

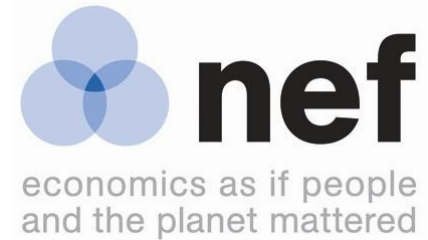
'Big Society'

Worklessness, austerity and the third sector...

...and the question of time

Anna Coote, new economics foundation
26 October 2010

What's the big idea?



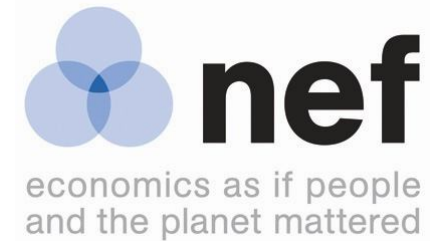
- 'From state power to people power.. From big government to the big society.' (Prime Minister)
- 'an audacious attempt to fashion a notion of social solidarity from the bricks of centre-right ideas... nothing less than to wean this country off its apparently unbreakable dependency on the state, centralism, welfare, and rule from Whitehall, the corrosive habits of half a century.' (Steve Hilton, David Cameron's Director of Strategy)

How will it work?



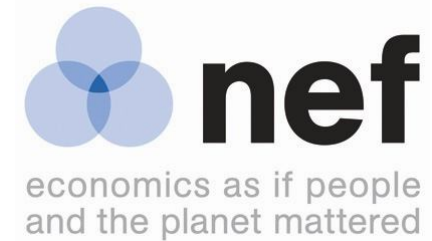
- **Strategy:** empowering communities... opening up public services... promoting social action'
- **Methods:** pushing power down to the lowest possible level... more 'transparency'... new planning laws to allow more direct action by citizens
- **Initiatives:** 'Big Society' bank ... 'Big Society' Network... 5,000 full-time community organisers... four 'vanguard communities'...national Citizens' Service... Office for Civil Society... Departmental units...structural reform plans to 'support the building of the 'Big Society'...

The spending review



- Council grants cut by 27 per cent cut to 2014-5; 14 per cent fall in spending
- £18 billion cut from welfare bill
- 500,000 job losses in public sector; one million overall
- £470 million over four years to help communities, including 500 organisers, national citizens' service and £100 million for 'transitional' help

Impact on 'Big Society'

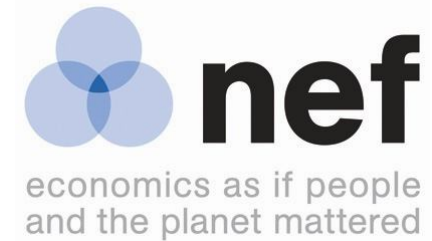


- Rising **unemployment**
- More jobs will go in **poorest** areas
- Unemployed face tighter and more **punitive** benefits system and drastically **pared-down** public services
- **Polarisation** between and within neighbourhoods, with 'Highland clearances'
- Local groups and charities **lose** council support
- **Families with children** hardest hit; **women** bear the brunt as the unpaid workforce

In a nutshell...

- **A much smaller state**
- **Much less** public spending
- **Much more** done locally by non-state bodies, in place of action by national and local government
- **Much more** voluntarism, philanthropy, local enterprise and big business
- The **end** of the post-war welfare state

'Big Society' and the new austerity



The 'Big Society' makes the **spending cuts** politically feasible. Together they mark the **end of the post-war settlement**.

This meant governments were committed to raising taxes to fund a secure framework of **public goods and services**, so that **everyone, rich or poor**, could be protected against risks that are **unpredictable and/or beyond individual control**, including illness and unemployment, being educated and housed and having enough money to live on.

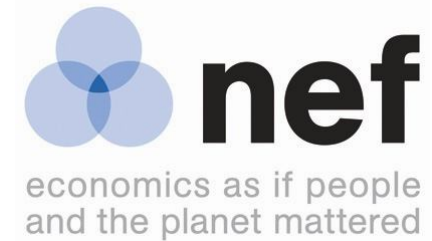
'Big Society' **shifts responsibility back** to self-help, charity, local enterprise and global commerce.

What's good about it?



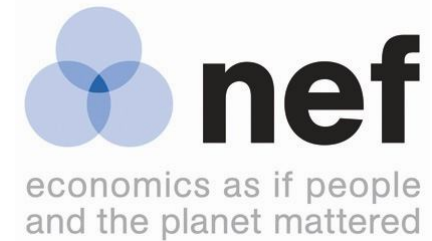
- More **engagement and participation** by individuals and small local organisations
- Offers citizens **more control** over what happens to them – good for well-being
- **Values human resources** and relationships, sees people as active contributors, not just problems
- More **flexibility** and stronger local **connections**

The need for change



- Post-war **welfare state** is past its prime
- Continuing economic **growth** is unsustainable
- Public services are stuck in a rut
 - ‘them and us’ **culture of dependency**
 - people **less able** to help themselves and each other
 - **too many** rules and regulations
 - **failure to prevent** more needs and demands
 - spiralling **costs**.

Some big problems



1. Inequalities

Capacity to participate depends on education and income, family circumstances and environment, knowledge, confidence, how we rate ourselves, how much time and energy we have, and access to places where decisions are taken and things get done. All are **distributed unequally**.

Equality matters. Inequalities are **widening**. They're a big problem for the poor, and for society as a whole. More equal societies enjoy better health, well-being and education for all, and lower levels of crime and disorder. They're better at coping with risks such as **climate change**.

Some big problems

2. Access

Organisations have **boundaries**, depending on blood ties, law, friendship, duty, obligation, tradition, geography, politics, wealth, status and class. They include some and **exclude** others. Some are much more powerful than others.

3. Society and economy

Plans for a 'Big Society' are **disconnected from economic policy**. They bypass the economic causes of problems that local action is supposed to fix and the need for a **sustainable** economy

Some big problems

4. The role of the state

A much smaller state will have a weaker capacity to protect the **rights of individuals**, defend the weak, guarantee access to essential **services**, **support** for local groups, ensure fair distribution of resources.

5. Accountability

Where does the buck stop? How can anyone tell if it is working?

6. Time

Participating in the 'Big Society' takes time. Some have much more **control** over their time than others, especially low earners with big family responsibilities.

Why time matters

- Government is calling on people to do more for themselves and their 'communities' through direct local action.
- Government is cutting jobs from the public sector – anticipates social and financial gains from replacing paid with unpaid labour.
- Most public sector jobs are women's jobs and women already do much more unpaid work than men do.
- There may be more women than men with time to contribute to the 'Big Society', but that leaves women with even less economic power and dependent on men.
- Long hours, low pay and unequal control over time undermines fairness as the 'Big Society' unfolds.

nef proposes...

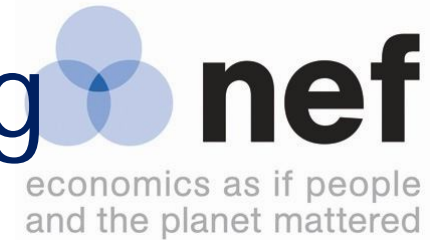


A gradual move towards
a much shorter working week,
to achieve:

- (1) social justice and well-being for all
- (2) a sustainable environment
- (3) a prosperous economy not dependent
on infinite growth.

Over a decade or more, 21 hours
becomes the new standard

Social reasons for moving to 21 hours (1)

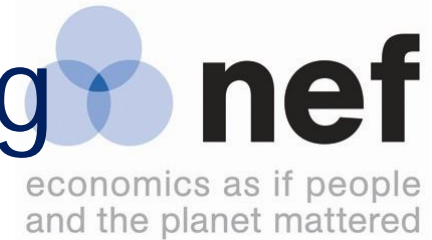


More people in paid work
Less stress
More control over time
Better well-being for
jobless and overworked



Redistribute paid and
unpaid time
Fairer shares between
men and women
Good for parents and
children

Social reasons for moving to 21 hours (2)



Making more of later life
More time to care
More 'free time'

Time to 'grow the core
economy' and co-produce
well-being
Time to make sense of
the 'Big Society'



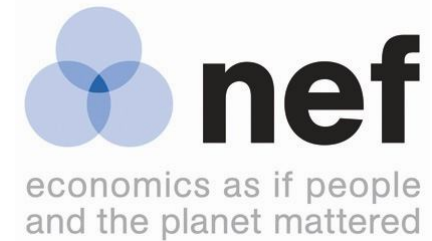
Environmental reasons for moving to 21 hours



Get off the
consumer
treadmill
Work to live,
not live to
work
More time to
live
sustainably



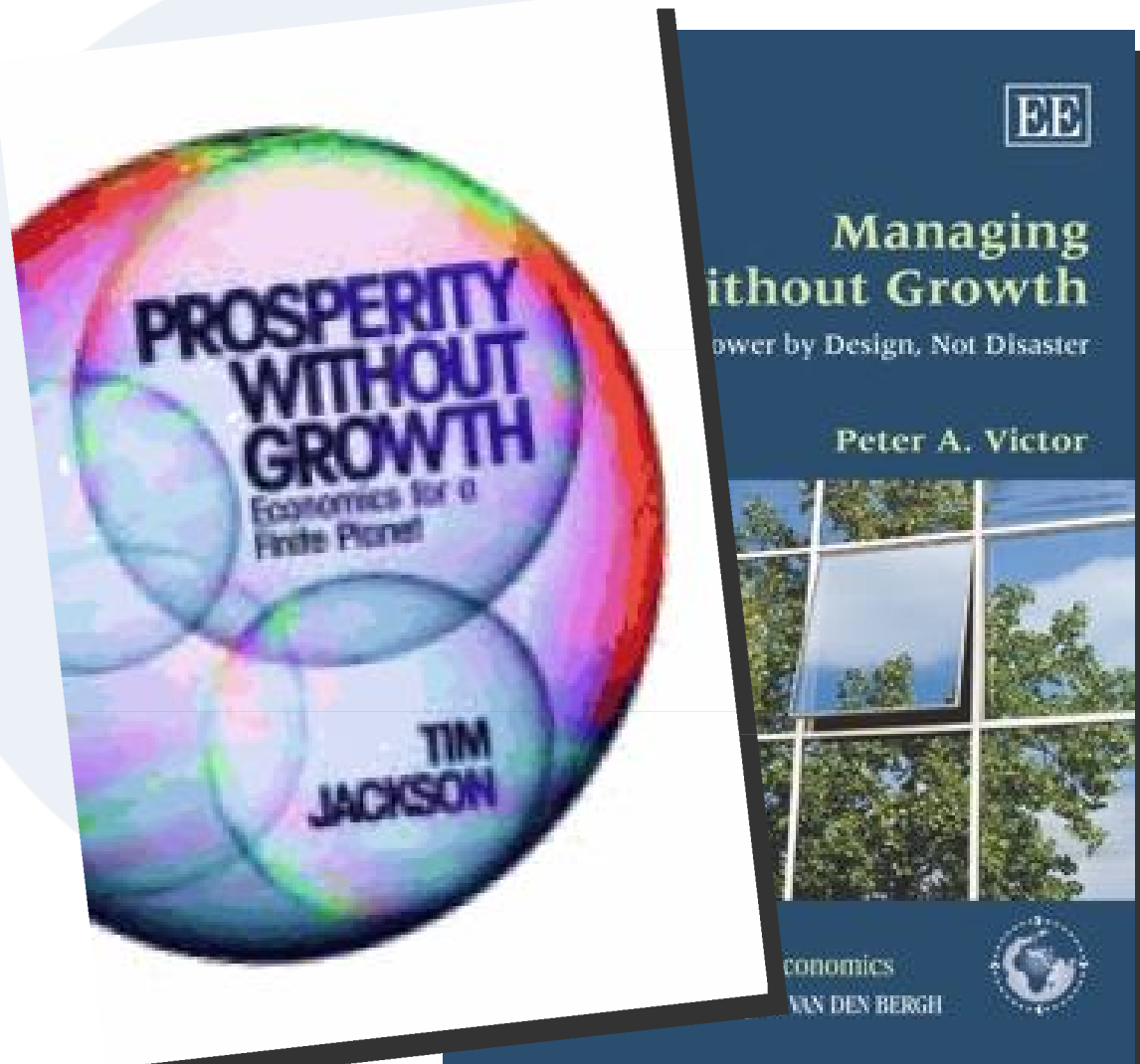
Economic reasons for moving to 21 hours



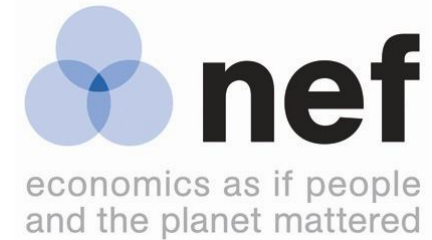
Helps to end credit-fuelled growth
Time a key variable in managing a decarbonised economy

Shorter hours plus more women make a more productive workforce.

A more resilient and adaptable economy
Safeguards public resources



Challenges of transition



Impact on poverty – the poorest could be hardest hit
Shorter hours could just mean more people do more overtime

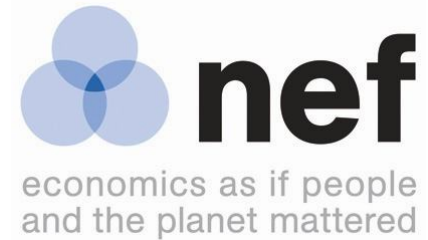
Against the grain of business culture

Few incentives for employers

Resistance from employees

Regulation versus civil liberty

Achieving shorter hours



- Negotiate small reductions in hours with annual pay increments
- Organise working practices to accommodate shorter hours
- Active training to fill skills gaps
- Employers costs per-hour not per-employee
- Reduce pay gradient
- Regulation with flexibility to suit employees
- More and better support for self-employed

A fair living income



Fairer distribution of
income and wealth

A higher minimum
wage

Improved state
benefits

Secure, high-quality
health, education and
other essential
services

More uncommodified
activity and
consumption

Better gender relations and quality of life



Flexible working
arrangements

Decent childcare

More job-sharing

Limits on overtime

Flexible retirement

Enforce equal pay and
opportunity laws

More jobs for men in caring
and primary-level teaching

More self-help and mutual
aid

Changing norms and expectations



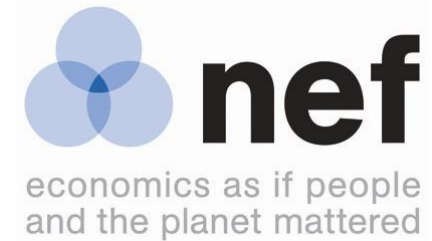
A national debate about how we use, value and distribute work and time...

...and how much 'stuff' is enough

Raise awareness about the value of unpaid work

More support for unpaid activities

Bring out the best in the 'Big Society'



Establish clear **goals**

Make sure **everyone** has a chance to participate

Move towards a **much shorter working week**

Co-production as the standard way of getting things done

A **whole-systems** approach, underpinned by a broader economy, a stronger democracy and a robust, strategic state

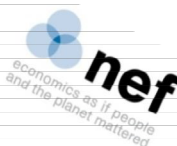
Measure what matters: redefine efficiency and success

And finally...

- There is **no plan or blueprint for the** 'Big Society'
- The **speed and scale** of deficit reduction and public sector cuts are **political choices**
- Can 'people power' define and shape it?
- It's up to us to defend the principle of **shared responsibility**, safeguard the interests of **future generations** and hold the government to **account**.



Ten Big Questions about the Big Society
and ten ways to make the best of it



21 hours
Why a shorter working week can help
us all to flourish in the 21st century

nef (the new economics foundation)



and forthcoming...
Cutting it
'Big Society'
and the new austerity
4th November, RSA

www.neweconomics.org