

**Blairfare:
Third-Way Disability and Dependency in Britain**

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Introduction

In this paper we intend to explore the social policy changes in relation to disabled people which are taking place in the United Kingdom, particularly since the election of the Labour government on May 1, 1997. We intend to first examine the key differences between this government and previous administrations and then to describe the policy changes which have occurred. We shall describe certain historical aspects of British social policy which are relevant to our analysis, a description that itself will involve an evaluation of the power structures that are emerging. The term which has been commonly used to describe this government's approach to economic and social policy is the "third way" and, while we acknowledge the value of this term in that it implies an alternative to either a collectivist or anti-collectivist approach to welfare (George and Wilding 1976), we have chosen to describe the policies we are examining as "Blairfare." This term, a combination of Prime Minister Tony Blair's last name and welfare, is intended to signify the rather personal character of "the third way" in Britain.

Globalisation and the Nation-State

For the past couple of years, the United Kingdom has had a Labour government but, unlike the experience of previous Labour and Conservative administrations, under the leadership of Prime Minister Blair we have been witnessing one of the greatest constitutional shake-ups this century. At the root of these changes is the acceptance by Tony Blair and some of his closest allies of the inevitability of some of the consequences of the globalisation of capital, a position which has disturbed many on the left of British politics (for example Held, 1998). However, given that the only serious challenge to Blair's position as leader of the largest post-war majority in the House of Commons could come from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, who shares Blair's views in this respect, this government have pressed ahead with a range of measures which will change the structure of politics in the United Kingdom and will, most importantly, reduce the role of the nation-state.

To date such measures have included: various levels of devolution in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland; the introduction of proportional representation in elections to these assemblies and to the European parliament; the relinquishing of political control over monetary policy to the Bank of England; the first stages of the abolition of hereditary peers in the House of Lords; and a positively friendly approach to the possibility of joining the single European currency, probably in the next parliament. (Given the current state of turmoil in the Conservative Party, it seems inevitable that Blair will be returned for a second term in either 2001 or 2002). While each of these changes has its own peculiarities, together they add up to a nation which is shifting the level at which much of its decision-making takes place. On the one hand, we have moved further into the European Union in order to maintain some influence within the global economy for it is only at this level that the institutions of regulation (Grover and Stewart 1999) can operate. At the same time,

the need for people to feel in some way in control of their own lives is met by the various levels of devolution.

One of the major impacts of globalisation throughout the world has been the diminishing ability of nation-states to determine their own levels of welfare. Given the speed with which capital can move from one country or continent to another, there has been growing pressure for some form of welfare harmonisation, at least in terms of the costs to the taxpayer - particularly the global corporate tax-payers. The acceptance of the inevitability of globalisation, therefore, carries with it an acceptance of the loss of authority to self-determine the levels of welfare in individual countries; and this inevitably leads to a new emphasis in the role of government. Rather than viewing itself as a tax-raising body with the responsibility to identify social need, and then acting on behalf of its citizens, the hands of government have become tied. What they are left with is the ability to redistribute that expenditure which can be tolerated by the global economy; and this has led to some of the more radical proposals now emanating from this "new Labour"¹ government - policies which have become known as "the third way."

The Third Way and Welfare

We intend to take an empiricist approach in looking at what New Labour² has done in Britain in the name of the third way in order to ascertain the characteristics of that approach to welfare. At this stage, we only intend to describe the initiatives and then assess them after some further discussion about the nature of social policy in Britain.

What exactly the third way may be and, more particularly, what it may be in relation to disability policy is difficult to determine from *simply* reading the literature. If we start with the writings of the self-professed guru of the subject, Anthony Giddens (1998), we learn that the third way is neither socialism nor capitalism; but quite what it is requires some explication. Giddens identifies three factors which are responsible for the "late-modernity" in which we find ourselves: globalisation; social reflexivity; and de-traditionalisation. The third way envisages a renewal of social democracy which is informed by philosophical *conservatism*. The third way's *socialist* values are not redistributive, but rather the values of compassion and caring-benevolence.

In operationalising the third way Giddens envisages what is termed a "utopian realist" political programme. The utopianism restricts itself to simply believing in a promising future whilst the realist political element of the programme will address a selection of actual trends in society, rather than legislating about what ought to be. The programme of the third way replaces the welfare state with the social-investment state - necessary because past institutions were developed for the industrial era and we are now in a new world-order of globalisation and informed, autonomous people. Giddens believes we need political and social institutions which respond to new circumstances, the main one being: risk. In the past, the welfare state responded to *external* risks such as unemployment; but today, risk is manufactured by human interventions created by late-modernity (divorce, career changes, and such like). And so, claims Giddens, the welfare state needs policies that enable people to help themselves. Equality has been redefined from a goal or an outcome to a set of opportunities for overcoming exclusion from global cosmopolitanism. The social-investment state must develop new policies that allow *us*, as individuals, to cruise through the risks of late modernity. The policies are said to be those of the active labour market which invests in human capital through lifelong learning and education. Later, as we explain the new-Labour programme, it will be noted how its politicians may be "on-message" in polemic though they stray from objectives in practice.

Darendorf (1998) argues that it may be a mistake to treat the third way as a quest for a single new ideology as this is something we could never find. Instead, the practice of the third way may involve 101 ways and the government should follow whichever is right in the circumstances at a particular point in time. Such pragmatism does not necessarily deny the existence of a third-way project; rather, it confirms the complexity involved in attempting to identify its components.

In relation to disability, there are five major policy developments which deserve consideration. First is the New Deal, which was introduced to tackle long-term unemployment and was extended to include disabled people. The New Deal consists of direct help from officials in employment applications and interview preparation and it may include re-training courses for individuals. There are also financial incentives for employers to recruit people to whom this policy applies. Further money is available to assist organisations and individuals to set up new businesses.

The New Deal was one of the main planks of the Labour election campaign alongside the promise to invest in education and to rid government of the corruption it was suffering under the Conservatives. New Deal measures were initially funded by the windfall tax which sought to reclaim some of the excessive profits that had been made through the privatisation of state businesses, such as water, electricity and gas, as well as British Telecom and British Airways. Despite the expected whinging of the very rich who would have to pay this tax, it was considered both a fair and necessary measure by the electorate who also recognised the need to do something creative about what had become a structural problem - long term unemployment:

In Labour's first Budget, we raised 3.5 billion [sterling] to spend on our welfare to work programme. Over the coming months we are extending the New Deal to new groups: the long-term unemployed, partners of the unemployed, and disabled people. Helping those who cannot work is a mark of a civilised society. The Government believes that those who are disabled should get the support they need to lead a fulfilling life with dignity. The Labour Government has given to disabled people a right which has been denied to them for too long - the right to work. Many people with a disability or long term illness are simply not in a position to undertake work. Our commitment to their welfare is unwavering. (Labour Party 1998)

The second new policy development under Blair's third way concerns education. The slogan of the election campaign emphasised that new Labour had three priorities: education, education, and education. The main thrust of these education policies was to end some of the schemes that the Conservatives had set up for the privileged classes by extending nursery education to all three- and four-year-olds and by reducing class sizes in primary education. Appointing David Blunkett, who is himself blind, as Secretary of State for Education did lead to a more personal commitment to the concept of inclusive education for disabled children. In October 1997 when launching the government green paper *Excellence for all Children - Meeting Special Educational Needs* (SEN), Blunkett made clear his opposition to segregated education and announced his intention to reduce the numbers of children in special schools:

This Green Paper proposes practical steps - including the use of information and communications technology to bring about a transformation in the way we help children with special educational needs. We want to see: basic problems tackled earlier and more effectively; more children with SEN in mainstream schools; and those in special schools not necessarily to be there throughout their school career. (Blunkett 1997)

The third area of third-way policy reform is that of housing. Since 1974, the United Nations has recommended the building of homes to an adaptable standard (i.e., designed so as to be easily modified for disabled persons' access); but most countries in Europe, including the United Kingdom, failed to implement this recommendation. And although the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 sought to ensure that a range of *public* buildings were accessible, in reality this has never been as widespread a practice as would be wished. For instance, many

disabled people are still being denied access even to polling stations. However, following a long campaign by disabled people's organisations, and research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Cobbold 1997), the action of new Labour since coming to power has been to enforce the building regulations to ensure adaptable standards to private dwelling houses. This policy will have come into effect in the autumn of 1999 (DETR, 1998), as this journal goes to press.

The fourth Blair development is in the area of social security and has led to some of the most angry demonstrations against this government. In May 1999, in fact, it led to a revolt by 65 back-benchers in the House of Commons. As for social security benefits to disabled people, there has been a number of strands to the government's approach. The new administration at first continued with what was known as the Integrity Project, a scheme started by the previous Conservative government which aimed to reassess entitlement for the Disability Living Allowance (DLA)³. The zeal with which the Project's officers undertook the review of entitlement criteria was so damaging that it led to disability organisations refusing to talk with the government. The scheme has subsequently been abandoned (Stewart et al. 1999).

Early in the life of the government, some ministers considered removing the DLA completely and, instead, giving the money to local authorities in order to increase the quantity of services they could provide. This plan, which reflects the traditional service approach of old Labour (Sapey and Oliver 1999), was abandoned - in part, because of opposition from Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, who has a strong constituency in the grassroots of the Labour Party and whose allegiance Blair requires. Further plans included ending the Industrial Injuries Benefit, but, again, this faced opposition from within the cabinet, leading to this comment from Blunkett:

Deep cuts in the totality of support for those disabled people who either cannot work or can find only very modestly paid work, would make a mockery of our [position] on social exclusion and the construction of a more just society.
(*Independent* 22.12.97)

In May 1999, the House of Commons did approve, albeit in the face of the back-bench revolt, a bill which will lead to cuts in the payment of Incapacity Benefit which is paid to people unable to work due to their disability. The issues here are interesting for, while the cuts have been altogether opposed by large sections of the disabled people's movement, the government argues for a restriction of this benefit to people who are unable to work rather than to disabled people who are unemployed-but-employable. This position does have some resonance with a civil-rights perspective.

The fifth and final area of the Blair-government policy developments under the New Deal concerns the legislation on disability discrimination itself. The previous, Conservative government had used procedural devices to prevent the passage of such a civil-rights bill, a bill well-supported by disabled people. The protests were so great, following the Conservatives' action to squelch anti-discrimination legislation, that the Conservatives were forced to introduce their own bill which became the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act. However, due to the concessions that had been made to business interests, the legislation was toothless (Gooding 1996). For one thing, it lacked an effective Commission which could bring cases to court and, most importantly, the bill was based upon an individual model of the disability condition.

The new Labour administration was charged with implementing this Act, but after consultation with disabled people, Blair's cabinet moved to set up a Disability Rights Commission Task Force which would include strong representation from the disabled people's movement. The Task Force's final report is yet to appear although the Commission has actually been formed. To date, the legislation has not been amended in any way, although the Act defines both illegal discrimination against disabled people (in terms of employment in certain circumstances) and *legal* discrimination! Great Britain remains, therefore, in a situation somewhat contradictory to the expectations of anti-discrimination legislation in force in other countries.

Furthermore, one of the new Labour government's early actions was to set up the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) whose purpose is to provide joined up policies for the inclusion within mainstream economic structures of various groups of disadvantaged people. In its ambitious brief, the SEU ranges across and attempts to include all policy-making and service-delivery agencies. At present, this unit concerns itself with young, single mothers and with youth, generally, as well as with "rough sleepers" and disadvantaged communities. But the SEU has not extended its remit to disabled people specifically. As we shall see later, the government's concern appears to be limited to cases involving exclusion from employment.

Functionalism and Social Administration

British social welfare has its roots firmly placed within functionalism. Indeed, the development of social administration from the years before the Great War (1914-18) has been an uncritical study of social services. It was not until the 1970s that any serious challenge to this tradition was unleashed. Even with the massive expansion of the social services in the post-war construction of the modern welfare state, the study of social administration remained essentially the same. The point of social administrative study was to advance welfare services by producing information which could be directly used by policy makers and campaigners who wished to implement changes. The doyens of this tradition might have protested that the subject could only be understood in the context of the whole economic, social, and political scheme of a particular society; but they rarely followed this through in their own analyses. Thus, social administration can be characterised as being partial and parochial, seldom moving outside London for evidence of need. In this tradition social policy was studied in isolation from the theories, perspectives and insights provided by sociology, politics, and economics.

The key components of the social administration tradition were these: a belief that there was a consensus in society around goals in an identifiable field labeled social policy; a rationalist view of how policy is made; and a naive belief in the benign, disinterested character of state institutions. The principal architect of the British welfare system was William Beveridge whose report *Social Security and Allied Services* (Beveridge 1942) was to be implemented by the post-war Labour government which was euphoric with the idea of replacing the 19th-century poor laws with a system based on universalism. The staunchest defenders of Beveridge, the welfare state, and the academic discipline of social administration were the academics at the London School of Economics (LSE), led by Richard Titmuss who was Professor there from 1951 to 1973 and who provided the seminal accounts of the subject (for example, see Titmuss 1963, 1974). In what is becoming a British tradition, rather like our royal ceremonial, the new director of the LSE, Anthony Giddens, can be seen as assuming the Titmuss role of apologist and proponent for the (new) welfare state.

Demythologising universalism has been the method of the principle critique of the welfare state - to show how the Beveridge Report of the 1940s, and the administrative measures which flowed from it, were based on structural racism and sexism (Williams 1989). For one thing, the Beveridge plan made assumptions that married women would be at home, looking after male breadwinners and other dependents, by stating: "The attitude of the housewife to gainful employment outside the home is not and should not be the same as that of the single woman. She has other duties." (Beveridge 1942, para. 114) And that: "... maternity is the principal object of marriage." (*ibid.* para. 109)

It is clear from the Report that married women were to be treated as dependents of their husbands. Their status as mothers was in the national interest and, in a phrase which wraps patriarchy up with racism, Beveridge states: "In the *next thirty years*, housewives as mothers have vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British race and of British ideals in the world" (*ibid.* para. 117, emphasis added). It now seems prophetic that Beveridge limited his 1940-version of patriarchy to 30 years, as the feminist critique would begin precisely in the 1970s!

The criticisms of the welfare state do not end here. Disabled people have claimed that

services are provided within a framework which does not recognise structural oppression (Oliver 1990, Barnes 1991). As social problems became defined into needs (for which, it was argued, there should be services), experts were drafted, in the social-administration tradition, to provide a specialist service for whatever particular group had been targeted. This type of crudely reactive strategy has proved unhelpful, to say the least, principally because it has been so socially divisive. Barnes has described how the dependence of disabled people

... is compounded by the present system of health and social support services, most of which are dominated by the interests and concerns of professionals who run them and the traditional assumption that disabled people are unable to take charge of their own lives. (Barnes, 1991,;228)

The Act which started it off (National Assistance Act 1948, sec. 29) is, in fact, very thin on provisions and having put no serious critical thought into what the then-*new* welfare arrangements for "blind, deaf, dumb and crippled persons" might be about, social administrators simply conveyed the medical model of disability, which had served under the poor laws, and assumed that experts would deal with the intricacies of practice in relation to disabled people. Their thinking was dominated by a focus upon impairment, by the provision of aids and adaptations, and by providing institutions little more than a better class of workhouse.

Many of these criticisms arose from a resurgence of interest in Marxist ideas which undermined the intellectual base of traditional social administration by questioning the possibility of consensus over aims and objectives as well as questioning the independence of the state in promoting benevolent reforms. Such critical debate was located within the mainstream of sociological study which itself was emerging from functionalism. Critics were querying not only the purpose of various welfare measures, but whose purposes they were serving. The service providers of the welfare state began to be characterised as agents of social control, dependency, and patriarchy. It is not too far-fetched to suppose that if social administration had not radically reinvented itself at this time, it would have been swept aside by the powerfully explanatory and burgeoning critiques - of which feminism is probably the leader, but of which the social model of disability is certainly an influence. These two new social movements had both explanatory force and a commitment to welfare that were very different from the patrician order of traditional social administration.

Social policy can also be understood in terms of historical tensions between the opposing economic ideologies of collectivism and anti-collectivism (George and Wilding 1976). On this analysis, the resulting consensus, characterised as the reluctant collectivism of the Keynesian-Beveridge welfare state, supported an administrative system which provided for those who were unable to participate within the rigours of a capitalist economy, primarily to maintain a level of social cohesion. Disabled people were easily identifiable as "unable to participate within an industrial economy" and, as a consequence, became the recipients (or victims) of welfare. To some extent, they were pitied and considered deserving of welfare help, but not worthy of inclusion in the mainstream economy. Disabled people became welfare dependents.

Welfare and Power

As we move through the informational revolution (Castells 1996), the relationships of capital and labour are subjected to new pressures and are in the process of change. The position of some disabled people within this informational economy may have changed with their gaining greater access to employment through the availability of technology and with the changing nature of production. However, at a political level, the impact of globalisation has led to the beginnings of a third way in policy formation and this restricts the value of an analysis which proposes a polarisation of two ideological positions. The problem we are faced with, whether as recipients of welfare or as its administrators, is how to predict the impact of the changes that are occurring when

our analytic tools have been made redundant. We need instead to return to the fundamental question of "whose interests are served by welfare?"

The issue of power is central to the social model analysis of disability and it is of crucial significance in the relationships between disabled people, the welfare institutions, and the professions which service them. It is useful, therefore, to draw upon a concept of power relations to guide our analysis of third-way policies. Castells also views this power as a significant factor in analysing issues within the informational economy. His theoretical understanding of the operations of power lends itself to an analysis of disability policy:

The theoretical perspective underlying this approach postulates that societies are organised around human processes structured by historically determined relationships of production, experience, and power. Production is the action of humankind on matter (nature) to appropriate it and transfer it for its benefit by obtaining a product. . . . Experience is the action of human subjects on themselves. . . . It is constructed around the endless search for fulfillment of human needs and desires. Power is that relationship between human subjects which, on the basis of production and experience, imposes the will of some subjects upon others. . . . Institutions of society are built to enforce power relationships existing in each historical period, including the controls, limits, and social contracts achieved in the power struggles. (Castells 1996:14-15)

Historically, disabled people have been excluded from the processes of production and, therefore, to a great extent from its products. In this sense, they have clearly been the victims of power relationships which have sought to treat them as unproductive. Indeed, Oliver (1990) has argued that economic exclusion and social segregation following the industrial revolution have been the unchanging experience of disabled people and that these conditions have shaped their perception of their position in society. However, in relation to welfare, disabled people have not simply experienced power inequalities, but have been treated as the matter of production itself. Their experience is not just that of powerlessness, but of a dehumanising process within the role of a dysfunctional body. Gruesome administrative credibility was given to that interpretation by one English local authority, Castle Morpeth District Council, in August 1998 when the Council argued that it was not liable for the funeral expenses of a woman who had died in a private nursing home. The rationalization went like this:

Without wishing to appear insensitive, one could argue that from a commercial viewpoint, residents of a home are its income-producing raw material. Ergo, from a purely commercial view, deceased residents may then be regarded as being the waste produced by their business (Thomas 1998).

While the ombudsman described this theory as being far-fetched and insulting, what she failed to take into account was the extent to which the institutional rules governing both the running of nursing homes in the United Kingdom and the decision making over when such provisions will be used do in fact cause a situation in which disabled people are treated by the state simply in terms of their economic value to a production process - in this case, nursing. That welfare measures should have the effect of reducing the lives of disabled people to purely economic factors is hardly surprising bearing in mind that the institutions of capitalism drive the state to implement appropriate modes of social regulation in order to maintain or enhance capital's ability to prosper. What we should consider, therefore, is: who actually benefits through the provision of welfare? We shall now return to the five areas of policy which illustrate new Labour's approach to disabled people and evaluate them through an examination of the power relationships such policy engenders.

I. The New Deal

The aim of the New Deal, as we have stated, is to tackle the structural problems of long-term unemployment. The original scheme was extended to include disabled people who are excluded from taking part in economic life. So far, there is little to indicate that these measures address the real issues facing disabled people. An analysis of press releases from the government, claiming successes for the New Deal for disabled people, shows that some of those large corporations which funded the programme through the windfall tax are themselves the recipients of large sums of money which encourage them to take disabled people onto their workforce. It should be noted that, by the summer of 1999, the utilities had not actually paid the windfall tax, but had already received massive amounts in subsidy payments for New Deal employees. Social Security Minister Hugh Bayley said, when visiting a British Gas scheme in Manchester, "A key element of the scheme will be to provide a best practice model for use by other employers wanting to give jobs to disabled people" (Department of Social Security 1999).

Apart from this recycling of taxation being a third way in fiscal probity, and a back-door approach to state intervention, the notion that large profitable corporations which require state funding in order to overcome their antipathy to the employment of disabled people should become models of best practice does not augur well for the long-term success of changing attitudes through New Deal policy.

Other subsidies have gone to community organisations that have set up schemes to produce and sell craft-work. Social Security Minister Stephen Timms said, on visiting one such scheme, The Ideas Place in Grimsby, Humberside:

I am delighted that so many local employers have contributed in the setting up of the shop. It is encouraging to see such a team effort which will provide disabled people with the real opportunities they want, and I hope other employers will be encouraged to add their support. This is an exciting initiative in the heart of the community, offering real work experience which will lead to permanent jobs in the business community, for people who have not had those chances before. (Department of Social Security 1998)

A sceptic might ask about the similarities of these craft schemes to the occupational-therapy favorite, basket weaving, which was considered the solution to disabled people's employment by the post-war Labour government. Indeed, one of the main provisions of their first disability legislation, the National Assistance Act 1948, was for the mechanisms to ensure the sale of such craft work.

In terms of real jobs arising out of the New Deal for disabled people, in April 1999 it was reported that, of 1,364 people who had seen a personal advisor, only 50 had been successfully helped into jobs (*Disability Now* April 1999). Given the scale of the problem in the United Kingdom, this is simply a drop in the ocean of structural poverty. So, in terms of who is benefiting from the New Deal, it is possible to see that the corporations who were taxed are reclaiming those payments; that the organisations which promote the charitable view of disability are receiving subsidies for therapeutic-style busywork; while disabled people being helped into real jobs are noticeably few in number. In this respect, the third way is hardly different from either the first or second ways.

II. Education

The initial responses of the National Association of Schoolmasters and Women Teachers (one of the major teaching trade unions in the UK) to David Blunkett's statement about the inclusion of disabled children in mainstream schools were to protest that this would be disruptive to the education of other children and to threaten not to teach children with special educational

needs (Oliver and Sapey 1999). While Blunkett has not allowed this attitude to detract from his policy of inclusion and indeed he has been quite forthright in his challenging of the unions over a number of other issues, he has not attempted to change the legislation which, in fact, supports the unions in this approach. The 1981 Education Act, which makes provision for the inclusion of disabled children, clearly states that this should not detract from the education received by other children thereby making inclusive education not a matter of the needs of the disabled child, but dependent on those of non-disabled children. We would not expect to see any real evidence of the effectiveness of education policies for a while yet, but it is worth noting the scepticism of school governors, parents, and teachers over whether the money promised to schools is actually reaching them. Their view is that spending on education is more geared towards the political popularity of the Labour Party than to the needs of any children.

III. Housing

As we have said earlier, the main act of this government in relation to housing policy and disabled people has been the implementation of building regulations that will require private dwellings to be built to an adaptable standard. As the Construction Minister Nick Raynsford stated:

The extension of Part M [of the building regulations] is an important measure that complements this government's commitment to implement the remaining duties of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act. Part III will improve disabled people's access to goods and services, and Part M will ensure better access to new domestic dwellings. This is, therefore, a key obligation for this Government, which is committed to social inclusion. (DETR, 1998)

This is clearly the type of structural change which has been needed to ensure, in the long run, that disabled people have the opportunity of independent living. But physically accessible dwellings are only part of the story. We have argued elsewhere (Stewart et al. 1999) that the New Deal will determine whether disabled people have access to housing in a financial sense. However, the government's policy of subsidising the *rents* of social, rented housing, rather than subsidise their *building costs*, is serving to increase disabled people's dependency on state benefits. Over the 18 years of Conservative government in the United Kingdom, there was a general shift from a policy of subsidising the capital costs of dwellings (the bricks and mortar subsidy) to a reliance on individual tenants paying the subsidy through their rents (which would then be compensated through their individual claims for means-tested Housing Benefit). The levels of this payment have been restricted for groups of people considered non-deserving, while those considered deserving, including disabled people, have found their rents, and hence their levels of Housing Benefit, increasing. All would be fine if one were prepared to accept continued reliance upon this benefit in order to finance living somewhere; but latterly this has been recognised as symptomatic of dependency culture. Furthermore, escape from such dependency becomes ever more problematic. The effect of higher benefits as a transfer payment for higher rents is to strengthen the benefits-trap where any increase in income *through employment* leads automatically to a reduction in income through state benefits making employment financially unattractive. Here again, the new Labour government do not seem to be dealing with the structural problems of their policy even as they continue to protect the interests of landlords and property owners: again not much of an alternative third way.

IV. Social Security

One thing which has been clear since new Labour came to power has been their determination to make cuts in the social security budget - not necessarily to finance tax-cuts, but in order to make available money for spending on other programmes which they otherwise could not afford because of the limits on their tax-raising abilities. However, the cuts they need to make are to budgets which have reached their current size through incremental steps and which are perceived

as rights rather than benefits (Wildavsky 1993). With such an approach, it appears as if the winning of power in an election is no longer the winning of the right to govern, but the right to manage some small aspects of a globalised capitalist economy. The end result of this for disabled people is that certain benefits upon which they rely are removed and offered to others deemed more deserving or more in need.

The implications of the cut-backs or changes to social security expenditure may be more far-reaching than it would at first appear. Many disabled people have come to rely upon their additional benefits for general cost-of-living expenses (Noble et al., 1997). Unless these benefits are replaced by employment income, they will experience varying degrees of poverty if their benefit income is cut. Furthermore, as the government imposes stricter limits on social-services spending many people are becoming dependent on their other income to pay for the services they require to live independently in their own homes. One of the groups of people affected by the cuts to Incapacity Benefit in May 1999 included those accused by the government of taking early retirement due to ill-health.⁴ The judgments did not take into consideration, however, the fact that local authorities reduce their budgetary limits for community care services when people reach retirement age. Many retirees are, or will be, forced by economic factors to enter nursing homes because they are the cheaper option for the local authority and the more profitable option for nursing agencies. Any cuts in benefits for older disabled people will inevitably lead to greater numbers of older people entering nursing homes as has been the case in both the United Kingdom and the USA throughout this century (Schorr 1992). Again we see that the government directly benefits from these cuts in that they appear to be taking action on welfare needs while not raising taxes. However, it seems likely that disabled people will be made more vulnerable to institutionalisation.

V. Discrimination and Social Exclusion

While the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act is firmly based in the individual model of disability, the actions of new Labour in setting up a Commission to ensure its implementation is one step further than the previous Conservative government was prepared to take. The investment in the Disability Rights Commission is greater than that of either the Equal Opportunities Commission (which deals with sex discrimination) or the Commission for Racial Equality. The Disability Rights Commission itself may well bring forward amendments to the antidiscrimination Act and it will be of interest to see if those amendments are acted upon by the government. For the moment the jury is out on this issue.

What is clear is that new Labour's approach to social exclusion - the term now widely accepted for the economic consequences for certain groups of people as a result of the globalisation of capital - will have to show that government is prepared to deal with structural causes of disablement for people with impairments. A measure of this may be the extent to which new Labour is prepared to use their influence within the European Union to ensure that the future economic unity of this region is based upon the retention of a strong welfare system.

Conclusion

With just a hint of irony, identifying the third way for disability policy in relation to British politics is relatively unproblematic. It is about the predominance of economic policy over the social need which results in disabled people being drawn into the rough-house of party politics where they are just as likely to be disparaged as dependent and scroungers, as lone-parents clearly are, in the UK. While it is possible to make predictions of the impact of the third way on disabled people, it is necessary to continue monitoring the effect of policy changes in order to ascertain the outcomes. In theory, the third way may constitute a coherent means of conceptualising social policy; but it would seem that Darendorf's (1998) 101 ways form the practice in government - although once again we can turn to Blunkett for some articulation of the third way's meaning to new Labour:

We want to return to the driving force which created the welfare state: self-help through mutual help, and not state welfare dominated by benefit dependency. Resources should be targeted at providing the means for individuals to flourish through learning, through work, through security at times of change, and dignity in retirement or severe disability. (Blunkett 1999)

Clearly, this statement is indicative of the success of the new Right in asserting the values of individualism. While it also reflects many of Giddens' arguments about what the third way should include, it is tempting to conclude that new Labour do not see their third-way project as much more than a compromise between self and mutual help - or between the values of capitalism and socialism.

However, as we have seen, many of the policies we call Blairfare have more to do with managing the margins of the economy than with any radical attempt to bring about structural change on the scale of the constitutional changes that are also being pursued in the United Kingdom. It may well be that new Labour's approach to welfare at the end of the millennium has more to do with their abdication of government in favour of managing a peripheral node in the global marketplace.

What is clear from looking at the power relationships within these changes is that it is not disabled people who are the beneficiaries of change. Rather, it appears to be government managers who benefit through their spin on policies. Whether it is new Labour intervening in the affairs of large corporations to first tax them and then return that money with conditions of employing certain people or whether they are redistributing education expenditure, this has much more to do with the appearance rather than action of government. If life is to improve for disabled people in Britain in the next millennium, it is unlikely to be as the result of government policy as they do not yet seem to have grasped even an elementary understanding of the social construction of disablement.

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Notes

1. In the period when Tony Blair was leader of the Labour Party in opposition he began to refer to the party as new Labour. This term has now come to distinguish the Labour Party and its current third way approach from old Labour which was committed to socialist policies of intervention.
2. DLA is a benefit which is intended to meet the additional costs of being unable to walk and/or needing help with personal care.
3. These changes in social security benefit caused furious debate in the parliamentary Labour Party. Sixty-five Labour MPs voted against the government in the crucial vote on its Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill in May 1999 (Independent 21.5.99).