Working Paper 10

Central and Local Government Policies and Social Exclusion

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Abstract

This paper gives an overview of the impact of social exclusion on national and local government policies since 1997. First, it analyses how government has viewed poverty issues since 1945, focusing on the post-1979 Conservative administration. Th political consensus of 1945-1979 had limited achievements in terms of equality and in 1979-1997 an intentional strategy of inequality was pursued, driven by a desire to cut state intervention and public spending. The paper then describes local government's response to national policy in the latter period, notably through anti-poverty work in urban authorities, whilst also referring to the under-use of local services by the poor. The Labour Government elected in 1997 is then discussed, with three policy strands identified: morality; work ethic within post-monetarist neo-liberalism (rather than redistribution) and an emphasis on the multi-dimensional nature of the problem (which requires 'joined-up solutions'). Overall, a centralised, directional approach is identified, with initiatives in a number of policy areas. Criticisms of new Labour's agenda are reviewed, such as its espousal of equality of opportunity, rather than equality. Here, the paper concludes with Levitas's view that the political framework within which social exclusion operates itself precludes a more equal society. Observations for public libraries are made, relating to opportunities for libraries to realign services to local needs and the impact of Government emphasis on partnership and consultation (November, 1999).

1. Introduction

"It is simply not acceptable that so many children go to school hungry, or not at all, that so many teenagers grow up with no real prospect of a job and that so many pensioners are afraid to go out of their homes. It shames us as a nation, it wastes lives and we all have to pay the costs of dependency and social division" Blair T. (Bringing Britain Together, 1998 p.7)

"I believe in greater equality. If the next Labour Government has not raised the living standards of the poorest by the end of its time in office it will have failed"
Blair T. (Howarth, 1998 p.17)

Two years on from New Labour's election victory in 1997 and Blair's early statements can be tested against government policy initiatives and assessed against policies in action. Some commentators see important changes that will start to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Others are sceptical of the limitations that the government places on itself as it attempts to achieve improvement within a market led economy.

This paper aims to give an overview, through examination of the available literature, of the impact that the concept of social exclusion is having on the policies and direction taken at both the national and local level since 1997. It will do this against an analysis of how government has

viewed poverty issues since 1945 and especially since 1979 and the election that resulted in 17 years of Conservative neo-liberal policies.

2. Consensus: 1945-1979

From the introduction of the "Welfare State" in the immediate post war years to the mid- 1970's there was a measure of agreement on the government's role in addressing poverty in Britain.

Alcock (1997) identified a "strategy of equality", first talked of by Tawney, and introduced with Beveridge's reforms in the first post-war Labour government. He writes that these changes were maintained throughout the decades following the war. Politicians from both major parties pledged support for the Welfare State's aims and achievements. Walker (1997 p.4) notes that:

"Up to 1979 there was a broad political consensus that one important function of government was to try and combat poverty and to reduce, rather than increase, social and economic inequalities"

The reality of what was achieved in these years can be over-emphasised. By the late 1960s the limitations of the Welfare State's "universality" mechanisms in addressing poverty were being recognised. Alcock talks of the "rediscovery of poverty" at this time and he identifies divergent explanations between those on the political left and those on the right.

On the right, politicians, such as Keith Joseph, turned the blame for continued poverty on the poor themselves. They identified "a culture of poverty", "a cycle of deprivation" and expressed concern that social security encouraged dependency on the welfare state. On the left, anti-poverty strategies were developed that focused on poverty traps, income improvement and the wider need to tackle environmental factors, especially in urban inner city areas (Townsend 1979). Tackling the "discovered" poverty against economic constraint resulted in measures heavily influenced by U.S. War on Want programmes. These involved the concept of professionals working in deprived communities to help the poor help themselves or to improve an areas infrastructure (housing stock, street furniture, community centres etc). In Britain, selective, targeted programmes became a feature from this time.

The Plowden Report (1967) was the first major example of recommendations promoting a targeted anti-poverty approach to resource allocation. Thereafter, a series of funding programmes were introduced by successive governments that channelled resources into poor urban areas in order to break "the cycle of deprivation". Bringing Britain Together (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998) lists the most well known and widespread :Community Development Projects (1968-78); the Urban Programme (1980's); Urban Development Corporations (1980's); Task Forces (1980's); City Challenge (1990's); and Single Regeneration (1990's). All of these budgets were cash limited and, increasingly in the 1980's, dependent on competitive bidding. Government funding was complimented by local government initiatives and funding that saw the growth of employment of community and welfare rights officers and increasing grant aiding of independent advice agencies, housing aid centres and law centres. (Alcock 1997)

3. A Strategy of Inequality : 1979-1987

With Britain in economic difficulties and unemployment rising, the Conservative Party came to power in 1979 with a clear brief to reject consensus politics. The views of Joseph and others pursuing a neo-liberal agenda on poverty became dominant. This coincided with similar theories emanating from the United States. Charles Murray's theory of the underclass and its threat to social stability was particularly influential (Levitas, 1998). Where there had been at least a "weak" consensus for combating poverty, Walker (1997 p.5) now discerned a clear intentional "strategy of inequality":

"Rather than seeing inequality as potentially damaging to the social fabric, the Thatcher governments saw it as an engine of enterprise, providing incentives for those at the bottom as well as those at the top"

Hills (1998) identifies the defining feature of Thatcher's government as its attempt to roll back the state: "Public expenditure is at the heart of Britain's present economic difficulties" it stated in its first White Paper on public spending. Expenditure reduction became the constant theme of the neo-liberals. High public expenditure and high taxes were seen as barriers to private enterprise. Low expenditure and low taxes needed to be justified and the theory of the culture of dependency became an influential justification for real reduction in social security and social insurance.

Walker (1997) identifies three key assumptions to the Conservative approach to social policy and the welfare state:

- First, the Government defined its role as providing a minimum for those in poverty rather than tackling the broader questions of social injustice…the market was to cater for rising living standards…[and] the 'trickle-down' theory assumed that the growing economy would automatically provide improved living standards for those at the bottom.
- Second, the Government attempted to deny the existence of real poverty as opposed to relative poverty
- Third, there was a strong emphasis on personal responsibility for poverty

These ideological stances, two economic recessions and rightist economic policies combined to create a "dramatic sharpening of inequalities". Deprivation indicators clearly illustrate this:

- Real incomes between 1979 and 1995 showed a 38% rise in average incomes, a 62% increase in the wealthiest 10%, and a 17% decline in the incomes of the poorest 10% (Alcock 1997).
- The number of individuals living below 50% of average income more than doubled from 8% of the population to 19% between 1979 and 1994 (Oppenheim 1997).
- The percentage of households without a working adult rose from 6.5% in 1977 to 19.1% in 1994 (Convery 1997).
- The proportion of those in workless households unemployed for three years or more increased from 45% to nearly 60% between 1992 and 1998 (Howarth 1998).
- Families with children made up nearly two-thirds of the people in households without paid work (Howarth 1998).

- The government allowed the value of the state retirement pension to increase only in line with prices and not earnings with the consequence that the basic pension fell from 23% to 17% of average earnings between 1979 and 1997 (Howarth 1998).

This was "desperate poverty on a scale not witnessed in Britain since the 1930's" (Walker, 1997) and before the 1997 election Walker and other commentators saw these statistics as a warning to the next government that the strategy of inequality:

"has failed even indirectly to improve the prospects of the poorest [and], in making comfortable Britain even more comfortable, it has widened social divisions to such an extent that they threaten economic performance"

Tony Blair recognised this early into his term when he spoke of poverty as having gained:

"its hold in Britain to an extent unseen since the last war. The 'five giants' that Beveridge identified – want, ignorance, idleness, disease and squalor- all prospered. Yet the system of the welfare state was neglected. It wasn't maintained or modernised. Its costs spiralled while its effectiveness diminished" (Blair, 30 January 1998 in Howarth, 1998 p.11).

4. Local Government in opposition: 1979-97

Before examining the new directions of Labour in office something should be said regarding the role of local government between 1979 and 1997.

During this period most of the large metropolitan districts and much of London were run by Labour councils, many of whom spent long periods opposing the neo-liberalism of the Tory Government. Their role in the development of practical micro anti-poverty strategies throughout this period was significant.

Harvey (1998) saw that:

"during the 1980's, and particularly in the 1990's, local government has led the way in developing new approaches to combating poverty through corporate Anti-Poverty strategies"

From a small number of left wing councils in the mid-1980's (12 in 1987) there were 117 local authorities in 1997 with adopted anti-poverty strategies. Another 99 were in the process of adopting them (Harvey 1998). There is no doubt that this increase was linked to the almost complete take over of local government by Labour and the Liberal Democrats in the 1990's.

What is an anti-poverty strategy? Is it more than a paper document? Can it really tackle poverty or social exclusion?

Harvey (1998) quoting Balloch and Jones (1990) and Robertson (1995) describes an anti-poverty strategy as:

" 'a corporate strategy whereby scarce resources can be effectively directed towards poor people, services made more accessible to them and greater control over their own living standards made possible for them.' The object is to mobilise the whole of the local authority activity in an integrated way. Since poverty affects individuals and communities at multiple levels 'it is logical to draw up strategies for action rather than responding in a piecemeal way' "

Pearson (1995) found that those councils involved in anti-poverty work had set up a wide range of support structures. These usually included operating welfare rights services, organising benefits take-up campaigns, providing debt advice, undertaking community development and community safety projects. Many targeted their services by geographical area and by client group or income.

Obviously, much of the development of this anti-poverty work was in response to the increasing economic and social conditions being created by national government policies. The breadth and scope of these developments illustrate the robust nature of the potential alternative agenda that still managed to operate. The Government placed increasing restrictions on all opposition but these initiatives were still able to flourish.

Balloch and Jones (1990) emphasise local authorities' crucial role in relation to the poor:

"Even within the changing legislative context [of 1990], as major providers and organisers of services for education, housing, leisure, social services and welfare rights, local authorities are in a unique position to gain knowledge of the extent of poverty amongst their population and direct services to those in greatest need. As important local employers they are well placed to encourage good employment practices especially in equal opportunities and low pay. As managers and planners they are closely involved in economic development, job creation, training and transport and thus should be able to act on behalf of those areas particularly deprived. In their responsibility for environmental health and in their liaison with the health authorities, concern over the relationship between inequalities and ill health can be turned into policy and effective practice. Similarly liaison with police and fire authorities can contribute to the development of 'safer cities' and in particular to the improvements of those deprived environments in which it is known that crime and accidents are concentrated."

Their caveat is that " local authorities can contribute in many ways to supporting the poor although it is undoubtedly central government with whom the final responsibility must rest."

Perhaps the word that is important here is 'supporting'. Alcock (1997), while agreeing with the importance of anti-poverty strategies believes that they have clear limitations:

"Important though these initiatives have been in revealing the problems of providing protection for the poor and securing much needed extra support for those experiencing extreme deprivation, there are nevertheless serious problems and contradictions inherent in targeted initiatives to challenge poverty."

This concern with the expectations of targeted initiatives is explored in the section under New Labour below.

Balloch and Jones were also to note that while local authority services were ideally placed, many of their services were underused by the poor and that the better off were benefiting most. Bramley (1996) and others have found the same tendency for services to be pro-rich. There was a contradiction that, while some parts of a council were pursuing targeted anti-poverty strategies, other parts were providing universal services that many of the poor accessed less (and felt able to access less) than others in the community. The evidence (Bramley, 1996; Muddiman, 1999) is that achieving 'whole council integration' of such strategies requires structural and cultural changes not yet widely undertaken. Accompanying ideas of area working and more corporate structures were attempts by local authorities, such as Coventry, to overcome these problems. New Labour awareness of the inconsistencies of achievement by local authorities partly explains their attitude to local government reflected in the Local Government Act 1999 (see below).

5. New Labour: 1997-

"I have chosen this housing estate to deliver my first speech as Prime Minister for a very simple reason. For 18 years, the poorest people in our country have been forgotten by government. They have been left out of growing prosperity, told that they were not needed, ignored by the Government except for the purpose of blaming them. I want that to change. There will be no forgotten people in the Britain I want to build" (Blair 1997a).

In the full text of this speech made from month two of New Labour in power, the kernels of the Government's approach to poverty and social exclusion are all laid out:

- the need to recreate the 'bonds of civic society and community'
- the alliance between the haves and have nots
- the price paid by society for economic and social breakdown in the poorest parts of Britain
- the existence of an 'underclass'
- moral duty and also enlightened self interest
- an ethic of mutual responsibility or duty
- the need for rights and duties to offset dependency
- building independence
- where opportunity is given there is a duty for them to be taken up
- the importance of work
- the shame of inequality
- zero tolerance

The uniting theme is that 'work is the best form of welfare'. Opportunity to 'get on' is important. Equality in terms of redistribution is not mentioned. Carrots and sticks permeate the feel of the speech.

Over the last two years a great deal of flesh has been put on many of these ideas, but each new government initiative maintains the core direction and tone of this speech. In the first annual report on poverty and social exclusion released in September 1999 (Department of Social Security), for instance:

- "It is morally wrong and economically foolish to allow a whole generation to be written off"

- "Fairness and enterprise go hand in hand"
- "everyone should have the opportunity to achieve their potential"
- "work is the most important route out of low income"
- "a cycle of disadvantage"
- "joined-up government"

To understand the government's policies on social exclusion it is important to explore three strands identified by commentators that are reflected in these consistent statements over several years. These key components may be described as: morality; work ethic within post monetarist, neo-liberalism; and the multi-dimensional complexity of the issue.

There is a strong sense of the injustice and immorality of exclusion behind the desire to improve the situation. "It is morally wrong … to allow a whole generation to be written off" (Department of Social Security, 1999). Blair and others in the cabinet speak of "shame" regularly when addressing the problem of poverty (*Bringing Britain together*, 1998; *Teenage pregnancy* 1999). Levitas (1998) is the main writer who tries to understand where this morality has originated. There is no doubt that a strong Christian tone runs through the comments of Blair, Brown and Straw in particular. This is also reflected in the expectations that if opportunities are offered there is a moral duty for the excluded to take them up. This ties in with the views on work ethic explored below. Levitas analysed the supposed influence of John Macmurray's communitarianism on Blair. However, she is sceptical that it amounts to more than an adoption of "Christian or ethical socialism" that signals a distancing "from egalitarian or 'economic' socialism and especially Marxism" (Levitas, 1998 p.105). This allows a shift whereby 'ethical' socialism "no longer rests on or requires economic change and is curiously compatible with capitalism". Adherence to neo-liberal economics with a more social concern is certainly the "post-monetarist" policies of Gordon Brown (Elliott, 1999). It is a morality that believes that something must be done to stop exclusion and give everyone "the opportunity to achieve their full potential" (Department of Social Security, 1999 p.5). These opportunities are expected to be taken up and there is a strong compulsory inclusive feel to the measures that are being put forward by the government to tackle issues. Blunkett (1999) describes this as the "something for something" social contract. Hills (1998) notes that in the proposals for the New Deal for 16-25's there will be:

"no fifth option of continued life on benefits after six months, a major change in the principles of the British social security safety net".

The same attitude is mirrored in the recent Social Exclusion Unit Report on teenage mothers. In future it proposes that the solution for those who cannot live with parents or partner "must be supervised semi-independent housing with support, not a tenancy on their own" (*Teenage pregnancy*, 1999).

If a new moral purpose is an underlying feature of New Labour then it is particularly apparent in the primacy it gives to work as "the most important route out of low income" (Department of Social Security, 1999 p.4). Hills (1998) and Levitas (1998) identify the overriding emphasis on "the promotion of work and the work ethic" as an inclusive device by New Labour. Work is the panacea for young unemployed (New Deal); for lone parents; for teenage mothers (*Teenage Pregnancy*, 1999). The Working Families Tax Credit is the major plank of its economic attack

on low pay. A low minimum wage is available but improvements to social insurance (unemployment benefit) are less important than maintaining job flexibility (Mandelson, 1998). Harriet Harman, quoted by Levitas (1998) said that "we [the Government] want to make the mainstream economy – with its opportunities and risks – the main path out of exclusion for all people of working age". Gordon Brown states that it is Labour's intention to "re-establish the work ethic at the centre of the welfare system". Peter Mandelson (1998) put the priorities bluntly:

"We are determined to do more for those on the lowest incomes when economic circumstances and the re-ordering of public expenditure makes this possible… But we must concentrate effort on helping individuals who can escape their situation to do so, in the knowledge that personal skills and employment are the most effective anti-poverty policy in the long run".

Government statements make clear that their policies need to be judged over a long time scale. The eradication of child poverty has a 20 year time scale (Department of Social Security, 1999) and there are a wide range of measures that link future work opportunities with the quality of education and life long learning provision. This emphasis on the long term, and the adherence to equality of opportunity rather than a goal of equality and more immediate redistributive measures, has been highlighted by some writers. "Equality of outcome…. Is neither desirable or feasible" Levitas (1998 p.135 quoting Gordon Brown). Robinson (1998) emphasises the government's belief that "social exclusion is best promoted through enhanced employment opportunity and not the redistribution of income through the tax and benefits system". The extent to which the government uses redistribution of income as a tool against social exclusion is likely to continue to be a contentious benchmark. Mandelson (1998), for instance, states that the government should be judged in 10 years when a more equal society will have been achieved "by many different routes not just the redistribution of cash from rich to poor which others artifically choose as their limited definition of egalitarianism". Levitas (1998 p.136), however, is already clear what the rejection of an equal income society means:

"Labour's rejection of redistribution from rich to poor is not, however, a rejection of redistribution in itself. Rather, it is a legitimation of the major redistribution from poor to rich which marked the 1979-97 Conservative regime".

Such comments cut to the heart of the criticisms of those who are frustrated that New Labour will always allow the exigencies of the global capitalist economy set the limits to support given to the socially excluded. Thus morality and inclusion requires a minimum wage but the market must determine its rate. Any work, within minimum wage guidelines, is considered more important than unemployment in the context of combating exclusion. Forrester (in Cotton, 1999) sees it differently:

"Neo-liberalism has introduced a new economic paradigm. Increasingly it offers the most vulnerable in our society a quite new choice – poverty at work or poverty on the dole"

The emphasis on work is also seen as overshadowing the needs of those for whom work is not an option:

- "The government has started using language borrowed from Continental Europe of 'social exclusion and 'social inclusion' but much of the way it uses it implies that the main way in which inclusion is achieved is through paid work rather than other activities" (Hills, 1998)
- Social exclusion arises not only in the labour market but affects many aspects of everyday life… Unemployment causes social exclusion but a job does not guarantee social inclusion" (Atkinson, 1998)
- "Although 'Welfare to Work' will undoubtedly help many people a substantial proportion of the population remain dependent on welfare benefits, including disabled and older people" (Edwards, 1998)
- "For pensioners an 'employment' based strategy for alleviating poverty is by definition irrelevant and for lone parents it raises issues relating to the balance between work and child care responsibilities" (Robinson, 1998)

The final strand of the government's approach reflects how it intends to provide inclusion within a largely non-redistributive agenda. It amounts to a very multi-faceted strategy to what it rightly perceives as complex multi-dimensional problems. As well as the lack of opportunities to work it identifies other problems to be faced: lack of opportunities to acquire education and skills; childhood deprivation; disrupted families; barriers to older people living active, fulfilling and healthy lives; inequalities in health; poor housing; poor neighbourhoods; fear of crime; and disadvantaged groups (Department of Social Security, 1999).

To address these issues it has adopted a very centralised directional approach and a whirlwind of initiatives, pilots, experiments and schemes. It puts a great deal of stress on the long haul to solutions but, conversely, is fast tracking pilot projects across the very wide social exclusion agenda it has set itself. Defining features of all the schemes are the emphasis on inter-departmental and cross sector working (the ubiquitous "joined-up government") and the importance of consultation with and empowerment of local groups, communities and individuals. Equally, there are no ideological agendas in delivering solutions. While the need to work with local government is often acknowledged, many of the pilots encourage consideration of non-local authority mechanisms (e.g. Department for Education and Employment, 1998).

While the centralised, hands on, approach to initiatives partly stems from a desire to control co-ordination and be seen to be pushing forward it also reflects a distrust of the traditional intermediaries of the state to deliver (Carvel and Brindle, 1999). This is best illustrated by the Local Government Act 1999 and the plethora of performance indicators accompanying the Best Value agenda. Contrary to what might have been expected with the election of New Labour, local government has seen a need to resell itself and argue that it has a role in these initiatives (Local Government Association, 1999).

The result of the government's almost shotgun pellet approach to exclusion is a bewildering range of initiatives in all fields. Rarely a day has passed without another ministerial announcement. In its first annual report on poverty and social exclusion almost 40 key initiatives, 35 future policy milestones and 40 indicators of success are listed (Department of Social Security, 1999). The whirlwind of activity clearly gives an impression of a seriousness to tackle issues. Timescales are inevitably tight. *Bringing Britain Together* (1999) outlines a reporting programme of 6-9 months for most of the 18 task teams.

Hills (1998) identifies some of the key planks to this national all embracing strategy:

- " The priority (including extra spending) given to education in general and training for the unemployed in particular as measures intended to address fundamental reasons for unemployment and low pay.
- Introduction of a national minimum wage.
- Subsidies to employers to take on the young and long term unemployed, and other elements of the New Deal.
- The Working Families Tax Credit, which will be more generous to low paid workers with children than the existing Family Credit.
- Increases in the universal Child Benefit and in allowances for younger children in Income Support.
- Proposed reforms to the Child Support Agency which will allow lone parents on benefit to keep some of the maintenance paid to them.
- Reforms to National Insurance Contributions which reduce taxes on the low paid and their employers.
- A new campaign to try and ensure that more of the poorest pensioners claim benefits to which they are entitled, and a real increase in the level of income support for pensioners…
- Special help for low income neighbourhoods through health, education and employment action zones and the 'New Deal for Communities'.
- Particular measures recommended by the Social Exclusion Unit to tackle school exclusions and truancy, street homelessness and the poorest areas of social housing.
- Commitment to produce an annual report on poverty in Britain."

To these initiatives can be added others such as the early creation of the Social Exclusion Unit to oversee joined-up Government policy and the requirement on local government and health services to adopt social exclusion strategies. With national standards and performance indicators being either introduced or considered, for everything from mortality rates in NHS trusts to library book stocks, flexibility outside of specific funding initiatives continually diminishes. Once a course of action is accepted as proven then all local government is expected to follow. Opting out is no more an option for local authorities than it is is for 16 year olds. Best Value is a prime example of this and reflects the reality that local government services have, in the past, been very disparate and of very variable quality. If inclusive agendas, such as equality of opportunity, are to be delivered it is not surprising that New Labour is taking a centralising performance indicator route.

For local government Best Value represents the most substantial challenge to its continued role as provider of services to local people. Over a five-year period each local authority will be required to "test" all of its services. It will have to challenge the accepted methods of provision. It will have to consult about its services with a wide range of its clients including showing that it has consulted with socially excluded groups. It will need to compare its service provision with other similar authorities and against local and national performance indicators. Finally it will have to consider competitors and whether other providers could provide or help provide the service better. Best Value is fundamentally a stick to ensure "continual improvement". Its indicators and standards will ensure uniformity of direction and increasingly uniformity of performance. What it does not ensure or even necessarily support is the continuation of public

services. As with much else the end is important but if alternative means of delivery provide the "best value" then they will be supported and encouraged. (DETR 1999).

All of the initiatives considered above clearly illustrate an agenda that is all encompassing. However, as the issue over equality versus equality of opportunity has already shown, what some commentators are most concerned with is the actual nature of this agenda (Levitas, 1998; Hills 1998). There is particular doubt expressed regarding the number of initiatives that continue to rely on the targeting of particular communities or particular groups. The publication of *Bringing Britain Together* (1998), for instance, coincided with the commencement of work on 17 of the "worst" estates, but the report itself identifies over 1000 in need of support. Moreover, many of the schemes remain competitive (Single Regeneration Budget; Education Action zones; Health Action zones; Sure Start). Kleinman (1998) and Alcock (1998) both see the dangers of the targeting approach of the 60's and 70's being repeated. Like Levitas (1998) they draw a distinction between targeting to alleviate the worst problems within a national strategy that includes income redistribution and what appears to be the case with New Labour which is a strategy without this particular national context. However, as the initiatives continue to multiple and cover more and more areas of social exclusion, the debate comes down to fundamental differences between those who believe in the need for an equal society and those who believe in the equality of opportunities within a capitalist society.

Levitas' (1998) conclusion is appropriate:

"While we should use the concept of social exclusion to pursue as much equality as is possible, we should remember that the political framework within which it operates is one which itself excludes the possibility of an equal society"

6. Conclusion

The Government's moral crusade can be seen as a genuine attempt to reduce the inequalities that have widened between 1979-1997.

- It is an attempt to bring about inclusion into a largely status quo (neo-liberal) society.
- It starts from a basis that exclusion is bad for all of society and is a threat to one nation harmony.
- It regards a need to have sticks as well as carrots to ensure inclusion.
- It reflects the intolerance in much of the 'included' society with the believed outcomes of the actions of the 'excluded' – drugs, crime, anti-social behaviour, teenage pregnancies, idleness.
- It has a clear agenda of rights gained through responsibilities.
- It believes particularly in the ability of work to be a tool for inclusion.
- It believes in creating opportunities that are accessible to all but accepts that there will still be inequalities in society and this is not bad.
- It believes that most of the measures that need to be taken should be focused on specific areas and socio-economic groups.
- In terms of area initiatives it considers the importance of community involvement, participation and decision making to be fundamental requirements.
- In terms of socio-economic groups it is often didactic in its statements about what they will have to do to be included.

- It is entirely open about the means and processes to achieving inclusion. Anything that works is an option. However, it shows distrust of the traditional delivery mechanisms including local government.

7. Observations for Public Libraries

- Strategies to tackle social exclusion give public libraries the opportunity to realign their services to the needs of local communities. It is an opportunity to more strategically develop a social policy centred on supporting those most in need and often least provided for by present strategies. If New Labour follows through its proposals then all public libraries will be expected to address social exclusion. The government is also clearly committed to the importance of ICT as a mechanism to combat the lack of skill base among socially excluded groups. There is potential for public libraries to harness the present concentration on technological futures with social strategies. New technologies are providing the public library with new tools. The social exclusion agenda, with its link into many fields (health, education, race, gender, crime etc) offers the scope for potentially imaginative partnerships with the community and other agencies.
- The importance given by the government to both community consultation and partnership working will also require many public libraries to consider their internal structures and how they can achieve involvement and participation with this agenda. It does not mean the return to 1970s community librarianship but it will require librarians and "whole" library structures that are more radical in challenging present service provision and more systematically responsive to communities and community empowerment.
- Government will also test the development of public libraries against annual library plans (with the likelihood of increasing use of rankings) and against performance indicators from Best Value and the Audit Commission (Department of environment, Transport and The Regions, 1999). Strategies to address social exclusion are interwoven into both.

Definitions

The Government has not attempted to produce a single, unifying definition to explain what it means by social exclusion. Indeed, some commentators are critical of it on this point (Edwards, 1998). Especially, there is some confusion regarding the use of the terms social exclusion and social inclusion. This research believes that the use of exclusion better locates the agenda on the needs of the excluded. Inclusion can be read both positively and negatively depending on the nature of the inclusive society being offered. Below are a range of definitions found in government documents and statements. They reveal the way the Government has both adopted the wider European definition of social exclusion and also tended to concentrate on notions of underclass, generational poverty and geographically confined area problems.

"Social exclusion is about income but it is about more. It is about prospects and networks and life-chances. It's a very modern problem, and one that is more harmful to the individual, more damaging to self-esteem, more corrosive for society as a whole, more likely to be passed down from generation to generation, than material poverty" (Blair, T. 1997. Stockwell School)

"Social exclusion is a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health, poverty and family breakdown" (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999).

"The extent of the Tory failure is truly shocking. Their legacy is 5 million families in which no one of working age works. 150,000 people are now deemed to be homeless. There may be as many as 100,000 children not attending school in England and Wales. Britain has a higher proportion of single parent families than anywhere else in Europe. There are 3 million people living in the worst 1,300 housing estates experiencing deprivation, rising poverty, unemployment, educational failure and crime. Behind these statistics, as the Prime Minister has said, are people who have lost hope, trapped in fatalism. They are today's and tomorrow's underclass, shut out from society" (Mandelson, 1998)

"These factors act together to create a cycle of disadvantage. The effects can persist throughout people's lives. Deprivation in childhood can lead to low educational achievement and on to worse outcomes in adulthood and to poverty and social exclusion in old age. And these effects can be passed between generations. The result is socially divisive and economically inefficient." (Department of Social Security, 1999).

"People who are socially excluded lack the means to take a full part in the economic, social, cultural and political life. They may lack basic skills or adequate accommodation, they may be socially isolated or living in economically and socially impoverished communities, perhaps with drug or alcohol problems, and they may be dependent on welfare. Social exclusion may be due to many factors – unemployment, low pay, low self-esteem, discrimination or lack of facilities and support. While material deprivation and lack of income are important aspects of social exclusion, this concept is not just about poverty. Neither is it simply about the effects of multiple disadvantage. Rather, it attempts to capture the many reasons and complex processes by which people become shut off from society" (Department for Education and Employment, Quality and Performance Improvement Division, 1998).

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