

Consensus theories – new right

Science



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

(3) 'Our judgement would be that, essentially, the New Right proceeded by assertion' [George and Wilding]. To what extent and why would you agree or disagree with the view that the New Right proceeded by assertion approach to welfare provision? Professors George and Wilding made the statement in their study of welfare and ideology that the New Right 'proceed by assertion' - that is to say that they make over generalised and unbalanced rhetoric about the state provision of welfare. The New Right emerged as an ideology in critical response to the post 1945 government attempts to provide a comprehensive system of welfare in Britain.

They argue that state provision is not only inefficient and ineffective, but that collective enterprise is actually impossible as they have no belief in a common purpose in society. New Right ideas can be separated into two major strands of thought. The Neo- Liberal philosophy that is concerned with economic factors; and the Neo-Conservative strand which is interested with social, moral and political implications. However, they can be grouped together to define a philosophy which favours more market and less state involvement in peoples lives. They equate that more government means less personal freedom which, for the New Right, undercuts the principles of democracy.

It is widely argued that the New Right present an ideology of Welfare that while being rational and efficient in theory; in practice is simply too idealistic and is neither sensitive nor flexible enough to the social needs of contemporary society. This essay intends to show that the ideologies of welfare presented by the New Right lack legitimate evidence to support and justify their proposals; this will be shown in two ways. First, the inadequacies

of the New Right philosophical basis will be highlighted to show that at the most primary footing of their perspectives on social policy are unsound. Secondly, I will look at their argument for the supremacy of the free market system over state provision. This will be examined in both the economic and social spheres.

The key and most basic reason why the New Right has a tendency to make statements with little substance or legitimacy is that their fundamental philosophical basis appears to be flawed. New Right thinkers emphasise individualism; Friedman asserts that 'The individual (is) the ultimate entity in society'. Clearly, there is little room for collective consciousness in their philosophy.

This egotistical individualism stresses that the welfare state, a collectivist policy, cannot work due to 'human nature' e. g. self-seeking and greedy. The New Right ideology claims that the nature of human kind is unchangeable which thus makes the Welfare State an impossibility. However, many critics of this theory argue that classifying human nature as fixed ignores all culture and history surrounding the development of society. They centre their ideology on agency and completely fail to recognise the role of structure. Thatcher, a leading figure of the New Right ideology, said there is no such thing as society - just individuals. However, George and Wilding dismiss this assertion by highlighting that as human beings, we are all linked together in patterns and cycles of dependency.

Williams also points out that surely 'We are not just individuals or families, but members of one another.' The New Right also asserts that the Welfare

State policies view people as social beings who can be motivated by social concerns and social goals. Naturally, the New Right reject this view of humans, again this can be rooted back to the importance of the individual and their assumption that humankind will very rarely act for the collective good.

However, this argument ignores the cyclical nature of human relationships, any moral or collective consciousness is disregarded which is highly unrealistic for as humans we are social beings, we are gregarious. New Right supporters also declare that the Welfare State is essentially inefficient due to its need for rational planning. They reason that due to the complexity of modern society, it is impossible to structure and implement plans that would be beneficial both economically and socially.

As Willets points out 'It is precisely the increasing complexity of modern life which makes centralised organisation impossible.. ' They dismiss constructive rationalism as unrealistic and call for less government intervention. Friedman views much government activity as undesirable. He believes it should have a limited role restricted to areas such as foreign policy and overseeing economic policies. However, it seems unreasonable to dismiss some degree of planning in modern society, people need valid motives and goals that are justified. The New Right principles on the role of the Welfare State assert that: we must first help those in need. Socialists believe that the State should provide an average standard.

We believe that it should provide a minimum standard, above which people should be free to rise as far as their industry, their thrift, their ability or their

genius may take them.... This highlights the New Right emphasis on individual freedom and choice. They say that the state provision of welfare is an encroachment on basic human freedoms as it restricts choice. However, if one considers services such as water, housing or healthcare, these are such fundamental needs that there is no real choice whether or not these needs are fulfilled.

As a result of this, consumers in markets for these services are in a weak position. Because of this vulnerability, state provision of these services ensures a comprehensive service which is regulated. Market systems in such essential areas of provision leave the consumer susceptible to exploitation and it also undermines the principles of a free democracy. As a result of the need for planning in the functioning of the Welfare State, many New Right thinkers dismiss it as it ignores the concept of spontaneous order- the market system.

Or, at a more tangible level, they favour monetarism over Keynesianism. - The New Right view the market as the most efficient system as it generates competition which, in turn, spurs innovation and a consumer led market. It also means that a monopoly cannot be created and consequently, prices are kept reasonable and quality of services are kept high. They argue that the Welfare State violates the spirit of capitalism and basic human nature. For the New Right, the market is the most efficient and rational way to operate economically and socially - The New Right also argue that the State presents a series of destructive economic consequences. Mead contends that the government projects a view to society that work is merely an option, not a necessity.

<https://assignbuster.com/consensus-theories-new-right/>

In other words, that social security creates a 'nanny state', causing idleness. He views the Welfare state as a victim of its own success by feeding and sustaining the type of behaviour it is trying to minimise. Another problem with this, according to the New Right, is because the welfare state is centralised it is therefore seen as 'government money', it is depersonalised and as a result becomes vulnerable to abuse and manipulation. Again, this leads back to the view that man is individualistic and self seeking, rejecting the concept of the 'common good' or collective social consciousness.

In the defence of the State, it is obvious that in any socio-political arena there will be negative and positive outcomes of any kind of social policy. However they must be weighed up against each other. It is impractical and unrealistic to assess the welfare state in the abstract, as the New Right tends to. Their philosophies also ignore the complex and diverse nature of modern society, and are simply not sensitive enough to the various needs. Holman explains that in reality, the New Right regard '... personal gain and material selfishness... as virtues while compassion for the disadvantaged and a readiness to share goods and power are sneered at as weakness..

' Thus far we have seen that the New Right philosophy celebrates private enterprise as it promotes democracy, however there is much substantial evidence to prove otherwise. Friedman, for example, claims in his writings NAME OF BOOK AND QUOTE DIRECTLY.. that it is the free market which made it possible for black people to overcome racial discrimination in the United States. This completely disregards the role of state legislation in this matter, and further presents an unbalanced and misleading view of the social policy process which seems to be a consistent motif that runs through <https://assignbuster.com/consensus-theories-new-right/>

the New Right philosophies. XPAND ECONOMIC POINT Another major factor in the inadequacy of the market provision of Welfare State services is that it cannot supply needs regardless of ability to pay or according to need. As a result, it is easy to deduce that the market solutions are distinctly less equitable than the state provision of public services.

Therefore, it can be argued that, the New Right fail to consider the social consequences of the market system. The problem of the New Right is that their opinions of the supremacy of the free market are formed from their own view point which is invariably secure, affluent and professional. They fail to recognise that the freedom the market offers is conditional. Holman argues that it '... depends upon the prior advantage of having jobs, opportunities, savings. The market provides freedom for the privileged.

' The World Bank, long regarded as supporters for the free market, issued a report in 1997 emphasising that an effective state is '... vital to the provision of goods and services and the rules and institutions that allow markets to flourish and people to lead healthier, happier lives. Without it, sustainable development, both economic and social is impossible.. This shows that while the New Right ideology is not wholly disregarded, it is seen as not looking at the whole picture, which gives an unbalanced and bias view of state provision.

The New Right can be thought of as 'leading by assertion' due to the fact that they often make statements without backing it up with legitimate evidence. According to the New Right ideology, the Welfare State has many negative social implications. Firstly, it undermines any sense

of responsibility and self-reliance by providing, not so much a 'safety net', more an altogether too comfortable cushion to those who get state provision.

This, in turn, fosters what Keith Joseph coined in the 1970's a 'dependency culture'. This anti-collectivist theory claimed that poor families in poverty transmitted this culture of difficult relationships, unskilled work or unemployment. However, this is a generalised statement that when examined, becomes totally inadequate. Williams argues that 'such an explanation .. fails to account for the effect of social circumstances... '

Charles Murray, whose work has been widely published in Britain by the Institute of Economic Affairs, asserts that the Welfare State in fact sustains an 'underclass' by removing any element of real risk or danger-factors which, according to the New Right, are essential to the consistent function of an innovative and motivated market.

This theory is best represented by a quote from the 1992 Conservative Party Conference where the Social Security minister, Peter Lilley, categorised single mothers as having dominant membership of this supposed underclass and described them as 'young ladies who get pregnant just to jump the housing list. ' This assertion by Peter Lilley is an example of how the New Right thinkers tend to make broad statements, often considering them in the abstract without using much evidence and dispensing normative prescriptions for the social ills. Clearly, however, a broader agenda is required when evaluating social policies. Also this approach fails to consider the supportive and cohesive functions that the Welfare State provides.

Holman shows effectively the inadequacy of the New Rights theory of the emergence of an underclass in his study of the effect of the implementation of New Right policies in Easterhouse during the early nineties. He presents quantitative evidence to show that it is not the 'feather-bedding' approach of the Welfare State that is accountable for social problems and 'wrong' values. Rather Holman argues that, the deprivations are imposed upon people by government policies and economic factors beyond their control.

The underclass thesis should be seen less as an explanation of the state of places like Easterhouse and more as a New Right excuse which diverts blame away from the dire results of New Right practices.. The New Right maintain that the free market promotes democracy by offering choice to the consumer. They argue that the Welfare state creates a monopoly, therefore there is no competition, which is bad for the consumer. asically the state is answerable to no-one because people are not directly paying for their health care or schooling (for example).

Williamson summarises that the Welfare State from a New Right perspective is 'significantly inefficient as it is an effective monopoly, bureaucratic in character and dominated by producers, not consumers. ' Williams also highlights the problem of the concentration of power in the market or oligopoly , which is fundamentally undemocratic. She asserts that business people rarely practice free competition whenever they are in a position to control the market themselves.

This is further reinforced by Richard Titmuss in his 1959 lecture 'The Irresponsible Society' where he stressed that major monetary decisions of

building societies, insurance and pension companies were being made by a small minority of people. Such decisions affect millions of people, and their views are not taken into account, which is fundamentally undemocratic. It must be noted, however, The New Right philosophy does not altogether reject the role of state in Welfare. Gray accepts the idea of quasi-markets within the welfare state, perhaps in the form of a voucher system.

This way competition is still strong because people have the freedom to choose which hospital or school they want. Seldon reinforces this by suggesting that ' National economic expansion can best be helped by putting welfare by stages into the market where the consumer will rule instead of the politician'. The effectiveness of the market system is not completely convincing. The New Right tends to present a distorted and partial view of the efficiency of the free market. -more explanation of efficiency of market see george nad wildiing chapter on democratic socialism. conclusion