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Social inclusion as a rationale for social policy CRSI Thurs 18 November 2010

I'd like to start where Ruth Lister finished in her conclusion to the Brotherhood of Saint Lawrence's 2010 Sambell Oration, delivered in Melbourne just a few weeks ago on 26 October.

In conclusion ... I have tried this evening to paint a broad brush picture of how we might build the inclusive society: a society which is *built on the principles of social justice and inclusive citizenship*; a society which cherishes childhood while also investing in children's future; a society which *values the care ethic as well as the work ethic*; and a society *which shows responsibility towards its weaker members and the wider world*. I am sure *you will each have your own vision of the inclusive society*, but I hope that what I have said will at least encourage you to articulate that vision and work towards achieving it both as individuals and collectively. Thank you for listening. (, 2010) (Lister, 2010: 11: my emphasis)

These are, to me, inspiring words. You can imagine how I like to see the issue of care given recognition alongside paid work, and how the ideals of social justice stir my heart. I feel both empathetically in tune with, and yet a little wary of the call for responsibility towards the weaker members of society and the wider world, precisely because there is an acknowledgement of inequality as ongoing, and an ethic of *noblesse oblige* expressed in the moral appeal to assume responsibility for weaker members, rather than there being actions taken as a matter of legal and political right to overcome their inequality.

Whatever my personal response, it is clear that it is a genuine and authentic expression of concepts of social inclusion from one of those who has earned a right to have her name associated with it.¹ It also provides, without doubt, a clear example of how the concept can provide a comprehensive vision and justification of social policy. Just as surely, the conclusion outlined invites a response from the listeners, from all of us, to identify our own vision of what an inclusive society might involve, to articulate this vision and work towards it, 'as individuals and collectively'. Rather than there being a single concept of social inclusion, this vision explicitly suggests that there are unnumbered millions possible.

In this short paper I attempt to address both characteristics of the concept of social inclusion – its capacity to mean many things to many people and to provide a large and luminous screen on which all manner of personal and social visions can be projected, as well as its capacity to provide a renewed justification for social policy in the 21st century. These two qualities, I argue, are linked and serve to reinforce each other. In turn, though, their coupling serves to weaken its capacity as a rationale to underpin the sorts of systemic changes that social policy demands if it is to operate to overcome the problems of exclusion identified and provide security and certainty to those whose causes are invoked. Rather, the concept, the attempt to create a discourse of social inclusion, in the hesitant, attenuated form that has been adopted, risks remaining simply a gesture towards managing at minimal cost and with little or no certainty, these same people.

Justifying social policy – a selective history

The social and economic arrangements often referred to as the welfare state emerged under capitalism as an acknowledgement that the market creates both wealth and social suffering

¹ Ruth Lister is emeritus and highly esteemed professor of social policy at Loughborough University and was for many years the Director of Child Poverty Action Group in the UK. An activist academic, thus, in the tradition of Richard Titmuss and Peter Townsend.

simultaneously. Market economies create suffering through the exclusion of those who are unable to be profitably employed and through the exploitation and damage done to many who are. These features worsened immeasurably as labour itself became the key commodity of industrialised economies, and employment the main, in most cases, the sole source of income. While initially those who faced poverty and misfortune as a result were left to fend for themselves or forced to rely on family or the charity of the workhouse, by the late 19th C youth and advanced age increasingly came to be considered as legitimate claims on public support. By the 1880s, the Factory Acts excluded children from the workplace and with the Public Education introduced in much the same decade, childhood increasingly came to be seen as a time to prepare, through education, for a life of work. At the other end of the life course, old age, in turn, received support, from government in a grudging recognition that those who had served their years in employment and had grown too old to work deserved support. Introducing a state supported pension for workers in 1889, from the age of 65 (at a time when the life expectancy of a German worker was just 45), for example, is said to have been Bismark's response, to attacks by German socialists that old workers were simply cut off from work and left to die in poverty while even old work horses were kept in pasture.

Over the 20th C social policy developed gradually but inevitably, eventually taking the form in the UK of the Beveridgian Welfare State (and elsewhere other forms of the same) – inspired by the depredations of both the Depression and WWII, and won through the struggle of trade unions, labour activists, churches and others fighting for progressive social reform. As T.H. Marshall reminds us, the extension of welfare support came to be regarded as rights, **the rights of social citizenship**. These represented a political attainment into the economic and social spheres that in many ways enabled participation that matched and helped give substance to the electoral rights of the vote attained decades earlier through universal suffrage. The term *citizenship* is important here, because these rights were linked to entitlements associated with residency and citizenship within the nation state. The justification of social policy as a right of citizenship, however, clearly finds its limits with the exclusion of non-citizens, a limit also seemingly inherent in the justification of social policy as an expression of social inclusion.

Redistribution vs recognition

The social policy of the post war period was underpinned by a discourse of solidarity and redistribution, at least for social democrats, Christian democrats, progressive liberals and many others, including many on the left.² Support of a kind also came from conservatives, although the justification has always been more in terms of a safety net and providing opportunities for self-improvement. The appeal to solidarity and to the justice of redistribution acknowledged the problems of lasting patterns of inequality, especially its expression in the form of class, and sought to remediate the worst effects by social transfers and services amongst relatively homogeneous populations of the nation state. In Australia, for example, a pioneer of much social policy in the early 20th C, the approach has been labelled the 'wage earners welfare state' (Castles, 1985). The emphasis was clearly on welfare through employment - ensuring a living wage for each family, to be paid to each male breadwinner, a measure denied women and carried to its logical extreme through the marriage bar. For any analysts today it is not surprising that this was underpinned by the restrictions on immigration – the white Australia policy. I won't need to remind you that Aborigines people were excluded from the formula, at least until the referendum of 1967, and arguably continuing in other forms since then.

² For conservatives the justification has always been more in terms of a safety net.

It is easy today for opponents to ridicule this sort of policy, limited to redistribution amongst a seeming privileged normatively (and largely culturally) homogeneous core population. The extent of transfers and services, though, have been impressive and transformative – from unemployment and sickness benefits, through to disability pensions, education, and eventually health care and tertiary education. The struggle to maintain these rights as public welfare has been restructured in recent decades, and the continued appeal that the ideals of redistribution have to those on the left should remind us of the value of ideals such as solidarity and redistribution.

Our discomfort with the model, however, arises at least in part from the critique of recognition – perhaps more widely perceived outside academia as the rise of identity politics, the extension of civil rights towards attaining human rights, the flourishing of social movements such as feminism, gay liberation, and through policies such as multiculturalism, that drew attention to those whose group identities did not lead to their benefitting from redistribution. As social policy developed and extended beyond models of homogeneous solidarity to acknowledge, manage and accommodate difference, contradictions have emerged. The issues of redistribution and recognition have been famously explored and debated by Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth (2003).

One of the apparent paradoxes of the models of welfare capitalism that have emerged is the failure of the USA to develop in a way that seems to validate the link between advanced capitalism and the welfare state apparent in other advanced capitalist states. While it is clear that there is an American system of public welfare, from unemployment support through to Medicare, Medicaid, with a retirement pension system that is more generous than ours and is arguably financially unsustainable, explanations have nevertheless kept coming. One of the most persuasive, that of Keith Banting and Wil Kymlicka (Banting and Kymlicka, 2006), builds on apparent contradiction between the discourses of redistribution and those of recognition. Put at its most basic, the more ethnically diverse the population, the less generous the welfare. The USA, with its large Afro-American population and its increasing Hispanic demography seems a perfect illustration. The generous, relatively homogeneous Scandinavian welfare states, too, seem to illustrate this principle.

Alongside the solidarity/redistribution rationales for social policy, others were also developed to serve niche purposes. Multiculturalism developed as a policy to help manage ethnic diversity based on migration, while self-determination arose as a core concept for advancing aboriginal welfare. Anti-discrimination principles were developed and implemented in many nations, while human rights principles were invoked and given institutional form for other social evils. There developed a grab bag of concepts, but the link between them remained implicit and was not clearly articulated.

But are the principles of redistribution and recognition essentially contradictory? Or might they be compatible? Certainly their compatibility is asserted by a number of writers and theorists such as Nancy Fraser (Fraser, 2010). Along with Woodward and Kohli (2001) and others, she identifies social justice as requiring the entailing of '*participatory parity*' along three dimensions – economic, cultural and political. At the level of material resources sufficient to enable independence and 'voice', that of redistribution; that of equal respect to achieve social esteem, that of recognition; and that required for political participation, requiring electoral rights of freedom, acknowledgement of constitutional rights and of the vote or suffrage. In doing so she draws upon and elaborates the critique inherent in the concept of social exclusion.

This, too, is the appeal of concepts of social exclusion and the goal of social inclusion. At once this constellation draws together redistribution, recognition, and electoral and civil rights.

Managing and providing for intervention to deal with the risks of unemployment, the need for support as well as recognition of disabilities, of carers, and of the aged, of ethnic diversity and of aboriginal/indigenous populations, can be drawn together in a single framework, or policy discourse that has clear appeal to a modernising agenda such as that of new labour, and the third way. This opens up, rather than closes off possibilities. There is no need to reduce it to single values, such as hospitality, although this too must remain one of the key possibilities it invites. In short, social inclusion enables the projection of a wide range of ideals of social justice in ways that suggest harmony rather than conflict.

It also poses questions.

Is the current model essentially Westfalian, as Fraser alleges, encouraging the exclusion of the global poor trapped outside the wealthy polities of welfare capitalist nations? Does it obscure rather than highlight inequalities based on employment – through the acceptance of casualisation and deprofessionalisation in employment, and encourage a benign acceptance of the power of the market and of corporate financial capitalism? Is this a discourse too easily propagated by those with power, rather than a call for the overthrow of the powerful? Ruth Levitas's typology of the 'discourses of social exclusion', as she terms them, is insightful in this regard. Social inclusion is readily reduced to a social integrationist discourse (SID), prioritising inclusion through the labour market. There is also a tendency for it descend into MUD, a moral underclass discourse. But if it does not privilege, it does not, either, entirely preclude the longer-standing ideals of a redistributive and egalitarian discourse (RED).

In an extended presentation I would like to explore the links between the rise of Social Inclusion based social policy and the 'new capitalism' of post-neo-liberalism and of what Castells calls network society; the compatibility of the approach with risk, and the rise of concepts such as capabilities, social capital and of the individual. Here I leave that for discussion.

Ontologically, to pick up J-P's and Debra and Mathew's term, social inclusion can and does provide a rationale for social policy that goes beyond redistribution towards recognition. But it also legitimises exclusions – such as international students and asylum seekers. It's strength is that it is at once weak, vague, and remouldable – an ideal that invites each of us, as Ruth Lister reminds us, to project our own passions and hopes onto. But it has been introduced as a discourse of policy, of government, rather than being a goal that has inspired social movements. Its achievements to date are not to be ignored. But its longer term prospects, I contend, are not capable of being resolved simply through academic critique. Instead, the challenge is a practical, political and historic one. Unless and until it becomes a popular political demand, rather than merely a policy justification/rationale, it is difficult to be optimistic about its longer-term transformatory prospects.

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