you might also think about parental engagement – how parents can support schools. You might think, even, of some questions around how children's learning contributes to their capacity to be good citizens. But none of these things is taken seriously by this government. Instead, their 'Big Society' policy is to allow some parents to set up their own schools. But these free schools are established by small group of parents, often working through national organisations and once they've been set up, they become largely conventional schools. Indeed, many academies and free schools have got weaker links to their communities than traditional state schools. The education minister Michael Gove wants to set up free schools, so he calls free schools 'Big Society' – but I don't recognise this idea as essentially Big Society at all.

Institut de l'entreprise: Were the academies closer to what you describe?

M. T.: The Labour ones? No, not really. The Labour academies were just primarily attempts to get money and new leadership into the most deprived areas. It was never really about community engagement. And now we have academy chains which are more centralised, more controlling than the local education authorities ever were. So schools, instead of looking out at the community, they're looking up to national headquarters in London or to the department. The fact that Michael Gove can say, "Oh, that's the Big Society" just tells you how conceptually fragile the notion has become. Similarly, in the Work Programme, which was outsourcing the whole of employment support, the Big Society idea was that lots of social enterprises, voluntary organisations would get involved, and what actually happened was all the contracts went to big private sector companies.

Institut de l'entreprise: But there was the Social Value Act.

M. T.: The Social Value Act is much more clearly related to the Big Society. It's great in principle but nobody seems to knows how to implement it. So the government felt it ought to support it, because it sounds very 'Big Society', but in fact, nobody knows what you do with it, because it doesn't really connect to anything else.

Institut de l'entreprise: So it's a good idea, but a very bad implementation.

M. T.: No, it's worse than that. It's a good idea at the level where it's easy to have ideas. It's easy to say, "wouldn't it be great if citizens did this? Blah blah…" And anyone can say that, it's just rhetoric. It's not even an idea – economists use this phrase about a bad argument, that it's not good enough to be wrong. So this is the thing – David Cameron is not saying anything that can be wrong or right. He doesn't have a set of criteria which can be consistently applied. Look, this is hard stuff. The idea that it is possible to encourage citizens to behave in more responsible ways, to engage more fully, is one that I've believed in all my political life, but the evidence that it is possible to do it is still pretty weak. So the real leadership of the Big Society is to say, "we need to do this, we need to show this can happen. There are big problems in society that we will not solve unless people change their own behaviours, their own attitudes - themselves and in their own communities. But this is a big experiment and we need to design and test it with the public". I sometimes give an example of what I think is Big Society leadership in action: the mayor of Oklahoma. Six years ago the mayor of Oklahoma, a Republican, went to the doctor, and the doctor said, "You're fat." So then, a few months later, he held a press conference outside the elephant cage in Oklahoma Zoo and he said something like , "I'm fat. I'm a fat man in a fat city in a fat country, and we're all going to lose weight. And I want us – the pole of Oklahoma – to lose one million pounds in weight." And he challenged the whole city, and he said, "I'm starting." And a year later, the estimate is that the people of Oklahoma have lost 750 000 pounds in weight. They went on weight loss websites, they competing with each other. And then after building popular momentum he held a referendum on a sales tax, because he said, "we're all losing weight, but Oklahoma's not a city where it's easy to get fit. There are no bicycle lanes, there are no play areas." So he got a referendum on a sales tax – he got overwhelming support for a sales tax to invest in making the city a city where it's easier to be fit. He got millions of dollars more from the corporate sector to invest in this. And now, the city is still fat, but it's a lot less fat, and it's got low unemployment – it's a very successful city. Now that's just one example. But Big Society leadership is about experimentation, it's about engaging people, nobody really knows how to do it. So the kind of leadership

you have, you say, “this is what we have to do, I don’t know how to do it, there are people doing stuff like it, how do we do more of it?” You begin a national conversation. But that’s really not what happened. What happened was: “this is a brand new thing called the Big Society, we’re inventing it and it will be delivered.”

Institut de l’entreprise: It should have never been a slogan for a campaign. It killed the idea.

M.T.: We always say in government: “under-promise and over-deliver”. And the Big Society was a classic case of over-promising and under-delivering. But the other example I give of this failure is Labour. When Labour pledged to abolish child poverty – what a wonderful thing to promise, to abolish child poverty, how fantastic. What Labour should have done was say, “We believe that we should abolish child poverty, but we cannot do that unless the nation is behind us, and so we are embarking on, Tony Blair and his ministers and his Party are embarking on a year-long conversation with churches, with trade unions, with businesses and the question is this: could we do this? Could we as a nation do this together?” And then at the end of that year, if it’s gone well, you say, “Yeah. We have got hundreds and thousands of organisations signed up to this. We have cities that want to be the first ones to do it. The whole nation is behind this. And now, we will do the government stuff, so now to kick it off, we’re going to raise tax credits, we’re going to invest in this and we’re going to do that.” But first of all, you create that national mood and you create a sense of agency – at the heart of the Big Society is a sense of agency. The reason that the Oklahoma mayor worked is because he gave people something to do which they could do – they could lose a bit of weight. They suddenly felt they were part of making the change happen. Most of the time, the government says to people, “we’re doing stuff to you.” Sometimes it says, “you’ve got to pull your socks up.” And people say, “government is messing up my life Why should I do anything for government?”

Institut de l’entreprise: You mean that it’s mainly at local level that things have to happen?

M.T.: Yeah, I absolutely think that. I also think very strongly that the Big Society is much more likely to be something which is created locally – I think that is, by the way, an example of a more general problem, which is: I think there is growing evidence now that cities are more functional levels for tackling what have been called ‘wicked problems’, ‘complex problems’. Benjamin Barber, the American intellectual, has a book out this year call *If Mayors Ruled the World*, which points out that mayors are more popular than

presidents and Prime Ministers around the world. Bruce Katz from the Brookings has published a fantastically powerful book [64] saying that nearly all the innovation, nearly all the energy, nearly all the dynamism in America is at the metropolitan level. To be fair to Cameron, decentralising power was a big part of the Big Society, and there has been, to some extent, a decentralisation of power, but the problem is that it's taken place in a context also of massive reduction in funding. So for most local authorities, it's simply involved devolving to them the choice over what to cut. But having said that, I think even in this space and even now and even with austerity, there is much more imaginative thinking going on about Big Society themes.

For example, have you come across Cooperative Councils? There is a movement in the Labour Party for local authorities called cooperative councils. This is the Labour's version of the Big Society. This is councils talking about the notion of cooperation, which goes back to the cooperative movement, so it's part of the Labour movement. They're talking about creating mutuals and cooperatives and devolving power to communities and a new ethic of mutual responsibility. We're working with them, because again, they're slightly conceptually confused, so we're working to try and get their story more fully developed.

Institut de l'entreprise: I suppose it is similar to the work of Julian Le Grand about mutuals in public services?

M.T.: I would say mutuals is an interesting example, probably, a mutual is better than a public service bureaucracy in terms of its capacity to mobilise citizens to be innovative, to be responsive, but not necessarily. You shouldn't be obsessed with the particular governance form – mutuals can be bureaucratic, mutuals can be out of touch, mutuals can be serving the employees and not the community. So this kind of mutualism is fine, but it's another example of the conceptual frailty of the concept. Mutuals may or may not contribute to the Big Society, it depends.

I'm sure that David Cameron and others will say that social enterprises are the Big Society but a recent survey was done of social enterprise spin-offs from the public sector: what proportion of them had users (I'm not saying that this is the only thing that matters, but it could be seen as a measure of the Big Society) involved in the governance of the social enterprises? The answer: one in ten. You look at a lot of these

64. Bruce Katz, Jennifer Bradley, *The Metropolitan Revolution: How Cities and Metros Are Fixing Our Broken Politics and Fragile Economy*, Brookings Institution Press, 2013.

social enterprises, they're big organisations, and ok, they don't have shareholders – if they make a surplus, it stays within the organisation, although they often pay their bosses a lot of money. But there's no particular strategy for user engagement and empowerment and citizen empowerment, they're not particularly talking about co-production, co-delivery, the kind of concepts that I would say are at the centre of the Big Society. They're simply taking a lump of bureaucracy from the public sector and putting some of it into a social enterprise.

Institut de l'entreprise: We have the impression that in the UK, you are quite in advance on public service reforms and especially co-production and. What do you think?

M.T.: Yes, although it's worth remembering that in certain countries, like Germany, for example, it has always been the case that organisations outside the state have played a bigger role in the provision of welfare state. In Britain, after the Second World War, everything was hoovered up into a highly centralised monolithic welfare state model. So in some parts of Europe, in Scandinavia, they never really adopted that model. They had a model which always provided a bigger role for other institutions within the welfare state. So I think that's the important thing to remember. And also to defend France – France has always had a much more devolved system, so there is a stronger kind of sense of government being in the community at the most local level, with the *commune*, with a mayor who's not a public sector bureaucrat, just a guy who lives in the street and everyone knows who he is… The smallest tier unit of government in Britain can be a local authority with 500 000 people living in it.

Institut de l'entreprise: Have you noticed some interest from the French government or the French Socialist Party for the Third Sector?

M.T.: No, I haven't.

Institut de l'entreprise: We have in France a Minister for what would be translated as Third Sector and he's working and he came to London two weeks ago for a conference about Social Impact Bonds. Hamon is kind of setting himself apart from this very 'liberal' version of small state and Third Sector…

M.T.: There's a left version and a right version. Look, if you accept the fundamental problem as a problem of alignment between people's behaviours and people's aspirations, then it's not a right-wing or a left-wing problem, it's just a problem. The left will tend to

think that it is more possible for the state to solve it than the right will think. But I don't think either of them has got the right answer. There are all sorts of people amongst Labour who tried to generate empowerment and civic engagement, and they didn't really succeed, because… it's like a boxer trying to thread a needle wearing boxing gloves, the central state is rubbish at that kind of thing. On the other hand, it's simply not true that if you pull the state back, citizens run public services for the hell of it. So nobody really knows the answer to is. Although what we do know – I don't know if this is true in France – it's certainly the case that young people's orientation is changing dramatically, and when it comes to politics for example, when it comes to action, young people do not really think "I must choose someone else to make decisions on my behalf and run things for me." Young people's attitude is "I will solve this problem myself. I want to set up a social enterprise, I want to make a difference." And now I think that's something which is changing fast, and a big political question is: is it the left or is it the right which engages with young people's desire to make change happen themselves? Because this is not just a desire to get rich, there's a really steady growth in young people's desire to be entrepreneurial, but generally speaking, they want to be social responsible. They want to be entrepreneurs with a social purpose.

Institut de l'entreprise: What would Tony Blair have done if he had launched this idea of Big Society?

M.T.: I did a lecture last year called "The Power to Act", and I was talking about kind of conceptual frames. And my conceptual frame here – derived from anthropology, sociology and psychology, and various other places – is in essence, that there are three active and one passive ways of thinking about change in society. There's the hierarchical way which is to do with leadership and strategy and bureaucracy and rules and regulations and the state, generally, but also large corporations. Then there's the individualistic way of thinking about change, which is to do with individual appetite, desire, enterprise, initiative, risk-taking, creativity. Then there's the solidaristic way of thinking about change, which is to do with values, memberships, social responsibility. And there's a fourth way, fatalism, which is to say that change won't happen. So if you think of these perspectives on climate change. The hierarchical one is when you have a treaty – when the scientists and government get together and agree a new treaty with new rules. The individualistic one says it's probably a bit exaggerated, we will solve it with technology, with markets - human beings solve problems. The solidaristic view is: we must stop flying, we must stop eating meat, we're going to change our lifestyle, it's because we've raped the planet. The fatalistic view says either it's all made up or we're doomed. Now

powerful organisations, powerful policies, powerful nations, powerful people even, mobilise all these three active ways of thinking about change. By the way we have all three ways inside ourselves, all of us are at certain times inclined to be individualistic, hierarchical or solidaristic and sometimes fatalistic.

So where is modern society? Modern society – and if you look at the most dynamic societies, like the Dutch Golden Age in the 17th century, you can see individualism, hierarchy and solidarity all brilliantly expressed, all working together, creating an unbelievable amount of social progress in an incredibly short period of time. But what has happened since the 1980s really is that hierarchies have become ever weaker – declining trust, failing organisations, and part of this is technology. So twenty years ago, technology made hierarchies strong; now, technology often makes hierarchies weak. So technology is part of this, but we see it across the world – declining trust and faith in leaders of all kinds, large organisations declining legitimacy. Solidarity, too, has been weakened by inequality, by diversity, by the pace of change, by the way it changes in society, by women's employment – it used to be that communities were held together by women who worked in those communities, and now those women are at work, so for all sorts of reasons, many of them are progressive things, good things, but they have weakened the social fabric. What then becomes dominant is individualism and fatalism, so we have a society – this is Britain I'm talking about – dominated by individualism and fatalism. What we have therefore to make society able to be strong and to progress and to respond to challenges like aging, is we have to reconstitute hierarchy in new forms of leadership, and reconstitute solidarity, new forms of solidarity. And in the end, the Big Society is a way of trying to address this question of how it is we rekindle solidarity, but this is a very very hard question! It is not achieved by creating a few mutuals or employing a few community organisers. It's a process that will take a very very long time, and a deep introspection in society. The great congregational institutions – the church, the trade unions, the political parties – Robert Putnam said that these things have all declined, and nothing has really taken their place. What's taken their place is single-issue campaigns: occupy, short-term movements that are kind of like a sugar rush. Everyone gets terribly excited, feels exhausted afterwards and there's no content. And look at what's happening in France: you have a president elected, and within a year, everyone hates him!

Institut de l'entreprise: It may be a typical French reaction!

M.T.: No, it's the same everywhere. Not a single government has been re-elected in Europe since the credit crunch! Merkel may be the first exception. A lot of this is about institutional reinvention. We have to invent new institutions, and that's a hard thing to do, because institutions, the great institutions emerge organically. What excites me most about the RSA is not the individual things we're doing but our really innovative forms of research. This is the Big Society, the Big Society in action: we developed a method of dealing with people having treatment for drug and alcohol dependency. What has happened in the past; you get a detox, you come off drugs, you come off alcohol but rehabilitation doesn't work, you get sent back to where you came from and all of your friends are drunks, all of your friends are junkies, you have no job… So we designed something called 'Whole Person Recovery'. And what we do is we look at the person wholly, all their assets, their social capital, their economic capital, human capital. We work with them to design interventions which make a difference. They provide those interventions, which raises their status, and makes them feel for the first time that they're treated as citizens, and we engage the wider community in supporting those people through that process. And at the moment, it's early days, but our results are incredibly impressive. And you go down there, the services are being provided by people who were drug dependent six months ago, and now they're providing services to other people. That's what we do, and that's great. But what really excites me about the RSA is this sense of creating a new institution, because you bring together the best ideas in the world through a fantastic lectures programme, and you bring together really good people doing powerful, innovative research in our research department, and then you have 27 000 fellows and they are actors in civil society taking our ideas forward. What is happening now in the RSA is that things are starting to spin out, things are starting to happen, and that's what political parties were like fifty years ago. They weren't just organisations for delivering, they were platforms for all sorts of ideas and initiatives. The church was like that. Many of those institutions have faded - we need new institutions which provide a framework for citizen initiative. And that's what the RSA seeks to be.

Part of the reason I came to the RSA was that I could never get the Labour Party to take this stuff seriously. And they're trying to now – I went to see the Labour Party a few weeks ago, and they've now got their organisers. They say, "our organisers don't just knock on doors and ask people to vote for people now, we're making things happen in the community" and I said that that's very hard. You will have a Labour council, the community will often be opposed to the Labour Council, the Labour Council will be

doing things they don't like, so how do you convince them? They're a bit naive, it's not easy to turn an organisation that has been a hierarchy, that has been about getting people in suits elected to run things – to turn that into a grassroots organisation. It's not easy to do at all. And I don't think the Labour Party understands how difficult it will be, so it will try to do it, and then when it doesn't work, it will pull back.

Institut de l'entreprise: If you follow Jesse Norman or Phillip Blond, the Big Society is all about reforming the state and the market. In a report by the RSA on social productivity, the connection is made between the Big Society and the renewal of the corporate social responsibility. Could you elaborate on that?

M.T.: Yes absolutely. One of the things that Bruce Katz argues in his book is that collaboration between the private sector, the state and civil society is much stronger at the civic level. I have done a lot of work on corporate social responsibility and the role that corporations can play in behaviour change, for example, and how corporations can change their business models so that they are helping citizens to make wise and socially responsible decisions. So I think that is a really important part of this agenda, certainly. By the way the RSA 2011 annual lecture was called 'Enlightened Enterprise' and the respondent to that was a guy called Ian Cheshire who runs Kingfisher.

I actually find corporate leaders are easier to talk to about this stuff very often than politicians. They kind of get it, because they want a richer relationship with their consumers. We're doing with Asda, which is part of Walmart, a big supermarket chain in Britain largely serving working-class communities, and they have in every store someone who works 25 hours a week on community engagement, and they have opened up all their stores for community use. They're doing this really imaginatively: so one store told me, for example, they have a meeting for women who have suffered from domestic violence, because these women can say to their husbands, "I'm going to the shops." Their husbands would go crazy if they said, "I'm going to talk about the fact that you're violent." So they get huge use of their facilities. And, notwithstanding the fact that they don't pay their taxes, Google is doing a lot of stuff around Apps for Good and all of this kind of things. So I think corporations understand that they've got to align with a business model, with an account of social benefit. Unilever is very good on this as well. So yeah, I'm involved in those conversations, and I find it easier – although a lot of what companies say is a bit superficial – to talk to them. They kind of get it – they get it because they know they've got a problem about legitimacy. Politicians say they get it, but in the end, every politician wants to get hold of the levers of power and pull the levers of power, that's

what they believe deep down. And when you say to them that the world is complicated and it's not about you doing stuff, it's about getting other people do it, helping other people, they don't really want to hear it.

What we're trying to get companies to go, which is really hard, and is what we have been doing with Asda, is to get them to evaluate what they do. So the tendency of corporations is to do something good and say, "Oh we've done something good, isn't that great!" And we're saying to them to try to get them to think more deeply. And the companies that really impressed me are the ones which are willing to change their business model. So Paul Polman at Unilever, he said, "I'm not going to do quarterly reporting, because it will force me to behave in a short-term way. And I don't want short-term investors in Unilever. I want long-term investors." And that's very brave, that's very big thing. I will give you another example: there's a company called Desso and they make industrial carpet. So they wanted to do something about making their product more sustainable, because what would happen at the end of a carpet's life is it would be thrown onto a landfill. They basically changed their business, so instead of just selling you the carpet they sell you is they sell you a service; you buy the carpet, then after four years or whatever, they come along and take the carpet away. They take the back off it and they recycle it as road covering and they take the fibres off, they wash the fibres – it's a complete closed-loop manufacturing process. They've completely changed the way in which they sell to their customers. When Unilever talked to their customers, they said, "this is about sustainability." Because Unilever realised that 70% of the environmental impact of Unilever products is what consumers do with them. And they found out that consumers would be happy to wash clothes at a lower temperature, so they invented a lower temperature washing powder. So they engage their consumers in helping them to design more sustainable, more ethical products. What Michael Porter has argued, and what I argue in my lecture is that the corporations that take this seriously, they understand that the important thing here is how you might change your business model in ways that both mean that you will be a successful business, but also mean that you will be doing social good. One of the reasons that you need to do that is that young people want to work in companies that do good. So if you want to recruit the very best people – there is a massive global chase for talent – if you want to get the most talented people, you're more likely to get those people if they feel your company is innovative and socially concerned. And that's a long long way away from the old model, which is the chairman gives one million euros to his spouse's favourite charity or whatever.

Nigel Williams

Nigel Williams est statisticien au sein du *think tank* Civitas.

Civitas, The Institute for the Study of Civil Society, s'attache à étudier les caractéristiques institutionnelles et morales des sociétés démocratiques et libérales. Fondée par David Green en 2000, Civitas travaille par exemple sur l'éducation et la santé mais aussi sur l'implication de la société civile dans l'économie, à la fois par des programmes ciblés et des études. Nigel Williams travaille comme statisticien chez Civitas depuis 2011.

Interroger un membre de Civitas, dont les travaux sur la société civile sont de grande qualité, nous a semblé nécessaire pour une bonne compréhension de la *Big Society*. Nigel Williams expose ici ses propres opinions, et non celles de Civitas.

Selon Nigel Williams, la *Big Society* répond à la volonté du Parti Conservateur de se débarrasser d'une image plutôt négative en se réappropriant le terme de "société" et en promouvant les initiatives de celles-ci. La mise en oeuvre de la *Big Society* a été entravée par le fait que les coupes budgétaires ont touché les *charities* et les autorités locales, alors qu'elles étaient en première ligne pour mettre en œuvre la *Big Society*. Parallèlement, le bénévolat nécessite de la part des personnes un surplus de temps, ce qui est rendu difficile par la crise. Par ailleurs, le Gouvernement n'a pas pris de mesures fiscales en faveur de la famille par manque de ressources, alors qu'à l'origine le projet de *Big Society* le prévoyait.

Par ailleurs, si l'on définit la *Big Society* comme l'application d'un altruisme moral ('*conscientious altruism*'), un tel engagement semble difficile à une époque de moins en moins religieuse. Une variante en est toutefois possible : encourager les individus à ne pas prendre à la société davantage que ce qu'ils méritent.

Pour Nigel Williams, le thème de la *Big Society* ne reviendra pas aux élections, car d'autres l'auront remplacé, comme l'éducation ou l'emploi.

Institut de l'entreprise: We know the interest of Civitas for the renewal of civil society – I am thinking of the work of David Conway for example. Given that context, what is your general impression of this idea of Big Society? And what is now happening, as there seems to be no communication anymore on this topic?

Nigel Williams: It began when Mrs Thatcher was still our Prime Minister in that a newspaper reported her saying, "there is no such thing as society" - that wasn't all she said – "there is no such thing as society, it is a collection of individuals". She wanted to convey the idea that for society to work individuals must contribute to it, but it got reported as only saying the first part of the phrase, and this added to the reputation of the Conservative Party as a selfish and uncaring group of people. Then there was a period of thirteen years, during which the Conservative Party lost all the general elections and were out of power. In order to detoxify the idea of being Conservative, they thought how they could reclaim the word 'society' so that it won votes rather than lose them.

Now David Cameron, while he was leader of the opposition, appointed a man as head of strategy called Steve Hilton. I knew him at college. He was a very kind hearted and generous man who always had time for people outside his immediate circle. I don't think he was a Tory at the time, but was studying politics, philosophy and education, and obviously was thinking political ideas at the time. I can quite see how, as a Conservative Party head of strategy, he would have ideas about what would appeal to people who weren't ordinary Conservatives. Which was, of course, how David Cameron needed to broaden the appeal of the Conservative Party.

Institut de l'entreprise: In that perspective, is it more of a marketing vision than a real political current?

N. W.: It is also a marketing idea. But the better marketing ideas have some truth of their own. You can sell somebody something false for a little while, but you can sell it better if it is true than if it is imaginary, and the idea of the Big Society does have an appeal to many people if it can be made to work. Now it did work in terms of winning votes, though of course not to the extent the Conservative Party wishes – they are the coalition government rather than the majority which is unusual for us. It is a long time since power had to be shared, and there are now many Conservatives that find it hard to believe that they cannot just win votes in the House of Commons without the help of the Liberal-Democrats. That means that their mainstream ideas have to be a bit more publicly generous, which mainly means less room for the private generosity that the Big Society requires.

Institut de l'entreprise: In the original thought of the Big Society there was the idea that the family needed to be strengthened. There was an initial proposal to implement fiscal incentives for families. But due to the coalition they had to leave the project, as the Lib-Dems could not agree with such a Conservative policy. Is that correct?

N. W.: Up to a point. In a large measure there isn't enough money to do all the things we would like to. David Green is very keen on the French idea that tax allowances depend on the family, whereas in the UK if you have children you are only offered child benefit. Conversely we are very aware that Lone Parent Benefit, whilst alleviating hardship, also gives an incentive to people to have a child as a 'career move' rather than as a source of income and housing. That's certainly not the case in every instance, and there is still a lot of work associated with bringing up the child, but it might look like a way out of a desperate situation. Where you put incentives in place, people respond to them. We would rather want the tax system encouraging people to do what they consider good for the family and society rather than the opposite.

Institut de l'entreprise: If one wants to define the Big Society, one can have a narrow one, which means volunteering or associations running public services, and a broader one, including the various reforms form the government, from localism to welfare state and public services provision. What do you think?

N. W.: The best marketing ideas are vague so anyone can understand them in the sense they want... But where the family fits into this vague idea of the Big Society, I think it is a necessary part for it to work. But people understand ideas of strengthening the family even when nobody is mentioning the Big Society. We are hearing much less rhetoric about the Big Society itself, but people are still talking of family ideas and wishing to strengthen that central unit on which so much else can depend.

Institut de l'entreprise: Concerning families, Iain Duncan Smith talked about 'broken Britain' in the CJS reports, as well as Phillip Blond in his book. As a statistician, do you think that the statement is still relevant?

N. W.: There are encouraging signs that things are getting better. Rates of crime are falling year by year, at least in burglary and robbery. Now there are crimes that are harder to count like card fraud. In terms of one-parent families, the last figures I looked at showed declining numbers of single people in households by themselves – lower than a few months ago –, which may look as if young adults were staying with their parents whereas previously they had gone off to live by themselves. I think that it is an economic

signal more than a social one. We have just made it very expensive to go to universities and that is making people think very hard about whether they want to get substantially in debt in order to acquire a qualification. And that is just a first look at figures, trends can very easily reverse.

Institut de l'entreprise: What do you think of the reforms that are actually implemented in the welfare state, as the Work Program or the universal credit? We all know in Europe that, because of our very high public expenditure, we have to reduce our welfare state. But we don't know what the society will look like with a reduced welfare state. The interesting part in the idea of Big Society is that it's not only a vision for reducing spending but an attempt to change the delivery of the public services. In that perspective we see the UK as a political and economic laboratory for the post-crisis society. What do you think?

N. W.: We are trying things nobody else would dare to try. But it's largely a reduction in the expenditure and entitlements. But I think this is a separate part of the Conservative agenda from the Big Society. It may be that some people would have interpreted the Big Society as meaning that the state didn't need to provide welfare for people in hardship, because individuals and charities would pick it up instead. But I think it is being pursued even though talk of the Big Society has largely been dropped. If the Big Society was meant to be the balancing part of the reduction in welfare expenditure, it is still going ahead without that balancing part. My feeling is that in times when there isn't a huge amount of spare money in the whole of society, there really isn't spare money for charities to start looking over difficult cases. Many of charities are publicly funded – we investigated on that in *Who Cares* (2007). If you take for example the charity Barnardos, they do fantastic work looking out for children without homes. It's hard to imagine a better cause than that. The public, people, individuals, support them to some extent: they sell a lot of Christmas cards, they have donations, people run the marathon for them. But they also receive money from the state or local authorities for each child they place into care or in housing. This charity is hugely dependent on public funds; if the public funds become scarcer and the allowances reduce, then that charity is not going to be in the position to increase its work to deal with greater hardship.

Institut de l'entreprise: There are working on new ways of financing these charities or social enterprises – another very interesting part for us – like Social Impact Bonds.

N. W.: Have you heard of Project Merlin? After the crisis, it was a deal with the large banks about how they should recover their place in society, and it included 200 million pounds to finance the Big Society bank. Now 200 million pounds in the context of the crisis, when those banks were bailed out by many thousand millions pounds... In terms of scale that doesn't look like very much to me.

Institut de l'entreprise: But if there is too much capital in Big Society capital, there is a risk of pouring money into private projects which will not be relevant. It is only the experimentation stage.

N. W.: That is a good idea. I have heard very few stories about projects beginning for the Big Society bank. It may be happening, but it's fairly quiet compared to central government expenditure being cut. An area that is getting particularly large cuts is the local government support. Local councils are having to reduce their social services budget, and those are the things that are providing exactly the sort of Big Society support. So, because there isn't enough money to go around, it does look like as if the Big Society were an imaginary alternative supply of money when the real supply of money is getting taken away.

Institut de l'entreprise: Have you worked on the impacts of the austerity measures? From France it is seen as pure austerity and very anti-social.

N. W.: It is all part of the balance. If we go back to the Big Society that depends on ideas of altruism, it is asking people to give things that they don't necessarily get back in return. One British commentator, Professor David Miller of Nuffield College, distinguished different sorts of altruism. He talked about 'calculating altruism' where you might work out that acting generously is good because you get the beneficial consequences of it in time. For example if you pay happily into the pension scheme before you are receiving from it, you get the benefit when you retire yourself. If you join the trade union and pay your subscriptions, then your pay is negotiated on your behalf when the pay review comes. He also found 'reciprocated altruism', when people would do things if they knew something would be specifically returned to them. And then you have the third one, 'conscientious altruism', when people do things just for the sake of doing the right thing; these are the really kind people and they are the hardest sort to find. For the Big Society idea to flourish, you need lots of those conscientiously altruistic people who just do the right thing because it's the right thing.

Now just along the road from here is Church House, where the Church of England is run from. They have been saying that they have been doing the Big Society for 500 years as the Church of England, and 2000 years as the Church. The latest figure I saw said that something like 20 million hours every month of volunteering time are given to causes outside the Church as well as large amounts of charitable donations. Now in a sense belonging to a church is somewhere between the conscientious altruism and the reciprocal altruism, because you do have the promise that if you believe you are doing the right things out of belief you will get a reward in heaven for it. You have no absolute proof that this reward will happen, but you do have the hope it will come about. In the last couple of generations, it has become much more open to criticise the ideas of that belief and just to say it is stupidity. Although there are still many people who will proclaim a faith to the world, they are often more extreme. And where you used to have people that would very happily say they were Christian, attend only on Christmas day, but would hear the message that they were expected to show generosity to other people, these people now will not go. The Church is a big source of what may turn out to be altruism for nothing in return. But that is getting taken away if the sort of moderate centre of English churches is getting undermined.

Institut de l'entreprise: There is an American version of the Big Society which is 'compassionate conservatism', which was very specific because America is still a Christian society.

N. W.: At least parts of America are very strongly Christian, while parts of America are still equally anti-Christian.

Institut de l'entreprise: They are more church goers in America than in Europe indeed. Can Big Society exist in a post-Christian society like Europe? There are Catholic and Christian churches, but new religions as well, as Muslims and Sikhs. Do they play a part in the civic life in the UK?

N. W.: They can do, and there are some areas of the UK that have strong Sikh communities. They traditionally very much like offering food to anyone who comes and asks for it. There is compassion in very many religions, but at its weakest when it feels threatened and has to defend itself.

Institut de l'entreprise: Have you seen some Muslims or Sikhs taking over the concept of Big Society?

N. W.: I think they would do it anyway.

Institut de l'entreprise: There are several paradoxes in the Big Society. One of them is that one tries to recreate cohesion in society by asking communities to engage more in the society, but the risk is that one strengthens what we in France would call 'communitarianism', which is negatively viewed.

N. W.: We have the idea of tribalism, where you will stick up for people like you against everybody else.

Institut de l'entreprise: If you accept that the welfare state draws back, the risk is that each community, religious ones included, will have its own private welfare protection, benefits and services. How can you in the same time nurture national cohesion and strengthen communities?

N. W.: It's a risk. It's a matter of judgement whether people, in doing some genuine good as part of caring for the community in feeling confident in themselves, will feel more able to be generous outside their communities. Whether that benefit exceeds the risk that the generosity will just be within the community... I don't think I could say which side of the balance it is tipping at the moment.

I wouldn't mind a chance to go back to a slightly more economic angle. If the sort of conscientious altruism is harder to find than it was, what we can hope to achieve, which applies to welfare reforms, taxations, banking and all economic aspects like that, is to try to encourage people even if they are not giving extra things then not to take more than they deserve out of society. We have a clamour at the moment to make large companies pay their taxes and not move them around the world, ending up paying as little as they can, and to discourage bankers from paying themselves large bonuses for an uncertain benefit to society from the work they do. But, also, to discourage people at the poor end from expecting without doing work to earn it. If you can expect people to give extra for the sake of it, you can expect people to show some restraint and take less, and that applies to the whole of society. If that sort of rebalancing makes progress, then there is a chance that there will be enough money to go around.

Now most benefits are quite meagre and offered to people only in case of genuine hardship that needs help. But when a system exists, it's always possible for people to find ways to treat it as available money that they just have to claim. It wasn't introduced as a free source of income. But once it is introduced it becomes much harder to restrict who can claim that money.

Institut de l'entreprise: Now Universal Credit is being implemented, as well as capping housing benefit.

N. W.: The Universal Credit idea is supposed to make it easier to administer benefits. Today, it may be possible for some people to benefit from conflicting entitlements simultaneously, whereas somebody equally deserving misses out on some of them. With Universal Credit, if as many as possible are processed together, one means test will work for everything.

The previous idea was something called Income Support: if you qualified for Income Support you also qualified for what were called Passported Benefits, which allowed you to claim for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and others. But even for Housing Benefit you have to show that you are paying that much in rent and that you don't get the whole of the rent paid. Anyway much of that goes to private landlords so that provides them with the incentive of making the rent higher - so the benefit doesn't go into the pocket of the individual. The market is inflated from having many customers and tenants who have funds from Housing Benefits to pay for their accommodation. Council Tax benefit is even stranger in that the tax is high for poor people and fairly low for rich people. If you have a huge house you will pay three times what someone with the smallest house pays, despite massive differences in earnings. The Council Tax benefit is just there so that poor people can pay high taxes: they are not actually keeping any of that money, and it's just there to redistribute the taxation. You could reduce that benefit by changing the taxation arrangement.

Institut de l'entreprise: Did the Big Society policies have an effect on the number of people volunteering?

N. W.: Increasing numbers of people are now working and often doing part-time work. But that reduces the number of people, what the statistics call economically inactive, who are best placed to do the volunteering. The army of helpers in the past has been mothers who weren't doing paid work and newly retired, though another major source is students and young people. But current policy requires that those students need a

part-time job to pay for their studies, the newly retired are still expected to be at work for extra years before they can claim their pension, and the mothers not doing paid work are expected to get a second income in order to pay for the family finances. The economics of volunteering require some surplus time for people to do it; it can be done at a time of economic plenty but it really doesn't fit with austerity.

Institut de l'entreprise: Promoting volunteering, in your opinion, has not been a success?

N. W.: The marketing idea has worked. And having a coalition with the Liberal-Democrats has actually required the Conservatives to behave in a more egalitarian manner than their instincts would encourage. Conservatives may want to concentrate on independence and a small state. There have been substantial tax cuts since 2010, but the other area has been in putting the basic threshold up to around the level of the minimum wage. People on the lowest incomes are not obliged to pay income tax – that was the Lib-Dems policy. It means there is less money for the Conservatives to devote to other policy ideas, but it does mean that there is greater progressiveness in the tax system and therefore more money among poor people that are, thereby, able to look after themselves better. So, if there hasn't been enough money to fund the Big Society, it doesn't mean it has been a failure. It just means that an alternative system, that the Conservatives were obliged to accept to become the government, has enjoyed the success that the Big Society might have had.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think we will still hear of the Big Society during the next political campaign for 2015?

N. W.: Its inventor, Steve Hilton, is not in Number 10 at the moment, and there are other people who will like to have their own ideas and slogans.

Institut de l'entreprise: Jesse Norman for example, one of the thinkers of the Big Society, is a close adviser to David Cameron. But there are so many currents, sometimes oppositions, among the Tories.

N. W.: They are. And the Tories are unused to being a minority government. Most MP's will have never have seen a coalition working. In the 1970's when our Prime Minister was a child, we had a pact between the Liberals and the Labour Party but it was still, I think, at a time when Labour had a small overall majority, and they only needed the pact to ease a few measures and avoid rebellions. Most of the time, for decades, a party has won the general election and can do absolutely what it wants.

The Conservatives cannot do that but the MP's and party workers cannot get used to that. They have the name Conservative, they want to do Conservative things, to privatise, reduce dependence, make a free-market economy that allows business to grow. Now they can pursue those policies only if the liberal-democrats agree with them and that's a huge change in their attitude. It's such a huge change that many commentators don't see it. Most newspapers support one political party for right or wrong, and newspapers comment on actions of a Conservative Prime Minister as if he was acting with a majority! He is getting criticism for not doing things that he probably has every wish to do but can't just because he is in a coalition.

Institut de l'entreprise: In your opinion, what will be the major subjects of the next election?

N. W.: There is a big difference between what gets talked about and what people care about. I think people care about having people in work: the number of employment and unemployment will matter. Education, both at primary level and higher education level, will matter as well. Now people are really having to decide whether they can afford higher education. Then most of the talking is about Europe - and we say Europe as shorthand usually for the European Commission, a terrible shorthand in that it makes us sound as if we were opposed to an entire continent... We don't like anybody else's regulations, and we're always happy to make our own, by which we expect other people to abide.

Institut de l'entreprise: Talking about education, have you done any work at Civitas about the free schools? Do you have any opinion on them?

N. W.: Yes, we have. Civitas also runs schools, we have a research wing and a school wing.

Institut de l'entreprise: What is the legal status of these schools?

N. W.: The Civitas schools are run on Saturday or in the evenings, largely to assist people to catch up on primary level English and maths. Many of the takers, the pupils, are from ethnic minority backgrounds whose parents don't wish them to fall behind in what is often their second language and therefore make sacrifices to get them extra tuition. That is, I think, very successful and does an awful lot of good. I'm very proud of Civitas schools, although I work on the research side so I don't make any contribution to it. If you wanted an instance of how the Third Sector or the Big Society should be assisting people in a way that state provision doesn't necessarily provide for, Civitas schools would be a very good example of it. We also have ideas about the state policy provision and

are writing a set of textbooks for primary school children which fit somewhere between using as school textbooks and resources for parents to work through with their children. Some schools are taking *What Your Year 1,2,3, 4,5 or 6 Child Needs to Know* series and using it as a basis for the curriculum.

We are definitely interested in the schools debate. In order to put out these ideas, it is very valuable that there are free schools and academies that are able to make independent decisions about what curriculum they will follow, and there is a strand of free-market thinking within the think tank that is very much in tune with the idea of independent schools and separation from local authority control. We have a long tradition of independent fee paying schools here in the UK, but this is a new idea of sorts, wholly independent schools funded from the public purse.

One of our former researchers, Nick Cowen, wrote *Swedish Lessons* (2008) on the Swedish model of education provision. If one leaves aside the question of funding, then the idea of independence and selecting a curriculum is very easy to support.

5 Non-profit

Toby Eccles

Toby Eccles est directeur du développement chez Social Finance.

Toby Eccles commence sa carrière dans la finance, chez UBS Warburg, puis se familiarise avec l'action sociale comme directeur de recherche chez ARK, une *charity* consacrée à l'enfance et à l'éducation. A partir de 2005, il devient secrétaire de la Commission on Unclaimed Assets, qui étudie les moyens d'investir l'argent des comptes dormants dans des actions sociales. Il travaille alors aux modalités de création de la banque d'investissement social, la Big Society Capital.

Il fonde ensuite Social Finance, fonds d'investissement dédié à l'économie sociale, en 2007. Il y développe de nouveaux outils financiers adaptés aux besoins du marché de l'économie sociale : en 2010, le premier Social impact bond (SIB), destinés à financer la réinsertion des prisonniers au Royaume-Uni, voit le jour. Ce premier projet a permis de lever cinq millions de livres de financements auprès de dix-sept investisseurs privés.

Le financement de l'économie sociale, et en premier lieu les SIB, sont au coeur du projet de *Big Society*.

Toby Eccles voit dans la *Big Society* des éléments très positifs mais celle-ci présente trois limites : intervenue au même moment que les coupes budgétaires qui devaient en soutenir, elle a été mise en œuvre de façon étatique et centralisée, alors que son ambition est d'abord locale.

Toby Eccles rattache la *Big Society* à un mouvement plus large concernant la fourniture du service public, où l'on assiste à un changement depuis une vision étatique vers une économie plus mixte, offrant davantage de choix, et où les autorités locales achètent les services au lieu de les fournir. Conséquence, la création de nouveaux modèles de contractualisation dans les services publics favorisant l'innovation. Seule imperfection, le

tiers secteur se trouve encore trop souvent en situation de sous-traitance des prestataires privés qui obtiennent les contrats. Pour y remédier, il faudrait renforcer la compétitivité des organisations à but social en les aidant par exemple à accéder au capital.

Les Social Impact Bonds (SIB) participent notamment de cette stratégie, tout en faisant en sorte que le service public se focalise davantage sur le résultat et l'innovation. À ce titre, la distinction entre SIB caritatifs, publics et privés est erronée car l'investissement social se distingue par son objectif et non par les moyens employés.

Institut de l'entreprise: How would you define the "Big Society"? According to you, is it more of a political vision, a state of mind to be aroused among the opinion or of a set of clearly circumscribed public policies?

Toby Eccles: The idea of the Big Society lies in saying that one should just not be reliant on the state but that there should be elements of self-reliance. The problem with the concept of Big Society, when it was initially dreamed up, was that it was meaning different things to different people. To the right of the Conservative Party it was about the reduction of the state and the increased usage of alternative methods to the state and increase of self- and community reliance. To the left of the Conservatives, it was about demonstrating that the Conservatives cared about society and not just about capitalism, business and the economy. Those are slightly awkward bedfellows, that's why it suffered a degree of complication from the beginning.

There is a difficulty here around authenticity of rhetoric. Big Society is part of wanting to make the Conservative Party image softer, wanting it to appeal more to the centre. The problem is that the core of the Conservative Party isn't very appealing to the centre and rebels against this rhetoric, wanting to pull further to the right and being more concerned about reducing the size of the state. Therefore, for a lot of people, the concept of Big Society is very damaged.

There has been another problem. The government was talking about the Big Society and at the same time implementing significant cuts, and that those cuts happened very often at a local level. The first thing that local government cuts is not its own services but the services it's buying from others, usually from the social and charitable sector.

Its last challenge was that they had a very statist and centralised way of trying to implement a very local agenda and support volunteering, probably out of naivety rather than anything else.

Then there's a much longer piece, the slow and steady progression from an inherent statist view of social service provision into generating a much more mixed economy, where there is therefore more choice, more room for innovation and adaptation, and where local government is buying services rather than providing them, which gives it flexibility. It also gives the chance to the government to be on the side of the consumer of the services, rather than being the rationer of the services. This wider piece is about creating a very different kind of social economy, which is an overlapping agenda with that of the Big Society.

That's the part of the Big Society narrative which I think is the most coherent. We live in a society which is taking a lot of external shocks, whether it's movement of capital, technological innovation or migration. Politicians are sitting with us on the bus being moved around by these external forces they can't control. But one thing is clear, the society needs to have the mechanism for adapting more quickly, which means social services need to be more adaptable, more innovative and to exist in a more constructive market place than simply universalised simple state provision of services.

The vision of this mixed economy might be that there is both private sector provision and social sector or social enterprise provision. One could argue that in that world the social sector participation is driving towards better outcomes for users. The private sector cares about that but is also demonstrating better efficiency. The tension between those two would be intelligently commissioned by government creating an overall better market.

Now we are a little way from that ideal. One of the key things that are stopping that from happening is the method of procurement, which I don't think ends up generating the best answer, because the people that are better at answering the question and provide the cheapest price tend to win. That's why trying to create models that enable innovation and enable social organisations to participate in that marketplace seems to me very important.

The second one is that the private sector and social sector don't have the same access to capital so they are not able to compete on the same terms. One must admit that the private sector has expanded within the provision of public services and has squashed

the voluntary sector organisations, subcontracting the latter and squeezing their margin. And I'm not sure that is always successful: in the Work Program, for example, it was not.

Therefore there is more to focus on in terms of the mechanism than on the end goals, because most people can actually agree about those goals. You have then a series of interventions on the one hand around building an investment community in a social investment marketplace, on the other around creating new model of engagement in contracting which can enable innovation to be taken to government. That's what we are doing, for the former part, with the Social Impact Bonds.

Institut de l'entreprise: Could you describe the way they function?

Where the social action of the government is expensive and has poor social outcomes, SIBs tries to find out whether there is a better way. If we can agree what the cost to the government is of this social failure then we create a contract that only pays if it's successful. The government can only benefit, either it doesn't pay anything, or if it does pay, it's out of the benefit of better outcomes. This structure can form the basis of a contract ; on the back of it we will raise money and pay for a set of services, implemented rigorously, and we will all be able to test if these work, producing payments and a return to investors, or not. This kind of thinking is still counter cultural and I think that's just a starting point of that whole question of how you get innovation to occur.

Institut de l'entreprise: Some social entrepreneurs are yet very critical about the Big Society. For them it's all about rhetoric from people who are not doers.

T.E.: It doesn't surprise me. Firstly there is some truth to this criticism. For example, when talking about the Big Society, suddenly discovering volunteerism, they were a lot of people in the social sector who were doing that for a little while. But I don't think that Big Society was completely without foundation. There was a kernel of a good idea in there. The arrival of Big Society Capital and the wish to get a capital market for social investment and social enterprises is a classic government intervention, one that should take a least five years to have a real impact. That the impact hasn't arrived, especially on lots of social entrepreneurs, is not surprising, given the time needed. And if the voluntary sector hasn't welcomed the Big Society so much, it is perhaps because it was coming from the side of the political debate where a lot of the Third Sector doesn't sit.

Institut de l'entreprise: How to build an investment community in a social investment marketplace?

T.E.: As for the building of the investment community for this, I think we have a particular Anglo-Saxon problem on the investment side: I do think financial services is being too focused on the short-term value in comparison to long-term value. In a certain sense, if capital became more long term, then there would be less room and need for social investment because the long-term aligned way of running a care home is quite close to the correct social way of running a care home.

In the social investment community, people would like their money to be doing something they believe in, and in the same time they would like it to make a presentable return. On the other side you've got a very serious latent demand of people who would love to be social entrepreneurs. How does one connect both sides? The first blocker is that procurement model I mentioned. The next is that the definition of social enterprise from government's point of view, which is effectively one that redistributes or absorbs most of its capital in its mission, describes it as an entity that has precluded itself and avoided any possibility of getting commercial capital. I'm not sure that's the right definition of social enterprise. Saying that one cannot crystallise capital value here means you could never raise risk capital! And what you end up then is a danger of creating a walled garden of a social investment community totally separated from a commercial investment. What you need instead, to make social enterprise take off, is an *early* walled garden: you won't redistribute any of your capital for the first years and will maintain mission. But the idea that you are precluding yourself from commercial capital for ever is just wrong.

The last blocker is that there is still an attitudinal problem in the way that investors in social world think. They don't pick winners, think of social organisations as being these lovely organisations, and don't think they exist in a competitive market. It has got some state elements to it. Now from a commercial point of view, you invest in an entity and when it's doing well you invest more money in it to make sure it can be competitive. From our point of view, our competitors are commercial consultants, which are going to come into what we do, whereas we're just a very small player.

Institut de l'entreprise: How would you define the activity of Social Finance?

T.E.: We enable social change through the lenses of understanding how to make a finance book better. We are working with government entities to understand their resources allocation in social issues, analysing the social aspects and financial aspects of a problem, and then working with them to building a different model. We work right the way across following the social change that we are trying to make. The other aspect is that we try to capture more capital to do socially oriented stuff, by creating funds or other structures.

Institut de l'entreprise: Among the various experiments of Social Impact Bonds (SIB), there is the well-known one in Peterborough, are there other examples?

T.E.: Of course, there are now fourteen in the UK. There were some that came out of something called the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Innovation Fund, mainly for people not in education, employment or training. We have helped develop five of them and another sixth one is coming through soon. We manage four of the fourteen SIBs - Peterborough, one with Essex county council around reducing the number of children in care, two with the DWP program focused on helping young people getting back into educational training or employment. They're slowly building momentum but it's taking a bit of time.

Institut de l'entreprise: For the investor, there is a premium if you reach some specific indicators. On which standards is it based?

T.E.: It depends on the particular one. In Peterborough, we'll be measuring the number of convictions for cohorts of 1 000 prisoners coming out, that is the number of times they went to court in the twelve months after they left prison. We would compare it to a group of similar individuals taken from the Police National Computer who were statistically as similar as possible, and we would get paid for the difference we made provided we achieved a 10% reduction.

Institut de l'entreprise: One of the conditions of the SIBs is to have a very good system of evaluation. For experimentations in the social field you need to be very strong in the evaluation process, given that for some issues you can have various definitions of 'success'. Isn't it a risk that the evaluation becomes too complicated?

T.E.: This is coming to the heart of these things, and there're two aspects that are important. Firstly we will never achieve the perfection that a classic academic statisti-

cian or researcher would like. You have to be quite pragmatic about achieving something that is good enough. In Essex, for example, we worked out that our primary measure is about reducing the number of days spent in care by the children, through an intervention with intensive family therapy to stop that happening. We are using a baseline based on historical records, which I'm sure an academic statistician would find too approximate. But if you wanted to make it perfect you would never get there. Just by the fact that in all these models, people are actually measuring to see if the young people end up going into care or not, which is a complete game changer. But the aggregate of the information of a number of projects joined together will add to the academic knowledge. Most of the time these things aren't properly measured at all, as they just measure if they got a lot of kids onto the program, not the referral part properly, or if the cost was kept down. What normally happens is that these programs are stopped after a while as one doesn't know if there are working. We are trying to shift away from that sort of culture

Institut de l'entreprise: Which are the fields that can be relevant for SIB?

T.E.: Clearly, criminal justice, reducing reoffending, children in care. I think there is real potential for better investment around drug recovery and rehabilitation services. I think too that there is certainly room for better management of some health pathways. Actually good health care is no longer about hospitals, but about supporting people living with chronic disorders and make the right lifestyle choices. It's not what the current health system is designed to do. There's a huge opportunity around building up community care pathways and a better use of technology.

Institut de l'entreprise: Is there any SIB in education?

T.E.: There is no education SIB so far. In a certain sense school is an interesting example because parents have a choice already. In a certain sense you have a degree of market forces. Your problem is that your school results are as much a product of your pupils as they are of your competence; the best way of improving a school is by improving the pupils.

You can't measure added value in education. I may be unfair, but there is too much teaching towards tests already rather than providing an education. If you wanted to improve schools, you would have lots of ways of doing it before getting SIB.

Institut de l'entreprise: There is a strong criticism of the targets in the public sector among the thinkers of the Big Society, Jesse Norman for example. How do you articulate that with the SIB, is it the same thing?

T.E.: This is all around perverse incentives, which is to do something stupid due to the way something is measured rather than what you would be doing. There are lots of ways of creating perverse incentives in your target models. For example, if you say that you require a minimum of four hours waiting going into Accident and Emergency, with a high penalty of missing this single step function, you will do all sorts of things to avoid it, as keeping ambulances waiting so that time doesn't start. But you need to put things into perspectives as well because you may produce quite a lot of positive change as well through targets, even with perverse incentives, because the organisations are working out systems to stop what was poor practice. Just raining against targets is a little bit naive.

However it's perfectly possible to create structures that don't develop perverse incentives. With Peterborough prison, after achieving 10 %, we get more for each conviction that doesn't happen, so we're incentivized to carry on working. Now, there is then a cap which I think is a pity to stop working. If you have 1 000 individuals, 60% reoffend in the 12 months after they leave prison, achieving 1700 on average further convictions, which is I think quite impressive. If we were measured on how much we have reduced that 60 percent, we would be trying to get down to 50 reoffend rather than, let's say, 1 500 convictions. That would imply that if you have for example a real hardcore drug user who is going through the system 10 times a year, the right thing to do is to do nothing with him. Whereas under our SIB model, when you are trying to get down from the 1700, the right thing to do is to help him. Structuring your measurement to incentivise the right behavior is absolutely fundamental to the creation of the model.

Institut de l'entreprise: Who is defining the measurement?

T.E.: The state is basically fixing some goals and objectives. But we work with them to make sure that those are aligned with how you do the best work.

Institut de l'entreprise: We read in a publication from the Young Foundation that SIB could be in the future to the social field what the private finance initiative (PFI) has been to the infrastructure. Do you share this point of view?

T.E.: The SIB are about allying all stakeholders around a common understanding of the outcome you are looking to achieve. PFI is very different to that. PFI has some negative reputation due to the high return in some of the projects, but it should be born in mind that PFI did help more projects to be built on time and on budget than what was happening before.

Institut de l'entreprise: With the idea of 'Big Society', we are entering a new world where you will have to accept failure. Is there the price to pay to have more freedom and experimentations?

T.E.: There is some truth to that. I also think government is still learning how to buy and is really bad at it. Some providers will say that they are providing a service, but will actually provide very little and make money from the initial payments – that seems to be happening in some instances of the Work Program.

government intends to assess the provider, saying that any that they feel have not been working authentically will not be able to bid next round. Those who have performed best will, automatically, get further contracts and those in the middle will be allowed to bid again. But part of the discussion frustrates me a little bit, and I do worry that there is going to be further procurement reform needed before we really get to the bottom of it.

Institut de l'entreprise: We read that they are different kinds of SIB - the charity ones, the government ones, the commercial ones. Among the ones taking place at the moment, how are they distributed?

T.E.: I don't agree with this structure at all. What we did with Peterborough was not philanthropic, it's on the contrary a highly socially motivated capital. And don't try to include the concept that the public sector can sell SIB, and therefore do their measurement internally. They never do the measurement to the same standards when there isn't some form of external contracting. From public sector to public sector, pure public sector outcome model isn't actually a SIB.

The idea that you only have philanthropic or commercial money disabuses of the idea of any form of public investment. The whole point is that one builds a hybrid; this is slowly working overtime, for example, we are starting to see some local authority pension funds interested in the idea of SIB. These are not quite the same as an hedge fund being interested in SIB where I would be very nervous. I think in general that there is a lack of nuance and understanding of what social investment needs.

Institut de l'entreprise: But when private companies or private finance structures want to finance a SIB system, is it the same thing as for a charity?

T.E.: I don't know if it will work with purely commercial money. When we were still in the very early stage of this market, being invested in by people who also saw the social value was important. Now you can be a bit more relaxed. Once we will have to a certain point of robustness, we will able to get commercial capital. But for a long time your government counterparty is going to want to know who is the investor, because these investments are dealing with quite vulnerable populations.

Even when it does move to commercial money, I think it will initially move only to commercial slow money, pension funds and others who are looking at it from a long term perspective, not a short term one. That's why I don't think you will see a secondary market for SIB for a little while. When you do, if eventually ones does, we will have by then created well-defined government structures to make sure that those investors cannot impact on the authenticity of the programs.

Toby Young

Toby Young est le co-fondateur de la West London Free School et Associate Editor au *Spectator.*

Toby Young est le fils de Michael Young, sociologue, militant de diverses causes sociales et très impliqué au sein du *Labour*. Ce dernier était responsable, comme secrétaire du "policy committee" du parti, du programme pour les élections legislatives de 1945 qui ont donné la victoire à Atlee. Michael Young est surtout connu pour avoir introduit et répandu l'usage du terme de "*meritocracy*" par un ouvrage du même nom (*The rise of meritocracy*) en en donnant une définition assez négative [65].

Toby Young a exercé la profession de journaliste au Royaume-Uni et à New York. Il s'est aussi essayé à l'écriture de comédies et à la télévision. Il a notamment tiré de son expérience mitigée chez *Vanity Fair* à New York un ouvrage, *How to Lose Friends and Alienate People*. Il est actuellement Associate Editor au *Spectator*, et écrit régulièrement pour le *Daily Telegraph*.

Toby Young est le co-fondateur de la West London Free School, l'une des premières *free schools* à avoir reçu l'approbation de l'administration. Cette école promeut une éducation très académique. Une première école primaire a été ouverte en septembre 2011, et une seconde devrait ouvrir en 2014. Toby Young est l'auteur de *How to Set Up a Free School*.

La *Big Society* est une « vision politique » lancée par les Conservateurs en 2010. Le concept, largement entendu, décrit la sous-traitance des services publics à des agences ou au secteur privé. Les *free schools* en sont le meilleur exemple contemporain.

65. Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, Thames & Hudson, 1958. Michael Young décrit la méritocratie comme un système dans lequel "merit is equated with intelligence-plus-effort, its possessors are identified at an early age and selected for appropriate intensive education, and there is an obsession with quantification, test-scoring, and qualifications".

La majorité des personnes ne cherche pas à prendre la responsabilité de la fourniture des services publics mais la viabilité de la *Big Society* ne dépend pas de la majorité. Quant à l'éducation, les parents qui s'y investissent ont un intérêt direct à gérer des écoles.

Alors que les bureaucraties ont été lentes, voire hostiles à la *Big Society,* le concept était un peu trop original pour trouver un écho. Il pourrait resurgir lors des prochaines élections, peut-être avec un autre nom ?

Les *free schools* sont une idée du *Labour.* La West London Free School de Toby Young présente les mêmes exigences que la *grammar school* mais est ouverte aux enfants de toutes capacités. Penser que l'extension des possibilités de choix dans l'éducation ne bénéficierait qu'aux classes aisées, argument souvent avancé par la gauche, « that's insulting to low income families who are perfectly capable of exercising choice. »

Les *academies* et *free schools* pourraient se maintenir malgré une éventuelle alternance car certains au *Labour* soutiennent l'idée. Permettre aux acteurs privés d'entrer sur le marché des *free schools* ne sera pas mal perçu par l'opinion si ces prestataires font un bon travail.

Institut de l'entreprise: How would you define the "Big Society"? According to you, is it more of a political vision, a state of mind to be aroused among the opinion or of a set of clearly circumscribed public policies? What is the scope of the "Big Society"? Among the reforms introduced by the government (education, health, employment, public service reform, decentralisation) which of them are the closest to the vision conveyed by the "Big Society"?

Toby Young : The Big Society was a political vision set out by the Conservative Party at the launch of the 2010 general election campaign, but it has a respectable philosophical lineage dating back to Edmund Burke. In its crudest sense, it's a catch-all term to describe the out-sourcing of public services to non-state agencies, whether mutuals or not-for-profits. Free schools are probably the best contemporary example of the Big Society in action.

Institut de l'entreprise: The Big Society has often been described by its detractors as a vague ideological concept; as a matter of fact, it can be very variously interpreted. Could it be said that there is a Conservative version of it, as well as a liberal or a progressive one?

T. Y.: I think there is a right-of-centre version of the Big Society and a left-of-centre version. David Miliband, who stood for the leadership of the Labour Party in 2010, set out his own version of the Big Society that emphasised community activism. Generally speaking, conservatives make the case for the Big Society by emphasising the financial benefits, while liberals stress the social benefits. But the British Conservative Party has also been keen to stress the social benefits and the Big Society is part of its efforts to re-brand itself as a progressive party.

Institut de l'entreprise: A key component of the Big Society agenda is to spread a bottom-up approach to tackle social issues and in some cases run social services. Is there evidence that the public really wanted to take on responsibility for service provision?

T. Y.: I don't think a majority of people are interested in taking on responsibility for delivering a public service and, for that reason, the Big Society tends to poll quite badly. But the viability of the Big Society doesn't depend upon a majority of people being willing to run public services, only a minority. And, when it comes to education, there are enough people interested in setting up and running schools to make the Big Society approach work.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think that technology can have a peculiar role in that context ?

T. Y.: The Internet certainly makes it easier for citizen activists with a common purpose to find each other. Most of the people who set up the West London Free School with me got in touch via email. The Big Society would certainly benefit from a Facebook for social entrepreneurs.

Institut de l'entreprise: Is the Big Society just about volunteering, social enterprises and mutual societies? Or is there any role for business (and especially large companies and financial sector) within it?

T. Y.: Yes, I think there is. There's a free school in Suffolk that has been set up by a group of unpaid volunteers who've formed themselves into a charitable company, but who

outsource the day-to-day running of the school to a for-profit Swedish education management organisation called IES.

Institut de l'entreprise: The "Big Society" seems not to be mentioned any more in the Prime Minister's speeches. Meanwhile, it would be too severe to dismiss it as a superficial campaign rhetoric, due to the significant legislative and policy initiatives which have been implemented so far. What is your opinion on that topic? Is the Big Society agenda still effective, even without being branded as such?

T. Y.: It was regarded as a bit too nebulous to resonate with the British public and the name has been quietly dropped. But it could easily be revived by the Conservatives in the next election campaign with a different name like 'Gov. 2.0'.

Institut de l'entreprise: You described yourself as "one of the few people who believed in the Big Society idea in 2010 and who hasn't become disillusioned". Do you think free schools reform is the flagship policy within the Big Society agenda?

T. Y.: Yes.

Institut de l'entreprise: How do you explain that citizens don't seem to have got involved in other projects as much as in free schools?

T. Y.: One reason is that people have a good, selfish reason for setting up free schools, namely, providing a good education for their children.

Institut de l'entreprise: According to you, what are the main obstacles the Big Society has encountered so far?

T. Y.: Local and national bureaucracies have been slow to put processes in place to enable voluntary groups to engage with them. Sometimes, they are just downright hostile. A case in point is the manner in which Brent Council rebuffed the efforts of a local group of volunteers to take over the running of Kensal Rise public library.

,Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think that the political orientation of the Big Society undermined the strength of its implementation and prevented the opinion to join the cause? Or is it the way it has been implemented?

T. Y.: I expect some potential volunteers have been put off by its association with the Conservative Party, given that citizen activists tend to be left-of-centre.

Institut de l'entreprise: Some commentators think that it is impossible to evaluate such a programme just three years since it was implemented. In one of his past interviews, Lord Wei, who was then advisor to the government, even said it might take sixty years before the United Kingdom could see the full benefits associated with the Big Society. According to you, when will it be appropriate to evaluate the Big Society's successes and failures? Which kind of indicators should be used?

T. Y.: I don't think you need confine yourself to England in assessing the success or failure of Big Society projects. In Sweden, for instance, voluntary groups have been running taxpayer-funded schools since the early nineties.

Institut de l'entreprise: How do you think the effort required should be maintained over time?

T. Y.: Bureaucrats have a role in ensuring that a Big Society project is functioning well. But, mainly, it's the responsibility of volunteer groups to ensure they're refreshed regularly with new recruits.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think the Big Society project can survive changes in the political majority?

T. Y.: Yes. The Labour Party's shadow education secretary recently announced that, while a Labour government wouldn't approve any further free school applications, it would approve parent-promoted academies, which are just free schools by another name. There are also influential figures in the Labour Party who approve of the Big Society, such as Maurice Glasman.

Institut de l'entreprise: Would you say that the Big Society concept could be exported abroad ? Have you heard of any interest in that policy from other countries?

T. Y.: Yes, I think there's plenty of interest abroad. Someone from the office of the Secretary of State for Education in New Zealand got in touch and visited the West London Free School. New Zealand is now introducing free schools for the first time. More generally, there seems to be quite a lot of interest in 'Gov. 2.0' in America, particularly the West Coast.

Institut de l'entreprise: In an article in *The Spectator* [66], you wrote that: "no legislation was required to usher in free schools because they're just a subset of the sponsored academies that were brought in by the previous government". Does that mean that Andrew Adonis should be considered as the real father of the free schools?

T. Y.: He's certainly one of the fathers of the policy, but not the only one. Kenneth Baker also deserves credit for setting up University Technical Colleges, which was the model that was adapted in the 2000 Learning and Skills Act to create City academies [67].

Institut de l'entreprise: Free schools and academies are presented as a solution to tackle the failures of the state comprehensive schools. How would you describe these failures, and which ones are specific to the UK?

T. Y.: Comprehensives, taken collectively (there are some exceptions), have failed in three main respects. First they have failed poor children, who generally do half as well as their peers in public exams. Then they have failed bright children, who don't make as much progress at comprehensives as they do at grammar schools and independent schools. Last, they have failed to compete with independent schools when it comes to exam results, percentage of children going on to good universities, etc. Clearly, the problems faced by taxpayer-funded schools in the UK are exacerbated by the fact that affluent parents opt out of the public education system to a greater degree than in most other OECD countries.

66. Toby Young, "Why Michael Gove is the best leader Labour never had", The Spectator, 15 juin 2013, http://www.spectator.co.uk/features/8933371/the-best-leader-labour-never-had

67. Kenneth Baker is a British politician, a former Conservative MP, a former Home Secretary and a former Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Institut de l'entreprise: Is that right to describe free schools as "start-up academies"?

T. Y.: Andrew Adonis defines them as "academies without a predecessor school". Strictly speaking, they are those schools that have been approved to open as "free schools" by the Secretary of State for Education since 2010. So many different types of schools fall into that category, it's difficult to be any more specific.

Institut de l'entreprise: As academies, free schools are granted autonomy to define their own curriculum (providing there is a balanced and broadly based curriculum) and methods of teaching. What is their exact scope of autonomy in that respect?

T. Y.: There are some limits when it comes to the curriculum, in addition to it having to be "broad and balanced". You have to teach religious and sex education, as well as maths, English and science,.

Institut de l'entreprise: Are the methods of teaching more traditional in free schools – and for example regarding reading, which is a highly controversial issue in France?

T. Y.: It varies from school to school. They certainly are in the West London Free School and the WLFS Primary, but not in other free schools.

Institut de l'entreprise: Are free schools more frequently subject to Ofsted inspections that state schools and academies?

T. Y.: No. They're inspected with the same frequency.

Institut de l'entreprise: What is your opinion regarding faith schools?

T. Y.: I would defend their right to exist and to be part of the public education system.

Institut de l'entreprise: Although localism and decentralization are at the center of the Big Society agenda, academies and free schools are directly monitored by the Secretary of State. The central government has the sole discretion to choose which free schools projects can receive a green light or what schools will be able to access the status of academies. Do you see a contradiction in it? How to explain it?

T. Y.: There's certainly a tension there. The key word here should be "funded", not "monitored" – they're directly funded by the Department for Education and, inevitably,

that gives the Secretary of State quite a lot of power over them. The present Secretary of State hasn't abused this power, but a future one might not be so benign.

Institut de l'entreprise: Free schools do not have to employ teachers with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), which has been much criticized by the media and the teachers unions. How can free schools consequently ensure the teaching quality, and what kind of profiles do they hire?

T. Y.: That's true, but latitude has now been extended to all taxpayer-funded schools in England. Free schools are required to advertise all teaching vacancies and, typically, they will interview several candidates for each position. It's in their interests to be over-subscribed and that means hiring teachers that parents will have confidence in. Where free schools have hired teachers without QTS, they have generally been qualified in other respects, such as having degrees in the subjects they teach, and many of them have been previously employed in indepependent schools where teachers don't have to have QTS.

Institut de l'entreprise: Over the 102 existing free schools as of May 2013, around only one third had been set up by parents, community, charity and other groups, while the remaining ones had being set up by teachers, existing schools and educational organizations. Do you think that the government has overestimated the ability and availability of unpaid and non professionals to set up schools? How do you think those proportions could evolve over time?

T. Y.: No, I think the Secretary of State has a preference for teacher-led free school proposals because of the lower risk of failure.

Institut de l'entreprise: One of the limits of free schools is the potentially cyclic involvement of the stakeholders: the commitments of parents initially involved in the creation and running of the school can fade over time. How can you prevent that risk of atrophy?

T. Y.: I don't think free schools are more vulnerable to atrophy than other taxpayer-funded schools. Nearly all schools depend on good people volunteering to serve as governors. As parent governors of free schools drop out, it should be possible to recruit new parent governors.

Institut de l'entreprise: Over the existing free schools, 46 have been set up in London[68]. Are the free schools more suitable to large cities ? And why?

T. Y.: At present, there are 174 open free schools. The reason so many are in London is because London is suffering from a greater shortage of school places than any other region in England. Remember, free schools can only be set up in England, not other parts of the UK.

Institut de l'entreprise: In comparison to the 203 academies set-up by the Labour government – the majority of which had predecessor schools – the opening of 81 free schools after just three years seems quite an unexpected success. At the same time, compared to the total number of schools, even five hundred free schools won't be enough to have an impact on the whole education system. What would be, according to you, the "tipping point" to reach to create a revolution?

T. Y.: I think the "tipping point" has already been reached as far as academies are concerned, with more than 50 per cent of taxpayer-funded secondary schools in England now being academies. I would be happy if free schools comprised around 10 per cent of the total taxpayer-funded secondary schools in England, which would be approximately 2,000.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think the free schools program is gaining ground fast enough? What are the main obstacles? Too much regulation? Reluctance from the local councils or the teachers' unions?

T. Y.: All of the above. But the main obstacle is the scarcity and expense of suitable sites.

Institut de l'entreprise: You said that the aim of your involvement in the West London Free School was to offer "a comprehensive grammar for all". Could you explain exactly what you mean? And what are the specific features of your school compared to the average state schools? How is it possible to achieve that aim without charging extra-fees to parents, and with the same granting per pupil than maintained state schools?

T. Y.: Not sure I ever used that phrase. I have described it as a "comprehensive grammar" and "a grammar school for all". What I mean is a school with grammar school standards when it comes to behaviour, teaching, sport, etc, but which is open to children of all

68. L'entretien s'est déroulé en mai 2013. Les chiffres ont évolué depuis (cf. rapport).

abilities. One of the key differences between the WLFS and the neighbouring maintained schools is that Latin is compulsory from 11-14 and we don't teach any technical or vocational subjects. It's perfectly possible to focus on a core of academic subjects without charging parents fees – it's actually less expensive than offering a broader range of subjects – but we do ask parents for a voluntary contribution to pay for the extra-curricular activities. We run an after-school clubs programme and all the children are expected to stay behind for an hour at the end of the school day to participate in an after-school club from Monday to Thursday.

Institut de l'entreprise: The West London Free School now belongs to the most oversubscribed schools in England. How do you explain its success among parents?

T. Y.: Lots of parents want their children to receive a traditional, academic education. Generally speaking, local authorities have under-estimated the demand for this type of education so it's not widely available in the state sector.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think you could replicate it elsewhere? Are you planning to open other free schools in the country?

T. Y.: We opened a primary school last September and we're planning a second primary next September. Our plan is to open at least four primaries and two secondaries. But we want to keep them in West London, where we know there's a lot of demand for a classical liberal education.

Institut de l'entreprise: Academics from the left often criticize the idea of extending choice in education, as it would supposedly only benefit to the affluent and middle classes. What is your response to them?

T. Y.: I think that's insulting to low income families who are perfectly capable of exercising choice. At the West London Free School, 30 per cent of our current Year 7s are on free school meals [69], which is almost twice the national average in England.

Institut de l'entreprise: In a 2012 International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) report, you advocated for the extension of profit-making into schools, as it is the case in Sweden. Is your view shared by other free schools advocates?

69. For a child to qualify for a free school meal, their parent or carer must be receiving particular qualifying benefits as stated by government.

T. Y.: If by "advocates" you mean people who have set them up, then no, that isn't a widely held view. The groups involved in setting up and running free schools tend to be left-of-centre.

Institut de l'entreprise: Don't you think allowing market providers in education risks to undermine the free schools movement in the public opinion?

T. Y.: No. More people are opposed to for-profits setting up and running taxpayer-funded schools than are in favour, but they could be won round if the providers do a good job. Don't forget that for-profit companies are already deeply embedded in public education in the UK, running nurseries, running Colleges of Further Education and universities and carrying out Ofsted inspections.

Institut de l'entreprise: Isn't there a risk that for-profit providers running free schools undermine the teachers' motivation?

T. Y.: Yes, but only if the providers are running the schools badly.

Institut de l'entreprise: What is your opinion towards the government decision to open military academies?

T. Y.: I'm in favour.

Institut de l'entreprise: What do you think of the GCSE reforms announced by Michael Gove? Can they restrain free schools freedom of curriculum?

T. Y.: I'm a fan. If free schools want to get good GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) results, they will have to pay attention to these proposals, but free school secondaries, like all taxpayer-funded secondary schools, can do IGCSEs (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) instead of GCSEs.

Institut de l'entreprise: Do you think that education will be at the center of the next general elections?

T. Y.: Not at the centre, but it will be one of the half-dozen or so biggest issues.

Institut de l'entreprise: Is there a risk of going backward on free schools if the Labour wins?

T. Y.: Yes. I think the main area of risk is that Labour wants to grant local authorities various powers over free schools and academies. For free schools in Labour-controlled local authorities, that could be a problematic.

Institut de l'entreprise: By contrast, would a landslide of the Tories pave the way to for-profit free schools, as suggested by Michael Gove himself?

T. Y.: I think it would, yes. But I can't see it happening quickly even if the Conservatives do win a landslide majority. The Conservatives are very keen to appear socially progressive and, for that reason, they will want to avoid the charge that they're "privatising" state education.

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Royaume-Uni, l'autre modèle ?

Regards sur la *Big Society*

La Grande-Bretagne a souvent été présentée comme un « laboratoire » de l'innovation politique. En 1979, l'arrivée au pouvoir de Margaret Thatcher marqua le début de ce qu'on a appelé la « révolution conservatrice » ; près de vingt ans plus tard, Tony Blair tentait avec la « Troisième Voie » une synthèse entre économie de marché et solidarité. En 2010, c'est un gouvernement de coalition Tory-Lib Dem, dirigé par David Cameron, qui portait un discours nouveau sur le thème de la « Big Society », et s'engageait dans un programme radical de réformes parallèlement au redressement de ses finances publiques. L'objectif ? Transformer en profondeur le fonctionnement de la sphère publique, en prenant appui sur le potentiel que constitue la société civile, et réduire la dépendance des individus à l'Etat-Providence.

Près de quatre ans après, on peut s'essayer à en tirer un premier bilan. La généralisation des mécanismes de rémunération au résultat dans la fourniture des services publics, la conversion progressive de l'ensemble des écoles publiques en établissements autonomes, l'expérimentation, au niveau le plus local, de nouveaux modèles de co-production du service public ou les innovations apportées au financement du tiers secteur semblent autant de signes de transformations de grande ampleur. Le Royaume-Uni est-il à même de représenter encore une fois un nouveau modèle économique et politique ? Si tel est le cas, quelles leçons notre pays peut-il en tirer ?

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