

THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Angus Erskine

INTRODUCTION

The Commission on Social Justice was set up by the late John Smith in December 1992 with wide ranging terms of reference. It was to consider the principles of social justice and their application; to examine the relationship between social justice and economic competitiveness and prosperity; to look at the changes in social and economic policy that have taken place since Beveridge and, projecting them into the future, to explore the consequences for public policy. It was to analyse policies on employment, taxation and social welfare and examine their contribution to the creation of a fairer and more just society. Its membership reflected a desire to make it independent of the Labour Party, including individuals who were not party members.

Given its composition and its terms of reference, it might have been expected that the Commission would not come to agreement on a final report. But they did. Some proposals were clearly controversial but, at the end of the day, all commissioners subscribed to the report. There was no minority report presenting an alternative vision.

This article outlines the Commission's analysis of the problems facing the United Kingdom and their proposals for reform. It welcomes some of the suggestions made by the Commission while criticising its caution and its acceptance of private and individual responses to welfare provision. Finally, it addresses how far a distinctively 'Scottish' dimension has been articulated in the proposed reforms .

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TIMES OF CHANGE?

This century, there have been three radical governments reforming social policy in the United Kingdom. First, the Liberal Government between 1906 and 1916 established an important principle - the state had a role in ensuring the collective provision of welfare for the population, working with employers and employees through social insurance and providing out of general taxation for other social benefits.

Second, the Beveridge Report and the ensuing legislation of the 1945 Labour Government established a primary role for the state in ensuring employment and providing social insurance against those predictable risks which interrupt income from work - ill health, old age, unemployment. The 1945 Labour Government tapped into a mood for a change. And its legislative programme in social policy has remained with us to this day. The legacy of Beveridge was that the state in the United Kingdom had the main role in the provision of welfare services. The British welfare state has been unique amongst other capitalist countries, not in the extent or level of its provision, but in the role played by a centralised state in delivering and financing welfare services.

Third, the Thatcher Governments have been the counterpoint of the 1945 government. They too were radical and, while never overwhelmingly popular, used large parliamentary majorities to move the social policy agenda to the right. At the heart of their changes was a belief that no longer was the state to be the main provider, but, instead, individuals and families should look after themselves and only if they could not should the state have a role to play. They redistributed income from poor to rich and introduced market forces into state services while maintaining and strengthening the power of a London government. State provision and expenditure on welfare has not been reduced to the extent that critics have feared or predicted. The overall effect has been a reduction in the quality of some public services, a change in their organisation and management and a consequent encouragement of alternative forms of provision and a greater reliance upon informal care, the voluntary sector or private providers. The greatest legacy of the 1980s is perhaps the shift in the debate about the appropriate role of the state as a provider.

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The Commission on Social Justice has attempted to set a new agenda for the millennium. It begins by presenting its principles of social justice. Political activists might have worried that a group of experts and academics would come up with an abstract, philosophical definition of social justice. They need not have feared. On the other hand, other observers might have hoped that the report would have built upon the recognised complexities of the nature of the concept of social justice and advanced practical ways of translating it into public policy. They may be disappointed.

The Report sets out four propositions on Social Justice. First, the welfare state needs to be redefined from a safety net in times of need to a springboard to economic opportunity through paid work and wages as the most secure and sustainable way out of poverty. Second, investment in people through improving access to education and training needs to be improved. Third, there should be choices across the life-cycle about the balance between employment, family, education, leisure and retirement. Fourth, social institutions need to be reconstructed to ensure that renewal comes from the bottom up.

These propositions set the tone for the rest of the Report. While they are designed to be generally acceptable, they are most notable because they are unexceptional. They do not amount to a vision of a socially just society. It is unlikely that the principles will inspire a political struggle to achieve them. And this may prove to be the major weakness in the Report.

While the Report recognises that social justice implies that policies must address the distribution of resources, life chances, work and time, it assumes economic growth will improve the position of the poorest and sketches out three contrasting views.

There are the Deregulators who believe that a free market will release innovation and enterprise and ensure economic growth. This wealth trickles down and improves the living standards and opportunities of everyone. There are the Levellers who neglect the production of income and wealth and focus instead upon its distribution. Finally, there are the Investors who want to combine 'the ethics of community with the dynamics of a market economy' (p. 95) - an extension of economic opportunity and prosperity as a basis for social justice. It implies that socially just outcomes will be the product of extending opportunity. At a conceptual level, it is difficult to distinguish this

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from the trickle down theory of the Deregulators. But the policies are a contrast.

THE CONTEXT

There is some consensus on the left and centre of politics about the problems which face the United Kingdom. There is growing domestic inequality at a time when there has been an economic revolution which exposes the UK economy to dynamic global forces. There is a social revolution in how we live our lives. Families are changing. And, the Report suggests, there is a political revolution brought about by challenges to old perceptions of Parliamentary sovereignty and the centralisation of government power.

In examining the state of the nation, the Commission turns Beveridge's five giants of want, idleness, ignorance, squalor and disease around. They add a sixth evil - racial discrimination - and re-present these six as potential opportunities - for financial independence, work, lifelong learning, a safe environment, good health and equal treatment.

The Report identifies the growing income inequality in Britain, the division between work-rich households and households where long-term unemployment has become a central determinant of their poverty. They draw attention to the well established connection between inequality and ill health, as well as pointing to Britain's poor educational outcomes and its rising crime rate.

Patterns of paid and unpaid work are changing. More people are becoming long-term unemployed while others are having to work harder and harder. In Britain, those without paid work are amongst the poorest in Europe, while those in employment work the longest hours. Women's earnings are still lower than men's, and the labour market remains divided into men and women's jobs.

Britain's system of welfare was built on Beveridge who emphasised the role of full employment. Employment was to be the main source of household income. The weakness of Beveridge was that he assumed that men worked in the labour market while women worked at home. Full employment for men could be assured through government management of the economy. Men's wages were to be redistributed within the household, while the state distributed income to cover temporary periods without paid work.

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Since then, it has been recognised that the economy and families don't work like that. More women are participating in the labour market and divorce and separation are increasing. And more and more people are becoming unemployed for longer periods, while others are working in jobs with very low wages. Part of Peter Lilley's social security budget is being swallowed up to pay for the low wages that Michael Portillo wants to encourage.

The Commission recognises that, for most people, income comes from paid employment and no benefit system can cope with permanent mass unemployment. Access to work, at wages which provide a reasonable standard of living, is a precondition for a successful social security system. Social security has to be able to provide for additional or special needs, but it can not replace income from paid employment permanently. The opportunity to take part in paid work, denied many at present, is crucial.

FULL EMPLOYMENT

The Report argues for a new definition of full employment and proposes a number of policies to achieve it. In the 1990s, they suggest that full employment will involve changes of occupation for men and women throughout their working life and a balance between periods in education or training, caring or employment (full or part time). They lay out seven conditions for full employment:

- high and sustainable growth;
- low inflation;
- a tradable sector which is sufficient to generate demand;
- greater intensity of employment;
- reintegration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market;
- a flexible benefits system which provides incentives to enter employment;
- a new balance between employment and family across people's life cycle.

An emphasis is placed upon economic growth as a way of generating more employment and then redistributing that new employment: 'when demand increases, it is crucial that we have efficient and equitable ways of distributing the employment that is generated'. (p. 170)

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The Report proposes a Jobs, Education and Training programme with six goals:

- providing a comprehensive re-employment service;
- using training as a lever to improve employability;
- sponsoring 'micro-entrepreneurs';
- assisting lone parents find child care;
- encouraging the development of Intermediate Labour Markets;
- using wage subsidies to reconnect the long-term unemployed to the labour market.

While Workfare is rejected and Job Guarantee schemes are given very qualified support, the Report does suggest that 'availability for work' conditions for benefit should be extended to lone parents.

On their own, these proposals do not represent a very hopeful route to full employment for the long-term unemployed and those who are most excluded from the labour market. They continue some of the current policies which concentrate upon the job readiness of those who are unemployed and upon ensuring that the unemployed remain connected to the labour market.

Deregulators believe that unemployment will be reduced by pushing down the price of labour, encouraging low pay, and deregulating the labour market, while disciplining the unemployed to force them to take up the new jobs that will be created. The Commission, as Investors, are arguing that the unemployed be encouraged back into the labour market by presenting them with opportunities. Both positions focus on the supply of labour, rather than the demand for it. People are not unemployed only because they lack the skills needed in today's labour market. If there was a lack of supply, companies would be only too keen to train the many people desperate for a job. But there is a lack of demand for labour. The Commission is right that investment in people may increase demand in the long term, but, at the same time, the level of demand will depend upon international economic forces, beyond the control of a UK government. The Levellers are right in pointing to the need to redistribute employment and income and to focus upon domestic policies which will increase the level of demand through job creation in sectors where needs are unmet and the market is unable to respond.

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The employability of those on the margins of employment will be improved through measures such as those proposed by the Commission. And everybody, whether unemployed or employed, would benefit from improvements in training, education and child care. But in the absence of either increased demand within the labour market, or a redistribution of work itself, it will not mean more paid employment and a consequent reduction in unemployment. The measures which the Commission proposes to tackle unemployment are mostly geared towards redistributing unemployment amongst those on the margins of the labour market. Making the unemployed more employable within an already fierce labour market will benefit some, but only where there is a growth in global demand will the unemployed as a whole gain. And those who gain are those who already are best equipped to compete.

The Commission does recognise this by discussing the distribution of employment. Shorter working hours, preventing discrimination and encouraging parent-friendly employment practices, are, they argue, all necessary to overcome the current divide between work-rich and work-poor households. But the policy proposals from their discussion are mixed. The Jobs, Education and Training programme should certainly encourage women into non-traditional employment. But some proposals are ambivalent: on reducing working hours, the Commission begins by seeming to adopt a Portillo line:

We do not wish to see this country moving towards a nationally imposed standard working week of the continental kind.....Indeed, Germany and other EU countries have recognised the need to relax their controls on working and trading hours (p. 191)

And they conclude by proposing that the UK should adopt the EU Directive on Working Hours because it won't reduce working hours where long working hours are needed, for example amongst professionals and managers. Yet, if demand is to be generated throughout the labour market, all people in employment need to work less.

More employment opportunities, even without economic growth, would be generated if we started at the top and changed attitudes in work-rich households towards the place of paid work in the life cycle. The work-rich professional's identity is focused upon their unique abilities and essential contribution to the workplace. This commitment to paid work reduces their own contribution to caring and learning. A redistribution of paid work and

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caring requires a cultural change and a shift in personal identity away from how income is generated. It is not just the unemployed who need to learn that how they are is more important than what they do. A redistribution of paid employment requires that those in the highest status and best paid jobs also think about how they are. It would require social and fiscal policies to discourage workaholics and encourage work sharing and family caring.

Other proposals are more progressive and definite, for example, the creation of a Human Rights Commission to promote and enforce a single anti-discrimination law. The policies for 'family-friendly' employment to benefit parents are spelt out:

- a national child care and education strategy for the under-fives;
- more choice over working hours;
- new leave arrangements for parents and carers;
- equal rights for part-time workers.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Report proposes more investment in learning and a shift in emphasis towards learning throughout life. They stress the need to improve educational outcomes for school leavers through unifying qualifications to end the divide between education and training for 14 to 19 year olds.

Post school education is addressed through two measures. First, an expansion of university education funded through student loans and a charge for a proportion of tuition fees. The logic of this proposal is that if university education is to cease being the preserve of an elite, then the necessary expansion will be expensive. The cost of such an expansion should fall, in part, on those who benefit from it through repayment based upon post-graduation income. They do not propose a graduate income tax, instead a form of individual repayment.

Second, alongside the expansion in higher education, the Commission proposes the establishment of a Learning Bank, through which education and training would be funded by Individual Learning Accounts into which government, individuals and employers would contribute. The development of credit-based courses and the funding of these courses through student contribution (from their Learning Accounts) would encourage flexibility for student progression.

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The policy objectives which are outlined in relation to education and training address the weaknesses which the Report identifies:

- the need to extend and improve provision;
- the integration of education and training;
- the need for lifelong learning which can respond to a changing labour market;
- the extension of higher education.

However, the way in which the Commission proposes achieving these objectives is a change from a previous commitment on the left to education as a communal provision. Instead, both the funding mechanism for post-school education and training and the nature of the organisation of the proposed provision present a shift towards both the individual and the market. It is not clear from the proposals whether the consequences of Individual Learning Accounts, funded by individuals and employers, won't be such that those who are in better paid jobs have more in their account and therefore preferential access to education and training. The unemployed or low paid worker seeking training may not have sufficient credit within their individual account to pay for the best provision. Likewise an individual contribution to the costs of higher education based upon post-graduate income, rather than a graduate income tax, means that those less rewarded in the labour market will be paying a higher proportion of their income than those in the best paid jobs. The net effect will be to widen divisions in our society rather than overcoming them.

While it may be considered necessary and could be argued as equitable to recoup some of the maintenance costs of full time adult students or trainees, the Commission's rejection of a graduate income tax and reliance instead on individual students' repaying their own costs means that a graduate who becomes a successful lawyer would repay the same amount as the graduate who becomes a nurse.

A market orientation by training and education providers may result in a further weakening of long-term strategic provision and concentrate instead upon meeting short-term labour market needs. Providers will be encouraged to ensure a volume of throughput rather than concentrate upon intensive training which might have high associated capital costs.

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The proposals for education and training appear to extend the Right's agenda rather than provide a new articulation of how policies can be constructed which ensure equal access, high standards and lifelong learning within a financial and organisational regime which is realistic but recognises that the benefits of education and training, while accruing in part to the individual, also impact upon employers, in general, and the country as a whole. An education system which is aimed at everyone has the potential to benefit everyone and therefore the costs should be met from general taxation. It requires a strategic view of the likely long term demand for an educated workforce and ensuring that the skills and knowledge which may not have a ready marketable value, but which meet societal needs, are supported. If graduates are amongst some of those who earn a lot, they could be taxed on their income.

SOCIAL SECURITY

A third element in the Commission's proposals for a new balance between paid work, lifelong learning and caring, concerns the nature of welfare benefits. Their objective is to translate benefits from a safety net into a trampoline, a way of encouraging people back into employment. Concentrating upon the role of paid work does not mean that those who don't have paid work are ignored. Income for those who care for children, retired people and those who are permanently or temporarily not in the labour market has to be adequate to ensure that they are not marginalised and excluded from a general growth in prosperity.

The Commission addresses the issue of means testing. One of the main advantages of universal benefits, like child benefit and state pensions, is that they include everyone. Because of this everyone who needs the benefit gets it and political support for the benefit is widespread. But they involve big transfers of resources by the state. The problem with means tested benefits or 'targeted' benefits is that they are stigmatising and difficult to administer. Because of this, they miss much of the target they are supposed to be directed at.

The Commission rejects means testing and proposes instead an extension of social insurance as a means whereby income can be transferred across the individual's life cycle. They also suggest that individuals should be able to make optional higher contributions for future higher benefits. Changes to Family Credit, the creation of a part-time unemployment benefit and a bigger

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earnings disregard for those on Income Support are designed to encourage people back into paid work.

The most radical of the Commission's proposals relate to pensions. They point to the problems of just raising the basic state retirement pension across the board. It would be very expensive and most of the benefit would go to richer pensioners. Those pensioners already on Income Support would not necessarily benefit because it would just be deducted from their income support. They suggest that, while retaining the basic pension, there should be a pension guarantee which would work as a guaranteed minimum income for pensioners without the problems of means testing. Pensioners whose income fell below the guarantee would be brought up to its level. The level should be linked to average net (after-tax) earnings to ensure that pensioners share in any growth in general prosperity. In calculating the Pension Guarantee, substantial earnings and actual income from savings would be taken into account, so that there would not be a problem for those with small capital sums or small earnings as there is with Income Support for pensioners at present.

This proposal is one which would unify the tax and benefit systems for one group - pensioners. The Report rejects the unification of tax and benefits across the board. They point out that this superficially attractive idea has many irresolvable problems, not least that tax is calculated over a fiscal year whereas benefits have to be calculated over much shorter periods. If taxes were calculated over short periods, those with high incomes could shift their earnings between tax periods for their optimal advantage. If benefits were calculated over longer periods they would go to people who no longer need them while not going to people who did. However, a unification of tax and benefits for pensioners makes sense because their incomes do not fluctuate in the same way that the income of many of working age does. Pensioner incomes have largely been determined during their working life.

The Report suggests that in addition to the state pension and the pension guarantee, there should be a well regulated second pension scheme for everyone. This could either be through SERPS or through occupational and private pensions. They propose improvements to the existing structure of regulation and improvements to SERPS which would make it a more attractive option as well as ensuring that those with caring responsibilities would be able to draw on a second pension in retirement.

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The Report again has its strengths in the analysis of the problems of the tax system, but fails to match them with bold policy proposals. For example, they argue that taxes should be 'fair'. Few would suggest they should be otherwise. Few would be able to agree what 'fair' means. They propose that there should be a maximum tax bill of no more than 50% of income. This argument might be sustainable for middle income Britain. Punitive taxation does not raise much revenue. However, if we are aiming to create a just society, there is no case against imposing punitive taxes on what is seen as morally indefensible. Taxation policy should be fiscally prudent, economically sound, promote social justice and encourage the good. Punitive taxation sends out a message to the very rich that there is no reward on earth for their greed and might encourage a redistribution of paid work away from them. Instead of a maximum tax rate, a maximum income would ensure that there was a better distribution of opportunity. Just as the Report encourages the majority to recognise a new balance of paid work, leisure and education, so too it should have recognised this for the super rich.

THE POLITICAL REVOLUTION

The Report argues that a good society requires strong communities and families. It suggests that there should be a clear legal statement of parental responsibilities for children to underline a commitment to them. Accompanying this they propose a number of improvements in policy towards children including the raising of Child Benefit and its taxing for higher-earning mothers or fathers, improvements in child care and nursery education, and a reform of child maintenance.

The creation of Community Development Trusts through a National Community Regeneration Authority is proposed to provide an institutional basis for the involvement of local residents in the regeneration of their areas. The Report argues that resources should be directed through Trusts in local areas designed to develop social wealth, the quality of life and reputation of the area, and reconnect the community to education, training and job opportunities. They should aim to generate sustainable development within the local economies.

Housing should be improved through the establishment of Local Housing Companies set up by local authorities with representatives of tenants and funded in part through a National Housing Bank with the task of developing and managing social rented housing.

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Finally the Report argues for the establishment of a national Citizen's Service which would be a national voluntary community service scheme aimed mainly at young people which would provide volunteers with a weekly allowance and credits for learning.

They support the establishment of a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh assembly, and devolution to the English Regions, as part of a programme of decentralising power, restoring political accountability and encouraging 'civic leadership'.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH?

The policy proposals cover a wide range of issues. But the Report is better at identifying and analysing some of the problems than it is in providing a new direction. Some proposals are necessary small-scale reforms, which could be relatively easily introduced - for example changes to the social security system. Others are more ambitious and require long term action - for example the pension proposals.

How far the Commission's proposals represent a new agenda can be questioned. There are three main areas that should be examined. First, the Report is clear that it is about the creation of additional opportunities through economic growth, rather than the redistribution of existing opportunities and resources. The political sensitivity of this strategy is obvious. The Commission is seeking to distance itself from the left and present policies which are not seen as a threat by those who are already prosperous. However, unless the enormous redistribution which has taken place since 1979, and which the Commission recognises, is tackled, state policies will continue to have to concentrate upon ameliorating the position of the worst off, thus providing the safety net rather than the trampoline.

For example, the Report points out that the bottom half of income earners amongst the population who received one third of national income in 1979, now receive only a quarter (p. 29). The poorest tenth of the population pay a higher proportion of their income in tax than the richest tenth (p. 31). About one fifth of the population live in poverty. But it is not just income inequalities which need to be tackled; it is inequalities in access to paid work, and inequalities in education and in health.

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The Investors strategy has one important weakness. Economic growth in the UK will not depend just upon UK domestic economic policy but also on global economic forces. Therefore, a government committed to improving the conditions and opportunities of the poorest in Britain cannot rely just upon growth to generate opportunities which they can then distribute. If faced with a global recession, it may be possible to limit its impact, but a Labour Government would still need a strategy to improve the position of the poorest, and that implies a redistribution of existing resources. Even with growth, there is no guarantee that its benefits will go to those who are currently most disadvantaged. Indeed it is likely that they will go to those who are already advantaged. For these reasons, the Commission's rejection of what they characterise as a 'Levellers' approach is mistaken. The tackling of inequality has to be a priority, through which new talents will be released and new opportunities created.

Second, in important areas such as higher education or pensions, the Commission suggests a greater reliance upon markets as an organising principle for provision and a greater emphasis upon the individual's responsibility to ensure their own provision. This sits uneasily alongside the Commission's emphasis upon community. The advantage of collective provision is that it is inclusive and can combine redistribution over the life cycle with redistribution towards particular social groups. As long as state provision remains a last resort, then, those who can afford to will opt out, leaving those least advantaged to redistribute resources between themselves.

The implications of the proposed funding arrangements for post-school education and training raise questions about the role of collective funding and provision, but also questions about what the Report means by decentralisation. The Commission proposes establishing a number of national bodies - National Learning Bank, National Housing Bank, National Community Regeneration Agency, National Citizen's Service and a Human Rights Commission. At the same time, provision for a second pension, the funding of post-school education, and provision for care in old age are to be left largely to individuals (within systems of partial state support and regulation). Within this framework, what is the role of a Scottish Parliament?

These proposals suggest a greater role for Whitehall in fields that are currently controlled by the Scottish Office - education, housing and urban policy. The lack of any analysis of the differences between the constituent parts of the UK has led the Commission to an 'England plus' view. The analysis of education is entirely English based but recognised as a footnote:

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Although our proposals focus on the situation in England and Wales, the principles apply throughout the UK (footnote 32, p. 149)

Any discussion of social justice in Scotland would have to focus upon issues such as the ownership and use of land, and communication and transport policy as well as the issues the Report addresses.

THREE PERSPECTIVES REVISITED

There are three interpretations of the Commission's Report - the Ideologues, the Muddlers and the Realists.

The Ideologues see the Report as a shift onto their ground which also attempts to maintain an appeal to a centre-left audience. They can point to the Report's acceptance of the primacy of market forces, not just globally, but also in some areas of traditionally state-provided welfare services. They agree with the Report's proposals for means-testing Child Benefit, a basic income for pensioners and keeping the unemployed connected to the labour market. Where they disagree is that justice is not a task that governments can pursue. Governments should ensure a level playing field for individuals and markets. Big ideas, like justice and morality are the proper concerns of individuals not government.

Muddlers proclaim the Report as the new language of politics. It combines a traditional concern with issues of social justice and opportunity with an emphasis upon individuals, families and communities in a market economy. It emphasises fairness and responsibility. It provides a set of policies based upon an analysis of where Britain is today. It provides an holistic approach to our current problems which will generate economic growth, reform our political structures and provide choices for individuals and their families.

They disagree with the Ideologues because of the growing inequality which free market policies have generated. While they don't see these inequalities as necessary to generate growth, they believe that the political reality is such that policies to reverse these inequalities would be unpopular.

Realists welcome the Commission's exploration of the issues which face Britain. They agree with the Commission's identification of inequality between women and men, rich and poor, black and white, able and disabled as crucial to understanding what is happening in Britain today. They are

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impressed by some of the recommendations, but are disappointed that the Report does not hold together. In some areas, a detailed knowledge by experts has presented the issues, but been unable to follow through the logic of their analysis. In others, an ephemeral populist ideology has persuaded the Commission to propose limited extensions of current government policy, concentrating upon the family and the individual. They agree that state transfers should promote investment in people, but recognise that any starting point has to reverse some of the current transfers which have taken resources away from most of the population and concentrated them upon the richest.

A NEW VIEW?

New words and new concepts are needed to adequately analyse new relationships and realities, but using different words doesn't, on its own, change the underlying relations. A rigorous analysis of the problems that we face needs to be matched with a bold vision of change. It is not enough to represent Beveridge's five giants as opportunities to be developed.

The strength of the Commission's Report is that it is the basis for a debate about the role of the state in welfare for the next century. What can be hoped from such a debate? First, a rethinking of the role of the state in social and economic justice and in the rewards for paid and unpaid work. Second, that new ideas about the future place of paid employment in the life cycle are generated. Third, that there is a recognition of the importance of carers to society as a whole. Finally, that poverty is prioritised as the foundation for a just society in which all women, men and children can participate fully.

Its weaknesses are its relative timidity and its lack of coherence. If the Commission was really independent of the Labour Party, it is surprising that they seem to have taken it upon themselves to ensure that nothing they proposed would offend the Labour leadership's caution.

CONCLUSION

Social Justice is a big idea, but who doesn't want fairness, opportunity and choice? It is the strong themes of the Report which may be more enduring. Redefining the place of paid employment within the life cycle can create real opportunities for women, men and children to improve their quality of life,

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but it requires a clear commitment to reducing working hours and redistributing income between men and women, between those without paid work and those with. Providing people with opportunities for lifelong learning does require removing the divide between training and education and breaking down the elitism of higher education. But it has to be supported by a funding system which recognises the benefits to the whole community of more open access to post-school learning and a planning system that prioritises provision in strategically important areas rather than relying upon a market. The decentralisation of power means restoring powers to local democracy, recognising the importance of people in their local communities and establishing a Scottish Parliament, but it does not make sense then to set up UK bodies to oversee social policies without considering the respective role of neighbourhood-based organisations, local authorities, Westminster, and Edinburgh.

February 1995