

Civic Resilience: A New Response To The Riots (guest blog)

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Why did they do it?

Media coverage and political debate in the wake of the English riots this past summer led quickly to the emergence of two opposing arguments as to the cause of social disorder in England: acts of criminality or alienation of the youth? The question now is how progressives should respond to social disorder and whether there are other causes – and solutions – being overlooked. At the core of the Polis Riots Debate was the idea of ‘civic resilience’.

This is a report by Polis Intern Casey Ackermann on “Responding to the Riots – A Debate.” The panel was Labour’s Shadow Home Affairs Spokesperson [Stella Creasy MP](#), ‘Red Tory’ thinker Phillip Blond and Head of the Social Policy Department at LSE Tim Newburn.

Deeper Understanding

In her “quest for a deeper understanding,” Stella Creasy has analyzed statistics released by the Ministry of Justice on the citizens arrested during the riots. The fact that many of those arrested have special needs and prior records and were from primarily poor areas of London highlights what Creasy called “the elephant in the room.”

As part of her attempt to both address and prevent social disorder in the future, Creasy created a parallel between personal resilience and “civic resilience” during her presentation. Creasy also emphasized the importance of both cultural resources and economic resources for civic resilience to succeed.

Creasy believes that the state can help extend relationships beyond the family unit with the hope of helping children realize their potential within society. Creasy also feels that the government should focus fewer funds on buildings and more funds on “building relationships.”

She criticised the previous government for its ‘managerialist’ approach to these issues in the past.

As a result of her findings, Creasy is strongly urging the Left to work together to ensure that society not only bounces back, but also bounces forward from the social disorder of last summer.

Moral Fundamentals

Phillip Blond responded first to Stella Creasy and “half agreed” with her evaluation of and solution to the riots. However, he chose to take a moral fundamentalist approach to his analysis of the riots.

A weakness in Creasy’s argument that he highlighted was the idea of the state acting as a “proxy parent.” He strongly believes that a definition of what the foundation principles are should be formed and fostered within society and, until then, civic resilience cannot occur. Blond pointed out that strengthening the family should be the focus because “the state has a poor record of loving you.”

Yet, he still thought that the State should platform and fund ways to ensure that civic resilience is present in communities. Blond also argued that the government cannot make an economic decision without making a moral one as well, which is why he believes that any solution must bring both left and right thinking together.

Specific Analysis

Finally, LSE’s Tim Newburn responded to both Stella Creasy and Phillip Blond with a more specific analysis of the potential causes to the riots. Three areas he addressed were police service response, poverty and inequality, and

whether or not society is facing a moral crisis.

While there is a high level of confidence and trust in the police, there is still a small portion of society that does not feel that they are being treated fairly. The example that Newburn used was “stop and searches,” which many see as unjust, unreasonable and targeted at certain people.

Newburn also believes that, despite what many people in government fear, we can look at poverty, unemployment and exclusion without saying that it is the sole cause. Personally, Newburn is uncomfortable with the idea of recreating “foundation morals” to be projected on the whole of society.

Generally, Newburn argued that there is a “fundamental economic problem,” but was not as comfortable addressing what specifically has caused the “moral problem” within society.

Overall, the three panelists, regardless of their approaches, agreed that progressives in parliament have to bring these concepts into the debate in order to ensure that the right steps are taken against social disorder. A final food for thought question was how could the media contribute to the prevention of both present and future social disorder.

This report by Polis Intern Casey Ackermann

You can read the full text of Stella Creasy’s speech [here](#)

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