

# Recent history and development of neoliberalism and learning disability services: looking back to secure a better future.

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“People who have interest in learning disabilities matters need a more unified and revived political and economic commitment in order to interrupt the current state and direction of service provision for people experiencing disabilities”.

# Outcomes for people experiencing disabilities



- between 2008 and 2013 “while the performance of children with SEN improved, the attainment gap between them and children without SEN widened” (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2015:25).



“the disability employment gap widened across Britain... The gap widened as the unemployment rate increased more between 2008 and 2013 for disabled people than for non-disabled people” (ibid:37).

# Other disparities



- Similar and more disheartening statistics with the above trend are recorded in the areas of independent living and housing, health, care, and quality of life.
- Hence the Preparing for Adulthood agenda which targets employment, independent living, health, community participation.

# How come social injustice still persist?

- “Parties are not simply competing teams of politicians producing policies to maximise electoral support but are bound together by some common principles, however, loosely held”. (Shaw, 2007).
- “Parties have encompassing beliefs and cultures within which specific policies and strategic emphases took shape and which provided the overall framework for policy and strategy”. (Cronin, 2004:7).

# What then is neoliberalism?

- Neoliberalism holds to a theory (though not necessarily a practice) that posits the following:
  1. The state (or what is wrongly referred to in popular parlance as “government) needs to reduce its interventionism in economic and social activities.
  2. Labor and financial markets need to be deregulated in order to liberate the enormous creative energy of the markets.
  3. Commerce and investments need to be stimulated by eliminating borders and barriers to allow for the full mobility of labor, capital, goods, and services.  
(Navarro: 2007: p.9)

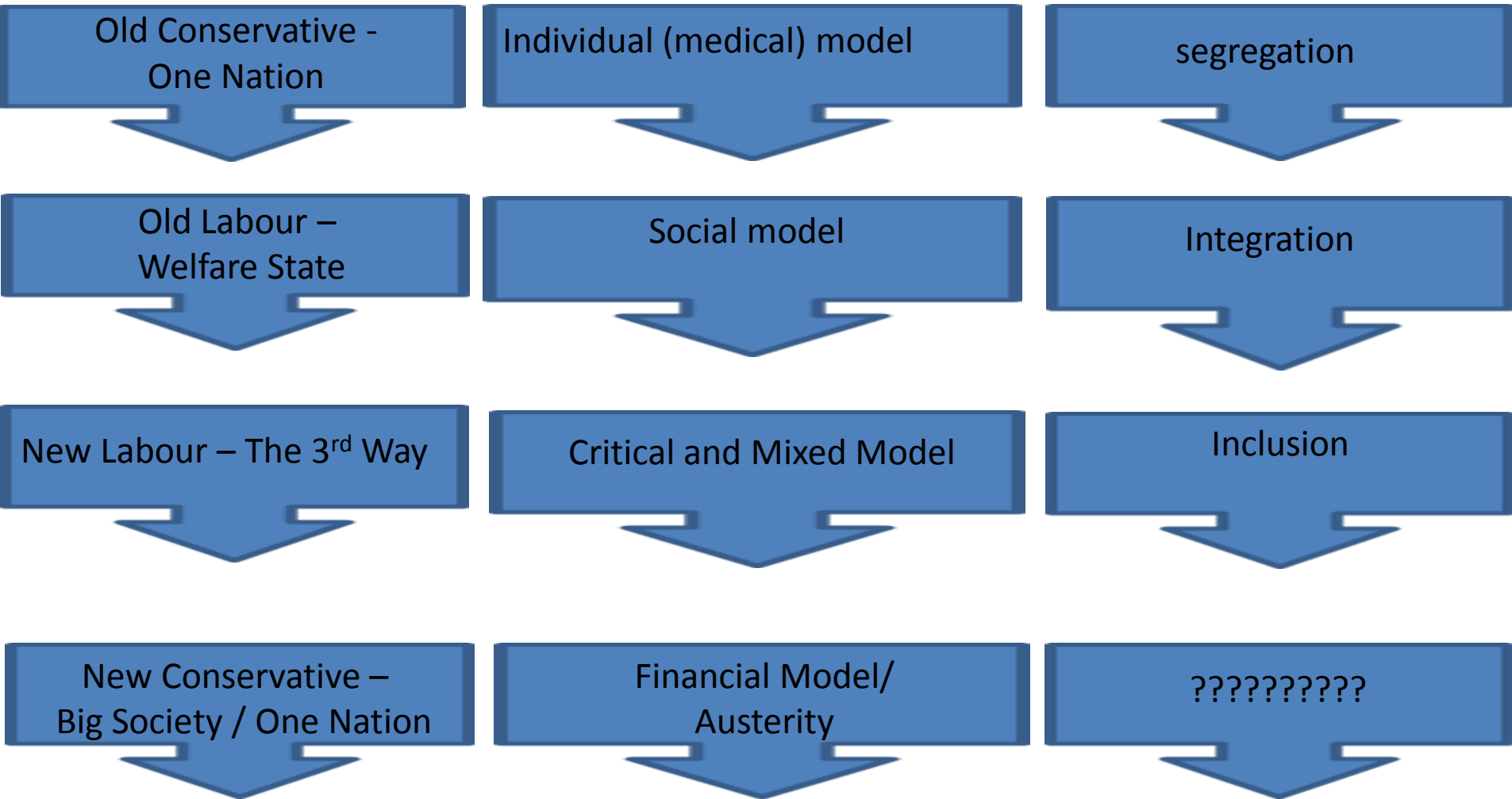
# What is that belief/culture?...

## .... It is Neoliberalism.

“ A trademark of our times is the dominance of neoliberalism in major economic, political, and social forums of the developed capitalist countries and in the international agencies they influence” ... (Navarro: 2007, p.9).



# Journey through history



# Learning Disability Services trail politico-economic ideologies



Disability Services

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Discrimination,  
inequality,  
Injustice

Society

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Segregation, Integration,  
Inclusion/Critical Disability  
Theories, financial model of  
disability

Governments – politico-  
economic ideas /  
commitments

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Neoliberalism – One  
Nation, The 3<sup>rd</sup> Way, Big  
Society, 'austerity', etc.

# What is evident from history?

- There is a “special relationship” between political and economic ideas on the one hand, and response to the needs of disabled people.
- The needs of disabled people trail political and economic ideas.
- People experiencing disability are still being discriminated against.

# Pointers to injustice

- “In truth, the whole special needs industry has become a gigantic con. We should stop playing this game.” (Tom Buckard, 2010)
- The Big Society is a “stale” slogan ... an “opportunistic” cover for spending cuts ... and constitutes “radical, long-term policies for which no-one voted”. (Rowan Williams, Arch Bishop of Canterbury, June 2011)
- For targeting the weaker members of the society, government’s austerity measure is “disgraceful”. (Vincent Nichols, Arch Bishop of Westminster, Feb. 2014)

The last Budget was an embodiment of government's political and economic ideas.

## From “Big Society” to “One Nation”

- “It is a budget of a compassionate, one-nation Conservative government determined to deliver both social justice and economic security. It’s a budget that puts the next generation first.” (David Cameron)
- **One of the strongest points about the budget was its level of injustice to disabled people leading to outcry even within the government.**

# Individual Political will and Commitment

- “I have for some time and rather reluctantly come to believe that the latest changes to benefits to the disabled and the context in which they've been made are a compromise too far. While they are defensible in narrow terms, given the continuing deficit, they are not defensible in the way they were placed within a Budget that benefits higher earning taxpayers.” (Ian Duncan Smith’s resignation letter)

# Impact of political will and commitment

- Revision of Budget
- “I think I have already said very clearly that the government has decided collectively and quite rightly to take the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) aspect of it [the budget] and try to sort it out.”  
(New WP Sec Crab)

# I am aware of, and appreciate:

- How much has been done in theorising disability (particular credit to Jan Walmsley, Len Barton, Mike Oliver, .....)
- The discrepancies between values, policy and practice
- The “policy cycle” ... (Bowe, Ball, and Gold 1992)
- The contributions from individuals and groups
- The work Mencap is doing especially its work in UK Parliament ...
- However, looking at history, you would agree with me that something is still lacking ....



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“People who have interest in learning disabilities matters need a more unified and revived political and economic commitment in order to interrupt the current state and direction of service provision for people experiencing disabilities”.

Stop being the passenger ... be the driver!

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# One Nation – Individual Model - Segregation

- Old Conservative – ONE NATION – 40s
- One nation is largely a term “giving the party a permanent but painless face-lift, one that would counter the charge and fear that the Tories were the party of industrial go-as-you-please and devil-take-the-hindmost’ (Heffernan, 2001:118)
- Heffernan, R. (2001) *New Labour and Thatcherism: Political Change in Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

# Third Way

- A political synthesis of the right and left ...
  - ... a combination of social equity, individual responsibility and economic efficiency in order to resolve social problems.
- “to the left of the Third Way is said to lie economic inefficiency, to the right social disintegration”. (Funk, L. (1999))
- According to Tony Blair ...
  - “ ... we must move decisively beyond outdated ways of thinking – beyond an old left preoccupied by state control, high taxation and producers’ interests and a new laissez-faire right championing narrow individualism and a belief that free markets are the answer to every problem”. (Blair, 1998)

# Select references

Bowe, Ball, and Gold 1992

Burkard, T. (2010) The special needs industry is a gigantic con. What pupils really need is to be taught properly.  
Daily Mail, 17 September 2010

[www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1312124...](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1312124...)

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Funk, L. (ed.) (1999) *The Economics and the Politics of the Third Way: Essays in Honour of Eric Owen Smith*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Navarro, V. (2007) *Neoliberalism, Globalization and Inequalities: Consequences for Health and Quality of Life*. New York: Baywood Publishing.

Shaw, E. (2007) *Losing Labour's Soul: New Labour and the Blair Government 1997-2007*. Oxon: Routledge.