

Towards a More Selfish Society

Written by Chris Blyth

Friday, 09 December 2011 12:05 - Last Updated Tuesday, 10 January 2012 12:56

The results of the latest [British Social Attitudes Survey](#) (of nearly 3300 adults) have just been published – with some very worrying (but perhaps not surprising) trends revealed..... and apparently effected significantly by the current economic turmoil and the prospect of austerity conditions for the next 5-10 years...

Popular support for “green” taxes to safeguard the environment (such as electricity surcharges to fund wind farms) has declined dramatically in the past ten years – from 43% of voters in 2000 to 25% in 2011, whilst 37% think that claims of climate change have been exaggerated – an increase from the 24% in 2000.

Support for tax rises to fund more public services in health and education has more than halved – from 63% in 2000 to only 31% today. Opposition to university fees, private health care, and private education has all declined – suggesting that we are generally recognising that personal or private funding is preferable to tax increases.

More than half of those surveyed (54%) believe unemployment benefits are too high and discourage the unemployed from seeking work (up from 35% during the 1980’s).

The overall picture from the Survey is that we are generally becoming more selfish and focussed on personal advantage – and a major question for politicians as to whether we face the next decade “together”, or just in it for ourselves.

Whilst the Survey was done in the UK, and may not be fully applicable to the island, the results suggest that there is a growing recognition of the need for more personal responsibility, but that any vision of a “Big Society” may be a pipedream, with hardening attitudes towards a “benefit entitlement” welfare society.

It would appear that the fear of losing out in these austerity times is driving us towards being more protective of our personal wellbeing - to the possible disadvantage of any social responsibility (“I’m all right Jack and damn the rest”).

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Our political masters need to be aware of these developments – we face some massive decisions over the next few years with enormous pressures on the national budget – an ageing population, major increases in the health and social security budgets, public sector pay, escalating public sector pension entitlements, difficulties with housing policy, losses on the bus services and at the airport, and the problems at the MEA, stagnant retail and construction sectors – are all combining in a “perfect storm” for our economy, and which will necessitate careful stewardship and a vision of political leadership that the island has not had for many years.

Let us hope the current crop of MHK’s are up to the job – it is not an enviable task.