Inequality: why the big issue?

February 2013

Daniel Ben-Ami and Danny Dorling introduced a discussion on the impact of inequality

There is a broad consensus that we are losing our sense of common purpose as a result of the sharp widening of economic and social inequality in western societies since the 1970s. The super-rich keep themselves aloof at the top, whilst a burgeoning underclass it is thought, if not helped, can easily be tempted into anti-social behaviour at the bottom. What is the best way to respond to this?

A defining feature of socialism was its desire to abolish class and hierarchy so that human potential could be fully realised. Conservatives, meanwhile, have typically argued that material inequality is inevitable and probably also desirable. The contemporary orthodoxy though, sometimes referred to as a “new progressivism”, is fundamentally different from the traditional

views of left and right. There are growing campaigns that slate the wealthy for failing to pay their fair share of tax, like for example the Occupy protesters who claim to represent the '99 per cent' against the super-rich '1 per cent'.

If equality was historically a core principle of the left then, so it is assumed, the current discussion and campaigns must be enlightened and humanistic. Those who oppose the plethora of apparently pro-equality initiatives are therefore cast as reactionary souls who are probably in the pay of giant corporations. So what's happened to all the conservative arguments for rewarding hard work and endeavour? Are we perhaps becoming uncomfortable with developing greater wealth and thus restraining ourselves by picking on those with more? Or will we only be able to progress if we all progress equally?

Some background readings

The Joy of Flex , by Karen Kornbluh, Washington Monthly December 2005

New progressivism is a cause to fight for , by Matthew Taylor, TES 13 November 2009

Ferraris For All , reviewed by Mark Iddon, Manchester Salon November 2010

The case for austerity among the rich , by Danny Dorling, IPPR March 2012

Rising inequality and rising austerity – when is the tipping point? by Danny Dorling, speaking at Soudings, Leeds 19 Sept 2012

Inequality and the world economy: True Progressivism , Leader, The Economist 13 October 2012

Did inequality cause the crisis? by Daniel Ben-Ami, Fund Strategy 26 November 2012

Why the rich want the super-rich to be restrained , by Daniel Ben-Ami, spiked review of books November 2012

The struggle to moralise capitalism , by Frank Furedi, spiked review of books January 2013

Inequality did not cause the crisis , by Daniel Ben-Ami, spiked 30 January 2013

Injustice: Why social inequality persists , reviewed by Ken McLaughlin, Manchester Salon February 2013

Books by the speakers, the themes of which will be discussed and debated

- Ferrraris for all: In defence of economic progress by Daniel Ben-Ami Pb 9781847423450 £8.99 RRP - **£7.50 cash or if ordered at discussion**
- Injustice: Why social inequality persists by Danny Dorling Pb: 9781847427205 £12.99 RRP - **£7.50 cash or if ordered at discussion**
- Fair play: A Daniel Dorling reader on Social Justice by Danny Dorling 9781847428790 £24.99 RRP - **£15.00 cash or if ordered a t discussion**
- Unequal Health by Danny Dorling 9781447305132 £24.99 RRP - **£15.00 if ordered at discussion (out 5th March)**

The Policy Press are also publishing three digital-only ebook tasters of Unequal health by Daniel Dorling, in a variety of formats. Competitively priced at only £1.99 each, they each give a flavour of three major themes: public health, social medicine and inequality and contain three relevant chapters from the book, preceded by an all-new introduction specially written by Danny Dorling.

Watch video of discussion, thanks to Dan Clayton the documentary film maker from Leeds for producing this.

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