

TAVISTOCK POLICY SEMINARS

“CONNECTING PUBLIC POLICY AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS”

Is the (post-war Bevanite) Welfare State Dead?

Speaker: Andrew Cooper

Respondent: Michael Rustin

Date: Thursday, 28 June 2007 (6pm-8pm)

Venue: The Tavistock Centre, Lecture Theatre

What is happening to our welfare state? Without doubt it is in the process of being radically reconstructed and transformed. But what are the organising principles of this transformation, and where are these developments leading?

In this seminar Andrew Cooper will propose that new Labour welfare policy is pulling in opposite directions, with important consequences for certain groups of 'users', and for health and welfare professionals.

The organising principle of contemporary policy is to promote and extend 'opportunity', not to make provision for vulnerable groups in society, and 'opportunity' means primarily ability to compete in the labour market.

The 'enabling' rather than 'providing' state, enacts its agenda via the new forms of 'governance' with which we are familiar. There has been massive new investment in welfare, but this combination of principles is producing radical changes in the quality and meaning of direct service provision - with important and in some cases serious consequences for vulnerable groups. Children in care and older people are two examples which will be explored in more detail.

In his response, Michael Rustin will suggest that from the start the British welfare state had more limited ambitions than some of its current defenders and mourners may care to remember. Within a class-divided social order, it sought to provide social protection to people at vulnerable stages of their life-cycle, but it did little to challenge social hierarchy and inequality itself. It is a matter for debate whether the Thatcher governments decisively moved Britain on a new 'Anglo-American' trajectory, or whether that attempted resolution also failed leading to a situation which is ambiguous and difficult to read. Have welfare systems now lost their capacity to ensure social solidarity and inclusion? Or might they be in process of being re-shaped, in what is plainly a continuing struggle whose outcomes are uncertain?

It is hardly a surprise that a post-war 'welfare state' which has been in existence for over 60 years should be changing. But it will be questioned whether these changes are necessarily for the worse.

Speaker

Andrew Cooper is Professor of Social Work at the Tavistock Clinic and the University of East London

Discussant

Michael Rustin is Professor of Sociology at the University of East London and a Visiting Professor at the Tavistock Clinic.

Programme

Seminars will begin at 6pm with the main presentations. There will be a short break for refreshments at 6.45pm after which the seminar will resume with an open dialogue and end with brief commentaries from the speakers.

Contact

Simone Silverstein
The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust
120 Belsize Lane, London NW3 5BA
Tel: 020 8938 2317
Email: ssilverstein@tavi-port.nhs.uk