

THE COSTS OF CHANGE

We seem to be being dragged inexorably back to the 19th century. With national and international pressures to run our economy with the soul purpose of wealth creation, the market is once again seen as the primary mechanism for achieving this. We seem to have learned no lessons from history, and the reasons behind the creation of the welfare state in this country. Under New Labour, the public sector has been the means of managing the fallout from the inequitable distribution of benefits within a market economy.

The result is that the rich are getting richer, our civil liberties are being eroded, our pensions are diminishing and now a government minister is suggesting we should pay for our health care and our children's education¹. Charles Clarke believes that our expectations of education and health care are too expensive to be funded solely through the tax and National Insurance contributions we already make towards them.

But what is too expensive is a modernisation agenda that has left the statutory sector reeling. The dust is barely allowed to settle on one set of changes before another set is announced and brought in. The government does not seem to understand the financial and human costs involved in this level of upheaval; costs which the statutory sector are left to fund, resulting ultimately in job losses and service cuts.

The government would achieve more if they created stability, let people focus on their work, and asked the front-line workers what they need to do their jobs better. But of course, in the government logic, it is the statutory sector workers who are inefficient, who need competition to focus their efforts, who need micro-managing and modernising.

And now it seems it is also our fault that the services are not delivering because we have too high expectations of what can be done with the money we already pay for them.

Through stealth taxes, service cuts and now, perhaps, through charges on essential services, the less advantaged in society are being asked to pay for the Government's inefficiencies and to subsidise an economy that benefits the rich. And this from a Labour Party.

If you wish to work with the Politics of Health Group on this or any other public health issues please contact Debbie at contact@pohg.org.uk

¹ Helm T (2007) "Let's charge for NHS and schools, says Clarke", *The Daily Telegraph* Thursday, February 8, p.8.