



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The Welfare State in Britain

Sheppard, W.

Citation

Sheppard, W. (1991). The Welfare State in Britain. *Bestuurskundige Berichten*, 6(2), 22-23. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:3233493>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

Downloaded from: <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:3233493>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

The Welfare State in Britain

William Sheppard

The political age of Thatcher and Thatcherism has borne heavily on the welfare state in the United Kingdom. It is difficult to recall the position of over twelve years ago, and the situation is now completely different, so my critical view of today's welfare system refers to ideals for the future, rather than to examples of past successes.

The position now

The welfare state in the United Kingdom has been moving towards a minimalist position for the last twelve years, though probably its rate of decline has slowed under Prime Minister Major.

The welfare state is becoming more and more a final safety net, saving citizens once they have fallen, and even allowing some to fall through its growing holes. The welfare state should be attempting to prevent its citizens from falling towards the net, and should they fall, it must erect ladders for them to climb back up.

Unemployment benefit has been substantially cut since 1979, following the ideology that if the unemployment can't rely wholly on welfare, then they will be forced to go out and find a job. Yet alongside this already shaky ideology, the Government has successively reduced the opportunities for the unemployed to find jobs. Funds for public training schemes have been cut, and market forces have been introduced into education, reducing the chances for advancement for the worse off. These and many other factors have seriously reduced the alternatives to relying on welfare.

Reasons for today's situation

The reason for this situation is quite clearly the particularly individualist Conservative Governments from 1979 until late 1990, and the effect that the ideology had on the country. Thatcher's emphasis on the family and the individual, and her famous, though probably misinterpreted phrase "there is no society", have contributed to a largely money grabbing,

selfseeking Britain.

Though there are calls for increased spending on such systems as health and education, especially during the current recession, many still rally to the proposals of more tax cuts. Thatcherism created a tax cut ideology over the previous welfare ideology, and only now are people beginning to realize that the two are incompatible. Taxation and public spending have become bad words and it will take a while until their value reasserts itself in the minds of the public.

Reasons for optimism

Having painted such a gloomy picture, I will now proceed by giving the reasons for my personal optimism. With Respect to Government, the first glint of light came at the end of last year with the demise of Thatcher, and her replacement with a much more moderate conservative. I wouldn't like to predict the outcome of the next general election, still probably about nine months away, yet my hope would be a majority victory for the Labour Party. To evaluate the chances of that though, would require a separate article. With respect to society I believe that the outlook is more certain. There are growing calls among the population as a whole for an increase in spending on such institutions as health, education and transport, alongside on emerging awareness that this will entail some tax increases. Growing calls for an electoral system of a proportional nature may in the future help ensure that extremes of government such as that as Mrs. Thatcher won't be elected by a minority of the population. Instead perhaps

we will see in the future, more of a consensus, rather than large swings between left and right, collectivism and individualism.

The ever growing impact and influence of Europe on the United Kingdom's society is cause for hope. Increasing experience of and exposure to the success of other European countries which are more welfare orientated than us, may help to change the attitudes of the British Public.

My vision for the future

The United Kingdom needs to become much more part of Europe both economically and politically. The British people need to be

educated and socialized back towards the idea that we all live in a community, and that we can best improve it by working together and working for the community. No longer Thatcherist ideology of the eighties, at working for ourselves as individuals, but the ideology of the nineties at working for ourselves by working for the community. BB

William Sheppard is een student van de London School of Economics en studeert gedurende dit semester aan onze universiteit Bestuurskunde.

Een excursie naar Edinburgh

Jan-Willem van Herpen en Roger Jolly

Het was niet de mooiste dag van het jaar, toen een groepje studenten zich op het de trappen van Leiden C.S. verzamelde. Uit een grijze grauwe hemel daalde het water vrijelijk neer. Het derde niet, want dit groepje stond op het punt aan een reis te beginnen: de B.I.L. excursie naar Edinburgh en iedereen was er die maandag de dertigste september klaar voor.

Vertrek

Rond kwart voor vier vertrok de gehuurde touringbus naar Europoort. Nadat wij om zes uur het zeegat hebben gekozen storten de reizigers zich op het, bij de prijs inbegrepen, diner om daarna, al dan niet slapend, de rest van de veertien uur durende overtocht door te brengen.

Aankomst en bustochtje naar Edinburgh

De volgende morgen is het al vroeg dag als een vriendelijke bandopname door de intercom schalt dat het zes uur is en men het ochtendmaal in het restaurant kan gebruiken. Om acht uur leggen we eindelijk in Hull aan en mogen van boord. Over de reis naar Edinburgh wil ik graag kort zijn: de bustocht duurt zeven uur, het landschap is mooi en er worden twee stops gemaakt.

Als wij goed en wel ingetrokken zijn in de jeugdherberg op Bruntsfield Crescent, gaan de meesten de stad in voor een eerste verkenning en een zoektocht naar het eerste avondmaal.

De Universiteit van Edinburgh

De volgende dag worden wij om tien uur op de universiteit van Edinburgh verwacht en omdat wij allen jong en sterk zijn is besloten gezamenlijk naar alle bezienswaardigheden te lopen, dus "vroeg" opstaan. Wij beginnen met een uur college over de "Politics and Public Policy in Scotland". Al snel blijkt dat Schotten zich een zelfstandig volk voelen en over het algemeen niets zien in de, zeer Engels gevonden, Conservatieve Partij. Vijftig van de 72 Schotse zetels in het Britse Lagerhuis worden door Labour bezet