



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT EMPTY WALLETS



In the midst of the debt crisis in Washington, D.C., Danny Hartzell backed a Budget rental truck up to a no-frills apartment building that is on a strip of motels and pawnshops in Tampa, Florida. He had been laid off by a packaging plant during the financial crisis of 2008, had run through his unemployment benefits, and had then taken a part-time job stocking shelves at Target in the middle of the night, for \$8.50 an hour. His daughter had developed bone cancer, and he was desperate to make money, but his hours soon dwindled to four or five a week. In April, Hartzell was terminated. His last biweekly paycheck was for a hundred and forty dollars, after taxes. "It's kind of like I've fallen into that non-climbable-out-of rut," he said. "If you can't climb out, why not move?"

On the afternoon of July 1st, Hartzell was loading the family's possessions into the rental truck—and brushing off the roaches that had infested the apartment, so that the bugs wouldn't make the move, too—when a letter arrived from the State of Florida. Four days earlier, Governor Rick Scott, a Republican backed by the Tea Party, had signed a law making it harder for Floridians to collect jobless benefits, and the letter informed Hart-

zell that he was ineligible for new benefits after losing his job at Target. "I guess it's just all water under the bridge at this point anyway, being that we're going to stake a new claim," Hartzell told his fifteen-year-old son. "Right, Brent?" Then the Hartzells drove ten hours north, to rural Georgia, where no job or house awaited them—only an old friend Hartzell had reconnected with on Facebook, and the hope of a fresh start.

On the day the family moved, there were officially 14.1 million unemployed Americans, or 9.2 per cent of the workforce. Hartzell himself probably isn't counted in these statistics. In recent years, he has fallen into the more nebulous categories of the part-time employed, the long-term unemployed, and the "marginally attached"—the no-longer-looking unemployed. Economists report that the broader, and more accu-

rate, unemployment rate is 16.2 per cent. Three years after the economic meltdown, nearly one in six Americans are out of work.

In Washington, President Barack Obama and Congress are engaged in high-drama brinksmanship, like members of an ordnance-disposal unit arguing about how to defuse a huge ticking bomb. Obama, securely in character, called on all sides to rise above petty politics, acknowledged the practical realities of divided government, and proposed a grand compromise that would lower the deficit by four trillion dollars. According to the *Times*' Nate Silver, Obama's offer, in its roughly four-to-one balance between spending cuts and revenue increases, falls to the right of the average American voter's preference; in fact, it may outflank the views of the average Republican. Among other drastic cuts to domestic spending, the President proposes a ten-year, hundred-billion-dollar reduction in federal contributions to Medicaid, a program that helped provide new sets of teeth for Danny Hartzell and his wife just before their move.

The Republicans are also securely in character. They've rejected everything that the President has proposed, because Obama's deal includes tax increases and the closing of loopholes for hedge-fund managers and corporate jets and companies that move offshore. Ninety-seven per cent of House Republicans have taken something called the "No Tax Pledge." Some Republicans have also proposed that any deal require Obama to



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repeal the country's new health-care law, which, had it been in place last year, would have provided the Hartzells with medical insurance, instead of forcing them to rely on charity hospitals for their daughter's cancer treatment. Representative Paul Ryan's ten-year budget plan, which remains his party's blueprint for the future, would impose a fifty-per-cent cut on programs like food stamps and Supplemental Security Income, which, as long as Danny Hartzell remains jobless, represent the Hartzells' only income. By the last day of June, the Hartzells had twenty-nine dollars to their name. The Republicans in Congress won't be satisfied until the family is out on the street.

The sociologist Max Weber, in his 1919 essay "Politics as a Vocation," drew a distinction between "the ethic of responsibility" and "the ethic of ultimate ends"—between those who act from a sense of practical consequence and those who act from higher conviction, regardless of consequences. These ethics are tragically opposed, but the true calling of politics requires a union of the two. On its own, the ethic of responsibility can become a devotion to technically correct

procedure, while the ethic of ultimate ends can become fanaticism. Weber's terms perfectly capture the toxic dynamic between the President, who takes responsibility as an end in itself, and the Republicans in Congress, who are destructively consumed with their own dogma. Neither side can be said to possess what Weber calls a "leader's personality." Responsibility without conviction is weak, but it is sane. Conviction without responsibility, in the current incarnation of the Republican Party, is raving mad.

Representative Austin Scott, from the Hartzells' new state of Georgia, is the president of the House Republicans' freshman class. Last week, Scott, addressing the possibility that the United States might default on its debt, offered this blithe assessment: "I certainly think you will see some short-term volatility. In the end, the sun is going to come up tomorrow." It was Lenin who first said, "The worse, the better," a mantra adopted by elements of the New Left in the nineteen-sixties. This nihilistic idea animates a large number of Republican officeholders. The battle over the debt ceiling is a contest between grown-up so-

briety and juvenile righteousness, which doesn't leave much choice.

Nor does it leave much hope. President Obama, responsibly acceding to the reality of divided government, is now the leading champion of fiscal austerity, and his proposals contain very little in the way of job creation. More important, he no longer uses his office's most powerful tool, rhetorical suasion, to keep the country focussed on the continued need for government activism. His opponents' approach to job creation is that of a cargo cult—just keep repeating "tax cuts"—even though the economic evidence of the past three decades refutes such magical thinking. What does either side have to offer the tens of millions of Americans who have settled into a semi-permanent state of economic depression? Virtually nothing. But if responsibility were fused with conviction—if politics were a vocation in Washington today—the Hartzells would be represented at the negotiating table.

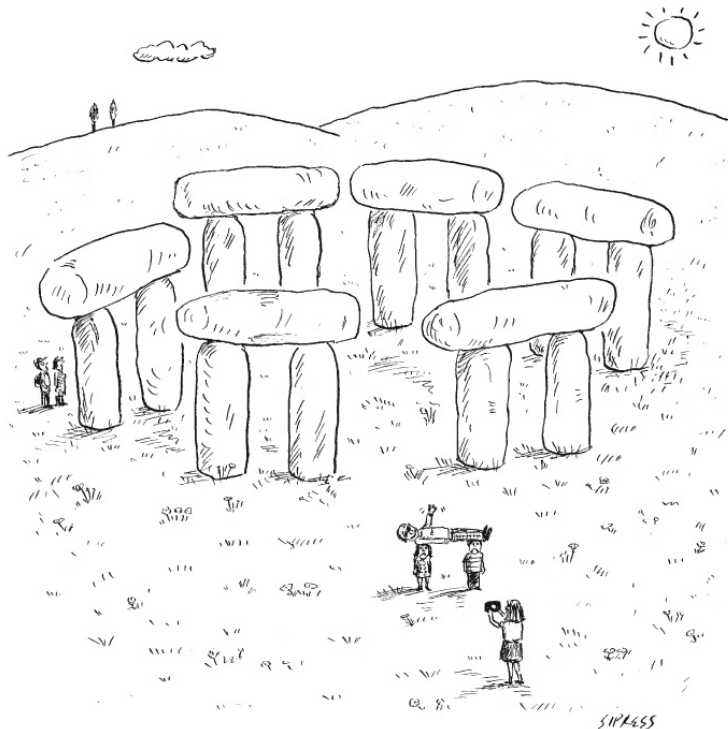
—George Packer

LONDON POSTCARD EARLY BIRDS



I think David Cameron is in much bigger doo-doo than he's owning up to," Chris Bryant, the strawberry-complected Labour M.P. for the district of Rhondda, was saying last week, as he sat on a bench under the soaring hammer-beam roof of Westminster Hall. For eight years now, Bryant has been a lonely, ridiculed voice against the excesses of Rupert Murdoch's newspapers, and their thuggish collusion with British politicians and police officers. Bryant was the person who asked the Murdoch executive Rebekah Brooks, at a parliamentary hearing in 2003, whether her papers had paid the police for information. Brooks answered in the affirmative. When asked why he chose to rile the Murdoch regime, even when, as he said, "whenever anybody put his head above the parapet, they chopped it off," Bryant recalled, "Well, I hadn't expected her to say yes!"

Brooks resigned on Friday, after a week of being fiercely protected by Murdoch, and after she, Murdoch, and Mur-



doch's son James were summoned to appear before a parliamentary committee to answer questions about their newspapers' hacking into the voice mail of private citizens to get scoops. As the scandal spread to the United States (the F.B.I. is investigating whether News Corp. papers hacked the phones of 9/11 victims, and Les Hinton, the Dow Jones C.E.O. who has worked for Murdoch since he was a fifteen-year-old on the *News of Adelaide*, resigned hours after Brooks did), Murdoch published an uncharacteristically contrite apology in all of Britain's national newspapers.

Bryant believes that his aggressive questioning of Brooks back in 2003 made him a marked man. Several months after the hearing, a set of Anthony Weiner-style self-portraits of him in a pair of tight white briefs, along with some steamy messages he had sent to a man he'd met on the Web site Gaydar, appeared in the pages of several tabloids. Over the years, the tabloids continued to give Bryant hell: "VOTERS MUST GIVE CHRIS BRYANT A RHONDDA ROGERING," read a typical headline in Murdoch's *Sun*. The *Times* (also Murdoch-owned) published a profile of Bryant titled "BLAIR'S ATTACK POODLE SAYS PANTS TO THE LOT OF YOU," which included a blind quote calling Bryant a "bumptious little berk." Bryant continued to flout the *omertà*. He told the *Evening Standard* recently, "I don't give a monkey's fart." His was among the thirty-eight hundred and seventy names found in files belonging to Glenn Mulcaire, a private investigator employed by *News of the World*. He made a largely ignored speech about phone hacking in 2010. In March, he called upon a nearly deserted Commons chamber to investigate the allegations. The past few weeks have been a vindication, but Bryant seemed more relieved than celebratory. "I got monstered by the press," he said. "It's not been very pleasant."

Earlier that day, Bryant had bumped into Lord Stevenson of Balmacara, a former adviser to Gordon Brown. Stevenson had asked him how it was going.

"It's good, but tiring," Bryant answered.

"Keep it up," Stevenson said.

Rebekah Brooks, a week before she resigned, had said that it was "inconceivable" that she would have known that *N.O.T.W.* had hacked the voice mail of Milly Dowler, a thirteen-year-old who

was murdered in 2002. After Brooks resigned, Bryant wrote that it was "inconceivable" that she didn't know what was going on in her paper." He added, "If she did know, she's been lying all this time—and if she didn't she's been culpably negligent."

Along with Bryant, Charlotte Harris, a partner in the law firm Mishcon de



Rupert Murdoch

Reya, has been to the phone-hacking scandal what Meredith Whitney was to the financial crisis—she called it loud and early. She is thirty-four and blond, and is prone to making such self-dramatizing remarks as "It's difficult when everyone's older than you, and most of them are boys." Harris was breaking for a steak lunch near her office in Holborn. She got involved in the phone-hacking scandal—which Brits had taken to calling *Omni-gate*, as it seemed to ensnare almost everyone in the country's public life—in early 2007, as an associate lawyer in Manchester. Her boss, Mark Lewis, was the lawyer for Gordon Taylor, the head of the Professional Footballers' Association. Taylor's phone was hacked by Glenn Mulcaire; Lewis and Harris won their client a reported four-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-pound settlement. "It was clear then that this was wider than one rogue reporter," said Harris, who was on maternity leave when the case settled. "I remember hearing the news, looking at my new baby in her bouncy thing, and thinking, Oh, I wanted a trial." Harris's next phone-hacking client was the public-relations impresario Max Clifford. She

won him a million pounds, if not the same sort of public outrage that the Milly Dowler revelations provoked. "Max basically taught me things that only Max can teach you," Harris said. "By the time I got other clients, I was able to say, 'Don't be scared. Let's get on with it.'"

Harris thinks that the Milly Dowler case tipped public opinion. "It gave people permission to be angry. There isn't really any discussion to be had about why it would be O.K. to hack into the voice mail of a murdered schoolchild and muck up the police investigation." She went on, "I don't know if we'll ever get to the bottom of how bad it really was."

In a strange way, the closure of *News of the World*, her longtime nemesis, had unsettled Harris. "It's a bit like being on the battlefield, all these bodies lying around, and you look at all the waste and the destruction, and think it really shouldn't have happened at all." She went on, "I've been litigating against *News of the World* my entire career, and, despite everything that's happened, you get to know people." The paper's abrupt disappearance, Harris said, was as unsatisfying as that of a bad boyfriend. "It's like catching somebody red-handed, and he says, 'Fine, I'm leaving,' and walks out the door." She took a bite of rib-eye. "It would have been nice to stay and make him change."

At Westminster Hall, Chris Bryant indulged in a moment of goofy release when asked if Murdoch, after everything that had happened, would still be able to intimidate British politicians. He held two thumbs together, forefingers up, in a W shape, and then turned them upside down: "Frankly, now it's like 'Whatever, Mary.'" That afternoon, Murdoch announced that he would withdraw his twelve-billion-dollar bid for the satellite broadcasting company BSkyB. Bryant is looking forward to next week, when the two Murdochs and Brooks are to testify in front of the parliamentary committee. He said, "If the Murdochs themselves don't turn up at the select committee, they will be kissing Britain goodbye." Later that day, he was supposed to lead a debate in the House of Commons on an unrelated bill. He excused himself, saying, "I've done bugger-all to prepare for it."

—Lauren Collins