

Demonising disabled people: public behaviour and attitudes during welfare reforms

[[Blog contribution: Welfare Conditionality: sanctions, support and behaviour change](#)]

Independent researcher Mo Stewart identifies the ease with which public behaviour can be manipulated and changed by government when aided by the press.

Public behaviour has also changed during welfare reforms

It is the service-users' behaviour that government seeks to change with government policy when linked to [harsh sanctions](#) but, in reality, it is public opinion and behaviour that has also changed when influenced by political rhetoric.

Behaviour change is not difficult to achieve when there is full access to the national press and media and when unfounded political claims, which are guaranteed to be reported, can manipulate public opinion over time which eventually creates a behaviour change in society.

This has come to pass in recent years with the concept of State funded welfare in the UK. Welfare reform, together with austerity measures introduced by the Coalition government in 2010, and the preventable harm created by government knowingly [demonising claimants](#) of long-term disability benefit suggesting wide spread welfare benefit fraud, now sees welfare dependent chronically ill and profoundly disabled service-users [living in fear](#) of the British government and the British press. In reality, the published government figures demonstrated welfare fraud [at 0.7%](#), not 75% as claimed in [the national press](#) to influence public opinion.

The political manipulation of public opinion was at its most fierce during the Coalition government's term in office, for five years from 2010, as the introduction of austerity was destined to cause distress, so it was necessary for the government to offer the public someone else to blame. The very easy targets of a quickly evolved [political smear campaign](#) were the long-term chronically ill and disabled people, who were totally dependent upon welfare funding for their financial survival.

This relentless [political attack](#) against those in greatest need was created to suggest that the UK could no longer justify the welfare budget, that following the 2008 banking crisis suddenly the UK was required to 'live within our means', with the suggestion that the public sector deficit

should be completely removed. In reality, this situation was planned many years ago to justify the eventual [removal of the welfare state](#) on route to the adoption of private healthcare insurance, and the banking crisis was the excuse needed to introduce policies which are identified as [the legacy](#) of the first UK female Prime Minister.

Fed by rhetoric by the Coalition government, the national press provided banner headlines insisting that [75% of claimants](#) '*languishing on the state*' were faking, and this relentless government [smear campaign](#) worked very well. There was a reported 213% increase in prosecuted disability hate crimes during the Coalition government's term in office, which the national press [willingly reported](#), whilst disregarding any responsibility they may have had by [demonising service-users](#) and suggesting that the majority of benefit dependent disabled people were unworthy of State financial support. This behaviour by people who felt able to commit disability hate crime was not unexpected, and was inevitable following the successful smear campaign supported by the majority of the national press over a sustained period.

[Grave societal outcomes](#) with large social financial inequity were guaranteed during austerity measures which were identified as being based on [political propaganda](#), and totally unnecessary with [academics](#) insisting that the austerity measures were adopted by right-leaning governments, and not by others. This gave way to the confirmation that austerity measures were *a political choice and not a financial necessity* when introduced [without any ethical approval](#).

At the same time as this travesty of justice was being created, chronically ill and profoundly disabled people, who had been deemed by all previous medical and administrative opinion as being unfit to work, were suddenly all under suspicion. Masquerading as welfare reform, all 2.8 million claimants of Incapacity Benefit were to be reassessed on route to being migrated to the new Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), as introduced in 2008 by the New Labour government. In order to qualify for the new ESA, all welfare dependent chronically sick and disabled people were required to submit to the Work Capability Assessment (WCA). The scope of the assessment was increased in 2010 and coincided with the introduction of austerity measures. [State crime by proxy](#) began in earnest as [corporate welfare crime](#) was created.

The relentless claims that a majority of welfare claimants were unworthy, as regularly promoted by Conservative politicians and the national press, witnessed a behaviour change

towards sick and disabled people with concern and empathy replaced with suspicion and [drivers using blue badges](#) for access to disabled parking harassed by onlookers.

Behaviour changes in society were created by neoliberal politics, with materialistic individualism [blessed as a virtue](#), with an acceptance of tolerated harshness. This legacy of greed meant that there was [no such thing as society](#) and the sense of community evaporated as demonstrated by total indifference to human need.

Welfare Conditionality

Sanctions, support and behaviour change

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<http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/2017/07/demonising-disabled-people-public-behaviour-and-attitudes-during-welfare-reforms/>

Published online July 12th, 2017