Poverty and Social Justice: recognition and respect

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Foreword

One of CISWO's main aims is to enhance the quality of life, by the promotion of social inclusion in coalfield communities.

The organisation is delighted, through funding pledged by the Trustees of the South Wales Miners' Welfare Trust Fund Scheme, to sponsor the publication of Ruth Lister's Annual Lecture 2003.

Her thoughts are a valuable contribution to understanding how poverty shapes peoples lives, not just materially but how they live and get on with a whole range of people and institutions in Wales today.

Sadly far too many people that we work with experience poverty and we see all too clearly the effects that poverty can have.

There is a real need for continued action by Government at all levels to address poverty.

In the meantime we are pleased to work with the Bevan Foundation to raise these issues.

Poverty and Social Justice: recognition and respect

Introduction

I am honoured to have been asked to deliver the third Bevan Foundation Annual Lecture; honoured both because of the huge contribution that Aneurin Bevan made to the cause of social justice and also to be following in the footsteps of Gordon Brown and Peter Hain. Although this will be a less political lecture than theirs, poverty and social justice are inescapably political issues and thus I will conclude by drawing out some broad implications of my lecture for policy and for politics.

First, though, I want to say something about the extent of poverty and make the link between poverty and socio-economic inequality and other social divisions. I will then talk about what we mean by poverty and consider its impact – both material and non-material - on those who have to endure it. This will lead into a discussion of how our understanding of poverty can be enhanced when thinking of it in terms of diminished human rights, citizenship, voice and power. I will frame my policy conclusions by arguing for a conception of social justice that involves a politics of both redistribution and what I call 'recognition and respect'.

Poverty, inequality and social divisions

The latest government figures show that just over a fifth of the total population and as many as 28 per cent of children were living in households in poverty in 2002/03. Although these figures are shockingly high, they do represent an improvement on the position the UK government faced when it came to power, particularly in relation to child and pensioner poverty. Comparisons with other members of the non-enlarged European Union underline how such high levels of poverty are not inevitable. We had the fifth highest level of child poverty in 2001; at the other end of the scale in Finland, Denmark and Sweden just over five per cent of children were in poverty. Most of the poverty experienced in our country is thus, as Nye Bevan put it, 'preventable'. He surely would not have imagined that there would be such high levels of poverty half a century on from when he wrote in *In Place of Fear* that 'a free people will always refuse to put up with preventable poverty' and that 'the belief that poverty is preventable is a natural outcome of the triumphs of the machine age…[and] a relatively new mood for mankind' (1961: 23).

Most of the poverty experienced in our country is, as Nye Bevan put it, 'preventable'

Wales is in line with the national poverty figures for the population as a whole and is well below average for pensioners. But it has a larger proportion of children in poverty at 30 per cent and the highest child poverty rate of the countries that make up the UK. It also has the fourth highest regional child income deprivation rate in England and Wales and an above average proportion of wards falling in the most deprived fifth of wards. More positively, whereas Merthyr Tydfil, which is the district with the highest child deprivation rate in Wales, ranked 11th in England and Wales in 1999, it had fallen to 22nd by 2001 (Work and Pensions Committee, 2004).

The Institute of Welsh Affairs warns that 'Wales has a formidable amount of poverty and deprivation to address, more than most other parts of the United Kingdom' (Osmond and Mugaseth, 2004: 133). The Welsh Assembly Government's *Social Justice Report 2004* (and I envy you having a Minister for Social Justice!) states that 'Wales is a country that suffers in places from pronounced deprivation. Such areas suffer from poor standards of health, low educational attainment, substance misuse, benefit dependency [a term I would prefer not to use] and a dearth of employment prospects'. Economic inactivity and low pay are key factors.

A social justice perspective on poverty means considering it in relation to the overall distribution of income and wealth. As one writer on social justice put it, 'we are discussing how the good and bad things in life should be distributed among the members of a human society' (Miller, 1999: 1). Or, in the immortal words of R. H. Tawney, 'what thoughtful rich people call the problem of poverty thoughtful poor people call with equal justice the problem of riches' (1913). For much of the twentieth century the trend was towards a more equitable distribution of material resources. The trend halted after 1979 and went into reverse; the share of income (both before and after tax) received by the top 1 per cent has returned to broadly similar levels to those when Nye Bevan was a government minister in the 1940s (Atkinson, 2003). According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the present government has not been able to bring inequality down to earlier levels but its more redistributive measures have at least helped to stem the rate of the upwards trend.

A social justice perspective on poverty means considering it in relation to the overall distribution of income and wealth.

While my focus is on poverty and social justice in Britain, Bevan's internationalism, reflected in the ethos of the Foundation, means that we must not forget global inequality. Although global trends are the subject of some dispute, many argue that an intensification of poverty in some countries is associated with growing global inequality, the level of which has been described by the United Nations Development Programme as 'grotesque' (2003: 39).

Throughout the world, poverty intersects with social divisions of gender, 'race' and disability and also with position in the life-course (with childhood and old age particularly vulnerable stages in many countries). Thus, it can reflect not just class-related inequalities but also discriminatory processes that disadvantage women, black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and disabled people. In the UK, it has been estimated that women are five per cent more likely than men to be in poverty (Bradshaw et al., 2003). But the statistics do not tell us the full extent of female poverty because they assume that resources are shared fairly within the family, an assumption questioned by a number of studies. Moreover, as an Oxfam GB study in Merthyr Tydfil demonstrated, a gender analysis deepens our understanding of the different ways that men and women experience poverty (Buhaenko et al., 2003).

The presence of a disabled adult or child increases the risk of poverty by seven to eight percentage points. Black and minority ethnic groups are more likely overall to be in poverty than white groups. There is, however, considerable diversity between minority ethnic groups. The greatest deprivation is among Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, seven out of ten of whom are in poverty. Although they are not picked up by the statistics, some of the worst poverty is to be found among asylum-seekers. The work of the Refugee Council suggests that the operation of section 55 has left some asylum-seekers destitute, reliant on the support of voluntary organisations and refugee communities.

What do we mean by poverty?

I am conscious that I have been talking about poverty without defining my terms. The figures I have given you are based on the measure used by government that is most frequently cited: 60 per cent of median income, after housing costs. This is sometimes erroneously called a definition of poverty, but it is no such thing. It is simply a measure and measures are technical devices that are constrained by limitations of methodology and by the available data. A definition should distinguish the state of poverty from that of non-poverty, for instance in terms of low living standards and/or inability to participate fully in society because of lack of material resources.

Such a definition is reflected in some of the ways that people in poverty themselves talk about poverty, for instance:

> 'Sleeping in a bed that used to be someone's else's, wearing cast-off clothes, and being expected to be grateful'; or
> 'Dreading every Christmas and birthday because of the disappointment in the children's eyes' (ATD u.d.).

But listening to people in poverty also reveals other meanings – words like 'humiliating', 'indignity', 'denial of human rights' (UKCAP, 1997). People talk about feeling judged and looked down on; 'never feeling good enough' (ATD u.d.).

This suggests that as well as measures and definitions, we need a broader conceptualisation of poverty if we are to understand its meanings, particularly for those experiencing it. A broader conceptualisation of poverty enables us to take on board its non-material aspects. These largely stem from people in poverty's everyday interactions with the wider society and from the way they are talked about and treated by politicians, officials, professionals, the media. Poverty has to be understood not just as a disadvantaged and insecure economic condition but also as a shameful and corrosive social relation. This perspective has been illuminated in particular by participatory research in the Southern hemisphere. This has highlighted non-material aspects of poverty such as: lack of voice, disrespect, humiliation and an assault on dignity and self-esteem, shame and stigma; powerlessness; denial of rights and diminished citizenship. I will elaborate on some of these in a moment.

Poverty has to be understood as a shameful and corrosive social relation.

The impact of poverty

The impact of poverty – both immediate and longer term – depends in part on whether it is a short term, long term or recurrent experience. One of the main developments in poverty research in recent years has been the ability to supplement traditional snapshot measures with longitudinal data that track what happens to people over a number of years. While some people may experience only one or two brief spells of poverty, others are trapped for years, if not a lifetime, or move frequently in and out of poverty over many years, without ever enjoying genuine security.

Thus government figures show that over the period 1991-2001, as many as half of all individuals spent at least one year in a household measured as poor and one in six spent at least five years. In contrast, only one per cent spent all 11 years at this income level. Research by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University estimated that just under one in ten children had experienced persistent and severe poverty over a five year period in the 1990s (Adelman et al., 2003).

Where poverty is long-term or recurrent it is likely to impact negatively on health, education and general life chances. Poverty affects the very likelihood of a baby surviving: a baby born into social class V is more than twice as likely to die within 12 months as a baby born into social class 1. As the Foundation's report on the South Wales Valleys found, 'the people with the greatest need too often have the poorest [health] services' (Winckler, 2003, p.38). The government frequently cites the statistic that by the age of 22 months there is a 14 percentage point gap between the educational development of children in social classes I and II and of children in classes IV and V. One study of literacy and numeracy found that social and economic disadvantage was the most important factor in hindering basic skills

development. It concluded that arguably the most powerful educational policy would be to tackle child poverty directly (Robinson, 1997).

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Poverty's more immediate material impact manifests itself through deprivation. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey found that of the UK's population of 58 million:

> ➢ some 9.5 million cannot afford to keep their homes adequately heated, free from damp and decently decorated;
> ➢ nearly 7.5 million do not have the money to participate in common social activities;
> ➢ a third of children go without at least one necessity such as adequate clothing and three meals a day, and nearly a fifth go without two or more;
> ➢ roughly 6.5 million adults cannot afford essential clothing;
> ➢ some 4 million do not have enough money for an adequate diet (Gordon et al., 2000).

Qualitative studies give more of a feel of what such deprivation means for those experiencing it. An overview of 30 such studies reveals that 'life on a low income…is a stressful and debilitating experience' especially for those living on benefit who 'face a struggle against encroaching debt and social isolation where even the most resilient and resourceful are hard pressed to survive' (Barclay, 1996). Nevertheless, research also shows how resilient many living in poverty are in their struggle to get by – particularly women who are typically the main managers of poverty and who act as shock-absorbers of poverty as they try to protect their children from its worst effects, often to the detriment of their own physical and mental health. Generally the picture painted is one of constant restrictions; doing without; running out of money at the end of the week; limited choice; no room for spontaneity; damaged family relationships; isolation from the wider society. 'Existing not living' is a recurrent phrase used by people in poverty to describe its material impact.

Bringing up children in poverty is particularly tough. The inability to meet children's needs and demands makes parents feel guilty and a failure and can lead to family tensions. Research shows that both parents and children place great emphasis on 'participation': the right of every child to share in the activities, experiences and lifestyle of the community in which s/he is brought up. Both also fear its negative corollary: exclusion.   In a materialistic world the ability for an individual child to participate largely depends on access to goods, services and activities, most of which have a financial cost.

A more recent study talked to children themselves. It found that children in poverty often don't 'fit in', particularly with regards to the 'right' clothing. The 'wrong' clothing can mean bullying and general exclusion. They often can't 'join in' shared social activities with their peers because of the cost. The children spoke of 'their fears of social difference and stigma' (Ridge, 2002) In the words of a child in a separate study carried out by Save the Children Wales with children in deprived communities: 'People think you're different and treat you different if you're poor (Crowley and Vulliamy, u.d. p15).

Othering 'the poor'

This brings us to the psychological impact of the way people in poverty are often treated. In a study I was involved in, 'poverty was associated with loss of self esteem, feelings of powerlessness, anger, depression, anxiety and boredom' (Beresford et al., 1999). In another report, one woman put it graphically: 'You're like an onion and gradually every skin is peeled off of you and there's nothing left. All your self esteem and how you feel about yourself is gone – you're left feeling like nothing and then your family feels like that' (UKCAP, 1997).

Stigma, lack of respect and denial of dignity are constant refrains when people in poverty talk about how they are treated by the wider society; the most recent example can be found in the Report of the Child Poverty Task Group (2004) published this week by the Welsh Assembly Government. Two contributions at a national poverty hearing held by Church Action on Poverty (CAP) are typical: 'The worst blow of all is the contempt of your fellow citizens. I and many families live in that contempt' and 'I just feel very angry sometimes that people are ignorant to the fact that we are humans as well and we do need to be respected' (Russell, 1996). The Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, of which I was a member and half of whose members had direct experience of poverty, reported 'the lack of respect for people living in poverty was one of the clearest and most heartfelt messages which came across to us as a Commission' (CoPPP, 2000). Participants in the South Wales Oxfam GB study spoke of their dislike of the stigma they felt attached to their estate.

Stigma, lack of respect and denial of dignity are constant refrains

What people in poverty are reacting to is a process of what we might call 'othering' i.e. they are treated and talked about as people who are 'other' to the rest of us. It is a process of differentiation and demarcation, by which the line is drawn between 'us' and 'them' and through which social distance is established and maintained. The line is imbued with negative value judgements that construct 'the poor' variously as a source of moral contamination, a threat, an 'undeserving' economic burden, an object of pity or even as an exotic species.

Language is an important part of the process. By and large, the language and labels used to describe 'the poor' have been articulated by the more powerful 'non-poor' – the media, politicians, academics. It is a language that is rooted in history with its division of the poor into 'deserving' and 'undeserving' groups. The more obviously demeaning examples today are 'underclass' and 'welfare dependant' – and the American terms 'white' or 'trailer trash'. But the less value-laden word 'poor' is itself problematic. It is an adjective that we 'apply' to 'them' but people in poverty themselves are often reluctant to wear what they perceive to be a stigmatising label, with its connotations of inferior as in 'poor quality'. Typically they are not asked how they want to be described.

Human rights and citizenship

This reflects a more general unwillingness to listen to what people in poverty have to say and to treat them as *subjects* of their own lives rather than as the *objects* of professional judgement, research and policy. As Moraene Roberts complained at the CAP poverty hearing: 'No-one asks our views…But we are the real experts of our own hopes and aspirations…We can contribute if you are prepared to give up a little power to allow us to participate as partners in our own future, and in the future of the country' (Russell, 1996). This is beginning to change thanks to pressure from organisations involving people in poverty themselves. These organisations are frequently framing their demands using a language of human rights, citizenship, voice and power.

The UN has helped to promote a human rights discourse. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, a human rights conceptualisation of poverty:

> leads to more adequate responses to the many facets of poverty…It gives due attention to the critical vulnerability and subjective daily assaults on human dignity that accompany poverty. Importantly, it looks not just at resources but also at the capabilities, choices, security and power needed for enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other fundamental, civil, cultural, political and social rights' (www.unhcr.ch/development/pov-02.html).

Two key tenets underpin this statement. First is respect for the dignity of all human beings. It can be the everyday *in*dignities that make poverty so difficult to bear. For instance, poverty activist Willie Baptist tells how the main concern of a group of homeless people in the US was the indignity of having to line up daily to receive a ration of five pieces of toilet paper. 'That infuriated them', he writes, 'it took them beneath any level of dignity they might have' and it was around that indignity, rather than the wider issue of homelessness, that they were prepared to organise. Similarly, a low paid worker, involved in a Living Wage Campaign in London, challenged a shareholders' meeting at the head office of the bank where he cleans: 'I am asking you for a living wage so that I and my colleagues can have the same dignity as ordinary people'.

Second, is the notion of the indivisibility or interdependence of human rights so, for instance, it is difficult to exercise political and civil rights to the full, if you are hungry or homeless, lacking adequate socio-economic rights. The language of indivisible human rights has proved a valuable mobilising tool for some groups in different parts of the world.

<u>Citizenship</u>

In the context of individual nation states, the more general human rights are made concrete through specific citizenship rights. Both poverty and social exclusion have been conceptualised in terms of the denial of the full enjoyment of the triad of political, civil and social citizenship rights. The concern with dignity and respect expressed by many experiencing poverty also has implications for the more recently developed notion of cultural citizenship rights, which include the rights to 'symbolic presence and visibility (vs. marginalisation)' and 'dignifying representation (vs. stigmatisation)' (Pakulski, 1997: 80).

Citizenship rights derive from membership of a particular society. At the first European Meeting of Citizens Living in Poverty, the European Anti-Poverty Network reports that 'participants stressed that they were first and foremost "*citizens*" before being "*people experiencing poverty*". Citizenship is something to which we all stake a claim and means "*being part of the mainstream of society*"' (EAPN, 2003, p4, emphasis in original). Being part of the mainstream of society involves participation in the social, economic, political, civic and cultural spheres.

Citizenship is, of course, also about responsibilities, as the government is constantly reminding us. Yet, poverty can undermine people's capacity to fulfil their responsibilities as a citizen. In the words of a study of disabled people's citizenship, 'the ability to contribute to or participate in society as a full citizen requires a basic level of access to essential goods, services and facilities' (Knight et al., 2002: 10).

<u>Voice and power</u>

A key element of participation from a citizenship perspective is political participation. A number of political theorists have posited the idea of a basic 'right of participation in decision-making in social, economic, cultural and political life' (Gould, 1988). Draft UN guidelines declare that 'a human rights approach to poverty reduction…requires active and informed participation by the poor in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies'.

This goes to the heart of the voicelessness and powerlessness frequently identified as critical to their situation by people in poverty in both Northern and Southern hemispheres. Oxfam conceptualises poverty as 'a state of powerlessness in which people are unable to exercise their basic human rights or control virtually any aspect of their lives' (Hocking, 2003). Lack of voice is both a symptom of the political powerlessness of people in poverty

and a cause of their often expressed feelings of powerlessness. As Nye Bevan observed, 'silent pain evokes no response. The social reforms of the twentieth century are a consequence of the democratic power of the masses and not of increased enlightenment…Political democracy brings the welfare of ordinary men and women on to the agenda of political discussion and demands its consideration' (1961, pp24-5).

But in today's democracy, even though we have a government committed to the eradication of child and pensioner poverty, the welfare of people in poverty is not very high on the 'agenda of political discussion' particularly at general election time. And excluded groups do not always feel that their views and interests are adequately represented through representative democratic institutions. Hence the growing calls for the voices of the marginalised to be heard in policy-making and campaigning. At a local consultation in Wales someone said: 'We are not inferior – we are not deficient – but we are made to feel that way. You have the power to change things – listen to our voice!' (CoPPP, 2000, p. 3). And a strong message from the consultation with children and young people carried out by the Child Poverty Task Group was that they should be listened to.

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Principles of democracy and of social inclusion are part of the case that is made for listening to 'the voices of the poor', along with citizenship and human rights arguments. It represents a demand for recognition of and respect for the expertise borne of experience alongside those forms of knowledge and expertise that have traditionally been privileged. Arguably, to listen to such demands represents a citizenship responsibility for the rest of society.

Politics and Policy

A politics of redistribution and of recognition and respect

Before concluding with some general policy implications, I want to spell out two general principles of social justice that underpin them. They draw on the work of the political and social theorist, Nancy Fraser. She argues that there are two understandings of injustice. The first is 'socio-economic' injustice and struggles against it typically involve a 'politics of redistribution'. Poverty is quintessentially the produce of socio-economic injustice and anti-poverty campaigns are central to any politics of redistribution. The second is 'cultural or symbolic' injustice 'rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communications'. She cites as examples: 'non-recognition (being rendered invisible via the authoritative representational, communicative and interpretative practices of one's culture); and disrespect (being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and/or in everyday life interactions' (1997: 14). The struggles against this form of

injustice are often called a 'politics of recognition'. Recognition has been identified as a vital human need.

People in poverty do not want to be treated as different – indeed that's the last thing they want

The 'politics of recognition' is typically linked with the assertion of group difference and identity – by women, lesbians and gays, BME groups, disabled people. People in poverty do not want to be treated as different – indeed that's the last thing they want. Instead their struggle is for recognition of their common humanity and citizenship and the equal worth that flows from that. But as we have seen, nonrecognition and disrespect are all too often the experience of people in poverty. Their struggle for voice is very much a politics of recognition. But, in order to reflect the language used by people in poverty themselves, I have called it a 'politics of recognition and respect'. The philosophy behind it is summed up beautifully in an article in the *Bevan Foundation Review* by one of your trustees, Kevin Fitzpatrick:

> Equality of treatment, equality of outcome, depends crucially on everyone respecting everyone else just because they are human. This respect has to be recognised publicly and must be demonstrated by our institutions and the way they behave…To be treated as a human being is to be given the respect and dignity everyone deserves just because they are human (2003: 7).

Fraser contends that the struggle for social justice requires the integration of a politics of redistribution and recognition. My own analysis of poverty leads to the same conclusion. Policy reform has to be directed towards tackling the material manifestations of poverty and ultimately its eradication. But so long as there are people living in poverty it must also address their lack of voice and the way in which they are treated by public institutions. In other words it must be informed by principles of equal citizenship.

Participation and dignified treatment

There is now acceptance in government of the principle that disadvantaged groups should have a say in decision-making that affects their lives. Here in Wales, the principle informs the *Communities First* programme – how successfully I do not know and I hope some of you might be able to comment on this. In England, it has likewise been central to the philosophy of the New Deal for Communities and the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. However, as John Gaventa of the Institute for Development Studies has warned, the growing acceptance of the principle of participation does not necessarily translate into 'voice with influence' (2002).

Oxfam GB (2004) writes that, despite the progress that has been made, 'people in poverty (and/or in disadvantaged communities) are still systematically excluded from key decisions affecting their lives'. Part of the

problem, it identifies, is that centrally imposed targets can undermine genuine local involvement so that local people have no real power. Moreover, all too often involvement in community regeneration programmes is rushed and limited to superficial consultation, without any feedback to the people who have given their time to the exercise. This often reflects a tension between the understandable desire for quick gains and the need for time to do the necessary community development work to make a reality of community involvement.

This is sometimes called building community capacity. But there is also a need to build capacity among officials and professionals to engage in this way of working. A rare acknowledgement of this can be found in the recent Home Office report, *Building Civil Renewal*. As Oxfam GB (2004) writes:

> it is vital to shift the ideas and beliefs of service delivers and decision-makers towards people in poverty, so that the latter are treated with the same respect that any other citizen feels entitled to – failure to do so is a recipe for continuing alienation from government and its efforts. Unless decision-makers have the political will and mechanisms to really listen to what women and men in disadvantaged communities are saying about the barriers that face them, long-term solutions will continue to be elusive.

One of the clear messages received by the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power (2000) was that 'people experiencing poverty see consultation without commitment, and phoney participation without the power to bring about change, as the ultimate disrespect'. A similar message is reported in the Foundation's report on the South Wales Valleys: 'So many people have told us that they were weary of repeatedly being asked for their views but nothing happening. People…want to see action on the ground, and evidence that they are respected and valued' (Winckler, 2003, p42).

There is evidence from some of the most deprived communities of how much local people can achieve, even in the face of considerable obstacles, if they are given adequate support. An example is the project that Oxfam GB supported on the Gellideg estate in Merthyr. The report on the project concludes that the story is

> to date at least, a success story. It is the story of how a group of people in a deprived area, with few resources and little education, training or money, came to build a real community. They not only raised large sums of money to provide job training, restore and equip community buildings, create an outdoor sports area, a café, a crèche, and employ community workers, but in the process of doing so came to understand the nature of the factors that were holding them back and to analyse the power structures both within their own community and in the world outside.

The report notes how difficult it was sticking to the first principle that for the initiative to succeed it must be owned and shaped by the local residents 'but stick to it they did, and it has changed the shape of their community, their

confidence in themselves, and the nature of many of their lives' (Buhaenko et al., 2003, p.24).

Many of the key decisions that affect people's lives are not, however, taken at local level. One of the central arguments of the report of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power was that there needs to be participation in decision-making at national level also. This is beginning to be taken on board by government, partly in response to the requirements of the European Commission for member states' National Action Plans [NAPs] on Social Inclusion. A participation working group has been established to advise the government. Its stated aim is 'to enable people in poverty to participate in the development of the UK NAP 2005 and beyond by establishing a real partnership between people living in poverty…and government at all levels in order to improve the anti-poverty policy and practice described in the NAP' (DWP, 2003). If this goal were achieved, it would be progress indeed.

Equal citizenship is also about dignified treatment. A study in a poor community in Brazil identified dignity as central to residents' conception of citizenship (Wheeler, 2004). Many felt that the undignified treatment they received from public services represented a denial of their citizenship. While the situation may be less extreme here, the evidence suggests that many parents raising their children in poverty do not feel they are treated with dignity and see mainstream public service professionals as unsupportive and judgmental. They also feel stigmatised by the way that they are talked about by politicians. As one parent told the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty at Westminster, 'We hear how the media, and some politicians, speak about us and it hurts' (APPGP, 1999).

Equal citizenship is also about dignified treatment

So there are lessons here for how public services are delivered and for how both politicians and the media talk about those in poverty. A recent report based on a national survey of parenting in poor environments recommended that 'services and professional support staff need to find ways to demonstrate respect for parents' own "expertise" in their own lives…Training in listening and engaging seriously with parents' own concerns, and negotiating in partnership with them about the best course of action may be needed for health and social care workers who support parents' (Ghate and Hazel, 2004, p. 23). The survey found that at present 'parents often felt disempowered by the way they were treated by busy professionals' and feared that seeking help risked a loss of autonomy.

In similar vein, the Gellideg study recommended that 'agencies and local authorities should be aware of the power relations at play when they are interacting with vulnerable people and adopt a code of conduct with guidance on acceptable standards of behaviour towards the men and women using their services. Care should be taken at all times to ensure that no-one is being marginalised by inappropriate attitudes' (Buhaenko et al., 2003, pp21-

2). I think that is a message that politicians could also do well to take on board.

<u>Tackling poverty</u>

With regard to tackling poverty itself, as I indicated earlier, the government has made real progress with regard to child and pensioner poverty. It is generally believed that it is now on course to meet its target of reducing the number of children in poverty by a quarter by 2004/05. But there is a big question mark over how it is going to reach the next milestone of halving the number of children in poverty by 2010. The reduction in poverty so far, and also in the incidence of severe hardship, has been attributed to a combination of a reduction in unemployment and improvements in financial support, particularly for young children. Despite rejecting the strategy of improving out-of-work benefits when it came to power, New Labour has – rather quietly - doubled the real value of income support rates for young children.

further progress will require continued action on both the employment and the financial support fronts

The general consensus appears to be that further progress will require continued action on both the employment and the financial support fronts. On the employment side, much more still needs to be done to remove the barriers to paid work that some groups face. Child care is an obvious one, particularly for lone parents and I know the Bevan Foundation is currently researching the role of childcare in tackling child poverty in Wales. Transport is another important obstacle in some areas, including some of the areas of high worklessness here in Wales (where it also contributes to the social exclusion of young people according to the Save the Children Wales study and the Child Poverty Task Group report). Some barriers are more personal – poor health, lack of self-confidence, multiple problems that make paid work difficult to contemplate. In today's labour market paid work can seem less secure than benefits and the period of transition into paid work can be very difficult, particularly where there is pre-existing debt. Although there have been changes to the benefits rules to ease the period of transition, it is still an issue. Moreover, finding paid work is only the first step. Jobs have to be sustained and pathways have to be created into better paid jobs to prevent people getting trapped in low paid jobs, subsidised by tax credits. This is recognised by government.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has argued that further reductions in child poverty will require 'either above-average increases in the earnings of low-income parents, or substantial year-on-year increases in the total state support to low-income families, including child benefit, the family element of the child tax credit, the working tax credit and income support' (Brewer et al.,

2004: 59). There are issues concerning: first, the balance between the level of universal child benefit and the minimum wage on the one hand and income-related tax credits on the other; second, the neglect of the adult rates of out-of-work benefits, which may be blunting the effect of the very welcome increases in the children's rates; and third the needs of particularly vulnerable groups such as minority ethnic groups and asylum-seekers, families containing a disabled person and larger families.

The objection frequently made to improving out-of-work benefits is that it will discourage people from seeking paid work and encourage 'welfare dependency'. As against that there is evidence that the greater the hardship on benefit, the lower morale and self-confidence are likely to be, to the detriment of effective job-seeking. Getting by on inadequate benefits involves hard work that can sap the energy needed to seek ways out of poverty. It is therefore unhelpful and demeaning to characterise benefits as a 'passive' form of welfare in contrast to 'active' forms of welfare designed to activate people to find work. Adequate benefits are necessary to support parents in their struggle to get by and bring up their children. And as the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee has recommended, the social fund needs an urgent overhaul if it is to support rather than undermine the government's anti-poverty strategy. (According to Children in Wales' evidence to the Committee, 51 per cent of families living on income support in Wales are repaying a social fund loan, which means they are living below income support level.)

It is unhelpful and demeaning to characterise benefits as a 'passive' form of welfare

The conclusion reached by most analyses is that achievement of the government's anti-poverty goals will require the dreaded 'r' word: redistribution. The government has indeed effected considerable redistribution towards those on low incomes. But, by and large, it has been redistribution by stealth. This probably reflects the government's perception that redistribution is not a popular policy. Indeed, in 2002, according to the British Social Attitudes Survey, only just under two-fifths of the population agreed that government should redistribute from rich to poor, compared with just over half in 1994. In contrast, though, there has been consistently high support – at over four-fifths - for the view that the gap between those on high and low incomes is too large and majority support for the proposition that government has a responsibility to reduce income differences between high and low incomes. Moreover, unfailingly, around three-quarters of the population have thought that people on high incomes should pay a larger share of their incomes in taxes compared with people on low incomes.

These findings, the author of the British Social Attitudes analysis suggests, imply 'strong public support for redistribution in practice, if not in word' (Bromley, 2003, p90). It may be that when even a Labour government is uncomfortable with the word 'redistribution' and does not make a virtue of its

redistributive policies, the wider public come to think that redistribution is a 'bad thing'. This could then weaken support for the further redistribution that is necessary. Thus 'in place of timidity' the government should confront what Bevan called 'the political high priests of wealth-privilege' (1961, p.25). And in place of 'doing good by stealth' the time has come for a higher profile, unequivocal and consistent message that places the reduction of poverty and inequality at the heart of the commitment to building a socially just society. That I believe would be true to the spirit of Nye Bevan.

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Biography of Professor Ruth Lister CBE, AcSS.

Ruth Lister joined the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University as Professor in January 1994. Prior to that she was Professor and Head of the Department of Applied Social Studies at the University of Bradford for six years. From 1971 to 1987, she worked for the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), a national campaigning charity, the last eight years as Director.

Ruth Lister graduated from the University of Essex in 1970 with a BA (Hons) in Sociology and holds an MA in Multi-Racial Studies from the University of Sussex and an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Manchester.

Her initial work as an academic built on earlier campaigning work, focusing very much on poverty and the social security system. This continues to be an important strand in her work, as reflected in a forthcoming book on the concept of poverty. Other elements in this strand of work include a number of commentaries on 'welfare' reform and two recent research projects.

The first is a study with Peter Beresford, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and Brunel University, of the attitudes of people in poverty to current debates about poverty. A report, *Poverty First Hand*, was published by CPAG in 1999. The second is a study of the distribution of income within families receiving social security benefits, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). A report, *Purse or Wallet? Gender Inequalities and Income Distribution within Families* was published by the Policy Studies Institute in 1998. This second study reflects the gendered focus of much of my more recent work on poverty and social security.

This then links in with the second main strand of her work: a feminist approach to citizenship. Ruth rather stumbled into citizenship theory in 1989 when she was asked to deliver the Eleanor Rathbone Memorial Lecture. She was struck by how Eleanor Rathbone and some of her contemporaries drew on the language of citizenship to make the case for the endowment of motherhood. Their gendered understanding of the concept stood in contrast to the 'gender-blind' and therefore gender-biased way in which it was being used by politicians in the late 1980s. Since then the subject has continued to fascinate her and she has developed her work to address wider questions of difference and exclusion, not only at the national but also the international level. While more theoretical than her earlier work, she has continued to ground the theory in issues of policy, practice and practical politics. Ruth's book*, Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* was published by Macmillan and New York University Press at the beginning of 1998 and a second expanded edition was published by Palgrave in 2003.

Ruth Lister has recently pursued her interest in citizenship through empirical research. Together with Sue Middleton, Noel Smith and Lynne Cox of the Centre for Research in Social Policy, she completed an ESRC-funded three year project looking at how young people negotiate the transitions to citizenship. This is part of the ESRC's Youth, Citizenship and Social Change Programme: http://www.tsa.uk.com/YCS. The first publication from the project was *Young Peoples Voices. Citizenship Education* (with S. Middleton & N.Smith Youth Work Press, 2002).

She is also involved in a couple of cross national research networks with an interest in citizenship. The first, based in Utrecht, is the European Network for Theory and Research on Women, Welfare State and Citizenship. A sub-group have produced a special issue of *Critical Social Policy* (vol. 18(3), 1998) on 'Vocabularies of Citizenship and Gender in Northern Europe' in which she contributed the piece on the UK and they are planning a joint publication on the challenge of studying gendered citizenship in a cross-national context. The second is the European Commission's COST A13 *Changing Labour Markets, Welfare Policies and Citizenship* working group on 'gender issues'.

Ruth Lister's teaching interests focus mainly on poverty and income maintenance and on feminist approaches to welfare and citizenship. She also teaches a compulsory module on social policy theory and concepts. She has been active in the Social Policy Association, was Chair of the Joint University Council Social Policy Committee 1994-1996 and is a member of the British Sociological Association. She was elected as one of the founding Academicians of the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences in 1999.

Alongside her academic work, she has served in recent years as a member of the Commission on Social Justice, set up by the late John Smith, to advise the Labour Party. Their report, *Social Justice. Strategies for National Renewal*, was published by Vintage in 1994. She also sat on the Opsahl Commission on the future of Northern Ireland. This was set up by an independent group, Initiative '92, and it took written and oral evidence from a wide variety of groups and individuals on a very broad range of issues. The report was published by Liliput Press in 1993.

More recently she has been a member of a Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, established by the UK Coalition against Poverty as part of their Voices for Change consultation project. The Commission's focus was the participation of people with experience of poverty in decision-making that affects their lives. The Commission was unusual in that half of its members had direct experience of poverty. In 2000, she was appointed by the Home Office as a Trustee of the Community Development Foundation and she has been involved on an informal basis in various Government meetings and seminars, and sits on various voluntary sector and research advisory committees.

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