



From Welfare to Workfare - But is it Really Fair?

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The welfare states role was based on protection and providing provisions for citizens when it was first created (Gordon, 1998). However, this has shifted dramatically, and increased neoliberal input has been one of the driving forces for these changes (Grover and Soldatic, 2013). This critical reflection will explore neoliberalism's effect on some of the most vulnerable people in society, those with disabilities. One of the main focusses here will be on policies aimed at placing people back into work. This will open discussions of a shift from the Welfare State, to a Workfare State based on regulation (Finn, 2001; Carter and Rayner, 1996). The basis of this reflection will be to explore the ideas around increased regulation of the disabled, through neoliberalism in the United Kingdom. However, due to the mobilisation of neoliberalism over the world there may be similarities in the welfare regimes of differing societies (Grover and Soldatic, 2013).

Neoliberalism is a capitalist form, and the main shift to neoliberalism within western societies

was in the 1970's (Harvey, 2005). To fully analyse the effect of neoliberalism on the disabled, we must first understand how neoliberalism works. Neoliberalism as a hegemonic project, whereby elitism is pushed

onto the world through processes of consent and willingness from non-elite actors, is a common view (Springer, 2012). However, there are other forms of neoliberalism including 'policy and programme', which focus on privatisation, corporate ideals, profiteering and monetarism, all of which are mobilised by the state (Springer, 2012; Harvey, 2005). This causes public sectors to become privatised, whereby care is

increasingly provided within private realms to increase profits for the state/economy (Carter and Rayner, 1996). Additionally, Harvey (2005) suggests neoliberal focus is on deregulation, and state withdrawal, alongside contractual, privatised, marketisation.

Echoing this, is neoliberalism as 'state form', whereby state capacities are rolled back, causing an increase in policing and invasive roles (Springer, 2012). This is reflected within

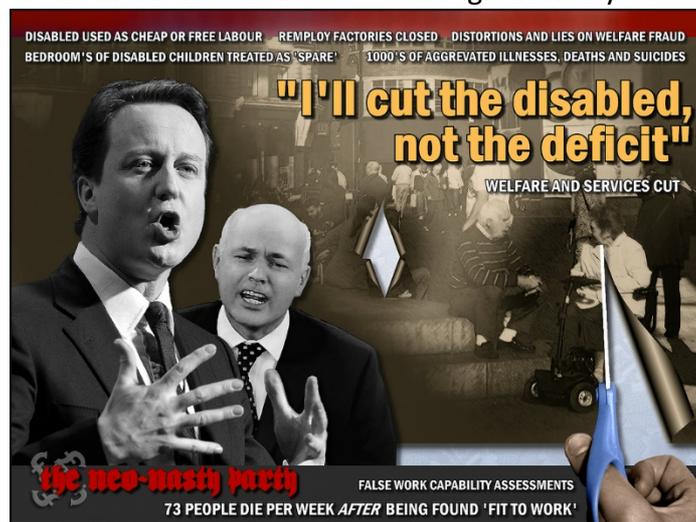


application processes for welfare state benefits, as disabled individuals are increasingly policed and forced to repeatedly prove their limitations (Legislation.gov.uk, 2013). Neoliberalism as policy and programme, and state form will be linked and applied to disability welfare within this reflection.

Some of the ways in which disabled individuals are 'helped' (policed) back into the world of work is through increasing regulations on welfare. This is shown through the change from benefits being available for life, to an undisclosed period, opening the possibility of them becoming able for work in the future (Legislation.gov.uk, 1999).

This is further exemplified by the regulations placed on disabled people; work-based interviews have become compulsory for all claimants, and if missed then the claims are rejected

deeming the individual unemployed and legally able to work (Legislation.gov.uk, 1999). Other regulations placed on disabled people under neoliberal welfare reforms include monthly payments rather than weekly. Individuals will have to wait longer for their benefits, making their monetary income more insecure on top of waiting for their claim to go through the system and be accepted (Legislation.gov.uk, 2016). This is because monetary income is not entitled until this process has been completed. (Legislation.gov.uk, 2013/1992).



Alongside this is the increasing intensity of the assessment criteria, shown in the shift from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment (PIP). On the previous benefit only 6 criteria were involved in the assessment process (Legislation.gov.uk, 1992). However, with PIP, limitations must be proven on numerous occasions, and evidenced within a period of one month from the start of the claim, otherwise there is the threat of benefits sanctions or claim rejection (Legislation.gov.uk, 2013. Connor, 2010). Also, there is the threat of losing support if individuals did not go back to work, even though in many cases this is against doctors'

orders, reflecting the PIPs push to re-prove limitations (Alston, 2018).

Aims for profit is one of the main issues between neoliberalism and welfare, as welfare costs are often reduced to meet these aims (Carter

and Rayner, 1996). Ways in which this is done is through welfare-to-work schemes, as state costs will be lower with reduced welfare claimants (Finn, 2001). Many of these workfare schemes redraw the disability category, increasing the difficulty to be perceived as a disabled individual (Grover and Soldatic, 2013. Grover and Piggott, 2005). Alongside this, is a shift of welfare role, to further scapegoating the vulnerable in society (Hughes, 2015).

In some cases, the stigmatised disabled in society are viewed as second-class, counterfeit citizens, undeserving of state help (Hughes,

2015). This is due to neoliberal views suggesting that unemployment is always a voluntary choice (Harvey, 2005). This reflects the views of a society centred on working, therefore, disabled people are invalidated, marginalised, labelled as unnecessarily dependant and desperate (Hughes, 2015; Gordon, 1998; Alston, 2018).

This view underpins many changes to welfare assessments and workfare reforms. It could be argued that the disabled are resented by neoliberalism due to their dependence (Hughes, 2015; Finn, 2001). Neoliberalism forms as stated above, view the disabled as having no value in a society based around

markets, they are a financial problem, and are confined to 'waste' (Bauman, 2004). To be confined to 'waste' includes task exclusion and a push towards invisibility in

society (Bauman, 2004). Bauman (2004) suggests there is too much 'waste' in society, so to reduce it, differences are perpetuated, pushing the disabled further into oblivion, to benefit neoliberalism and marketisation.

One-way disability differences are perpetuated is through benefit applications. All individuals on welfare are deemed to be a *claimant*, one of the synonyms of claimant, which I believe quite fitting to neoliberal disability portrayal is: *pretender* (Collinsdictionary.com, n.d.). Disability pretence assumption is shown through benefit assessment criteria individuals must go

through, as they are likened to lie detector tests, treating people as cheaters to the system (Hughes, 2015; Grover and Piggott, 2005). Those who are deemed pretenders are placed into the unemployment category instead of the disabled one which they had aimed for. However, often this work is precarious, part time, temporary and low paid (Grover and Soldatic, 2013; Mladenov, 2015). Also, with the dismantling of accessibility schemes such as Remploy, disabled people were pushed further into work uncertainty, within an open post-Fordist marketplace to access work on their own accord (Connor, 2010). Something to note however, is the shift

of these marketplaces from Fordist mass-production into Post-Fordist craft-production (Carter and Rayner, 1996). This has opened many opportunities for disabled people

in terms of working (Grover and Piggott, 2005). However, there are some difficulties with Post-Fordism for disabled people, as new market conditions and emerging technologies may not be accessible for the disabled majority (Carter and Rayner, 1996). One example of inaccessibility is the digital-by-default benefits applications of which many cannot navigate due to mental or physical limitations (Alston, 2018).

Reflecting neoliberalism, ideals of Post-Fordism include flexibility and competition to strengthen the national economy (Carter and Rayner, 1996). This Post-Fordist shift links with



neoliberalism nicely, as after 1979, more welfare industries were introduced under Thatcher, whereby welfare was self-served and commodified (Carter and Rayner, 1996). This also links with the shift towards a Workfare State, as benefit regimes are pushing individuals into Post-Fordist labour processes, and jobs that nobody wants (Finn, 2001). This is further enhanced with the partnerships between the government and businesses for providing jobs within their workfare schemes - and private sectors have been noted to be the best at providing these employment zones for individuals who are out of work (Finn, 2001). To achieve these ideals then the labour force must involve themselves in this competition and have the means of being flexible. For Post-Fordism, flexibility includes, working 0-hour contracts and being in insecure positions (Grover and Soldatic, 2013; Mladenov, 2015). The disabled are the most likely people to be pushed into these positions, and in many societies, they are the people you can pay the least wages to (Grover and Piggott, 2005). Tory MP Phillip Davies suggested that this should be the case in the UK, he suggests that disabled individuals should get less than the minimum wage because they are a risk and less productive than the general employee (Stratton, 2011). However, he argues this will increase the likelihood that they will get work because of this, as low pay is an incentive for



employment (Stratton, 2011). This is the welfare reform's agenda, to place people back into work even if it is for a short period of time (Grover and Piggott, 2005). As people even away from the world of work for a short period are no longer seen as being needed in society (Bauman, 2004). To put it bluntly, "they are 'out', but only temporarily – their 'staying out' is an abnormality that commands and musters a cure; they clearly need to be helped 'back in' as soon as possible" (Bauman, 2004: 71). To conclude, there has been an increase in regulation on disabled individuals under welfare/workfare reforms, assessment, eligibility policing, and a shift towards placing disabled individuals in precarious work. This is all in the interests of neoliberalism, especially under the forms discussed here: 'state form' and 'policy and programme'. This has caused a shift in the categorisation of disabilities, and disabled people's access to first class citizenship (Grover and Soldatic, 2013). Due to the society we live in being centred around work, in the future, these categorisations may change again, hopefully for the better. This however does not seem like it will be the case as disabled individuals in most cases are unable to participate in the labour market. However, this will not stop further welfare change and neoliberal regimes trying to push them back into it.

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