

THATCHER'S DARK LEGACY MUST **BE STOPPED**

Neoliberal politics opened the door for the future destruction of the welfare state when aided by an unelected banker with too much political power, writes MO STEWART.

Margaret Thatcher was the first elected neoliberal politician in the UK and, since then, toxic neoliberal poison has swept the world.

Neoliberal politics has successfully replaced need with greed and, in Britain, has gradually eroded all evidence of any moral or ethical responsibility by government to the chronically sick and disabled public, who are financially dependent upon welfare funding.

Known as the '*Iron Lady*', it was Thatcher who declared in a magazine interview that "*there is no such thing as society*" and she demonstrated this belief using a dominant leadership style, which saw her forge a deep bond with Ronald Reagan in America, and eventually obliged her to resign from office in 1990 following a battle within the Conservative Party. But Thatcher has since been immortalized and her dark legacy continues...

The long ago planned demolition of the welfare state couldn't happen overnight and began quietly. In November 2001 a conference was assembled at Woodstock, near Oxford, and the subject of the conference was '*Malingering and Illness Deception*'. The 39 participants were all linked to UnumProvident Insurance, the American corporate giant acting as advisers to the UK government on 'welfare claims management', represented at the conference by John LoCascio and supported by Mansel Aylward, the Chief Medical Officer for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The American corporate influence would be ever present within the DWP, as Mansel Aylward worked to undermine welfare funding for chronically sick and disabled people by suggesting that chronically sick and disabled welfare claimants were "*malingering*", not least because he disregarded diagnosis and all medical opinion. Aylward's biased opinion, influenced by corporate America, was welcomed by politicians on both sides of the House of Commons because it would eventually reduce the welfare budget.

In 1995 21% of Incapacity Benefit claimants had a mental health problem and by 2005 the proportion had risen to 39%, or just under one million people. This is why future DWP commissioned welfare reports claimed that one million people should be removed from longterm out-of-work disability benefits and returned to work, suggesting that mental health problems are not considered to be serious enough to warrant welfare support.

To reduce the numbers, eventually a new benefit and a new benefit assessment model would be introduced to limit access to welfare funding, to coerce as many chronically ill and disabled people as possible to find work, to manipulate the British public with propaganda and to spend a great deal of DWP time and energy demonising sick and disabled people when guaranteed to be reported by the Tory national press.



Commissioned by John Hutton in December 2006 when Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in the New Labour government, former city banker David Freud first gained attention in early 2007 with the publication of the report '*Reducing Dependency, Increasing Opportunity: options for the future of welfare to work*'. The first draft was produced in only three weeks when limited to using evidence from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) published data, which has since been exposed as being unsound.

Freud's report recommended that it was possible to reduce the 2.68 million out-of-work disability benefit claimants of Incapacity Benefit (IB) by one million people, who should be

returned to work, and also recommended that the private sector should undertake all reassessments of IB claimants.

This became a reality in October 2008 with the introduction of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), conducted by an unaccountable corporate giant known as Atos Healthcare, who reassessed IB claimants being migrated to the replacement Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) benefit, and assessed all new ESA claimants.

This new assessment system when using the private sector permitted state crime by proxy. An appointed unaccountable corporate giant was expected to tolerate any public protest against the fatally flawed WCA, whilst the DWP could hide behind the corporate screen at a cost to the taxpayer of £500 million per annum.

What is not well known is that the evidence in the '*Freud Report*', as it came to be known, was exposed in an academic paper by Professor Danny Dorling in 2007 within weeks of the DWP commissioned report being published. Dorling identified Freud's incompetence and demonstrated that "*he got his numbers wrong*" as Freud had misinterpreted his own references, but successive governments disregarded the identified flaws and adopted Freud's recommendations.

For his report, Freud used information from various DWP commissioned reports. The 2005 Waddell and Aylward report '*The Scientific and Conceptual Basis of Incapacity Benefit*' had also advised that one million people could be removed from long-term sickness benefit, without providing any supportive evidence for such a claim.

The 2005 Waddell and Aylward report opened the door to future preventable harm by disregarding the medical opinion of claimants' GPs and Consultants and recommending a "*functional assessment*", using the biopsychosocial (BPS) model, for the reassessment of all 2.68 million IB claimants and for all new claimants of the replacement ESA benefit.

Despite having no political experience and admitting in a press interview that he knew "*nothing about welfare*", Freud was ennobled by David Cameron, which meant that as a member of the House of Lords he could be invited to work on behalf of the Conservative Party.

Never elected, Freud was first appointed as the DWP Shadow Minister for Welfare Reform for the Conservative Party in 2009. In 2010 he was appointed as the DWP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Coalition government and was reappointed, in May 2015, as the DWP Minister of State for Welfare Reform in the new Conservative government.

During his time in office, Freud recommended many changes to welfare funding with the priority of reducing DWP welfare costs. With only one notable exception, when Freud recommended that disabled people should work for only £2 per hour, the Coalition and Conservative governments accepted Freud's recommendations verbatim and, very quickly, chronically ill and disabled people learned to live in fear with the constant psychological tyranny of relentless DWP re-assessments, which could remove essential funding without warning.

DWP coercion and brutality became the norm. The regular use of sanctions, with the claimant's only income stopped for several weeks, meant that chronically ill people would starve to death in C21st UK as a penalty for being five minutes late for a Job Centre appointment when the 'bus was late.

The two most damaging DWP commissioned reports, used by successive governments to cause preventable harm to chronically ill people were the 2007 '*Freud Report*' and the 2005 report by former DWP Chief Medical Officer Mansel Aylward and Gordon Waddell: '*The Scientific and Conceptual Basis of Incapacity Benefit*'. Both reports would be exposed by academic excellence as being fatally flawed, but they were used by government to justify a dramatic reduction of the welfare budget, regardless of consequences. The budget is the only political priority, not the people in need of access to welfare funding.

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