



The 1st RADAR Debate:

“This House believes the majority of disabled people can and should work”

The Brit Oval, Monday 1st September 2008

Edited Transcript of the Speech in favour of the motion by David Freud, DWP Policy Advisor and Chief Executive Officer, The Portland Trust

14 DAVID FREUD: I think before I really get
15 going, I do have to address Bert's challenge to the room
16 here. I think he clearly was an Oxford philosopher in
17 a previous life and he thinks the way to address these
18 matters is to slice up the meaning of words in a subtle
19 way to cause confusion and chaos. I would like to just
20 pull him down-to-earth a little bit, if I can, by using
21 words in the way that they're generally meant, which is
22 clearly you can't expect a non-working age people to be
23 in the category we expect to go to work and I would take
24 that, as anyone who was not an Oxford philosopher like
25 Bert, as the way to read this motion. I should actually

1 make clear that although I'm currently honoured to be an
2 adviser to the DWP, I'm going to talk today in an
3 independent capacity because you've got quite enough
4 DWP representation on the table and it would be unfair
5 to put two speakers on it. I will pick up the question
6 that Bert raised, one of the questions he raised, which
7 is who on earth are we talking about here? Who are the
8 people with disabilities in this country? What is the
9 majority, or a majority over what group are we actually
10 talking about? And the reason that's an issue is that
11 in this country, you would think that a category called
12 incapacity benefit would encapsulate the group that
13 we're talking about here. But unfortunately, it
14 doesn't. It's a very poorly structured benefit. It was
15 set up under a philosophy which basically had a thrust
16 that people needed to be protected from work. It had
17 a better rate to it than ordinary unemployment pay as it
18 was then and never underestimate the financial -- the
19 effect of financial inducement. It actually discouraged
20 people who were on it from going to work, or looking for
21 work, and finally, it's very name tells people they are
22 incapable. It's actually quite an offensive name, when
23 you think about it. Don't underestimate also the effect
24 of what labels do to people who are labelled in that
25 way. Not surprisingly our IB figure is a swollen

1 figure. It's not surprising because the history is very
2 well known. It was used by the Government through the
3 eighties to try to massage down, if Rachel remembers
4 what was on top of city hall, massage down the
5 unemployment figures, and there was a real terror at
6 that stage that they'd go and burst through the
7 3 million mark which I think is an invocative figure
8 because that's meant to be the figure in which Hitler
9 got power in Germany ...

10 So sloppily designed for political motives, and
11 until recently, very little reformed. In particular,
12 under the assessments, the PCA assessment, there's much
13 too much focus on what people can't do as opposed to
14 what people can do. And it's incredibly easy, or not
15 incredibly, but relatively easy under that system to
16 notch up points for relatively minor conditions to get
17 over into the category. In addition in the past, it's
18 been all too easy to slip from the JSA category into the
19 IB category. You can actually do it, or people would do
20 it, because once you're not actively looking for work,
21 for fulfilling the JSA category, you've got it relatively
22 easy, I'm talking about 10 years ago, to slide over into the
23 IB category.

24 So we have a swollen IB figure. But I don't think
25 that you need to devote huge amounts of energy into

1 sorting out who should be in it and out of it. That's
2 because the evidence base now tells us that far from
3 being bad for people's health, actually work is good
4 for people's health, and not working is actually very
5 bad for it. And I was as I imagine many of you have,
6 gone through the burden, review of all the evidence,
7 there's more than 200 pieces of research cited and used
8 and summarised in this research, and it's really quite
9 unequivocal. If I can just rush through the quote or
10 pick out key bits, it says: "There is strong evidence
11 showing that work is generally good for physical and
12 mental health and well being. Worklessness is
13 associated with poorer physical and mental health and
14 well being. Work can be therapeutic and can reverse the
15 adverse health effects of unemployment."

16 That's true for healthy people of working age, for
17 many disabled people, for most people with common health
18 problems and for Social Security beneficiaries. The
19 provisos are that account must be taken of the nature
20 and quality of work, and its social context, jobs should
21 be safe and accommodating overall the beneficial effects
22 of work outweigh the risks of work and are greater than
23 the harmful effects of long-term unemployment or
24 prolonged sickness absence. Work is generally good for
25 health and wellbeing.

1 Now, some people with disabilities are actually some
2 of our greatest heroes. Nelson, who lost an arm and an
3 eye. Churchill, with his depression. I'll cite Steven
4 Hawking, and you'll all say oh, yes. He's more or less
5 immobilised and still economically active. You'll say
6 that's an exception, because he's brilliant, because
7 Rachel's brilliant. But that actually makes the point.
8 It makes the point. It's not the disability alone that
9 is forcing people out of the work markets. It's a whole
10 number of factors that come together that compound to
11 make it difficult for them to function in the work
12 market. And that I think is why the new ESA benefit is
13 so much better than the IB one. It means you can have
14 a disability, but that does not mean that you are not
15 expected to work. I think the green paper proposal that
16 we move from the people who are new on to the benefit to
17 the people who are existing claimants is also of great
18 use. And I also think that the work in the ability
19 assessment is so much stronger than the one it's
20 replacing, PCA, because it asks the question not what
21 can't you do, but what can you do? It's not enough just
22 to classify people, we have to help them through what is
23 a series of problems in order - to [solve those] that are
preventing
24 them from getting into the workforce, some being
25 a disability. I think the proposition in the report

1 I wrote last year basically said there are big, big costs
2 involved in doing that, and we need a big investment
3 programme to do it, and we need to find a sensible
4 target. What does it mean to get somebody into the
5 workforce? It does not mean getting someone a job for
6 13 weeks. It means having a programme that gets them
7 into work and keeps them in work not necessarily the
8 same job, for, I thought, 3 years, but you can juggle
9 with the exact figure. If you've got that sensible
10 target which is a kind of turn around of someone's life
11 target, you can then afford to look for payment by
12 results, which means that money is well focused and I'm
13 actually delighted that the best thing I think that's
14 happened in this area this year is that the treasury has
15 now accepted that approach and will pay by result.

16 As Rachel said, many people suffer from mental
17 illness. I think we need to approach this in a much
18 cleverer way. I think we need to dementalise it. As
19 Rachel said, and I'm not going to go on about it because
20 I think she got the nail on the head, we have to take
21 a holistic view to how to help people with mental
22 problems and that doesn't mean a pure medical approach.
23 Secondly, we need to look at ways of providing support
24 for those who will always need support in the workplace.
25 And I've been particularly impressed by the ways that

1 the social firms abroad have been doing that so creating
2 an entity that can actually absorb a reasonable number
3 of people and are financed to do that. So, in
4 conclusion, this may not be the case in all cultures all
5 round the world, but it is certainly the case in western
6 culture. Work is a central factor, because it provides
7 so much to people. It provides a sense of identity, it
8 gives them social net works, it provides independence
9 and self worth. I think that if we want to have
10 a society in which people with disabilities are
11 included, we should throw everything at making sure that
12 they can have a job. Thank you. (applause).

