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## Creating ‘Opportunity for All’? New Labour, New Localism and the Opportunity Society

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*Since coming to office, New Labour has made much of a ‘public philosophy’ that stresses the importance of equal access to opportunities. This article does not so much criticise this fairly modest understanding of social justice as ask whether the kind of social policies that New Labour has devised are capable of delivering ‘opportunity for all’. The suggestion is that, because ‘targeted’ policies – Labour’s local regeneration initiatives are the example taken here – face intrinsic difficulties as vehicles for social inclusion and thus greater equality of access to opportunity, they need to be supported by a wider commitment to distributive justice.*

The changed nature of the Labour Party’s ‘public philosophy of social justice’ since the emergence of New Labour has been the subject of sustained academic commentary for some years now. Often discussed in terms of the merits, or otherwise, of ‘third way welfare’, debate has turned around the shift towards a conception of social policy that stresses individual responsibilities as well as social rights and the benefits of a welfare mix that increasingly favours market, or market-oriented, solutions, supported by an enabling ‘opportunity state’ (see for example Driver and Martell, 1998; Dwyer, 2000; Giddens, 1998, 2000; Le Grand, 1998; Levitas, 2005; Lister, 2000; Powell, 1999, 2000; Prideaux, 2005). While these debates have done an enormous amount to enhance understanding of the UK’s contemporary welfare system, their focus has clearly been on *change*, its consequences and possible explanations for the shift away from the post-war Keynesian welfare state (see also Powell and Hewitt, 2002). The approach taken here is to ask whether New Labour’s social justice rhetoric, as highlighted in politicians’ statements and Party manifestoes, is matched in policy practice.

It can be invidious to cherry-pick soundbites from politicians’ writings and speeches, but the main objectives of New Labour’s public philosophy are clear. The notion of opportunity as a means of contributing to a social and political environment characterised by an emphasis on equal worth and respect is unmistakable. For example, Tony Blair, in his speech to the Labour Party Conference in 1999, maintained that it was ‘not equal incomes. Not uniform lifestyles or taste or culture. But true equality – *equal worth, an equal chance of fulfilment, equal access to knowledge and opportunity*’ that was Labour’s goal (BBC: 1999, our emphasis). More recently, in 2005, Blair argued in similar terms that ‘the only society that works today is . . . one founded on mutual respect, on a recognition that we have a responsibility collectively and individually, to help each other on the basis

of each other's equal worth' (Blair, 2005: 2). And equal worth, though never properly elaborated, is set in the context of a society which gives individuals 'the chance to make the most of themselves, to lead a fulfilled life, to feel they are participating members of our community' (Blair, 2005: 3). For Gordon Brown, too, equal worth entails equal access to opportunities. As he wrote in 1999, 'the starting point is a fundamental belief in the equal worth of every human being' – and 'if every person is to be regarded as of equal worth, all deserve to be given an equal chance in life to fulfil the potential with which they were born' (Brown, 1999: 40). These themes are clearly present in Labour's 2005 General Election manifesto: in his Forward, Blair refers to the government's desire to 'extend opportunity to all' (Labour Party, 2005: 3), while the Manifesto itself promises that 'no area of our country should be excluded from the opportunity to get ahead' (Labour Party, 2005: 20).

In terms of social strategy, these ideals frequently take policy form in the preoccupation with social inclusion as the gateway to the 'opportunity society'. The egalitarian quality of this commitment is, at best, unclear: as Driver and Martell argue, 'a key characteristic of [New Labour's] approach is an orientation to inclusion *into* the world of opportunities as much as equality of opportunity *within* it' (2002: 77, our emphases). Certainly, even the briefest visit to the website of the Social Exclusion Unit demonstrates a concern about social inclusion, at least as the term is narrowly defined, as enabling the poorest and most vulnerable groups to gain greater access to education and training, employment, health and healthy environments. But, can the policies developed to create greater social inclusion actually do so in ways that lead to a society that extends opportunity equally to all? What follows takes one area of policy-making – neighbourhood regeneration and policy initiatives currently being developed under the aegis of the 'New Localism' – to consider whether core policy initiatives are likely to provide a framework able to support New Labour's stated ambitions. Why this area? For one thing, New Labour has always made much of 'community', particularly the need for local communities to be 'strong' and 'responsible' (see Mandelson and Liddle, 1996). Just as significantly, it is clear from recent work by Wheeler *et al.* (2005) and Dorling and Thomas (2004) that inequalities have a spatial dimension. Indeed it appears from this research that localities with high levels of poor health and/or low educational attainment are also those with the least resources – whether these be key personnel like doctors and teachers, or employment opportunities. On this reading, it seems that, despite the fact that the precise nature of the relationship between the physical and social environments and poverty/inequality has proved hard to ascertain (see Atkinson and Kintrea, 2000, 2001; Buck, 2001; Forrest and Kearns, 2001, Lister, 2004; Powell *et al.*, 2001), the geographical dimension of inequality nevertheless needs to be prioritised as part of a general effort to enhance opportunities.

### **Area regeneration policies under New Labour**

New Labour believes that high-quality services, delivered by local partnerships characterised by high levels of user and community participation, and offering sufficient consumer choice, are the best means of ensuring that the most deprived communities are 'regenerated' and 'socially included' (SEU, 2000, 2003; CRU, 2003, 2004). In particular, as the government has consistently maintained, poverty, poor health, low educational qualifications, un- or under-employment, poor housing and high crime must be eradicated if communities and those living in them are to make the most of the opportunities on offer.

A brief examination of this hugely complex policy area shows, as Lupton (2003: 141) notes, that there have been two distinct phases of policy, the first of which continued, but added to, 'the short-life area-based spending programmes managed by multi-agency partnerships' of New Labour's Conservative predecessors. This phase saw the development of key area-based initiatives, such as the New Deal for Communities, Employment Zones, Education Action Zones, Health Action Zones, Sure Start and other programmes. Some of these initiatives have been discontinued, but others are in the process of being 'mainstreamed' into more comprehensive area programmes – Children's Centres in the case of Sure Start, for example. The second phase, dating from 2001, is more significant and has been 'marked by the introduction of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal' (NSNR), which places 'greater emphasis on establishing mainstream structures and funding mechanisms that . . . ensure a longer-term focus on the problems of poor areas, and reach a larger number of areas than area-based programmes could possibly target'. Stung by accusations of 'control freakery' (see Geddes, 2000; Clarke and Glendinning, 2002; Rummery, 2002) and swayed by arguments about the importance of social capital and 'capacity building' (see CRU, 2003), as part of the NSNR New Labour has explicitly targeted the 88 most deprived local authority areas with a view to focusing on 'mainstream services as well as additional programmes within a strategic and coordinated approach' (Lupton, 2003: 144). Each of these authorities has been required to establish Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), regarded as the best means of engaging relevant agencies from the private, public and voluntary sectors in developing local renewal strategies – the LSPs being supported by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (ODPM) Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, regional Neighbourhood Renewal Teams and various forms of funding, including Neighbourhood Renewal funding and a Community Empowerment Fund specifically 'to support community involvement in LSPs' (Lupton and Power, 2005: 122). More recently the development of Local Area Agreements (LAAs), currently being rolled out to all top-tier local authorities by 2007 and 'intended as mechanisms for delivering better local service outcomes through better coordination between central government and local authorities and their partners' (ODPM, 2005: 5), will effectively extend the logic of LSPs to all local authorities and build on other initiatives such as Local Public Service Agreements.

### **Regeneration and renewal: towards the opportunity society?**

Although it is not possible to examine the impact of these renewal policies in depth, research by CASE at the LSE indicates that civic renewal has had some positive effect on employment rates, schools (primary schools in particular) and some elements of health care. Looking at 'overall improvements', Lupton and Power (2005: 129) conclude that 'on all the areas that the government has targeted, there have been improvements, in aggregate, in the poorest local authority areas'. So, for example, with reference to social housing, there has been a reduction in homes falling beneath the decency standard, while 'employment rates have risen . . . in the 30 worst local authorities since 1998 and slightly faster than the national rate' (Lupton and Power, 2005: 127). There are problems, however. The research also acknowledges that 'in most cases it seems likely that, despite the progress made, the government will not succeed in relation to its own targets, at least at the current level of intervention'. At neighbourhood level, more specifically, results are mixed, and although some trends appear encouraging, as an indication of 'the success

of the NSNR ... [they are] at best, inconclusive' (Lupton and Power, 2005: 130). Lupton and Power (2005: 130) go on to argue that 'we cannot expect neighbourhood policy on its own to deliver better neighbourhood outcomes'.

The picture to date, then, is one of small-step improvements in certain areas but nothing on the scale required to achieve the kind of sea-change necessary to achieve New Labour's goal of equal access to opportunities. The key question, therefore, is why widespread social inclusion may be difficult to achieve in practice and, beyond this, whether current policies can realistically hope to create conditions for 'opportunity for all'. It is argued here that three closely related difficulties stand out in particular, namely the problems of 'control', participation and user involvement, and social closure. These issues will be considered in turn.

The problem of control refers to the contested nature of power, autonomy and interest in what Filkin *et al.* (2000) and others (see Pratchett, 2004; Stoker, undated) call the 'New Localism'. For Stoker (nd: 3), the New Localism represents an attempt to respond to 'a significant practical challenge', which he defines as:

how to manage a substantial variety of state service provision and interventions in a world that defies the application of simple rule-driven interventions and often requires an effective response from the recipient of the service or intervention in order for the state action to work.

The New Localist approach, very much embodied in LSPs and LAAs, is to recognise 'the importance of national standards and priorities as a driving force for public policy' with the centre stressing 'particular policy outcomes and [focusing] attention on particular priorities', while simultaneously recognising 'the primacy of the institutions of local governance in delivering public services on behalf of the centre, as well as wider arguments for locally sensitive policy implementation and community leadership' (Pratchett, 2004: 369). However, this statement conceals real difficulties associated with the ultimate location of control, as Pratchett (2004: 371) acknowledges.

Some of these difficulties have begun to surface in the pilot group of LAAs. It is clear, for instance, that developing an LAA is 'an extremely resource-intensive process, involving a large amount of work in a short period of time, out of phase with other established planning processes' (ODPM, 2005: 34). Coordination among central government departments, government offices and local partners in the pursuit of their LAAs, though broadly dialogic and possibly contributing to 'stronger and more effective partnerships' (ODPM, 2005: 102), has proved difficult, with complaints arising about 'micro-management and [demands for] a greater devolution of control to localities' (ODPM, 2005: 104). It appears that, despite accusations of over-centralisation, the government remains reluctant 'to accept many of the requests for freedoms and flexibilities' demanded by LAA teams (ODPM, 2005: 10) – and this desire to control outcomes risks alienating and disillusioning local partners. And yet, on the other hand, in view of the wide range of agencies and sectors involved in different LAAs, and the clash of interests and assumptions in some cases, the *absence* of firm central control, clear performance targets and the paraphernalia of the contemporary 'evaluation culture', risks entangling this version of 'top-down-bottom-up' multi-agency working in organisational chaos. These complex problems demonstrate that the balance of power in the New Localist paradigm is far from straightforward (Somerville, 2004) and it remains to be seen

whether a coherent governance framework can emerge from the LAA process. There are real difficulties here that may prove insurmountable: most obviously the perennial issue of how to resolve the contradictions inherent in any desire to achieve national outcomes by means of local autonomy.

On the second issue, 'participation' and user involvement ostensibly offer a means, not only of building capacity for greater civic engagement, but developing positive attitudes on the part of local citizens towards their neighbourhoods and communities in ways that could potentially increase self-confidence and so lead to a greater willingness and ability to take up the opportunities on offer (see for example, CRU, 2003, 2004). Evidence is patchy, however. Qualitative research certainly reports a greater sense of empowerment deriving from 'shared experience' for *certain* users of *certain* programmes or projects in *certain* areas (Williams, 2004: 434). Nevertheless, while the 'inward-looking' initiatives of small-scale community projects, local Sure Start programmes and so on may produce instances of individualised empowerment, CASE research indicates that 'outward-looking' participation including 'levels of active involvement in decision making with local government and service providers' have not increased significantly (Richardson, 2005: 105). One problem is that different government initiatives operate with different ideas of 'participation', with inevitable tensions developing among local authorities, partnership agencies and community participants. In this regard, a recent review of evidence relating to the New Localism (Aspden and Birch, 2005: 121–122) highlights a number of issues concerning the difficulties that LSPs currently face when undertaking community engagement. Practices vary enormously across local authorities, but the reviewers note, for instance, that local councillors are wary about the role of the voluntary and community sectors in local initiatives, and in particular how the enhanced involvement of these sectors challenges councillors' self-perception 'as legitimate and accountable community leaders and representatives'.

There are a number of reasons why participation at this critical level is likely to prove difficult. Leaving aside the thorny issue of the nature of the relationship between 'participation' and 'democracy', it is likely, as Stevens *et al.* (2003: 90) argue, that forms of community involvement will be perceived differently depending on particular perspectives and affiliations. As mentioned above, 'local authorities are still resistant to dialogue and lack the political will of officer drive for involvement' (Richardson, 2005: 109), Richardson commenting that agencies can find it difficult to listen and respond, while potential participants can feel intimidated, either by those in authority or, indeed, by other groups more used to having 'voice'. It is the case, too, that participation is often interpreted as 'consultation' – certainly devices such as focus groups, citizens' juries, visioning exercises and so on currently popular with local authorities are essentially 'consultative' – as opposed to anything more 'active' (Aspden and Birch, 2005: 59). Furthermore, it is unclear how actively the less affluent can participate. In the case of unemployed people, for example, it could be hard to square participation in local community development initiatives with the pressures of the 'employment first' welfare state (Finn, 2005) and the requirement to seek work, and make the most of the employment opportunities on offer. The general point, however, is that active citizenship, participation and involvement are, at best, ambiguous goods: individuals and communities *can* feel empowered – but there is equal scope for disempowerment and alienation as the complexities of power and interest surrounding decision-making processes are revealed

to groups, many of which will have little previous experience of the (local) political realm (Dinham, 2005).

The final issue concerns social closure. For all the criticisms, there is no doubting the plethora of initiatives that New Labour has devised to encourage regeneration and civic renewal (SEU, 2000; CRU, 2003, 2004). However, it may be that initiatives targeted at creating social inclusion in the poorest areas, though well-meaning, are simply unable to expand opportunities on a sufficiently equal basis to offset the inbuilt advantages of more affluent areas and those who live in them. The nature and distribution of social capital is an issue here. Following the work of Frank Parkin (1979), a number of urban sociologists (Buck, 2005; Butler, 2004, 2005, Atkinson and Kintrea, 2001) have revisited the phenomenon of social closure. They suggest that social capital and capacity building have a downside and stress the *exclusive* character of certain social networks (see also Williams, 2004). Buck (2005: 58), for instance, argues that there are 'some obvious examples of tight networks within local communities which are "anti-social" in terms of their effects . . . on . . . "inclusion"'. His point is that 'we need to be concerned . . . with patterns of inter-connectedness, and with the (social) distribution of . . . social capital'.

The work of Butler and Robson (2004) on middle-class gentrification in London provides a rather different example of the ways in which culturally and economically rich networks can close out other groups, while Atkinson (2006) goes further in noting the increasing tendency of the better off literally to exclude themselves by creating gated communities. Of course, closure is not only the province of the middle classes: active, inward-looking local communities with high degrees of internal participation can also develop on ethnic and/or socio-cultural lines, and work in ways that, intentionally or not, can intimidate and exclude others, reducing opportunities and restricting life chances in the process.

A different version of social closure originates from 'structural' problems, which it might simply be beyond the capacity of governments to control. Lupton and Power (2005: 136) point out that people naturally move between neighbourhoods with the result that 'even within a local authority area, poor neighbourhoods as a whole may improve, but some . . . may become a lot worse because of the exodus of more advantaged residents to improving neighbourhoods and an increasing concentration of the most disadvantaged in others'. Low housing demand and an excess of school places can lead people to avoid certain areas, resulting in local spatial segregation – a feature which could be exacerbated by the increasing availability of internet-based neighbourhood information for potential movers and house-buyers (Burrows and Ellison, 2004; Burrows *et al.*, 2005). In such cases, inclusion-intensive policies may not be able to make a sufficiently marked impact on local opportunity structures to compensate for embedded difficulties of this kind. For this reason, Lupton (2003: 220) concluded her study of 12 of the most disadvantaged areas in England and Wales by arguing that 'somewhat depressingly, we will not see an end to what I have called . . . 'Poverty Street'. Poor areas will always exist [because] . . . since choice will always enable the better-off to choose where they live, the poor will always be concentrated, to some extent, in the least favourable locations'. Social policy can, of course, potentially make a difference but, as Lupton (2003: 20) argues:

We will not bring an end to the problems of 'Poverty Street' either by reducing residential segregation or by improving management and services, unless we are also prepared to challenge

seriously the inequalities in our economy and society that are the real causes of relative poverty and social exclusion.

This claim clearly opens up the wider question of how feasible it is to rely on targeted policy initiatives to achieve the broader vision of social justice contained in New Labour's public philosophy of opportunity for all. It is to this issue that we now turn.

### **Redistribution and 'opportunity for all'**

The above examination of New Localist social inclusion strategies has suggested that hopes of developing forms of inclusion capable of ensuring a greater equality of access to opportunities across space are unlikely to be realised owing to the inherent complexities and contradictions involved. Some may object, of course, that there is more to New Labour's social inclusion agenda than regeneration initiatives – employment policy being an obvious example. This is certainly the case, although where employment is concerned Wheeler *et al.* (2005) point out that much is awry in the 'employment first welfare state'. High-status jobs are unevenly distributed and the 'country appears to be divided into "work rich" and "work poor" areas' (Wheeler *et al.*, 2005: 1), the implication being that locality plays a significant role in determining the chances of finding a 'good job'. In addition, it is not clear that the various New Deals offer genuine work opportunities (and of course the stress is always on *paid* work). Employment strategies that aim to contribute to 'opportunity for all' surely require 'real jobs' and a more generous interpretation of what counts as work if the ills of poor working conditions, low waged employment and the invisibility of certain forms of social contribution are to be challenged (see Levitas, 2005; White, 2003).

Returning to the general principles that underpin New Labour's public philosophy, however, if policies specifically targeted at, *inter alia*, neighbourhood regeneration, employment or, for that matter, education and health, are always likely to be vulnerable to the embedded nature of socio-spatial inequalities, as Dorling (2001) and others (Forrest and Kearns, 2001) demonstrate, then a more 'universal' approach to the redistribution of opportunity through an attack on income and wealth inequalities, and a related commitment to improving social and intergenerational mobility, may also be needed to complement them. At the very least, a commitment of this kind would help to ensure that excessive material wealth and the proceeds of 'good fortune' could not accumulate in ways that unduly privilege the life-chances of better-off groups – perpetuating inequality of opportunity as a result. So, at bottom, if access to opportunities is to be made more equal, there is likely to be a need for what Tawney (1964) referred to as 'practical equality'. By this term he meant a policy environment that provides citizens with a sufficiently 'equal start' in terms of goods, services and conditions of life, and subsequent fair access to relevant resources, to allow them to make fair use of their individual capacities. Practical equality also implies a commitment to social and intergenerational mobility, and, in consequence, the conviction that material inequalities should be constrained at least to the point where equal worth and equal respect – core elements of the opportunity society – are not invalidated by the ability of the better off not so much to 'exclude' themselves as to become 'exclusive'.

Tawney wrote in a different time and a different idiom, to be sure, but this approach to social justice influenced Labour Party thinkers and policy makers for the greater part of the

postwar period (see Ellison, 1994; Foote, 1985), and its underlying logic, if not the precise detail, continues to resonate among academic commentators today. Stuart White's (2003) recent work on the 'civic minimum' is a contemporary example of an attempt to fashion a left-of-centre vision for new times. Placed within a framework of 'fair reciprocity', where citizens are expected to perform certain duties (to take reasonable offers of paid work or perform other vital responsibilities such as caring for the vulnerable), citizens have a right to a 'high minimum' of income security in addition to 'a decent minimum of health care and disability coverage' (White, 2003: 202), educational provision and so on. White goes into great detail with respect to possible mechanisms of financing a complex mixture of compensatory social benefits and asset-based egalitarianism, but it is important to note his conviction that talent-based income inequalities and inequalities resulting from wealth transfers need to be sharply reduced through various forms of taxation in order to eliminate 'bad luck inequalities', finance decent levels of income and service support, and also to provide 'basic capital grants' from public funds to be paid to all citizens on maturity.

Obviously, the complexities underpinning issues of this kind cannot be dealt with here. What constitutes a fair level of resources, how 'desert' is conceived, questions about 'incentives', which inequalities can be justified and how, and the overall balance between 'liberty' and 'equality', particularly perhaps where taxation is concerned, remain key problems in political theory, which this article does not seek to address (see, for example, Rawls, 1999; Walzer, 1984; Miller, 2005; White, 2003). For present purposes, what matters is that New Labour's apparently moderate public philosophy of social justice as equal access to opportunities will need a radical twist if the difficulties associated with targeted policies are to be overcome. So, where poorer neighbourhoods, communities and their inhabitants are concerned, for example, access to core opportunities in the form of good jobs and public services must not only be at least roughly equal between poorer and more affluent spaces, and recipients themselves empowered to capitalise on opportunities irrespective of class, gender, ethnicity or (dis)ability, but supporting policies, perhaps taxation in particular, need to be developed in ways that discourage the holding of excessive material wealth and resources, while simultaneously encouraging high levels of social and intergenerational mobility.

To date, the briefest assessment of New Labour's record indicates that 'where redistribution has taken place it has been... limited to improving the situation of those at the bottom relative to the middle, with the position of those at the top considered irrelevant' (Stewart and Hills, 2005: 15). Even within the poorer sections of the population certain groups are treated more favourably than others; for example, while the assault on child poverty is to be welcomed and has been relatively successful (Hills, 2004: 234), noting that 'projections [suggesting] that relative child poverty may fall by eight or nine percentage points between 1997 and 2004-5', low-paid working-age adults without children have not benefited to the same extent (Sefton and Sutherland, 2005: 247). Meanwhile, favoured by low income tax rates and rapidly rising salaries, the incomes of the top 10 per cent (and particularly the top 1 per cent) have continued to rise dramatically. Hills (2004: 78) reports that, whereas those at the borderline saw their earnings rise from 1.7 times median earnings in 1971 to 2.1 times in 2001, a gain of 22 per cent over the period, the top-most earners enjoyed an increase from 3.4 times to 6 times median earnings, an increase of 75 per cent. While these trends became established during the period of Conservative hegemony, New Labour has done little to alter the situation,

leading Toynbee and Walker (2005: 30–1) to comment that 'on Blair's watch a relatively small number of people got grotesquely richer'.

Where wealth is concerned, there is no evidence of an egalitarian trend since 1997. In fact, Hills (2004: 31) notes that, measured by the Gini co-efficient, inequalities of wealth have actually increased since the late 1990s with the top 1 per cent increasing their share 'to 23 per cent of the total, from 17 per cent in 1991'. This share remained the same in 2001 and is 'the highest since the UK series [previously GB series] began in 1976'. Of course, in Blair's terms, 'the issue isn't in fact whether the very richest person ends up by becoming richer. The issue is whether the poorest person is given the chance that they otherwise don't have' (*Newsnight*, 2001). The question, however, is what worth to put on this chance when the weight of opportunity appears to be skewed so markedly towards the better off.

That opportunities are indeed skewed in this way is further illustrated by the fact that recent UK studies indicate that intergenerational mobility remains low (see Marshall *et al.*, 1997, Blanden *et al.*, 2005). Discussing a number of measures of mobility, Jackson and Segal (2004: 29–30) point out that the elasticity of incomes across generations continues to favour the better off, while they (Jackson and Segal, 2004: 58) also state that 'the odds of ending up in the middle class versus ending up in the working class are five to six times higher for those born into the middle class, compared with those born into the working class'. Research from the DfES (2005) supports this finding, suggesting that the long-term association among academic attainment, social class and income continues to persist. Indeed, in primary schools, using free school meals as a proxy measure of socio-economic status, pupil level analysis indicates that, in attainment in English and Maths, 'the class gap has not narrowed in recent years' and might have 'slightly widened' (DfES, 2005: 11–12).

## **Conclusion**

In general terms, this article has drawn attention to the importance of the relationship between a political party's public philosophy and the policies designed to achieve the vision of social justice it contains. That the relationship is an uneasy one, with some inevitable slippage, is perhaps to be expected – after all, the cut and thrust of daily politics in a rapidly changing social and economic environment will, by definition, make it difficult for any government to remain entirely faithful to an understanding of social justice, which in New Labour's case was largely established before the Party came to office in 1997. The real difficulty identified here though concerns the current social policy mix and, specifically, the apparent belief that targeted policies alone can lead to a much wider condition of social inclusion and the 'opportunity society'. Although a 'strategy' of this kind can certainly produce benefits for (some) disadvantaged groups in (some) areas, as Deacon (2003) has noted in relation to New Labour's efforts to break 'the cycle of disadvantage', it is hard to see how it can lead to genuine opportunity for all in the absence of a stronger commitment to redistributive justice of the kind that the government appears reluctant to endorse. Two rather different dangers are involved in mortgaging political principle in this way. First, as argued above, if they are allowed to retain the fruits of very high earnings and permitted to accumulate and retain large concentrations of wealth, better-off groups will always enjoy greater opportunities than poorer sections of society, thereby negating any chance of establishing more

equal access to opportunities overall. Second, to ignore the logic of stated principle opens up the risk that policy could become merely pragmatic. If 'third way' social policies have always had a necessary hint of pragmatism about them, this makes it all the more important that consistent critical engagement with the policy–public philosophy relationship keeps them attached to principle. To escape principle too completely obviously reduces the power and scope of socio-political vision, and means that policies will increasingly be justified on the narrowly conceived basis of 'what works'.

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