Rethinking Poverty

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This chapter begins by comparing the society we have with the society we want, and then considers how to close the gap. This brings us to our second framing question: ‘How do we achieve a good society without poverty?‘

This has been a central question for social reformers since Beatrice Webb’s 1909 Minority Report challenged society to end destitution. Having considered some of the main methods to achieve this, the Trust research suggests that this is the wrong approach. The first question to ask is not ‘how to do it?’ but ‘who does it?’

Comparing what we have and what we want

It is evident that the society we have (described in Chapter Two) is markedly different from the society we want (described in Chapter Three). Chapter Three suggested five principles of a good society:

1. We all have a decent basic standard of living.
2. So we are secure and free to choose how to lead our lives.
3. Developing our potential and flourishing materially and emotionally.
4. Participating, contributing and treating all with care and respect.
5. And building a fair and sustainable future for the next generations.

These five principles imply a society where people have sufficient wherewithal to be secure and free to live fulfilling lives. Achieving this would enable people to enjoy caring and respectful relationships and exercise their creativity, while helping to build sustainable futures for themselves and the coming generations.

The model of society we have now is based on the principle of individuals maximising their income. Success is measured by footfall in the shops and increases in per capita GDP each year. This approach has produced a society that helps a wealthy minority to flourish while one-fifth experience chronic poverty and many people on middle incomes fear for their futures.

What people want is security. Lying awake worrying about how to pay the bills is debilitating, causing stress that people carry over into their work and relationships. People want enough to pay their way and to have the occasional night out and holiday. While people desire modest prosperity, there is no evidence that they want to be rich or value a society where wealth is the emblem of success. Instead, the research suggests that the main yardstick for success is the quality of relationships they have.

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**What would a good society look like?**

‘Being able to leave the house without being afraid. Being able to earn a living not just earning enough money to survive.’

‘An inclusive one in which everyone feels safe and secure.’

‘A fair society where no one is exploited and everyone can live without fear and prejudice.’

‘Everyone is secure and no one is at a disadvantage simply due to their race, sexuality or moral beliefs.’
HOW DO WE ACHIEVE A GOOD SOCIETY WITHOUT POVERTY?

‘Security, safety, harmony, tolerance, support.’

‘A sense of belonging, knowing how one fits in, feeling safe and being mutually supportive.’

Source: YouGov focus groups.

These findings are consistent with many findings from happiness research.¹ Once basic material wants have been satisfied, extra income adds very little to happiness. Economics appears as a supporting factor – essential up to a point to guarantee enough money to live a decent life. Beyond that, human relationships, social participation and human creativity become more important. These results echo the findings of psychologist Abraham Maslow, who developed a model of human personality in which economic factors are low down in our hierarchy of needs. Once these are satisfied, other needs – for belonging, recognition and self-actualisation – take over.² Philosopher Eric Fromm suggested that too much concern with ‘having’ impairs our ‘being’. Liberation can be found in activities that move us towards solidarity and creativity. A concern with having leads us away from our true natures and alienates us from ourselves.³ The quality of people’s being in the world is more important than what they own.

The findings also echo the Buen Vivir movement in Latin America, which is based on the principles of harmony between human beings and nature leading to universal wellbeing.⁴ The roots of the movement lie in indigenous traditions of balancing human needs with the environment. It is now being developed by activists and academics who are attempting to translate Buen Vivir into principles that can be adopted into the public sphere. There has been some success in Ecuador and Bolivia, where Buen Vivir has been adopted as part of the constitution. This is being translated into policy and practice through economies based on the principles of solidarity rather than growth.
The limits of economics

Economics appears to play a much less important part in our lives than politicians of all stripes would have us believe. And yet the economic paradigm is the dominant force in our world. Richard Easterlin concludes his 1996 defence of the unbridled free market, *Growth triumphant*, with the utopian vision of ‘never ending economic growth, a world in which ever growing abundance is matched by ever rising aspirations, a world in which cultural differences are levelled in the constant race to achieve the good life of material plenty’.

And yet, as the winner of the 2015 Webb Memorial Trust New Statesman Essay Prize, Beninio McDonough Tranza, put it:

> The quest of growth has left the economic and, increasingly the political power, of rich societies in the hands of unaccountable economic elites. It has intensified inequality between nations, condemning vast swathes of the world’s population to ceaseless toil while others, less fortunate, beg for work to avoid starvation. Yet, most terrifyingly of all, it has led to the exploitation of the planet and its resources at such a scale that threatens the very existence of human civilization.

So, while we should acknowledge that economic growth has brought benefits, there is much evidence that it has gone too far. The consequences can be seen in rising inequality, damage to the environment, and whole populations that have not benefited from the fruits of economic growth. Not only has it not succeeded in producing benefits for all; the prospect of wholesale collapse, which is never far from the surface in public debate, raises a bigger question about whether economics has failed more seriously. The inability to foresee the 2008 crash is cited by many as evidence of a serious problem at the heart of the discipline.

There are attempts to reform economics from within. Billionaire philanthropist George Soros, for example, has set up the Institute for New Economic Thinking to find alternatives. Others, such as Robert...
and Edward Skidelsky, suggest that a society that gives precedence to economic growth and exalts material reward over all else is a poor society, downplaying what matters to people – leisure, knowledge, friendship and other goods that have no price. They argue against Lionel Robbins’ classic definition of economics as ‘the science that studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses’.

This puts scarcity at the centre of economics and excludes judgements of value; it effectively makes scarcity a permanent feature of the human condition. The book cites many counter-arguments to this view, originating from Aristotle’s opinion that the practical business of making money is a means to an end, not an end. Keynes foresaw a future when economic growth combined with technological innovation would mean that work would be replaced by leisure as our main activity. As Robert and Edward Skidelsky put it: ‘Keynes lived most of his life in the nether regions of capitalist action, but he always had one eye on the heaven of art, love and the quest for knowledge.’

The principle of scarcity means that society is always in deficit. The answer to scarcity is always ‘more growth’, yet scarcity always remains, demanding yet more growth. This, according to bestselling author Brené Brown, is a cause of much unhappiness. Her argument is that our sense of scarcity means ‘We wake up in the morning and we say, “I didn’t get enough sleep.” And we hit the pillow saying, “I didn’t get enough done.”’ She says that we’re never thin enough, extraordinary enough or good enough – until we decide that we are. ‘For me’, she says, ‘the opposite of scarcity is not abundance. It’s enough. I’m enough. My kids are enough.’

To get off this treadmill, we need to pursue something different. The five principles for a good society coming out of the study provide the kind of emotional sustenance that people want.

The research suggests that the preference given to economic rationalism over compassion is a serious error made by the political class. The next sections show that this error is compounded by the methods chosen to advance society. Although some of these methods
have worked in the past, they no longer appear to do so. Following this, the beginnings of an approach that holds more promise will be set out.

The failure of top-down technocratic solutions

The traditional methods to produce social advance no longer work because they are driven by technocratic solutions rather than transformative processes. There are four main dimensions to this. First, the methods used are contested politically and are apt to be reversed by an incoming government, which means that the wellbeing of citizens is subject to a game of political ping-pong. Second, government programmes have been driven from the top down, based on unevaluated theories of change, rather than being developed using the skills, knowledge and expertise of people in communities. Third, the failure rate of public sector programmes has been high. Finally, the reliance on economic development, which once worked to lift people out of poverty, now fails to do so. Each of these points will be taken in turn.

Contested approaches

The question ‘how do we end poverty?’ divides people, which means there is always limited support for any approach. Although there is general agreement at all points on the political spectrum that reducing poverty is part of a good society, there is a split over methods between left and right, so policies are contested and likely to be reversed. The left believes that social and economic structure is the determining factor, while the right believes in individual agency. Those who favour structure see state solutions involving taxation and welfare as the means; those who favour agency see growth and jobs as the means. In neither case is there a clear pathway towards solving the issue.

Welfare reform – that is, reducing welfare benefits – sharply divides people. Those on the left mostly feel that the withdrawal of benefits will increase the proportion of people in poverty, while those on the right tend to suggest that people will find work and move out of poverty. In
fact, as Mark Easton, home editor of the BBC, has pointed out, data so far offers no evidence as to whether welfare reform has a positive or a negative effect on poverty. Describing the release of official figures on poverty on 25 June 2015, he noted: ‘The “experts” are scratching their heads. Today was the day, we were told, when we’d see a sharp rise in poverty as official figures included the full impact of welfare cuts for the first time.’

The evidence on ‘Welfare to Work’ programmes, invented by the Clinton administration in the US and adopted by Labour, Coalition and Conservative governments in the UK, is far from conclusive either way. In the US, there were expectations that poverty levels would rise as welfare benefits were withdrawn, but they did not; in fact they fell in the 1990s. At the same time, despite both Tony Blair and David Cameron publicly claiming that ‘work is the best route out of poverty’, the fastest growing category of people in poverty is the working poor. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation concluded in December 2016 that 55 per cent of people in poverty are in working households. According to its Monitoring poverty and social exclusion report, the figures for the working poor are the highest ever.

Attempts to find evidence for what works to reduce poverty are thin on the ground. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation commissioned a series of evidence reviews, but these often rely on identifying risk factors associated with poverty, and there is no guarantee that reducing the risk factors will reduce poverty, because it would take very sophisticated multivariate analysis to unravel the effects of the different variables. The Trust put this to the test, commissioning the Smith Institute to identify the factors that led to improvements in poverty, and it was found that it was impossible to disentangle one factor from another. For this reason, a comprehensive and integrated strategy to end poverty is – methodologically speaking – a pipe dream. Paul Spicker has criticised the Joseph Rowntree Foundation strategy to end poverty because it is a collection of proposals that does not add up to a strategy.
Top-down government programmes

For evidence of the drawbacks to top-down efforts to build a good society without poverty, there is no need to look further than the classic study of the ‘War on Poverty’ in 1960s America conducted by Peter Marris and Martin Rein. In his efforts to create the ‘Great Society’, Lyndon B. Johnson founded the Office of Economic Opportunity to conduct a systematic programme to abolish poverty in America. Policies often failed to take root because powerful interest groups opposed the proposals, state officials were too hidebound to implement new ways of working, and labour unions resisted any change outside the immediate interests of their members.

Although less ambitious, Labour’s flagship National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal also failed to gain traction. Launched in 2003, it aimed to end the persistence of large disparities between the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the rest of the country so that ‘within 10 to 20 years, no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live’. Acknowledging that previous regeneration programmes had failed to reverse neighbourhood decline, the strategy aimed to tackle the causes of deprivation comprehensively, focusing on the poorest neighbourhoods in the country and considering the interrelationships between those causes of deprivation. Its goals were to improve education and skills, health and housing, while reducing worklessness and crime. The programme was ended early by the Treasury because of lack of progress. Although evaluations show that there were some positive results, there were few signs of the wholesale transformation intended.

Such an observation could be made of government regeneration schemes over many decades. In a review of area-based regeneration conducted for the Trust, Steve Osborn noted:

The lessons from more than 40 or so years of neighbourhood regeneration schemes, since the Urban Programme in the late 1960s, are not encouraging. Although there have been some successful schemes, and there is no doubt that some
neighbourhoods have been physically transformed, the general picture is of disadvantaged neighbourhoods remaining disadvantaged despite repeated interventions.20

While there have been some examples of success, such as the major housebuilding programme after the Second World War, the overall findings from evaluation of regeneration programmes have been gloomy. To take a specific example, a workshop held to review developments in Benwell, an area of multiple disadvantage in the West End of Newcastle, concluded that, beginning in the late 1960s with the National Community Development Project, the area had become a ‘laboratory for government policies’ and yet remained one of the poorest of the country.21 The workshop concluded with a reflection on the many times that local people had been consulted as part of strategic planning: ‘history shows us that the Benwell community is very good at “imagining” better futures. But we have also to keep asking why so often they cannot have what they ask for.’ Examination of the distribution of poverty across the country shows us that the Webbs’ ‘cities of poverty’ are still with us.22

**High failure rate of public sector programmes**

The evidence suggests that public intervention does not guarantee success. Public spending does not necessarily lead to positive outcomes because the money is easily absorbed by the system without productive output. There are many failed government programmes, described by Crewe and King’s *The blunders of our governments*,23 the latest well-meaning failure being the Troubled Families Initiative.24

In *Seeing like a state*, James Scott catalogues the failures caused by state planners applying so-called scientific blueprints without incorporating the know-how of local communities into planning processes.25 Technology writer Evgeny Morozov has labelled this approach ‘solutionism’, and suggests it limits our ability to think creatively about the nature of the problems we want to solve.26 In its extreme form, solutionism leads to precise numerical targets to
measure social advance. But, as Tim Harford has shown, targets are no guarantee of solving the problem because it is easy to ‘hit the target, but miss the point’.  

One reason why state solutions have failed to gain traction is that it has become progressively more difficult to use ‘social administration’ solutions to reduce poverty. The 1944 Bretton Woods arrangements enabled states to run their own economies insulated from the shocks of international markets. But these arrangements were abandoned in 1971. From that time, states have not had the means to ensure the welfare of all their citizens, even in a society that is generally more wealthy. Despite many years of efforts to reduce poverty in a rising economy, the bottom quintile has living standards way below what is expected in a modern country.

This was the quandary the Trust tried to unravel when it supported a Fabian Society project called ‘Poverty in the age of affluence’ in 2006. It is noteworthy that in the final publication of the Fabian Society project, *The solidarity society* (2009), proposals to end poverty relied almost entirely on central government action through increased public expenditure. By the time of its publication, it was clear that the 2008 crash had cut the ground from under such proposals. The public sector would have fewer resources and reduced capacity to deliver.

**Growth fails to deliver**

According to *The Economist*, economic development has taken almost a billion people out of poverty in the past 20 years. Michethwait and Wooldridge, in their influential book *The fourth revolution*, suggest that economic growth is the only sustainable way to reduce poverty in the future.

The Trust research suggests that, its achievements globally notwithstanding, economic growth fails as a solution in the UK for several reasons. The Trust commissioned Neil McInroy of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies to examine the processes of economic development. He reviewed the literature, including the work of Nobel Laureate Simon Kuznets, who suggests that inequality and disadvantage
decrease as an economy develops. This is the theory of ‘trickle-down’, which suggests that once private investment capital is secured, economic and social success will follow as supply chain benefits and local jobs are created. McInroy shows that such an approach does not work, and that economic growth fails to lift those at the bottom much beyond subsistence level. Yet the view that economic growth will bring prosperity for all has been a key plank of government policy since the war. McInroy calls this ‘boomgoggling’ – the tendency to see economic boom and social benefit as inevitable. He describes this as ‘an optimism bias which goes unrecognised’.31

One of the main reasons for the failure of trickle-down is the way in which the market distributes its rewards – a process called ‘predistribution’. In the US, Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson found that policies governing financial markets, the rights of unions and the pay of top executives have all shifted in favour of those at the top, especially the financial and non-financial executives who make up about six in ten of the richest 0.1 per cent of Americans.32 This work inspired the Trust’s support for the Smith Institute study on workplace democracy, Just deserts, which suggested a greater role for employees in making decisions at work,33 and a High Pay Commission study on the business case for moderating executive remuneration.34 The rewards of economic growth do not benefit most people. In fact wage rates have not risen. Although employment rates were at an all-time high in November 2016,35 long-term economic trends have removed well-paying jobs from the economy, so that the fastest growing category of people in poverty has been those in work.36 Tracy Shildrick and colleagues coined the expression ‘low pay no pay cycle’ to describe the experience of many people as they move in and out of badly paid work.37

Prospects for the future of work are dim. As technology continues to replace people with machines, the likelihood of well-paying work for the mass of the population is diminishing. Research in 2013 by two Oxford economists, Frey and Osborne, concludes that, in the next two decades, 47 per cent of employment will be ‘in the high-risk category’, meaning that it is ‘potentially automatable’. It is mainly less well-paid
workers who are most at risk. Consequently, there is a move towards what the OECD calls ‘inclusive growth’, in which the benefits of economic growth are shared more widely. The Royal Society of Arts has set up a City Growth Commission to examine the challenges to cities posed by demographic shifts, climate change, pressures on public finances and economic uncertainty. It is too soon to say whether this new approach will address the deep problems that we now face.

System failure

The surest sign that the twin pillars of the postwar settlement — social security and economic development — are no longer sufficient to reduce poverty is the fact that, in some cases, social security now subsidises the private sector rather than poor people. Take, for example, tax credits. Introduced in 1999 and developed through the Tax Credits Act 2002, their main purpose is to help families on lower pay make ends meet. They are also intended to lift families out of welfare dependency and provide incentives for people to work. As Peter Kenway has pointed out, the cost has been large and ‘displaces the older idea, which underpinned the original design of the Welfare State, that the role of a social security system is to provide an adequate income in the event that a household lacks work’.

Rather than providing sustainable solutions to poverty, critics have suggested that the social security system subsidises the private sector. Citizens UK calculates that the Treasury pays out £11 billion a year in benefits and tax credits to the 22 per cent of the UK workforce who are paid less than the living wage. Five firms alone (Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury’s, Morrison’s and Next) are subsidised to the tune of £1 billion a year — despite making a profit in the UK.

A second example of social security subsidising the private sector is housing benefit, where money is paid to private landlords charging high rents rather than building and sustaining low-cost housing. Such a use of the social security system is a sure sign that it has lost its way.
Need for a rethink in face of a ‘trilemma’

The long-term failure of state action and private enterprise, which brought gains in society during the ‘thirty glorious years’ from 1945, is no longer fit for purpose. At the heart of the problem is what Toby Lloyd, head of policy at Shelter, calls a ‘trilemma’:

By this I mean that it is impossible to simultaneously avoid widespread destitution; an ever-rising welfare bill; and major state intervention into key markets. It should be possible to avoid one or even two of these at once – but not all three. At any given point in history society is effectively making a choice to embrace, or at least tolerate, one of these three options. It may not be explicit, but by prioritising the avoidance of one or two of these outcomes, we are implicitly agreeing to put up with the third as the lesser of three evils.

If we continue to use our current framing, it is hard to see how we can find a way through this. First, the market no longer produces good jobs for people. A report the Trust commissioned from CPAG and Working Families demonstrates fundamental changes in the organisation of the economy which mean that low-paid work is likely to become more prevalent. Second, increasing welfare payments does little to address the underlying causes of poverty and is unsustainable: as a strategy it is politically unpopular and runs counter to the idea of a society of empowered individuals who are in control of their lives. Third, the scope for state intervention in markets is limited if it involves significant expenditure. Given that the size of the public debt reached an all-time high in December 2016, there is no reserve to fund development without an increase in taxes. Even if there were, there is no clear pathway for the state to follow to reduce poverty. As we have seen, state initiatives have often failed.

Put this way, we cannot make progress if we frame poverty as a problem to be solved. This is because such framing places poverty as an undesirable by-product of the society we want. As Big Issue founder
John Bird has pointed out, as consumers, we want cheap goods. We therefore commit ourselves to low pay to keep our costs down, and so create poverty and tolerate it as ‘collateral damage wrought by an otherwise buoyant marketplace’. In other words, if our societal goal is a thriving capitalist society then we must accept poverty as part of that. As Bird puts it, poverty is ‘the backbone of contemporary capitalism’. This chimes with the work of Zygmunt Bauman, who suggests that poverty is embedded in the system because the poor are useful. In a society based on production of goods, the poor are useful as a pool of cheap labour. In a consumer society, he suggests, their main role is to be humiliated as a warning to the rest of us not to fall off the consumer treadmill and become one of the undeserving poor. 

The conclusion from the Trust’s research is that a complete rethink is necessary. Although economic development, improved welfare policies and state intervention once lifted our society, they are not fit for purpose for the future. Results of a consultation commissioned from Compass confirmed that the days of tweaking a failing system are over: what is needed is reform of the whole system. At the heart of this is a change in values that establishes the end of poverty as a necessity for the future of our society – one of several features of a good society rather than something to be repaired as ‘collateral damage of a buoyant marketplace’. In this way, poverty reduction would become an integral feature of a good society rather than a compensatory afterthought.

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**Why a complete rethink is necessary**

**Situation**

‘Brexit as a rational decision of the voiceless and the humiliated.’

‘Alienated working class.’

‘The supply side won’t deliver a good society; we need new and inclusive policies.’

‘A lack of coherent agency.’

‘Referendum showed people use power when they have it.’
This approach involves radical change. We cannot solve poverty through a series of technocratic fixes that treat society as if it were a machine. Instead, we need transformational processes that regard society as an ecosystem where everyone is included in developing the society we want. If a good society is to be achieved, it must be achieved organically within society. Society’s elites can and must help to do this but they cannot lay down blueprints.

The great error of the delivery of the welfare state was the principle that ‘the gentleman in Whitehall knows best’. The postwar settlement enabled people to be passive in relation to questions of employment and social security. In ‘Why successful movements are all about relationships’, Hilary Cottam describes ‘Beveridge’s mistake’ on the welfare state:  people were ‘done to’, not ‘done with’. Similarly, Julien Le Grand’s famous 1997 study ‘Knights and knaves’ characterises the public as ‘pawns’. Towards the end of his life, Beveridge saw that the welfare state undermined what people acting together could do to bring social advance and argued for the government to promote a vigorous programme of mutual aid. However, the damage was done because – initially – the system was good at providing jobs, services and benefits. As seen in Chapter One, when the defects of the system
became clear, the cold bureaucracy of the state began to be hated by people who depended on it.

In post-Brexit Britain, where contempt for the establishment is widespread, ordinary people, particularly young people, are no longer willing to play a passive role and accept blueprints handed down from above. The growth of Poverty Truth Commissions, and their slogan of ‘Nothing about us without us is for us’, is emblematic of the new mood. An example of what people can do for themselves is the Living Wage Campaign. Ordinary people in the East End of London – despite their evident diversity – united around a common aim and changed government policy from below. If enough people want change, change will happen.

These examples show that ordinary people, including those on low incomes, are competent to run their own affairs. This exposes what historian E.P. Thompson described as two fallacies. One is what he called the ‘Fabian orthodoxy’, in which ‘the great majority of working people are seen as passive victims of laissez faire’. The other is the ‘orthodoxy of the empirical economic historians’, in which working people are seen as ‘a labour force, as migrants, or as the data for statistical series’. We must recognise that people have power and agency. This, as John Bird shows, through both his work and his writings, includes people who are poor.

Who not how

So, the question ‘how do we end poverty?’ is the wrong one. The question should not be how do we develop a good society without poverty, but who should do it? Answers to this question imply responsibility, agency and power.

One of the chief merits of the ‘who question’ is that it avoids the polarisation of the current debate, based on the dichotomy of government versus individual responsibility. From the point of view of the social science literature, agency and structure are two sides of the same coin of social change. Agency – the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own choices – takes place in the
context of structure. Structure is the amalgam of factors of influence (such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity and customs) that determine or limit an agent and his or her decisions. The relative influence of structure and agency is unclear. The evidence gives us no reason to say that one dominates the other. The main point is that both agency and structure matter. We need to find common ground while embracing a multiplicity of views about what is good for progress. We need to be inclusive and to find accommodations between different views. As the survey responses show, idealists (who favour structural solutions) and libertarians (who favour individual solutions) are both in a minority.

On this view, poverty is a ‘systemic’ issue, rather than merely structural or individual. The solution depends on all parts of the system. Everyone has a role to play, as suggested in the New Statesman in November 2015, where interim results of the Trust’s research were published:

Who should solve the problem of poverty? This is a central question posed by the Webb Memorial Trust in its latest research to define a good society. Our answer is ‘everyone’. Arising from this, if everyone has responsibility for poverty, how does each of the parties fulfil its responsibilities? A crucial precondition of everyone being involved is ownership. Connell and Kubisch argue that the success of any initiative depends on the people who make change happen being involved at the outset. Making recommendations at the end of a process that has not involved key agencies is unlikely to work because the agencies have no ownership of the results.

Looked at in this way, society becomes a self-organising system in which everyone is tasked with helping to create the economy and society we want. The key is relationships. One of the reasons why Citizens UK has been so successful is that its approach puts citizens’ relationships with one another at the heart of its work. In her contribution to the 2014 Webb Memorial Trust New Statesman Poverty Supplement, Ruth Lister stresses the importance of participation
in reaching societal solutions and cites the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power as an example of good practice, with half of its members having had direct experience of poverty.\textsuperscript{57}

Participation plays a vital part in developing society.\textsuperscript{58} There is a line of history, almost entirely disregarded by current thinkers, that traces connections between John Ruskin’s \textit{Unto this last}, first published as essays in 1860, its translation into Gujarat by Gandhi in 1908, and its influence on the campaign for Indian independence, and subsequently on the civil rights movement in the US and the broad-based organising of Citizens UK. The central point is that transformative power is found in relationships that are shared and not hoarded.

\textbf{Towards a new paradigm built on compromise}

Participation offers an alternative to the prevailing view of society, one that values non-material qualities as well as material ones. As the research suggests, there is an impressive consistency in what most people want – security, fairness and independence. The narrative is dominated by social factors rather than economic ones.

To find this new paradigm will require compromise: the old bifurcation between right and left leads us to nowhere but conflict. While there are substantive differences of view between people and vested interests on the left and right that will resist change, which guarantee that the road to compromise is fraught with difficulty, the research suggests that this is the only route that will deliver the society most ordinary people want. At the outset of the research programme two trustees of the Webb Memorial Trust, who happened to be members of parliament, Kate Green (Labour) and Chris White (Conservative), wrote a joint article in the \textit{New Statesman} in which they pointed out that ‘no political party “owns” the issue of poverty, and that all parties have an interest in working together to create long-term consensus around policies’.\textsuperscript{59} They further suggested that:
if we are going to create a broader consensus on tackling poverty, politicians need to ensure that they work not just between themselves but also with interest groups, charities and businesses. Given the important role that these organisations play in feeding into the political process, and the way in which their practices too will impact directly on individuals’ experience of poverty, any effort to improve communications and develop solutions on poverty must also include these important players.

Following this article, the Trust supported the All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty and this has become an important vehicle for dissemination of its work and discussion of other questions related to poverty across the parties. The Trust was encouraged in this direction by Paul Addison’s observation in *The road to 1945* that the postwar consensus emerged during the Second World War because of cross-party discussions. An important suggestion was made by a Conservative, Quintin Hogg, that social security for all needed to be the leitmotif of the peace.⁶⁰

The idea of security seems to be the foundation stone of a good society in the minds of most ordinary people, and it is an idea that has resonance across all the main political parties. For this reason, the concept is a good starting point for building compromise. The Trust therefore decided to use the term ‘security’ not ‘poverty’ as a way of introducing discussions about a good society without poverty. To take this further, Michael Orton was asked to develop ideas from across the political spectrum and to explore with various actors in politics, academia, think tanks and civil society the potential for ideas to build a consensus. Unlike much social research, this did not lean towards the left or the right. It drew on work from a wide range of political traditions. Thus, the right-leaning Centre for Social Justice, Civitas, Bright Blue and The Good Right were cited alongside left-leaning organisations such as the Fabian Society and Friends of the Earth. The *Daily Telegraph*’s James Kirkup was quoted, as was *The Guardian*’s Polly Toynbee. As Michael Orton points out:
The fetishising of the state, markets, family and so on is avoided and, instead, recognition is given to a role for the public and private, the collective and the individual, the financial and the relational, the state and civil society and communities and families.\textsuperscript{61}

The results of the research were launched at an All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty meeting in 2016 as \textit{Secure and free}.\textsuperscript{62} The report identifies what Orton calls ‘5+ ideas’. These are five substantive suggestions to foster social and economic security, together with some add-ons. The ideas, together with their sources, are expressed by Michael Orton as follows:

1. ‘Above inflation increases [in the national minimum wage level] should become the norm in periods of economic growth until there is an indication of a negative impact on employment’ (Centre for Social Justice) + ‘Make improving productivity and improving the quality of employment mutually reinforcing policy objectives’ (Smith Institute).

2. ‘A Harold Macmillan-sized, state-supported housebuilding programme … designed to the highest environmental standards’ (The Good Right) + Improve ‘security for home-owners through … a “right to sell” and a “right to stay”, so that those who can no longer meet mortgage repayments can sell their properties but remain as tenants paying fair rents’ (Friends of the Earth) + ‘Curb future rent growth and improve security for tenants’ (Civitas).

3. ‘Unleash the power of the social sector’ (Centre for Social Justice) + Implement non-financial help for families and relationship support (various).

4. Make early childhood education and care a specific and distinct element of the universal care and education system, free at the point of delivery (various) + ‘Significant real increases to child benefit’ (Fabian Society and Sir Tony Atkinson).

5. Given the current lack of consensus about how to provide a decent basic standard of living, Compass offers to work with other civil
society groups on building agreement around a shift from welfare for some to social security for all right through to older age + many social actors from across the political spectrum commented that democratic renewal is a necessary condition for change – so relevant additional ideas are put forward.

These ideas have been well received and could form a good starting point for building a consensus about a good society. Chapter Five looks at how this might be done and the roles different groups might play.

Notes
3 Fromm, E. (1978) *To have or to be?*, London: Jonathan Cape.


End Child Poverty publishes new figures on the level of child poverty in each constituency, local authority and ward in the UK. Available from: www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area-2016


HOW DO WE ACHIEVE A GOOD SOCIETY WITHOUT POVERTY?


