



## The 1<sup>st</sup> RADAR Debate:

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

The Brit Oval, Monday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2008

Edited Transcript of the Speech opposing the motion by Kate Green, Chief Executive, Child Poverty Action Group

17 KATE GREEN: Let me start by making quite clear, like  
18 I think every other speaker on the panel this afternoon,  
19 that the child poverty action group is not anti-work.  
20 We accept all the arguments in its favour, the arguments  
21 that have been made this afternoon, that is good for  
22 individuals, good for their wellbeing, but it gives  
23 a sense of purpose, a sense of participation, an  
24 opportunity to contribute. It's good for the economy  
25 and good for families - decently paid jobs of course

1           boost family incomes too. I accept that for disabled  
2           people, [given the] lack of recognition of what they can  
contribute,  
3           and the discrimination and prejudice that they face, for  
4           those people ensuring that we create and promote and  
5           maintain a right to work, is absolutely vital if  
6           disabled people are to have access to equal rights. So,  
7           Liz, there's a rather tedious amount of agreement on  
8           your panel this afternoon which really is perhaps marred  
9           by the one-way voting of the people in the room. But as  
10          has already been pointed out, whatever you might think  
11          about the content morally of the motion, we're the  
12          logical ones, we're the ones who will show you why it  
13          just doesn't, as presently worded, actually stand up.  
14          Nobody is doubting the question that many disabled  
15          people, perhaps the majority, probably the majority of  
16          disabled people, even the children, even the pensioners,  
17          certainly can work. The question, and the question that  
18          the motion seeks to address, is also whether they  
19          should. You can't just vote for half this motion, and  
20          Liz has already said, you can't amend it. So those of  
21          you who can't see the rational position that you ought  
22          to be voting for, perhaps you'll allow me to go a little  
23          bit further in explaining what's wrong with this motion,  
24          part two.

25                Today, the rights and responsibilities approach,

1 something for something, and the increasing  
2 conditionality that's going with it, people that can  
3 work, should work, doesn't answer a number of really  
4 important questions about what work is actually for. It  
5 doesn't answer the most important question, actually:  
6 will that work lift families out of poverty? It doesn't  
7 answer the question that many people who want to work  
8 face substantial barriers to doing so, and the it  
9 ignores that the whole rights and responsibilities deal  
10 that we've got to do is frankly a one-way. Does work  
11 lift families out of poverty? Well, from all that  
12 you'll hear from the politicians, that work is the best  
13 group out of poverty, all too often the answer is no.  
14 Around half of children growing up below the poverty  
15 line are doing so in households where at least one adult  
16 is in paid work. That's work that's low paid, unstable,  
17 employers calling you in and out on a whim, where your  
18 boss thinks taking time off to deal with family or  
19 health were general assist is your problem, not his or  
20 hers. Work, in other words, that doesn't work. That's  
21 despite the improvements that the Government has  
22 introduced since 1997 and to which we should pay tribute -  
23 the national minimum wage and better rights at work.

24 For disabled people of course many of these hidden  
25 problems are actually magnified. First, it's harder to

1 get a job in the first place. Employers are very  
2 suspicious of people with uneven health track records,[and]  
3 as other speakers have said they're especially  
4 suspicious of people with fluctuating conditions or  
5 mental health problems or learning difficulties, they're  
6 frightened they don't know how to cope. Then, if you do  
7 get work, you'll likely earn less. At every level of  
8 qualification. And this is shameful and outright  
9 discrimination. At every level of qualification from  
10 entry to higher degree, disabled people earn less than  
11 non-disabled people with the equivalent qualifications.  
12 That cannot be right. Even if after all that you're  
13 still holding down a job, the associated costs and  
14 difficulties that you have to manage, finding child care  
15 that you're able to get your kids to, perhaps taking  
16 account of your own disability in the process, the  
17 demands of balancing work with home responsibilities,  
18 the travel arrangements you have to make, the extra  
19 support and equipment you may need to do your job, the  
20 need to keep well and keep fit, avoid becoming too  
21 exhausted by the demands of work, all these challenges  
22 are exacerbated, increased, for many disabled people,  
23 and the help available to meet them too often is  
24 impaired.

25 Society is not surprising that many (inaudible)

1 a couple of years ago, that though they often wanted to  
2 work, there were loads of difficulties in their way.  
3 First, employers ran a mile. One young mother told us  
4 that she'd in the past had mental health problems, and  
5 that had led her to self harm. She'd looked at retail  
6 job opportunities but as she said, employers took one  
7 look at the scars on her arms, they don't want me  
8 working in Top Shop looking like that, she said. Where  
9 employers did offer work, they were often reluctant to  
10 make adjustments as they are legally required to, so  
11 that disabled parents could do the job. Again and  
12 again, parents told us they found lack of flexibility  
13 about hours or adapting their duties was absolutely the  
14 norm. Parents also talked to us about how tired they  
15 became, coping with a health issue or a disability, and  
16 then going home to clean a house, feed your kids, help  
17 with the homework, get the ironing done and the shopping  
18 in, disabled parents told us they need more flexibility  
19 when they're at work if they're to cope with these  
20 demands and what they actually found [was that what] they  
were often  
21 having to do was to spend more of their hard earned  
22 earnings on help for chores around the house that they  
23 were no longer able to do.  
24 So that's why I say that the rights and  
25 responsibilities deal is a one-way deal for disabled

1 people. For all these problems, the employer  
2 discrimination the pay differential, the lack of  
3 support, disabled [people] are increasingly expected to take  
4 work, the language is hardening, and the new employment  
5 (inaudible) looks to me as if it has been deliberately  
6 structured so that more disabled people will have to  
7 think about taking work or face financial penalties if  
8 they don't. That's hardly a recipe for lifting their  
9 families out of poverty. Hardly a fair deal for  
10 disabled people. Where are the responsibilities on  
11 employers, you might ask? Why aren't disabled people  
12 demanding more of the Government in the rights and  
13 responsibilities deal? Certainly we have seen the  
14 Government do some good things. The increase in the  
15 Access to Work project that Lord McKenzie mentioned is  
16 very welcome. The increasing back to work support he  
17 talked about is welcome too. But generally, the  
18 introduction of the employment and support allowance and  
19 child poverty action is one massive slap in the face for  
20 disabled people. Apparently, starting from the  
21 assumption that they've had it too easy, that the  
22 already toughest personal capability assessment test in  
23 the world somehow needs toughening up, that reducing the  
24 amount of benefits that many disabled people will be  
25 entitled to, which ignores the fact that active ... By

1 claiming that the employment support allowance will give  
2 more money to those who ministers regard as more  
3 deserving is actually misleading; the support element  
4 will offer some disabled people less than they receive  
5 currently. Some as little as £3.15 more a week, than  
6 they get currently on incapacity, with the income  
7 support top-up, and an extra 3.15 a week is hardly going  
8 to make you rich, is it? Insufficient financial support  
9 for disabled people as they move back into work. Why,  
10 for example, do we set the bar for claims for working  
11 tax credit at 16 hours a week when for many disabled  
12 people, beginning with lower working hours, perhaps in  
13 time being able to work up to an increased number of  
14 hours would be a very good solution, but so much for  
15 joined-up Government, the taxpayer's regime, in this  
16 regard as in so many others, simply hasn't kept up. So  
17 it doesn't sound to me like the Government is keeping  
18 its side of the bargain and helping disabled people to  
19 deal with the pressures of going back to work.

20 Meanwhile, politicians remain mealy-mouthed when it  
21 comes to making demands on employers Lord McKenzie was  
22 at it again this afternoon. We've got to show them the  
23 way, coax them, persuade them. Every welfare reform  
24 Green Paper we've seen in recent years, and we've seen  
25 a lot of them recently, has talked in language of

1           persuading and encouraging employers, making the  
2           business case. Well, if we're to hear the  
3           language of rights and responsibilities on disabled  
4           people, I'd like to hear the same language of rights and  
5           responsibilities in relation to employers too. Because,  
6           until the rights of disabled people at work turn into  
7           real rights, until pay discrimination has ended, until  
8           flexible employment that enables people to cope with  
9           their health condition is insisted on, until work is  
10          a real route out of poverty for all parents, we cannot  
11          say that disabled people, indeed that any parent should  
12          work, if we're serious about the ambitions that -- to  
13          end child poverty that politicians of every party claim  
14          that they have.

15                 Finally, and this is self indulgence, let me say  
16          a little bit, because I can't resist it, about the model  
17          of provision that David proposed in his report to the  
18          Department for Work and Pensions last year which I think  
19          now has been pretty well entirely adopted by the  
20          Secretary of State. David already knows about my  
21          scepticism, but there's nothing automatic, and indeed,  
22          CPAG will be publishing research very soon now looking  
23          at some international comparisons to demonstrate this,  
24          nothing automatic to say that the voluntary or private  
25          sectors make better providers of long-term back to work

1 support than do the public sector. The international  
2 evidence shows that the position is well, at best,  
3 mixed. That the contract culture described, inevitably  
4 drives providers to respond to financial incentives, not  
5 necessarily the best interests of disabled people, that  
6 concentrating provision with a small number of large  
7 leads providers, risks driving the standards down and  
8 not up.

9 Now I've been saying these things to very little  
10 effect in the DWP. I obviously need to take some  
11 lessons in lobbying from you, David, but I'm saying [them]  
more  
12 urgently now as we go into the economic downturn. I'm  
13 very worried, with Bert, that just as jobs are harder to  
14 come by, harder to sustain, we're setting in place  
15 a model that will bear down harshly on people if they  
16 can't find decent work. In the process of contracting  
17 out support for those people, we will compromise the  
18 voices of those advocacy organisations who are taking up  
19 the contracts when they ought to be speaking out and  
20 defending the interests of disabled people first. My  
21 final challenge is to my own sector. Where are we in  
22 the fight for disabled people's interests and the rights  
23 and responsibilities debate? Of course disabled  
24 people must have the right to work, but they have a  
25 right that they and their families should escape poverty

1           too.

2           Today, when work fails to lift families out of  
3           poverty, when benefits are set below the poverty line it  
4           seems that to me that there is much more to do to secure  
5           a life free of poverty for disabled people and their  
6           children. Until work can guarantee that, it is quite  
7           wrong, morally and practically, to say that disabled  
8           people, if they can work, should work. The debate is  
9           much, much more nuanced than that. (applause).

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