

Publishing Editor's column

I AM WRITING these words on the tenth anniversary of the day that the Labour party came to power in Britain under Prime Minister Tony Blair. It has been a time of continuous economic growth, with large sums of additional expenditure on health and education. During this time my own city of Norwich, for example, has had a new hospital, is in the midst of a massive programme of new school building and has seen a large new shopping centre open. There is much house building on derelict sites, flights from the local airport have been much expanded and shops have an ever greater range of goods from all over the world. With such a record of success Mr Blair ought to be at the peak of popularity and the Labour party assured of continuing victory at elections. Yet Mr Blair is widely denigrated and is about to resign, and his party is on the verge of significant defeat at local elections. There seems to be a general feeling of discontent in the air. Why should this be?

There is a whole list of areas in which the government is seen to have failed. Despite the extra resources, the health service is perceived not to be functioning well. School standards are perceived as declining and children's behaviour worse, crime is increasing, with police effectiveness hampered by political correctness and form filling. Housing prices have trebled in ten years, roads are more and more congested and levels of personal debt have increased enormously. The government is blamed for announcing new initiatives but not following them through, for massaging the truth to present a more favourable picture and for scandal and sleaze.

Why is it that, when they have so much compared with people in other parts of the world, people are unhappy with the situation? Why are they so disillusioned with a government that is so much better than the corrupt and tyrannous régimes elsewhere? Why, when standards of living, health care and educational facilities are so much better than in the past, do we have the social problems and growing crime levels of today? The answer is human nature, coupled with a departure from the standards God has set.

The past fifty years in Britain have seen immense improvements in living standards and great deterioration in standards of behaviour. Government policies have at best not encouraged stable family relationships and at worst actively

discouraged them. Emphasis has been placed on human rights rather than responsibilities, expectation raised that you can have what you want when you want it. Restraints on what can be published or broadcast have been cast off, so that people can read, see and hear much that is vile and immoral. Virtually all restraint have been lifted on how much people can borrow, resulting in huge mountains of debt. These things have created huge social problems and much unhappiness.

Regarding the main areas of complaint about the government—health, education and crime—individual misbehaviour causes major problems. Increasing alcohol and drug abuse, violence on the streets and selfish misuse of emergency and out-of-hours cover places the health service under growing pressure. Children undisciplined at home, fed junk food and lacking in parental instruction in the basics of living, make it difficult for schools to function as they should. Crime, by definition, is individual bad behaviour, with much of its growth being due to the aforesaid drug and alcohol abuse and lack of home discipline. People have high expectations of government without being prepared to fulfil their responsibilities.

Government initiatives to reduce crime and improve education are doomed to failure without improvements to individual behaviour, and individual behaviour will not improve in a society which has no respect for Divine standards. The prospect is for things to get worse and worse till God chooses to intervene and set up His Kingdom. When that time comes we will see a very different society established, one which will fulfil the prayer of the Psalmist David:

"Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood: that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace: that our garners may be full, affording all manner of store: that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets: that our oxen may be strong to labour; that there may be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD" (Ps. 144:11-15).

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