

ULRR

Neoliberal policy and its influence on welfare ideology: A source of social injustice?

Item Type	Article
Authors	McCoy, Ger;Peddle, Roisin
Citation	Socheolas;3(2), pp.61-79
Publisher	Department of Sociology, University of Limerick
Download date	2026-04-10 15:12:09
Item License	https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/1.0/
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/10344/7990

Socheolas

Limerick Student Journal of Sociology

Volume 3, Issue 2

Neoliberal policy and its influence on welfare ideology: A source of social injustice?

Ger McCoy & Roisín Peddle

February 2012

**University of Limerick
Department of Sociology**

Available at <http://www.ul.ie/sociology/socheolas/vol3/2>

ISSN 2009-3144

The Department of Sociology, University of Limerick, welcomes applications for post-graduate study

- MA in Sociology (Applied Social Research): <http://www.ul.ie/sociology/ma.html>
- MA in Sociology (Youth, Community and Social Regeneration): <http://www.ul.ie/sociology/ycsr.html>
- MA in Gender Culture and Society: <http://www.ul.ie/sociology/gcs.html>
- PhD by research: <http://www.ul.ie/sociology/researchdegrees.html>

Neoliberal policy and its influence on welfare ideology: A source of social injustice?

Ger McCoy & Roisín Peddle

Law Plus and Joint Honours

University of Limerick

Neoliberalism believes in the freedom of the individual, however, the individual is responsible for their own welfare. Neoliberalism balks at the idea of the state spending money on the poor- it is an individual's responsibility to earn enough money to support themselves and their family. Just as the individual is responsible for their own financial welfare under the neoliberalist philosophy, the individual is responsible for their own personal well-being in the strictly secular postmodernist sphere. The language used by neoliberal policy makers when describing individuals who are eligible or dependent on welfare services is very distinct. The notion of unemployment as a choice puts the blame at the feet of the individual for being unemployed. The neoliberal system may give limited, residual benefits to the poor, but it refuses to address what makes these people poor in the first place

Introduction

“The hegemonic position of Neoliberalism has resulted in an understanding of social justice, which focuses on helping individuals to alleviate their difficulties, rather than actually addressing the structural causes of these difficulties” (Welsh and Parsons 2006, p.52).

The above statement recognises what is, for many, one of the main problems of neoliberal social policy. The neoliberal system prioritises individual and personal responsibility for one's own circumstances. Agency is of primary importance in the neoliberal model, yet this ignores the part that social forces and institutions play in shaping our lives. This essay will first explain what

Neoliberal policy and its influence on welfare ideology: A source of social injustice?

neoliberalism is, and where it comes from, and then demonstrate its hegemonic position in Western discourse. It will then present an overview of the neoliberal social justice model and highlight its failings in addressing the structural inadequacies that exist within the welfare policies of those governments who have adopted this model. It will address some of the dominant social policies of neoliberal ideologies and especially concentrate on the individualistic nature of these policies and their inability to alleviate poverty as well as their tendency to restrict upward social mobility and promote social exclusion. This essay will also examine the language used, primarily by neoliberal policy makers and debaters to promote their prevailing ideologies, but also by the media who communicate these ideologies which cultivate the hegemonic position of these ideologies. It will highlight how this language should be changed to appeal to the more compassionate nature of society thus addressing the issue of social exclusion. It will also look at the notion of social citizenship, as expressed in the language of New Labour, and how welfare users, heavily dependent on state services, make sense of this social citizenship. It will also argue that Welsh and Parsons' statement is accurate with regards to neoliberalist social policies, especially concerning social welfare. Finally it will look at how the neoliberal system is structured against the poor and will contend that, if social exclusion is to be avoided, change is not only possible but entirely necessary in the relevant social spheres discussed in this essay.

Neoliberal ideology and the idea of social justice

Neoliberalism is a reworking of the old ideal of liberalism, which first gained currency in the Enlightenment period. The 18th century economist Adam Smith was one of the primary proponents of this system that advocated a laissez-faire approach to business. Left to its' own devices, the chain of supply and demand would enable a capitalist economy run efficiently to the benefit of all (Considine and Dukelow 2009, p. 122). Liberalism placed an emphasis on

individualism and personal responsibility. Social welfare in the nineteenth century, apart from that provided by charity, was almost solely the responsibility of the individual and their family. Social insurance schemes were in use in Bismarck's Germany but this was an extremely basic scheme, a forerunner of contemporary Ireland's pay related social insurance (PRSI). (Considine and Dukelow 2009, p. 94).

In the period following the Great Depression and World War II, the economic theories of JM Keynes gained currency. Shocked by the crisis of the 1930s and the contribution it had to Hitler's rise to power, the global community saw the dangers of unregulated capitalism. Keynes argued that government needed to have a strong presence in fiscal policy in order to maintain equilibrium. Government would have to stimulate demand in order to create full employment in their economies; and if this resulted in inflation, government would have to step in and reduce it (Scott and Marshall 2005, p. 334). This delivered global prosperity (at least in the West) in the 1950s and 1960s. However by the early 1970's, economic crisis loomed again. A variety of factors led to this crisis; a move from manufacturing and developments in technology which led to unemployment and therefore a fall in tax revenue, a currency crisis, oil wars in the Middle East and other instabilities (Harvey 2005, p. 12). In the late 1970s neoliberalism began to emerge and in the US and the UK, the elections of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher sealed its rise to prominence.

So what exactly is neoliberalism? Like liberalism before it, it "reasserts the merits" (Considine and Dukelow 2009, p. 125) of the free market and comparatively unhindered capitalism. Neoliberalism believes in the freedom of the individual, however, the individual is responsible for their own welfare. Neoliberalism became the dominant global system during the 1980s and has survived beyond Thatcher and Reagan into the present day. The Washington

**Neoliberal policy and its influence on welfare ideology:
A source of social injustice?**

Consensus and the tenures of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair in the 1990s cemented the dominant position of neoliberalism (Harvey 2005, p. 13). One could argue that it can be seen as the perfect ideological economic system for the postmodern, globalised era. Postmodernism sees cultural experiences as commodities - basically everything can be bought or sold. Postmodernism, like neoliberalism, places the focus on the individual (Barry 2002, pp. 81-95).

Neoliberalists see individualism as an essential value to be protected and, according to George and Wilding (1985), society should be prearranged through a set of political maxims, the principle of which being that the individual would be better at performing much of the undertakings that the state has traditionally performed thus placing the onus on the individual for provision of their own welfare (Considine & Dukelow 2009, p.122). Just as the individual is responsible for their own financial welfare under the neoliberalist philosophy, the individual is responsible for their own personal well-being in the strictly secular postmodernist sphere. However, there is a discrepancy inherent in this. Just as being a good consumer means being the same as everyone else, no matter how much of an individualist one is in the neoliberalist system, one is still subject to the 'scientific rigours' of market forces (Harvey 2005, p. 21). As we have seen since 2008, when this system starts to fail, one may find it difficult to exercise individual freedom while paying off a heavy mortgage.

The neoliberal position on social justice can be seen as an extension of its roots in eighteenth and nineteenth century liberalism. While many large companies today have an active commitment to social responsibility (e.g. Google's relief efforts for Haiti), this can be seen as a continuation of the philanthropic actions of people like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller from an earlier age. Neoliberalism welcomes charity as it benefits the needy with no direct contribution from the state; after all, it is up to the individual how they spend

their money. Neoliberalism balks at the idea of the state spending money on the poor - it is an individual's responsibility to earn enough money to support themselves and their family. In the United States, state intervention and support is minimal for the poor. For example, in the U.S., one can spend a maximum of five years on welfare during one's lifetime, which is not a lot when you consider the transient nature of employment for many low-skilled workers (Dye 1998, p.135). The U.S. is recognized as having a passive institutional attitude to the poor and underprivileged, and in the late 1990s 38 million Americans were below the poverty line. (Dye 1998, p, 112). In the UK, which first coined the term the welfare state, support has been rolled back considerably since the Thatcher years. In Ireland, increasing neoliberalism under Fianna Fáil has seen severe cuts in the public sector.

The ideology of neoliberalism and its dominance in the Anglo-American world is not unique. It has also infiltrated continental Europe, which was traditionally split between conservative and social democratic welfare systems. Sweden, for years seen as the utopian social democratic state, cut public spending and moved closer to neoliberalism following a financial crisis in the 1990s (Gould 1996, pp. 72-94). Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the formerly conservative welfare state of France, promised to end welfare dependence and encourage risk ventures when he was elected in 2007 (*The Economist* 2008), and while he has flip-flopped between ideologies since, his recent cutbacks and raising of the pension age suggest a neoliberal outlook. Sarkozy also has a limited commitment to equality, labelling disadvantaged youths "scum" during the Parisian race riots of 2005 (Rastello 2005) and forcibly expelling Roma gypsies in 2010. Neoliberal policy has become the norm across Europe, North America and Oceania. Even developing countries in parts of Asia and Africa have embraced neoliberalism (Harvey 2005, pp. 85-86). China, for example, while being ostensibly communist, has become a major world economic power on

**Neoliberal policy and its influence on welfare ideology:
A source of social injustice?**

capitalist principles. It is obvious that neoliberal policy has become consensus for those governing the global economy.

From the early 1980's neoliberalism has engulfed the political landscape of western democracies and left behind “demolished social infrastructure, inequality, poverty, privatisation and individualism” (MacGregor 1999, p.93). This new movement brought with it new ideologies and a shift from state control to market control and from community responsibility to individual responsibility thus expressing a rebirth of the classic liberal tradition of individualism (MacGregor 1999, p.102). In the 1997 general election campaign, New Labour adopted the maxim that rights imply duties and Tony Blair, to emphasis this maxim, used an excerpt from a speech of Margaret Thatcher (Lund 1999, p.451). She quoted from a letter from St. Paul to the Thessalonians: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (Blair (1996), cited in Lund 1999, p.451). This reinforced the idea of one's individual responsibility to provide for one's welfare and reiterated an earlier idea of unemployment as being a choice. MacKay considered this idea, in relation to classic liberalism, as “counter-revolutionary economics” (MacKay (1998), quoted in Byrne 1999, p.17) and held that the unemployed could have achieved an entry into the workplace by accepting inferior wages, reduced working conditions and by either tolerating lengthier commuting journeys or changing to other locations, professions or trades (MacKay (1998), cited in Byrne 1999, p.18).

The model of social justice adopted by neoliberalism can be traced back to nineteenth and early twentieth century classic liberal ideologies when the 'Poor Law' was developed and implemented (Considine & Dukelow 2009, p.84). This Poor Law categorised poverty and the people held within it as 'impotent poor', 'able bodied', 'deserving' and 'undeserving' and held an underlying philosophy of individual responsibility (Considine & Dukelow 2009, p.84). However William

Hazlitt (Byrne 1999, p.16) saw the poor being chastised not only for poverty induced crime which they had to reduce themselves to, but also for the very fact of being in poverty and dependent. He thought this was especially the case after the New Poor Law of 1834 was enacted (Byrne 1999, p.16). The individual was considered to be responsible for his/her own welfare and if incapable of this the individual's family should provide for their welfare and only then, when the family cannot provide, would the state assist. The overriding sentiment was that the individual was solely responsible for his/her decline into dependency and the structural causes which contributed to this situation were unwillingly acknowledged by the state (Considine & Dukelow 2009, p.85), thus negating the responsibility of the state to prevent such dependency occurring in the first place.

Language of the Neoliberals

The language used by neoliberal policy makers when describing individuals who are eligible or dependent on welfare services is very distinct and must be examined to fully understand the support they receive in delivering and engaging their policies. As previously discussed, individual responsibility is the primary concern of the neoliberal doctrine. And when this individual responsibility is, according to neoliberal teaching, shunned, the state is forced to step in and provide for such 'undeserving poor'. The word 'undeserving poor' conjures up notions of scammers and laziness. However it is not only the language of the policy makers but also the language of those who communicate this policy to the people. The media has a huge influence on this communication and thus has a huge influence on what is and is not communicated.

In her study of this language used by both the policy makers and the communicators, Vicki Lens noted that the print media was most influential in driving public opinion, (Chaffee & Frank (1996); Johnson *et al* (1996); Neuman

**Neoliberal policy and its influence on welfare ideology:
A source of social injustice?**

et al (1992); Dickson (1992); Patterson (1980), cited in Lens 2002, p.139) and especially the two notable American newspapers, the Washington Post and the New York Times. What is quite interesting and useful for this paper is the fact that Lens' study focuses on newspaper articles printed when the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programme of 1994 was passed (Lens 2002, p.139). This programme insisted that lone mothers who were receiving assistance from the scheme had a time limit on their eligibility and had a requirement to work (Considine & Dukelow 2009, p.108). The study was conducted with the assumption that the notion of welfare is condemned by virtually everyone and those who avail of welfare, are also disdained (Gans 1995; Gordon 1994; Ellwood 1998; Katz 1989, cited in Lens 2002, p.140). Katz (1989, cited in Lens 2002, p.140) also argues that capitalism's support and contempt for the poor act together while Piven and Cloward (1994, cited in Lens 2002, p.140) hold that the stigmatization of welfare and the denigration of poverty and the poor ensures the growth of capitalism as it provides the means to a cheap work force. Thus the study centered on the question of how, rather than why, a society communicates these views (Lens 2002, p.140).

Myths of the Undeserving

Edelman and Stone (1975, 1988, 1989, cited in Lens 2002, p.141) opined that myths are stories that help society to ward off the feelings it has about social misgivings by providing "readymade characters, including victims and villains, and equally as readymade solutions." According to Gans (1995, cited in Lens 2002, p.141) one of these prominent myths is that of the word 'underclass' being assigned to welfare recipients which translates to undeserving poor or those of deviant behavior from that of the dominant culture. The recipients of the TANF programme were stereotyped as the underclass and elected officials who participated in the TANF debates referred to them as the kind of people "you would not let baby-sit your kids or grandkids" (Vobejda (1995), cited in

Lens 2002, p.142) while one participant compared them to “animals, who become dependent if not encouraged to find their own food” (Pear (1995), cited in Lens 2002, p.142). The elected officials were not alone in their contemptuous language of the recipients. Bureaucrats and experts also got involved and used what Schramm (1995, cited in Lens 2002, p.142) refers to as “economist therapeutic managerial discourse” which examines the states regulation of individual issues. Thus they focused their criticisms on individual failings such as being “bewildered by social mores of working”. Lens also found that journalists reinforced these stereotypical images of the recipients portraying them as individuals who are behaviourally dysfunctional (Lens 2002, p.142). Loseke (1999, cited in Lens 2002, p.143) held that the initial construction of these social issues includes the creation of moralities and Lens notes that the use of selective language can summon these moralities by the encapsulation of an entire ideology within a word or phrase (Lens 2002, pp.143-144).

The word ‘welfare’ according to Edelman (1975, 1988, cited in Lens 2002, p.144) encapsulates in the vast majority of people the notion of a problem which encourages laziness. Another may be ‘dependency’ as it connotes a meaning of individual insufficiency and not structural deficiencies that have caused the problem (Lens 2002, p.144) These words, acting as a linguistic reference, enabled people to reestablish previously held beliefs about the type of people who fell into poverty and about the causes of such poverty (Edelman, cited in Lens 2002, p.146). The debates and communicates of the TANF discourse were infused with these moral words and phrases (Lens 2002, p.144).

Stigmatizing Unemployed Welfare Recipients

The notion of unemployment as a choice puts the blame at the feet of the individual for being unemployed and seems to relieve the state of all responsibility for not addressing the structural deficiencies which may have

**Neoliberal policy and its influence on welfare ideology:
A source of social injustice?**

caused this situation in the first place. When these structural problems are not addressed it can lead to long-term unemployment. This, in-turn, leads to the stigmatization of the unemployed and welfare recipients and as MacGregor (1999, p.103) notes this new concept of welfare dependency claims that the long-term recipients of this welfare have differing values and culture than those of 'ordinary people' and Murray (1984, cited in MacGregor 1999, p.103) opines that this concept categorises these welfare recipients as those who are most probable to lose the work ethic, exploit the system and adopt a lack of a sense of responsibility. These stereo-typified labels can easily be adopted by potential employers who may refuse to employ such welfare recipients. Deemed unemployable, these individuals will be restricted in the achievement of upward mobility.

According to Deacon and Fisher (1976; 1973, cited in Lund 1999, pp.452-453) a feature of social policy within the twentieth century has been the pursuit for the “scrounger” or the “malingerer,” notwithstanding economic sequences and full employment in two world wars being as a root of variations in joblessness. This feature has also been adopted into neoliberalism. This can be seen through their social policies such as the welfare to work themed workfare introduced most notably within the US (Considine & Dukelow 2009, p.108). One such programme introduced in 1994 was TANF programme.

Poverty is always deserved, except in a small minority of cases. Neoliberals paint the picture of people on benefits as workshy and lazy; they are *Shameless*, as the TV show suggests. However, put to scrutiny, this does not stand up. Many people who go welfare assistance for unemployment (the dole) for example speak of their shame at doing so; for example, in a Swedish study one participant echoed the general consensus when she said “You shrink every time somebody asks you what you do. You feel disappointed... because you don't

have a job. You are ashamed” (Quoted in Starrin 2002, p. 17). Proponents of neoliberalism believe that social welfare payments increase a person’s dependence on benefits. For a small minority this is true. In addition to those who are lacking confidence in their own abilities to secure employment due to their long-term reliance on state money and/or lack of education or other qualifications, there are people who take advantage of the system without any intention of ever entering the labour market. However, there are those people- people lacking any kind of work ethic- also in the upper echelons of society. The constantly scrounging Ross O’Carroll Kelly caricature is as his creator Paul Howard states, based on the observations he made of south Dublin rugby schools, which he couldn’t print for legal reasons (TV3 2010.). In the Edwardian novel, *Room with a View* by EM Forster, not having to work was seen as downright noble. To take a real-life example, our British neighbours pay a high percentage of tax to support the British monarchy, whose incumbents have never had an exactly strenuous working life.

If those in the upper-classes can seemingly get away with not working, why should the poor feel they need to work? This essay argues that unemployment is undesirable for the vast majority of people, whether rich or poor. As mentioned earlier, it can feel shameful to rely on state help, and most people need to feel that their time is occupied. If then, reliance on social welfare is such an undesirable situation for the majority of recipients, what prevents them from moving out of welfare? Is it not just as simple as ‘getting a job’? Up until a few years ago, jobs were seemingly plentiful. Are there structural difficulties preventing people moving out of welfare and into the workforce?

If one traces the life cycle of a consistently poor person, we can see the inequality of the system that prevents them from getting out of poverty. A person may be born in a deprived area of Dublin or Limerick- their address is

**Neoliberal policy and its influence on welfare ideology:
A source of social injustice?**

enough, in later life, to turn potential employers off their CV. A person born to parents who abuse substances or are abusive has barriers put up against them from birth; in extreme circumstances, for example, the baby could be born addicted to narcotics. Naturally, in such dire circumstances, the child and family would come to the attention of care services. However, as we have learned from the recent report into the Roscommon incest case, and other recent HSE failings, the care provided by the Irish state for children is often haphazard, disjointed and negligent. Social workers speak of their severe caseload and restricted resources- one envisions the situation only getting worse in the near future with swinging cuts in public spending looming.

While such dire poverty could be seen as relatively rare, there are 5000 children in state care as of 2009 (Citizen's Information, 2009). Another factor in determining poverty for children is the structure of their family. 65% of the 7% of Irish children at risk of consistent poverty in 2007 were children of lone parent families (Russell, Maître and Nolan 2010, p. 16). Many lone parents are prevented from seeking work outside the home by a lack of affordable childcare; inflexible working arrangements; and moving off welfare only to become 'working poor' when they obtain low-income jobs. Neoliberalism sees lone parents as the definition of undeserving poor. They are raising their children without "appropriate male role models to show them [the children] the virtues of work ethic and the morality of responsible parenthood" - (Fulcher and Scott 2007 p. 731). However, the blatant sexism and lack of understanding of the 'single mothers do it on purpose' argument disregards the difficulties faced by single parents in gaining employment and making a decent wage. For example, a single parent working full-time in a minimum wage job, earning roughly €375 a week, loses any entitlement to benefits, yet they must pay for childcare, schooling etc. out of this money (OPEN 2006).

Neoliberalism and Educational ‘Choice’

When a child raised in poverty begins their education, they have yet more structural barriers placed in their way. Private schools and the advantages that these bring are an obvious impossibility for any child born into a low-income family. However, there is a valid argument that in rural Ireland at least, that being educated in a state school doesn't represent a huge hardship, unlike say, the gun-ridden inner city high schools of Chicago and the gang-dominated comprehensives in parts of London; Ireland has been consistently recognised as having a high standard of education, rated 15th in the global programme for international student assistance (PISA) study by the OECD in 2006 (OECD, PISA 2006 p. 21). It could be argued then, that Ireland is a country that provides equality of opportunity as regards education. But equality of opportunity does not translate to equality. However, during the Celtic Tiger years, the numbers of those who attended private secondary schools rose to 8% (Allen 2000, p. 69). Even within the state system, there are advantages to be gained. In Limerick city for example, certain state schools are more desirable than others and a complicated system of catchment areas and cherry-picking of the best and brightest students, often result in poorer children being educated in what are seen as 'bad' schools. Money is also a huge factor in the type of education a child receives in both primary and secondary school. In recent years, 'voluntary' contributions have become endemic in Irish schools at all levels; these can cost up to €300. There have even been reports of the children of families who haven't paid this contribution being singled out by teachers in front of the class (Pope 2010). Crested uniforms, grinds, music and other extra-curricular activities, books, tutorial colleges; the list of ways richer parents can advantage their children by providing them with the best education possible is endless.

**Neoliberal policy and its influence on welfare ideology:
A source of social injustice?**

Neoliberalism sees education as another arena of competition, “the reinforcement of intensely competitive structures of mobility both inside and outside the school” (Apple 2001, p. 410). There is competition between schools; while Britain has published league tables of schools for years, the Irish Department of Education has consistently refused to publish official league tables, leaving it to the more ‘upmarket’ Sunday broadsheets to do so (Geraghty 2010.) However, despite this reluctance on the part of the Department of Education there is unofficial competition, especially in larger rural towns. In the past, “vocational schools were geared to the children of... manual workers and were often under-funded,” whereas “good” schools were run by “religious” orders (Allen 2000, p. 68). While this has been diluted by the decline of the Catholic Church in active teaching, there is still an element of this in some places. For example in the hometown of one co-author, the Christian Brothers school and Mercy school were seen as better quality schools while the Vocational Education Committee school was viewed in a much lesser light and considered a poor quality school which attracted certain types of pupils. Within schools, there is usually competition between parents that is passed onto children, who are quite susceptible to picking on those children wearing second-hand clothes.

One could argue that the cream will rise to the top and that talented children will excel in school regardless of circumstances. Yet, for many disadvantaged children the education system does not meet their needs and they may drift away from it, especially in deprived areas. The parents of these children may not see the value of education and peer pressure within the wider community may encourage these children to turn away from education. This has a wider impact on their future job and career prospects, and in turn influences the prospects of their own children. According to the Combat Poverty Agency, poor households are more likely to be headed by somebody with a low educational

level. “The importance of education as a buffer... [those head of households] ...without formal educational qualifications...accounted for half of income-poor households in 2007.” (Russell et al 2009, p.14).

Challenging Neoliberal Discourse

This leaves the question as to how to change welfare discourse to present a more compassionate and tolerant paradigm in order to ensure that society will accept those on social welfare without disdain. The answer could be as simple as changing the language used to communicate such discourse. Lens (2002., p.149) believes that to substitute the word ‘welfare’ for the words ‘child poverty’ summons up a different mood of thought and if people were to apply for ‘help’ rather than ‘welfare’ then the public perception would be of a less negative image of the applicant. Lens also adds that the prevailing myths about woman portray them as unsophisticated and incompetent yet on a daily basis these woman confront challenges which would unnerve and unsettle even the most educated of us, so she concludes that words like ‘inventive’, ‘courageous’ and ‘resourceful’ should be submitted instead of ‘flustered’ and ‘confused’ (Lens 2002, p.149). Including these words into the welfare debate could transform the stereotypical images of recipients from the ‘underclass’ to being considered members of the community and not abandoned outside it (Lens 2002, p.150).

Conclusion

The focus of this essay was to provide the reader with an understanding of neoliberal ideology and its inadequacy in addressing structural flaws even when they are identified as the underlying cause to certain social problems. In the Vicki Lens study, all the participants in the TANF debates, such as elected officials, bureaucrats and even advocates for the recipients, pointed out the structural problems which existed, such as insufficient wages and deficiencies

**Neoliberal policy and its influence on welfare ideology:
A source of social injustice?**

within the labour market for low skilled jobs which led to the 'working poor' but none of them offered any structural solutions, instead concentrating on individual solutions such as individual behavioural change (Lens 2002, pp.146-147). The reliance of neoliberal policies on market forces and individualism has corrupted the political theatre and relieved the state of many responsibilities which are inherent to good government. It has forced the needy and dependent into social exclusion, not only through its uncompassionate and disdainful language but also through its lack of initiative in tackling the structural problems causing unemployment (Dean and Taylor-Gooby (1992), cited in Considine and Dukelow 2009, p.108).

This has left thousands of people in disadvantaged circumstances and as such made them members of disadvantaged groups that are prone to severe measures of social exclusion. This essay has argued that one issue is definite - that the understanding of social justice as helping individuals to alleviate their difficulties rather than concentrating on the structural issues inherent in neoliberalism is in itself causing difficulties by reducing opportunity, restricting mobility and forcing people into social exclusion whom otherwise would most certainly not be in those situations.

Unless these inequalities are addressed, the cycle of poverty will continue for the current poor. The neoliberal system may give limited, residual benefits to the poor, but it refuses to address what makes these people poor in the first place. The proponents of neoliberalism are usually the ones who benefit most from it. Ireland's only overtly neoliberal party, the now defunct Progressive Democrats, was mostly made up of prosperous Dublin business people. Neoliberalism, as stated above, is in favour of charity and philanthropic acts. However, one must acknowledge that charity in the traditional sense does not assist people in the long run; rather it is a short-term solution. As the old

proverb states, ‘give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.’ Neoliberals would agree with the above sentiments, as they believe that ‘hand-outs’ increase dependence, yet it would cost too much- both in terms of finance and status- to teach the man to fish- or in real terms, reduce inequality inherent in the system. If change is to come for the people who are trapped within disadvantaged groups then change needs to come in the form of new policies that tackle and address the ever growing problems at the structural level and not blame the individual for deficiencies which he/she has no control over.

References

- Allen, K. (2000) *The Celtic Tiger: The Myth of Social Partnership in Ireland*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Apple, M. W. (2001) “Comparing Neoliberal Projects and Inequality in Education,” *Comparative Education*, Vol. 37 No 4. pp. 409-423.
- Barry, P. (2002) *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Second Edition, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Byrne, D. (1999) *Social Exclusion*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Citizens Information (2009), Children in care, available: http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth_family_relationships/services_and_support_for_children/children_in_care.html [accessed 30 Oct 2010].
- Considine, M. and Dukelow, F. (2009) *Irish Social Policy: A Critical Introduction*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- Dwyer, P. (2002) ‘Making sense of social citizenship: some user views on welfare rights and responsibilities’, *Critical Social Policy*, 22(2), 273-299.
- Dye, Thomas R. (1998) *Understanding Public Policy*, Ninth Edition, Simon and Schuster: New Jersey.

**Neoliberal policy and its influence on welfare ideology:
A source of social injustice?**

Economist Reporter, (2008) 'Is Sarkozy a closet socialist?' *The Economist*, 13 Nov, available: http://www.economist.com/node/12607041?story_id=12607041 [accessed 1 Nov 2010].

Fulcher, J. and Scott, J. (2007) *Sociology*, Third Edition, Oxford.

Geraghty, T. (2010) "In my opinion: League tables don't reflect quality of inclusive schools", *Irish Independent*, 6 Oct. available: <http://www.independent.ie/education/features/in-my-opinion-league-tables-dont-reflect-quality-of-inclusive-schools-2366367.html> [accessed 30 Oct 2010]

Gould, A. (1996) "Sweden: The Last Bastion of Democracy," in George, Vic and Taylor-Gooby, Peter, *European Welfare Policy: Squaring the Welfare Circle*, Hampshire: Macmillan.

Harvey, D. (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford.

Howard, P. (2010) *Interview on Ireland AM*, [television] TV3, 15 June, 08h available: http://www.tv3.ie/article.php?article_id=39271&locID=1.65.74.149&pagename [accessed 1 Nov 2010]

Lens, V. (2002) 'Public Voices and Public Policy: Changing the Societal Discourse on "Welfare"', *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 29 (1), 137-154.

Lund, B. (1999) 'Ask not what your community can do for you: obligations, New labour and welfare reform', *Critical Social Policy*, 19(4), 447-462.

MacGregor, S. (1999) 'Welfare, Neo-Liberalism and New Paternalism: Three Ways for Social Policy in Late Capitalist Societies', *Capital & Class*, 23(1), 91-117.

OECD.- The Programme For International Student Assessment, (2006), "PISA 2006 Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World", OECD. Available: <<http://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/13/39725224.pdf>> [Accessed 30 Oct 2010.]

OPEN.- (2006) *Making Work Pay and Ending Child Poverty for One Parent Families, Budget 2007: Submission to the Department of Social & Family Affairs*, Dublin: OPEN.

Pope, C. (2010) 'The Free School Myth', *The Irish Times*, 16 Aug, available: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/pricewatch/2010/0816/1224276880458.html> [accessed 1 Nov 2010].

Rastello, S. (2005) "Sarkozy's Tough Talk amid Riots Erodes Popularity, Poll Shows," *Bloomberg*, 8 Nov, available: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aVGXyFBqg3Po> [accessed 1 Nov 2010].

Russell, H. Maître, B. and Nolan, B. (2009) "Monitoring poverty trends in Ireland: 2004-2007: key issues for children, people of working age, and older people", Research Series: No 17, Dublin: ESRI and school of Applied Social Sciences UCD. Available: <https://sulis.ul.ie/xsl-portal/site/f08e1dab-d625-4e87-8726-838eeb64266e/page/406ce6cd-6196-44ce-8e5f-cb4a85c4544e> [accessed 30 Oct 2010]

Scott, J. and Marshall, G. (2005) *The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, Third Edition, Oxford.

Starrin, B. (2002) "Unemployment, Poverty and Shame: Exploring the Field" (draft), Karlstad University Sweden and Lillehammer University College Norway. 6 Sept. Available: <http://www.humiliationstudies.org/documents/StarrinUnemploymentPovertSha me.pdf> [accessed 30 Oct 2010]

Welsh, P.J. and Parsons, C. (2006) 'Social justice, service delivery and welfare: reform the politics of deprivation, disaffection and education in the District of Thanet', *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 1(1), 39-57, available: Sage database [accessed 22 September 2010].