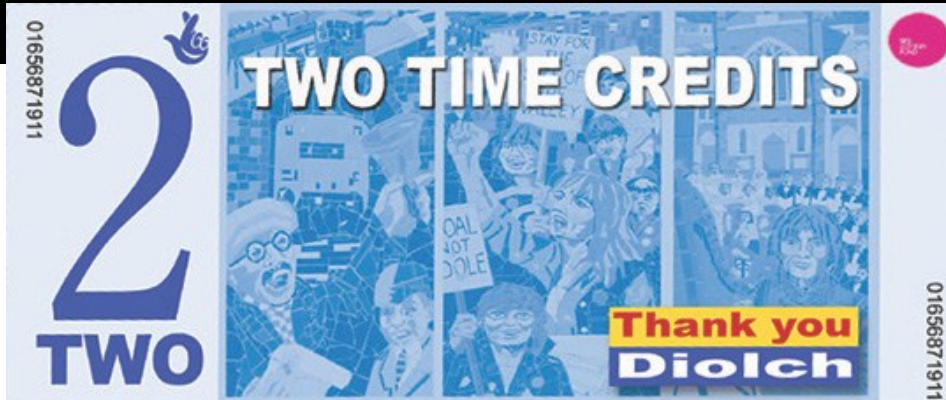


A mutual model invites citizens to become members of soft power civil infrastructures underpinned by time currency. When people know they are connected to civil infrastructures there is a platform for trust that abates a culture of disengagement, unconnected narratives, mutual indifference, isolation and suspicion. Research by the Social and Economic Research Council has shown that communities with high levels of citizen engagement are also communities that foster favourable outcomes such as better health, lower crime, improved educational performance and greater life satisfaction.

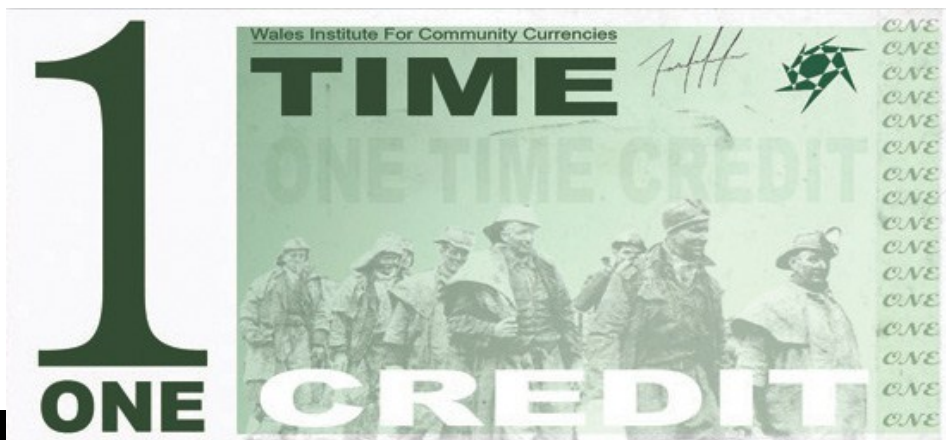
A CURRENCY FOR SOCIAL RENEWAL



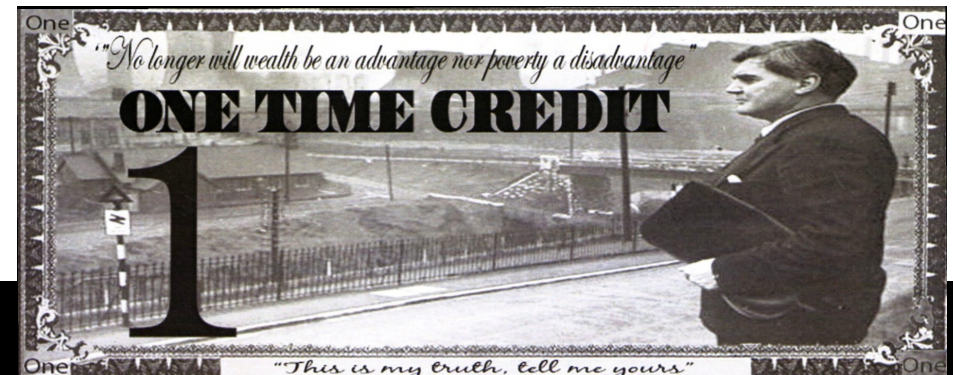
To turn on the lights and keep them turned on, soft power strategies are needed to take us out of social recession, to build civil infrastructures to accommodate civil transactions, restoring a civil culture with a capital "C" that will generate positive social capital and sustain a unity in every community irrespective of difference.



When the lights go out in a big city people seem surprised how easily life can plunge into darkness. Although millions complain about the temporary disruption to everyday life, there is a common understanding that the lights will be switched back on. People assume that the physical infrastructure is in good shape, and will be reconnected. What we sometimes forget is that in order for civil society to function we require an equivalent civil infrastructure. When this civil infrastructure fails, or generates negative social energy, life rapidly descends into darkness.



The cost of building these civil infrastructures are fractional, their benefits are immense. If we fail to restore the social bonds that bring us together, to bridge the ever widening spaces of separation, to reclaim our humanity in places where we live, our bequest to future generations will be this desperate earth, an open grave of disconnected hearts and bones.



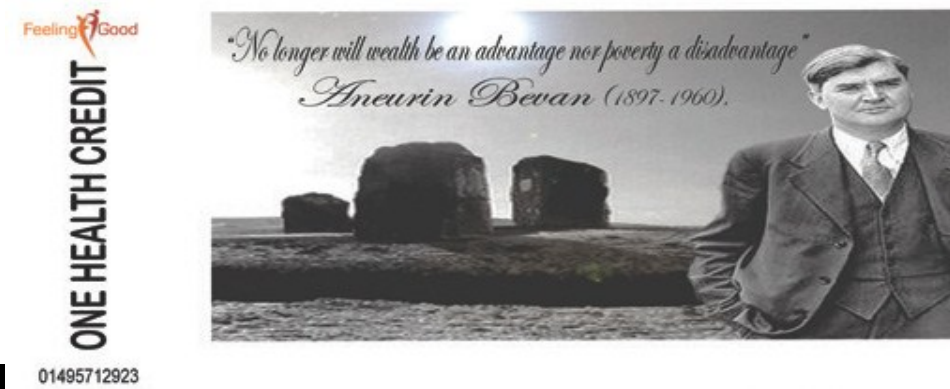
Decent begins with lack of civil respect for others, picks up speed en-route to dehumanisation and ends with final solutions. The holocaust did not start in Auschwitz, it began with the dangerous whisper that our culture will not accommodate your humanity. Strange fruit did not suddenly appear on trees in the Deep South, its harvest was planted in the seeds of dehumanisation.

The first characteristic of dehumanisation is branding, the means by which people confirm that others are outside the walls of their heart.



Aneurin Bevan raged against the tyranny of dehumanisation in the name of any abstraction or ideology, warning us that dehumanisation is the deadliest of things; if we fail to defend against it with our hearts and culture, it will eventually destroy us all. Bevan articulated a socially inclusive philosophy that asked one question of people's humanity "does your ideology, be it secular or religious, dehumanise the existence of others?" If the answer is 'yes', then return to the drawing board.

Experience of social injustice taught Bevan's generation that to be free in a just world it is necessary to destroy the power, efficacy and brutality of dehumanisation, to confront any Reich or righteousness that violates humanity. Acknowledging that the struggle against dehumanisation is a civil rights issue, Bevan envisioned an inclusive culture with a capital "C" opposing any lower case "c" culture that advocates exclusion. Arguing that exclusive cultures which refuse to honour humanitarian principles prosecute the belief that their mandate, be it from a ballot box, a divine right, or a gun gives them the right to subjugate their citizens, to terrorise, to harvest strange fruit.



Bevan's vision of an inclusive culture with a capital "C" is not dead history it is the bedrock for rebuilding civil society in the 21st century. Its principles can be reinvented and practically applied through the reworking of social values in time currency. In the same way that commercial currency values commercial transactions, time currency values civil transactions. Using time as a standard of value, time banking works on the communitarian principle that for each hour a person gives to building civil society they receive one time credit. Time credits are used to access events and activities on a quid pro quo hourly basis. This new way of honouring citizen engagement will rapidly rebuild civil society.

Mainstream social policy does not assign dehumanisation the same high profile as economic development or climate change. Post 1945 political parties have primarily focused their connection with citizens through the hard power of elections. Hard power requires minimum acts of citizenship, turning up at the ballot box once every few years, attending the occasional public meeting or being recruited by consultants to attend focus groups. Reliance on hard power harbours inactive constituencies. This is reflected within the ward boundaries of political parties where membership has declined to the point where they are now outnumbered by those who subscribe to the Society for the Protection of Wildlife. It is further reflected by the number of people who socially excluded themselves from the democratic process. In 2007 41% of the electorate chose not to vote, the highest figure ever recorded. This political and democratic deficit reflects a wider civil deficit.



There is an increasing tendency for people not to engage in civil society but to keep themselves to themselves, to raise the drawbridge, to become fortress families. During the past 50 years levels of civil trust between neighbours have fallen from over 60% to under 30%. In the same way that an economic recession is evidenced by declining commercial transactions, a social recession is evidenced by declining civil transactions. By this count we are in the midst of a severe social recession.



Building a strong civil society requires political parties to adopt soft power strategies that work with citizens, so that investment in schools, health centres and public buildings revitalises citizenship. Soft power welcomes people as citizens not clients, customers, service users, tenants or beneficiaries. A hard power model of public services with people viewed as clients receiving services from expert providers is ill equipped to build civil society. It is a model that generates minimum social interaction between professional, citizens, and the broader community. By contrast soft power promotes a mutual model of public services, acknowledging that citizens not clients build civil society.