

Social citizenship in the Cameron years: a cold climate for claimants, rich terrain for researchers

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SOCIAL RIGHTS, CITIZENSHIP AND THE WELFARE STATE

SOCIO-LEGAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE, NEWCASTLE – 6 APRIL 2017

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Social citizenship under the Cameron governments

- Reduced generosity of benefits
- Increasingly disciplinary treatment of claimants
- Political drive to reduce public spending
- Anti-welfare 'scrounger' narrative



Why social citizenship?

- Citizenship about membership of a community, inclusion and exclusion
- The changing rights and responsibilities of citizenship
- Social citizenship narratives explain changing approaches to social security

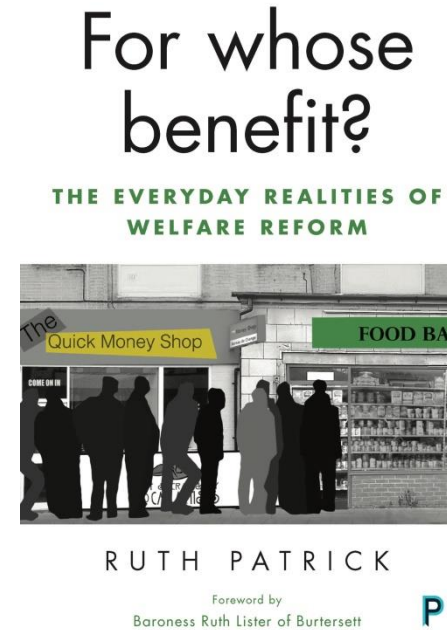
- **What do different approaches to research tell us about the legal status and lived experience of (social) citizenship?**
 - As defined from above
 - As experienced from below

Social citizenship from below

Qualitative longitudinal research

Interviews with single parents, young jobseekers and disabled people

Included participatory dimension



Key findings

1. Significant gap between citizenship as it is narrated from 'above' & citizenship as it is lived and experienced from 'below'
2. The 'work' of getting by on benefits & other forms of contribution in which individuals were engaged
3. Welfare reform often did not support individuals into employment....and yet central role of paid employment in individual lives
4. Impact of punitive narrative & claimants' identity as an 'other' (Lister, 2016)



I feel like a bum. I feel useless. When you're walking around the streets... everybody knows that you're not a worker because you're out and about through the day so you feel worthless... You feel like some people are looking at you as if to say "fucking, he's taking piss, he's another one that just sits about and does nowt". And then when you go shopping and you're having to buy all the cheapo stuff, you feel, I don't know, you feel ashamed. That's how it is. You see people putting nice products in their trolleys and you can't, you've got to get the minimum and it's tough if you like it or not because that's all you can afford. (James)

I've been poorly through depression every time I've been on benefits, because my mum and dad have worked hard all their lives to be where they are now, so that's the impression I get, that you need to work hard and earn your money. (Rosie)

Social citizenship from below

Values of this approach:

- Enables in-depth 'listening' to those whose voices are often neglected in political and policy debates
- Particular potential in following people over time (Neale, 2015)
- We can better understand how policy interventions are experienced 'on the ground' and the impact of these on individuals' citizenship in/exclusion.

Limitations of this approach:

- What this research cannot tell us is the intentions and motivations of policy elites and street level advisers
- There is particular untapped potential in trying to understand how devolution and welfare reform intersect



Social citizenship from above

- Socio-legal study
- Elite policymakers' discourses of social citizenship (Scotland & Northern Ireland)
- Exploring the impact of differences in the social citizenship narrative:
 - the social union
 - social security law
 - lived experiences of citizenship



Social citizenship from above

- Key findings
- **Scotland:**
 - Support people into sustainable, rewarding employment
 - Don't force people into low-paid work
 - Core to independence campaign, drive for more devolved powers and use of new powers
- **Northern Ireland**
 - More comfortable with disciplinary approach
 - Aspects of DWP policy too punitive
 - GB reforms accepted with limited mitigation

Social citizenship from above

■ Scotland:

- “The opportunity for Scottish welfare services is in the way we provide them and the culture of the organisation” (civil servant)
- “There is potential for us to have a more supportive policy, a policy that's based more on recognising individual worth than portraying recipients as a drag on society” (politician)

■ Northern Ireland:

- “We’re buying into the Iain Duncan Smith view of the world” (civil servant)
- “We... have people who don’t want to work. And why would they want to work when... if they were to get a job it may not be of the same level that they’re getting on the welfare benefit system?” (politician)

Social citizenship from above

■ Value of the approach:

- Elites make the legal change happen
- Legal changes impact directly on the lived experience
- Extent of differences in *social* attitudes unclear, but elite can attitudes make the difference

■ Limitations of the approach:

- Law does not exist in isolation from society – the lived experience matters
- Legal reforms and narrative inseparable – both impact on claimants and on street-level implementation of policy

In conclusion...

1. The legal discipline has traditionally had a poor record of recording the lived experience of social citizenship through the eyes of people living in poverty
2. There is particular value in looking at both perspectives to see extent of any (dis)junct and gap between the policy intent and how it is experienced on the ground
3. There is perhaps also a 'missing middle' that needs attention
4. We welcome questions & thoughts!

