

Coalition Disability Policy-A Consolidation of Neo-Liberalism or Benign Pragmatism?

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The Conservative-Liberal coalition came to power with the intention of the reducing the major public deficit that came to a head in the late 2000s under the stewardship of the New Labour government (HM Government, 2010). Whether this deficit was the result of profligate party policies or longer return economic cycles of capitalism is debatable and beyond the scope of this paper. Firstly the article is interested the Coalition's use of language of 'the crisis' to progress some of the toughest, and arguably most regressive social policies since before the foundation of the welfare state in the 1940s (Roulstone & Prideaux, 2012, forthcoming). Secondly the article aims to explore why and how some of the most socially and economically vulnerable have been picked off as a relatively easy target for deficit reduction (Lister & Bennett, 2010). Thirdly I want to argue that whilst a struggle continues over the reversal of decommodification of key sectors (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Holden, 2003), most notably health, we are arguably heading inexorably towards a competitive market individualism in most other disability policy-welfare, employment, social care, housing and transport. This, it will be argued, represents a consolidation of the New Right project from the late 1970s in the UK in placing increasing sections of social goods & services in the hands of markets and quasi-markets.

As with all aggressive market economies, those that need help but do not represent a worthwhile investment or who are newly deemed ineligible for services in transitions to market solutions will both lose out. I also want to suggest that the response to the crisis disproportionately impacts upon disabled and chronically sick people. It is noteworthy that having 'flown a kite' as to the further marketisation in health (Lansley, 2011), the Coalition suggested that certain areas would remain sacrosanct from this process, noting that acute/emergency medicine would not be opened up to market forces (Field, 2011). This leaves services in chronic ill health and disablement very vulnerable indeed and in a way that may be significantly deleterious to the position of those who can be neither marketised or welfarised in a way that reduces central and local state activity in these areas.

New Right and the Thatcherite Legacy

Perhaps the most lasting and pure interpretation on New Right thinking was the expression coined by Andrew Gamble to summarise their thinking in the term the 'free economy and the strong state' (Gamble, 1979). Here the strong state refers not to an overbearing regulated state but to a strong authoritarian central state that in part aimed to take control of the reins by 'rolling back' the wider frontiers of wider state bureaucracy. The philosophy was thus far from being libertarian, but was however a fierce and sustained critique of the 'nanny state' which had created dependency in a way that had depleted self reliance and entrepreneurship (Boyson in Alcock, 1997; Murray, 1984; 1999). State welfarism and powerful trade unions had also made the 'poor too well off' and the disincentivised the wealth creators to invest further their efforts and finance in UK PLC. The internal machinations of Conservative party politics, a backlash from the 'centre' or 'wet' wing of often one nation Conservatives ensured that free markets applied only to those areas least treasured in the popular imagination, such as utility companies. Key right of centre victories were established through tougher labour laws and the defeat of primary industry trade unions and the subsequent decline of many areas of heavy industry.

However throughout this period contradictory forces were at work in some areas. In disability terms this was the case. Community care policies emphasized naturalistic solutions to previously institutionalized lives for disabled people (Barnes & Mercer, 1996). Whilst these ideas were criticized for their misunderstanding of community, community resource and the infrastructure for those too ill to return to the community in any meaningful sense (Bornat et al, 2003; Slater, 2007), the developments represented an end to the worst forms of segregation built on protectionist and often paternalist assumptions (Jones, 2000). Meanwhile, sick and disabled people were exempted from the fiercest winds of change in Thatcherite attacks on welfare or 'dole' scroungers-indeed the Disability Living Allowance scheme was introduced and grew dramatically during the Thatcher and Major years. Incapacity benefit not only grew, but was arguably used as a smokescreen to hide growing levels of unemployment. This mirrors Erkulwater's findings of disability welfare spending growth during the Reagan and Bush (senior) presidences (Erkulwater, 2006). Most notably, the neo liberalism of the 1980s and first half the 1990s did not connect welfare dependency and disability in any meaningful sense.

Blair and 'Centrist' Neo Liberalism: Old Wine in New Skins?

It was a surprise to many policy observers that Blair's accession to power was based on initial spending controls and an indebtedness to the mainstream

attack on dependency wrought by the Thatcher years (Blair, 1999; Giddens, 1998). Market solutions through privatization or marketisation remained part of the third way policy palate. As with neo-liberalism more generally, Blair did not aim to return to Keynesian demand management in the late 1990s. The end of clause four did not ensure a brokered deal that protected other shibboleths of old Labour remaining in place. The notions of 'failed communities' (Lister, 1996), the needs for a revised communitarian rights-responsibilities based social contract sat alongside the felt imperative to reduce dependency. For the first time in any wholesale sense this dependency-busting ethic explicitly included sections of the 'disabled' populations. Never before the welfare settlement of the 1940s had such a concerted onslaught on disabled/sick people been witnessed. Even Enoch Powell, the doyen of desiccated Conservatism in the 1960s had constructed disabled people as the victims of paternalist failures rather than as an arm of the feckless poor.

In contrast Tony Blair found a convenient way to avoid a bad press, but to reduce the benefits take, by developing and popularizing a policy binary between the deserving and undeserving disabled that took Britain back to the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. The Benefits Integrity Project (BiP) was the first salvo in this policy offensive. The BiP failed to convince a skeptical disability community of the importance of the 'problem' (Hyde, 2000), whilst others pointed to the invidious distinctions being made around what might be called disabledness between the genuinely and the 'wannabee' disabled claimant populations. Disabled people's exclusion - once viewed as a by-product of an exclusionary assemblage of social and economic structures were in a work-first era now captured in the shorthand of *claimants*-legitimate or otherwise (Roulstone and Barnes, 2005). This binary approach, one devoid of evidence in an era when evidence was deemed important, asserted that the role of government was to distinguish between the 'bad backs and the genuinely disabled' (Johnson, 2004). New Deal and broader welfare to work policies began to blur prior distinctions between the deserving and undeserving which had previously attached to non-disabled and disabled claimants of working age people respectively (Hyde, 2000).

Aside from the policy incoherence here, the failure of the minister and their advising civil servants to understand that disability is a complex relationship between impairment, perception and environment (WHO, 2011) has meant that sick and disabled people were conveniently reclassified to fit Treasury cost-saving imperatives (Stone, 1984). The mismatch between being reclassified as fit and the lack of sufficient employment alternatives has left

some in a 'half-world' between work and validated welfare (Roulstone and Barnes, 2005). Similarly the aim of getting 1 million sick/disabled people off incapacity benefits once again was not based on evidence about disability or the labour market (Stanley, 2003). What can best be described as anecdotal policy formulations also characterized the push to employment as the route out of dependency for disabled people. Anne MacGuire the erstwhile Minister for Disabled People exhorted disabled people and employers to better connect the available job opportunities with workless disabled people (MacGuire, 2007). It was asserted that 1 million disabled could and indeed should move into these untapped employments. There was scant evidence of the existence of such opportunities and thus the mirage of new jobs and a war on voluntary worklessness were merged into one utopian vision for the future. The low level of placement in sustained jobs characterizes the New Labour era from early New Deal (Arthur et al, 1999) through to Pathways to Work (DWP, 2010). It is noteworthy that the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and its amendment made little major difference in the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people (OECD, 2003; Pearson and Prinz, 2005). This mirrors developments in the USA where welfare reform and the ADA sat alongside a widening of the employment gap (Stapleton & Burkhauser, 2003). This suggests that structural factors remain despite the policy discourses overlaying these barriers. We see then that together the neo-liberal project was adding, if perhaps inadvertently to the difficulties of sick/disabled people who had faced major social and economic exclusion over the decades. The project to this point can be summed up as constituted by:

- The gradual *marketisation* of disability provision-whether through welfare to work schemes, supported employment, work preparation, social care, equipment provision.
- Graduated introduction of *contributory conditionality* into a range of support-charging policies in domiciliary support,
- Graduated introduction of *moral conditionality* attaching to continued welfare support (e.g ICBs)
- Increasingly pervasive *binary discourses* of those needing support and those requiring dependency-busting policies

Enter the Coalition-Continuity or Change in Neo-Liberalism?

The accession of a Coalition of formerly very disparate policy traditions of Conservative and (social) Liberalist ideas makes for very strange bedfellows.

Some might argue that both sides have forged a Faustian pact to ensure political power. An unseemly image of ideology and opportunism underpinned many observers thinking across the political spectrum. Yet more surprisingly the Coalition attaches a new-found vigour to the virtues of neo-liberalism, markets and self direction alongside a continued communitarianism ethos captured in the notion of the 'big society'. Viewed positively, the increased role of civil society, community, neighbourhood and localized not-for-profit activity complements a much reduced need for impersonal professionalised central, regional and local public services. Viewed critically the shift to a 'big society' notion mirrors the imagined communities (Ahmed & Fortier, 2003; Anderson, 1983) of early community care policies and can be viewed as a dewy eyed nostalgia for neighbourly and reciprocal communities which even in the 19th century sociologists and community theorists were beginning to document their demise (Tonnies, 1887 & 2001; Durkheim, 1893 & 1997).

Despite the continued sanctity of certain public provision of social goods (the clearest example being the NHS) the public sector under the Coalition has come in for sustained and again largely anecdotal criticism as wasteful and as sapping the economic vigour of UK society. Suddenly ministerial utterances on the profligate state seem indistinguishable from Daily Mail headlines. However as with previous neo-liberal compromises there is devil in the detail. The proposal to cut up to 40% from some departments has sat alongside an initial amnesty for health and overseas development (HM Treasury, 2010). This has later been challenged by the Coalition and the struggle for the NHS continues. However the Coalition's former Chief Secretary to the Treasury David Laws made clear the emboldened commitment to cut the public sector spend and remit longer term:

The years of public sector plenty are over, but the more decisively we act the quicker and stronger we can come through these tough times....(Chief Secretary to Treasury the Cited BBC News 24th May, 2010) Available at:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8699522.stm> accessed 19th December 2010

Sadly Laws stint as Chief Secretary were short lived and somewhat ironically perhaps he resigned under allegations of personal financial irregularities. Returning to the theme of high flown rhetoric and dependency-busting, the newly appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne noted:

I want to support the person who leaves their house at six or seven in the morning, goes out and does perhaps a low-paid job in order to provide for their family and is incredibly frustrated when they see on the other side of the street the blinds pulled

down and someone sitting there and living on out-of-work benefits (Chancellor of the Exchequer Budget Speech, June 22nd 2010). Available at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/andrew_marr_show/8750301.stm

The celebration of low paid work in the above statement is very telling, the neo-liberal work first and work at all costs philosophy can now be seen as a sine qua non of progressive neo liberalism. A key tenet of Coalition thinking is the perception that even previous neo-liberal policy was not effective in erasing the deeper problems of dependency culture and a recalcitrant working class. The ambiguous language of policy, one which mixes metaphors of rescue and disgust at the lumpen poor is apparent in much Coalition thinking. In the interests of balance it could be argued that the coalition is fiercely committed to fairness and that at its' worse is instigating a tighter form of targeting in commensurate with early Right thinking on state spending. Indeed the 'State of the Nation' document, a detailed evaluation of policy challenges (HM Government, 2010a) notes that 'out of work' benefits increased whilst not reducing the gap between the richest and poorest in UK society. This could of course be attributed to low benefit rates. During New Labour's tenure in office 1.4 million people have been workless for 9 of the previous 10 years-a shocking statistic. The income gap during the period 1997-2007 grew to its largest point since 1961 despite major anti poverty targets and an unprecedented shift to mainstream tax credits. (HM Government, 2010a: 6). This latter point seems to blame previous administrations for poverty, inequality and worklessness. Taken together the very different discourses of state versus individual blaming take some unravelling, indeed they beg questions as to just what the true beliefs of government are on these issues.

However, these dual sentiments are not new and were an abiding feature of New Labour rhetoric (Grover and Piggott, 2007; Roulstone and Barnes, 2005) around workless disabled people. In terms of longer-run policy shifts, there seems to be evident in Coalition policy a consolidation of neo-liberal aims of a free economy, an enlivened private sector and a reaffirmation of the value of 'organic communities'. Lister and Bennett provide an early appraisal of the Conservative government's welfare and work policy programme noting that it did not escape '*.... out of the policy paradigm established by Labour*' (Lister & Bennett, 2010: 102). The Coalition Prime Minister David Cameron summed up his vision of the 'Big Society' as based on: 'Things that fire you up in the morning, that drive you, that you truly believe will make a real difference to the country you love' (Speech, 19th July, 2010). A more worked up statement is made clear in the Coalition Programme for Government:

We share a conviction that the days of big government are over; that centralisation and top-down control have proved a failure. We believe that the time has come to disperse power more widely in Britain today; to recognise that we will only make progress if we help people to come together to make life better. In short, it is our ambition to distribute power and opportunity to people rather than hoarding authority within government

(HM Government, Foreword, 2010b)

So authoritarianism is arguably just taking on a new form, whilst populism in rhetorical terms around welfare dependency and rolling back the state has arguably reached new heights. In concrete terms these discourses attach severe benefit withdrawal sanctions for example in failure to look for work. This is nothing new, but the stated policy intention to make it work is new. The extent to which these reforms take account of the contradictions of welfare policy and 'make work pay' are open to question. Certainly the first sighting of disability welfare policy seems unduly harsh and based on highly selective appraisals of the problem at hand. Indeed the extent to which evidence underpins the proposed policy reforms is highly questionable. For example, the notion that worklessness is too easy, that the public sector drains the lifeblood of the economy and that unleashed community energies exist to underpin new social policies all lack substance in evidential terms. In terms of disability policy, the effects of imagined communities at the heart of first wave community care reforms seem not to have survived in the policy memory. To argue for greater community volunteering seems to some to reflect a degree of desperation on the part of the incoming coalition government.

Disabled People and Welfare Policy Reform in Detail

As noted above the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition has acceded to power with a major objective of reducing the public finance deficit and placing future public spending on a new footing. Services should be delivered by a mix of private, not for profit and public providers. This is not itself new but the anticipated future size of the public and third sector is under major scrutiny, with a strong sense that public sector organisations will be at best enabling of others, at worst a picture where the state is a residual function dealing only with security, safety and help for the deserving very poor in extremis. This image of what Holden calls administrative recommodification (Holden, 2003) if it comes to pass, will align reality with early New Right formulations of the state posited by Hayek and Freidman in informing Thatcherite and Reaganite policies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. We shall

for now assume a more temperate roll out of Coalition's reformulation of the public sector, one based on carefully targeted budgeting for those services best delivered by a more efficient and responsive public sector. Indeed all alternative policy explanatories are also evident, one premised in tackling unfairness and the waste of dependency:

'Instead of helping, a deeply unfair benefits system too often writes people off. The proportion of people parked on inactive benefits has tripled in the past 30 years to 41% of the inactive working age population. That is a tragedy' (Duncan-Smith, May 2010)

This may at first glance be viewed as an extension of the pragmatism embodied in Blairite third way policy. Alternatively it may be viewed as a return to a Thatcherite emphasis on a fundamental review of the size and relationship between the public-private/third sectors. Certainly the reduction of the public sector is a key plank of coalition policy and the observation that the state drained the creative energy of private entrepreneurship. Criticisms of welfare seem at the heart of these new political imperatives. A more critical point would view the new welfare discourses as similar to those commonly stated during the Thatcherite era that the fundamental problem of welfare is that the poor are too well off and business too severely stymied by high taxation. The reality is perhaps more complex in that a close reading of proposed coalition policy, its' emphasis on welfare reform, work first and reduced dependency follows closely New Labour policies. Continuity rather than fundamental policy change seems to sum up the coalition approach. However, as New Labour explicitly continued aspects of the neo-liberal project between 1997-2007 this is yet another incremental development in the project.

The new secretary of state for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan-Smith has made clear the intention to make work pay and to disincentivise out-of-work benefits. The mooting of workfare style programmes and penalties for failure to look for work suggest a toughening of approaches to welfare reform. The coalition government do defend their policy stance with commitments to reduce poverty which is linked to worklessness. These proposed changes have significant implications for disabled people given their greater reliance on out of work benefits, housing benefits than non-disabled people. The extra costs of disability have to date not been factored into any calculations of the benefits of paid work over benefits. Whilst discourses and media coverage of both incapacity (now employment support allowance) and Disability Living Allowance have arguably created the most negative public perception of the link between disability and welfare experienced in post WW2 Britain.

A key target for policy reform are those disabled people claiming Employment Support Allowance (ESA), a key out-of-work benefit. More differentiated approaches have already been introduced to establish those disabled people too sick/disabled to work, those that should move rapidly into work or mainstream jobseekers allowance and a review group who will face continual Work Capability Assessment and it is assumed many will be moved off ESA where work capability is in evidence even in the absence of paid work. This would represent a hardening of welfare policy and a substantive shift to the Right in UK policy. Those ESA recipients deemed closest to the labour market and allocated to the Work Related Activity Group will have their claim limited to one year. The key benefits that make work possible for those on low income are also however being reappraised. Housing benefit will be capped at a modest level. This will likely impact negatively on those disabled people in high cost areas housing support. The value of housing benefit in enhancing disabled people's household finances is beyond question. Any tightening of eligibility for new housing benefit claimants will likely impact negatively on disabled contemplating entry to lower paid work. Government limits on mortgage interest payments is likely to be perceived in a similar light for those disabled people with mortgage agreements who may be worried about future loss of mortgage interest support if they have to leave the labour market at some point. The coalition government is to introduce a universal credit that aims to incentive greater access to work and hours build up. The exact impact of the universal credit on the 5 million claimants is very hard to gauge. The benefit withdrawal rate is all important here with initial details suggesting a benefits withdrawal of 65/100 as opposed to the current 75/100. However, as Nick Pearce (IPPR, 2010) has noted, job creation and support is not receiving the same degree of attention as welfare reform.

Of note the government is planning scrapping the currently complex array of work programmes for disabled people-for example New Deal, Work Step, Work Preparation. This is of course welcomed. It intends to introduce a single Work Programme for all out of work benefit claimants. Although the detail is limited, it appears some disabled people closer to the labour market will be supported via this single gateway of support. For disabled people with more obvious support needs a Work Choice programme is being introduced to provide intensive support. The details provided on intensive support suggest CV writing, brokerage and closer working with employers will form the main support activities. In truth these forms of support were available under previous schemes (DWP, 2011), whilst the more hands-on approach to employers seems at odds with the proposed reinterpretation of disability

discrimination legislation which may be viewed as reducing the power of ADL in the disability field (Cabinet Office, 2011). No figures are available for the savings of an additional entry of large numbers of disabled people into paid work as although full savings will be evident where someone enters work full-time, where extra hours are worked and withdrawal rates made to benefit the claimant, this will obviously carry an continued cost. How the costs/benefits of full and partial exit from out-of-work benefits will play out is hard to judge at this stage. The key gamble being made by the coalition government is that work will be available to match disabled people's entry to the labour market.

The key assertion that benefits are more attractive than paid work because of disincentives in the benefits system is borne out by some evidence (OECD, 2003) however this report also failed to find one key fiscal incentive programme or approach across OECD countries that substantially improved disabled people's path to paid work. The government does however plan to increase tax allowances for low income earners from April 2011 which may benefit some disabled people. Also helpful may be the reforming of Access to Work a key workplace support fund to allow funding before a job is secured so that a disabled person can enter employment with support in place. The exact role of employer contribution, a current feature of the scheme is unclear at this point. However we do know that disabled people's educational deficits are one important factor in competing in the labour market. Substantial and prolonged support for educational gains for disabled people would likely cost significant investment at a time of major retraction of public services. Local labour market conditions are closely linked to rates of out-of-work disability benefit recipients, research (Beatty and Fothergill, 2004) points to the absence of job opportunities, benefit traps and also cycles of worklessness all being important. Harsher welfare regimes in the absence of greater employment opportunities will simply lead to movement on to less generous benefits (typically Job Seekers Allowance), an important policy consideration where genuine extra costs are no longer met. Similarly entry into low paid work without additional cost benefit entitlement may increase levels of in work poverty for some disabled people. We lack evidence on current reasons why disabled jobseekers may be deterred from keeping paid work opportunities. Evidence from the mainstream jobseekers allowance population of churning, repeat entry and exit to the jobs market suggests that sustained employment for some disabled people leaving ESA may be limited. This may be to do with both personal factors such as condition flare ups, but also workplace barriers and poor work. The governmental position that work is inherently an aid to social betterment can ignore the often poor working

conditions created by poor employment practices such as zero hours contracts, frequent lay offs and contract ends due to some employers exploiting job subsidies.

Perhaps the most surprising development has been the government's commitment to reassessing all current Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claims by 2013. DLA mobility and care components provide key forms of support for extra costs related to getting about and getting support. DLA is widely envied even by commentators in high income countries (Mitra, 2011) as meeting additional costs without a means test and available both in/out of paid working conditions. The exact reasons for reviewing DLA claimants is less clear than for say ESA as DLA is generally claimed by those with more obvious and enduring impairments. All DLA claimants have already been assessed as eligible for the benefit, although differential levels of award are made depending on levels of 'disability'. This is clearly an attempt to review the threshold for support and the development is clearly premised on the view that access to DLA has been too generous. There is no evidence available to support this assertion. Concerns attach to human rights implications of exiting people with very significant need. This is borne out by the high levels of appeals for refused claims and the use of controversial assessment providers who some have claimed are driven by targets for benefit withdrawal. If this is true this would go against the principles that underpinned extra payments benefits from the early 1970s in the UK. The government has also said it would prioritise the review of working age DLA recipients who are not in paid work. This fundamentally misinterprets DLA as an extra payments benefit and not a work related payment. Indeed DLA eligibility attaches to both those working age claimants who are/not in paid work. DLA is also being withdrawn from current recipients living in residential accommodation. This will see the withdrawal of benefits for over 50, 000 claimants. The exact reasons for this withdrawal nowhere clear, however governmental comments align the withdrawal with loss of DLA whilst in hospital. These are quite different contexts however, and although social care may be funded in residential care, living options in getting out and being part of the wider community arguably necessitates the continued payment of the benefit. This seems a particularly harsh and regressive policy move.

For those with the highest levels of social support needs the news that around 2 billion pounds is being made available to support adult social by 2014/15. The Disabled Facilities Grant, a means tested fund supporting accessible homes is being increased from 169 million in 2010/11 to 185 million in

2014/15. These commitments are welcomed by some disability organizations, but the timetable, in taking the commitments to 2014/15 has prompted concerns that actual uplifts in 2011/12 will not be anything approaching this sum. This news comes in the wake of major reviews on the funding in this area-the Wanless Review and the Sutherland Review. An ageing population, personalization and user led organizations (ULOs) of course are all premised on further budgetary investment. Arguably however, these extra monies will bolster an already very strained budget for adult social support-with a number of ULOs and Centres for Integrated/inclusive living (CILs) under threat and many local authorities now restricting their funding to the top category of eligibility (NCIL, 2008). It seems reasonable to assume that wider local authority budget cuts in the Rate Support Grant (Local Government Association, 2010) and the reliance for up to half the new monies coming from health budgets that adult social are funding is likely to be extremely limited in the next 2 years. The figure of circa 500 thousand less jobs in the public sector is unlikely to leave to leave social care funding unscathed. New developments sit alongside withdrawn services. For example, personal budgets (allowing a mix of direct use and officially provided services) are being extended to children. Of note, recent evidence from the Audit Commission points to lower than anticipated take up of personal budgets. The Independent Living Fund, a fund providing funding for the most complex needs will no longer be taking new applicants as the scheme is gradually withdrawn. This requires monitoring, whilst direct payments may be seen to have superseded the ILF as a delivery mechanism for such packages of support.

The Coalition aims to end the Child Trust Fund for disabled children and will likely redirect funding to direct payments for children and carers to provide greater respite care and hospice provision, with an extra 10 million per annum from 2011. Whilst welcome these are essentially funded relief to prevent deterioration, however the funding makes no connection to positive empowering life choices. The government's statements on education are arguably the most worrying aspect of their proposed reforms. With little evidence to back up their assertions, the coalition government have stated: 'We will improve diagnostic assessment for schoolchildren, prevent the unnecessary closure of special schools and remove the bias towards inclusion'. What is meant by removing the bias towards inclusion' is entirely unclear-how inclusion, a key plank of child policy for 13 years can now be viewed as a bad thing begs major questions on the underlying philosophical changes in some parts of the coalition.

Overall the emergency budget of May 2010 and Comprehensive Spending Review outcomes in November present some positive developments for disabled people. However the pledges of increased spending by 2014/15 seems to offer 'jam tomorrow' for many disabled adults. The ability to fund these uplifts seems heavily dependent upon reduced benefit payments given the wider fiscal squeeze on spending to 2015. This is a major gamble with the public finances. The ability to encourage more disabled people into paid work whilst respecting their human rights to good treatment and not being forced to take poverty level benefits is a very real one. Critics have tended to view the rhetoric of the ending of the tragic waste of disabled worklessness as simply a smokescreen to save money and redefine the disability category regardless of the altered economic position of those moved out of the more generous disability benefits (Roulstone, 2011). The proposed cuts in health and social care risks reversing hard won debates around personalised and enabling packages in the form of direct payments and personal budgets. The narrowing of eligibility already under way is likely to continue in the absence of new monies for adult social care. Disabled people are disproportionately reliant upon the public sector for their support as private profit margins are rarely attractive enough for major private sector interest. The coalition government's faith in a renewed private sector and shrunken public sector has major implications for disabled people. The remaining period of the coalition's term in office will demonstrate the effectiveness of their new policy blueprint.

Reflection

The above has suggested that new developments have taken place in the wake of the Coalition's accession to office; however these can be viewed as a further development and consolidation of neo-liberalism. The post-war welfare settlement, whilst not in total reverse, is being severely challenged. The protective state is being recast as the sapping and dependent state. These ideas are not new, the confidence and vigour of their advocates is new however. A careful reading of the Coalition's response to myriad academic criticisms across a swath of policies also points to arguably the strongest-anti-intelligentsia ethos in government in living memory. Advisors are nowadays more likely to come from self made entrepreneurs, venture capitalists and asset strippers and without a twinge of embarrassment. Research agendas are being recast to service UK PLC. Policy is often remade with scant attention to the available evidence. This has severe consequences.

Disabled people are more likely to need public services. Evidence spanning over 20 years suggests firmly that poverty, social isolation, worklessness are

all more prevalent amongst disabled people (OPCS, 1989; WHO & World Bank, 2011). They are also more likely to work in the public sector and may be first to be jettisoned in the cutbacks (Thornton & Sainsbury, 2005). As early as 1958 the US liberal economist Kenneth Galbraith (no firebrand he) noted that the shift from public to private solutions in an affluent society has greater implications for the poor, those that cannot choose where to live, how to get around and buy alternatives (Galbraith, 1958).

The shift towards a mixed economy, one where the private and third sectors predominate, will have major implications for many disabled people. The third sector is innovative, it has to be, but its' reliance on soft money and short-term funding leads to project and expertise waste (Thornton, Barnes, & Maynard-Campbell, 1998). The private sector can be responsive, but many disabled people do not represent the affluent middle as Galbraith dubbed the consumer mainstream that markets are so driven to serve. Some disabled people, those who don't meet the severest of need assessments and who are reliant on basic income replacement benefit will of necessity be drawn to state support more generally. The shift to a residual state alongside these wider dynamics will risk leaving some disabled people further isolated from social safety nets and support options. We can view Coalition policy as a harmless and temporary rebalancing exercise and changes to the social support fabric temporary. Alternatively, we could in accepting incremental shifts to neo-liberalism, be sleepwalking into a market economy akin the USA where support is highly contingent, inconsistent and for some non-existent. Disabled and sick people must be afforded humane, fair and sustained support where they meet minimum thresholds of impairment/need. The attempt to shift who counts can be seen as a rather cynical piece of policy manoeuvring at a time where we continue to fund major discretionary projects such as space and conflict programmes. This may seem more radical than much current mainstream policy analysis; but at times of fiscal crises these sort of decisions need to be made. Disabled people ought not to bear the brunt of policy failure.

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