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### *Children (but not women) first: New Labour, child welfare and gender*

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### Abstract

The paper's starting point is an analysis of New Labour's agenda for children in an emergent 'social investment state'. It provides an overview of policies for children, which simultaneously are investing in children and regulating children and their parents/mothers. Although children have moved to the heart of social policy, there is some disquiet about the way they are being positioned in this brave new world of social investment. This disquiet focuses in particular on: the construction of children as 'becomings' rather than 'beings'; the paid work-focused and future-oriented model of citizenship; the relative neglect of groups of children who are not seen to represent such a good investment; and the eclipse of parents', and in particular, mothers' welfare. The final section sketches out how the social investment approach might be modified in the interests of children's well-being and flourishing and with reference to principles of (gendered) social justice.

Key words: human rights, mothers, social investment, social justice, well-being.

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## Children (but not women) first: New Labour, child welfare and gender<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

This paper focuses primarily on the child welfare side of the theme of this issue. Nevertheless, it does so within a gendered framework, which supports Brid Featherstone's argument (in this volume) that New Labour's child welfare policy lacks a gender analysis. One consequence is that children are decoupled from their mothers so that it is no longer a case of 'women and children first' but 'children (not women) first'.<sup>2</sup> The paper thus draws out some implications of an approach which divorces children's welfare from that of their parents - crucially, given the continued gendered division of household labour, that of their mothers. By coupling children with women in recognition of the latter's care responsibilities, the article, of course, runs the risk of reinforcing the very gender divisions that some of its arguments challenge. This tension between 'practical' and 'strategic' gender interests is one that analysts and activists frequently have to navigate (Molyneux, 1984).

The paper is divided into three sections. The first provides an analysis of New Labour's agenda for children in an emergent 'social investment state' in which children can be said to represent 'citizen-workers of the future' (Lister, 2003b, 2004c). The second explains why, despite the wide welcome given to the prioritisation of children in New Labour's social policy, disquiet has also been voiced. This disquiet reflects both the way in which children are constructed within the 'social investment state' and the way in which the gendered needs and concerns of adults, including parents, are eclipsed. Finally, the paper makes the case for modification of the social investment approach in the interests of children's well-being and flourishing in the present and of greater attention to human rights and social, and more specifically gender, justice.

### Children: '100% of our future'

The notion of the 'social investment state' can be understood as both an ideal and an analytical tool (Jenson, 2004; Lister, 2003b, 2004c). The term was coined by Anthony Giddens as an alternative to the traditional welfare state in order to promote 'investment in *human capital* wherever possible, rather than direct provision of economic maintenance' (1998: 117, emphasis in original). Children, and in particular, young children represent the main 'human capital' to which Giddens refers.

Children emerged as key figures in New Labour's nascent 'social investment state' early in 1999 when, in his Beveridge Lecture, the Prime Minister pledged the Government to eradicate child poverty in two decades and explained that children were the Government's 'top priority' because they are '100% of our future' (Blair, 1999: 16). Although the pledge to end child poverty was made by Tony Blair, the real drive behind the child poverty strategy has come from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who had taken up the cause of child poverty when a back-bench MP. Gordon Brown has developed the theme of investing in Britain's children, and in particular children living in poverty, as investment in the country's future. Moreover, he

has argued that 'tackling child poverty is the best anti-drugs, anti-crime, anti-deprivation policy for our country' (2000). The 2003 Budget Report went so far as to claim that 'support for today's disadvantaged children will...help to ensure a more flexible economy tomorrow' (HM Treasury, 2003: para 5.4).

The strategic significance of children for a state keen to equip its citizens to respond and adapt to global economic change so as to enhance competitiveness in the knowledge economy is underlined by a Strategic Audit drawn up by the Government's Strategy Unit. It states that the first 'strategic priority' is to be 'ready for the future'. Key to its achievement is 'ensuring people have the skills and qualities for future jobs, lives and citizenship' (2003: 37). In particular, it emphasises 'the very strong evidence on the cost-effectiveness of targeted investment in children' (2003: 78-9). Likewise, the recent childcare strategy document states that it is in 'the nation's social and economic interests' that 'children get a good start in life', for 'children are the citizens, workers, parents and leaders of the future' (HM Treasury, 2004: para. 2.11).

This exemplifies the future-orientation of the 'social investment state'. This future orientation is also reflected in New Labour's pre-occupation with life-chances and equality of life-long opportunity rather than the more traditional social democratic concern with equality as such. Structural divisions of class, gender and 'race' are overshadowed by the promise of a prosperous future for all and by a focus on the child as a 'unified, homogeneous, undifferentiated...category' (Dobrowolsky, 2002: 67).<sup>3</sup> This elision of structural divisions is described by Harry Hendrick as 'a reframing process within the 'social investment state': 'focus on the "needs" of specific groups of children, but underplay structural economic and social class determinants, thereby reframing the matter as one of personal responsibility in the quest to equip oneself to take advantage of "life's chances"' (2005: 56).

Hendrick also points out that, from an historical perspective, government investment in children for the greater good of the nation has many antecedents. What is novel, he suggests, is the way in which New Labour has 'put children at the *centre* of a social investment strategy' and of social policy making (Hendrick, 2005: 8, emphasis in original).

### **Policies for children: investing and regulating**

Investment in children involves improvements to both cash support and services. On the cash side, we have seen: a one-off real increase in the universal child benefit (for the first child only); increased support for children in low income families both in and out of work through a new tax credit scheme and improvements to social assistance payments for children (the latter curiously unsung by Ministers keen not to alienate Middle England); the introduction of statutory educational maintenance allowances to encourage young people from low income families to stay on at school; and a new child trust fund, a form of assets based welfare which has itself been characterised as a key building block of the 'social investment state' (Sherraden, 2002).

From the outset New Labour has emphasised the importance of services to welfare. Education, early years provision and childcare have been the main service instruments for investment in children. The childcare strategy, framed in terms of both child development and removing obstacles to paid work for parents, especially mothers, has been complemented by improvements to paid maternity leave provision and the introduction of limited paid paternity leave and unpaid parental leave.

Although the Government has taken on board growing demands to enable fathers to play a bigger role in the care of young children, it has shown timidity in not challenging the traditional gendered division of labour. Following consultation, new, revised, proposals, preserve the first six months of maternity leave for mothers and allow fathers a maximum of six months 'additional paternity leave' (APL), the first three months of which may be paid at a flat rate. However, a father is only eligible for APL, if the mother goes back to work; and entitlement to paid APL depends on her entitlement to statutory maternity pay or maternity allowance. This is an improvement on the original proposal to allow mothers to transfer part of their maternity leave to fathers. However, it still fails to give fathers an independent right and, as campaigners have pointed out, APL will only represent a meaningful option for fathers, if it is paid at a reasonable rate. It is therefore no surprise that, the Government has estimated that only between 9,000 and 16,000 out of 657,000 new fathers each year will take up the APL (*The Guardian*, 20 October 2005).

It is disappointing that the Government does not appear to have given serious consideration to the Nordic 'daddy month' model, which reserves a portion of paid parental leave for fathers on a 'use-it or lose-it' basis. This would have represented a more overt challenge to the gender culture that underpins the traditional gendered division of labour. Yet it has implicitly acknowledged the need to shift the gender culture in its attempt to encourage more men to work in childcare and has emphasised the importance of men's role in child care more generally. David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions launched National Childcare Week with the declaration that 'it is important for men to play a real part in raising children for the benefit of children, fathers and society as a whole' - though not, significantly, it would seem for mothers (DWP, 2005). So far, however, steps to ensure men do play such a part are little more than tokenistic.

This reluctance to use policy to change behaviour in the 'private' sphere of the family contrasts with New Labour's willingness to do so where that behaviour has more obvious 'public' consequences (Deacon, 2000). Yet, as the State Secretary in the Swedish Finance Ministry argues, it is 'implausible' to treat decisions as to who cares for children in the family as purely 'private' 'when the choice is almost always that the mother is going to remain at home. It is a structural problem, and progressive politics has an obligation to fight old-fashioned structures' (Andersson, 2005: 175-6). The failure to do so means the dominance of the 'universal breadwinner' model (which has replaced the previous 'male breadwinner' model) without any real attempt to move towards a 'universal care-giver' model in which men combine paid work and care

responsibilities in the same way that women do (Fraser, 1997; see also Featherstone, this volume).

For all its weaknesses, the overall childcare strategy, nevertheless represents a breakthrough in British social policy in its recognition of public as well as private responsibility for the care of children and for facilitating parents' (in practice typically still mothers') ability to combine paid employment with their family responsibilities.

More generally, children's services are being redeveloped following the broad-ranging Green Paper *Every Child Matters*. While its main emphasis is on the protection of children, children and their parents are also required to exercise responsibilities, in line with New Labour's philosophy that with opportunities come responsibilities. Fawcett et al. argue that 'many of the initiatives are predicated on parents changing their own behaviour' and that common to a number of policy areas is 'the increasing social control of childhood' and a marked authoritarianism (2004: 43 & 113). This is best exemplified by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003). Among their provisions are: compulsory parenting orders designed to ensure parents control their children's behaviour; child curfews; and anti-social behaviour orders (nearly half of which have been applied to children and young people).<sup>4</sup>

Parents can also be fined, or even jailed, in cases of persistent child truancy, although a proposal to dock their child benefit was abandoned in face of opposition (including from within Government). The latest suggestion, made by Blair to a government taskforce, is that parents might be forced to stay at home to 'babysit' children suspended from school so as to prevent them from causing 'a nuisance on the streets or in shopping centres. It is clearly essential' he explained 'that parents fully accept their responsibilities if we are to improve discipline and respect in schools' (quoted in *The Guardian*, 21 July 2005). Although it appears that the taskforce has not endorsed the proposal in this form, it is reported that the Government is planning a new law making it an offence for parents to 'allow a child to be found in a public place during school hours without good cause' (*The Independent*, 22 October 2005).

Such policies are designed to ensure that investment pays off in terms of promoting social cohesion and security and turning children and young people into responsible adult citizens. This dual approach to investment in children and young people is summed up by Tony Blair:

One thing that we know is that the more we invest in young people at the earliest possible age, the better chance we have of making sure that they become responsible adults - hence the importance of programmes such as Sure Start. That is why it is important that, as well as clamping down on antisocial behaviour, we should continue to invest in the education of our young people (2004).

Time and again it is made clear that policy will be used to encourage and, if necessary, enforce the responsibility of parents 'to bring up children as competent, responsible citizens' (Blair, 1998: 12).

### **Why only two cheers?**

Children have moved from the margins to the heart of social policy. Overall spending on both financial support and child care/early-years services has increased significantly. In a country that has been described as 'a serious contender for the title of worst place in Europe to be a child' (Micklewright and Stewart, 2000b: 23), reflecting ambivalent public attitudes towards children, a discourse of investment is being used to good effect to promote a children's agenda.

Why, therefore, are those who have been arguing for such an agenda for years now able to muster only two cheers at best? Governments can always be criticised for not doing enough. However, this is not simply a question of not moving as fast as the children's lobby would like. There is also some disquiet about the way in which children are being positioned in this brave new world of social investment. The next section outlines four main sources of disquiet, the last of which is of particular relevance to the overall theme of this issue - the dislocation of child welfare from its gendered context.

### 'Beings' or 'becomings'?

The first concern is rooted in what has been called a 'new paradigm of childhood', which values children as 'beings' in the present and not just as potential adults or 'becomings' (Fawcett et al., 2004: 17). Thus, paradoxically, the iconisation of the child in the 'social investment state' has involved the partial eclipse of *childhood* and the child *qua* child. Moreover, the child her or himself is de-gendered (see Featherstone, this volume), with little attention to how, for instance, gender might affect the experience of childhood poverty (Ridge, 2002, forthcoming).<sup>5</sup>

Child care and education policies are more oriented towards employment priorities – current and future – than towards children's well-being. The gap between this orientation and children's own priorities is underlined by research with children carried out by the children's charity, Barnardo's. It notes that the main outcomes of consultations on *Every Child Matters* relate to 'achievement but not enjoyment; education and not play', in contrast to the priority children themselves gave to play and fun in the consultation process. This, Barnardo's argues, 'suggests a view of children as adults in waiting' whereas 'play and enjoyment are in their very essence about the quality of children and young people's lives' (Kelley, 2004: 34-5). The importance of play and access to safe public spaces also emerges from consultations with children carried out by Save the Children (2005). Yet play is an aspect of children's lives that does not fit so well into the social investment template; it is therefore accorded relatively low priority.<sup>6</sup>

Lisa Harker, chair of a leading childcare charity, has suggested that an important lesson for the development of childcare provision in this country is the need 'better to reflect on the totality of a child's experience, and that the

best early years services are...child-centred' (2004). In contrast to such a model, Norman Glass, the godfather of the innovative early years programme, Sure Start, has warned that the programme's initial child-centred focus is at risk because it is in danger of 'becoming a New Deal for toddlers', captured by the 'employability agenda' (Glass, 2005: 2).<sup>7</sup> There is also a strong emphasis among national policy-makers on Sure Start delivering changes in parental (read primarily mothers') behaviour.

For older children, education is reduced to a utilitarian achievement-oriented measurement culture of tests and exams, with insufficient attention paid to the actual educational experience. According to the New Economics Foundation 'our secondary education system is not supporting young people to naturally grow and flourish, which implies that they have lower well-being, both currently and across their lives, than they might have done if the education system' explicitly promoted 'individual and societal well-being' (Shah and Marks, 2004: 12).

#### Citizens of the present or the future?

It is as citizen-workers of the future that children figure as the prime assets of the 'social investment state'. Criticisms of this model centre both on its elevation of paid work as the primary obligation of citizenship, to the detriment of care and voluntary work, and on the limits of its acknowledgement of children as (human) rights-bearing members of the citizenship community.

As noted by Featherstone (this volume), paid work is promoted by New Labour as the key to social and economic citizenship and as the main path out of poverty, regardless of family responsibilities. The tensions this can create, in particular for lone mothers attempting to balance paid work and increasingly prescriptive responsibilities in relation to child-rearing and children's education, have been documented (see, for instance, Standing, 1999; Horgan, 2005). Blair's suggestion that parents might be required to exercise their responsibility to improve school discipline by staying at home to 'babysit' children excluded from school, referred to above, brings the tension into stark relief.

The over-emphasis on paid work has given rise to a developing critique, which attempts to counterpoise a care ethic to that of the dominant paid work ethic (see, for instance, Williams, 2001, 2004a). The challenge is to develop a gender-inclusive and gender-sensitive model of citizenship as a framework for policies, which enable both women and men to flourish as citizen-earner/carers or carer/earners and also to have time for other pursuits or just 'to be' (Lister, 2002, 2003a).

Children figure in such a model as the recipients of adult care. However, we are also seeing the beginnings of a discussion about children's own relationship to citizenship, fuelled in part by New Labour's construction of them as citizen-workers of the future. This raises much wider questions, which cannot be developed here.<sup>8</sup> They overlap with the more widely rehearsed issue of children's human rights.

A number of bodies, including the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, have criticised the Government's piecemeal and partial approach to children's rights. The latter criticises it for its failure to build 'a culture of respect' for children's human rights (cited Williams, 2004b: 421). Pivotal government documents such as *Every Child Matters* make no reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to which the UK is signatory (Henricson and Bainham, 2005). The model adopted for the long-called-for children's commissioner, which is finally being introduced in England, has been widely criticised for its weakness with regard to championing children's rights.

In general the Government has been more willing to countenance rights for children who do not live with their parents than to intervene in the private sphere of the family to uphold the rights of those who do (Fawcett et al., 2004). This is most notable in the refusal to ban smacking, for fear of being labelled 'the nanny state' with an incursion into the private sphere too far (Toynbee, 2004). Smacking has been strongly criticised by the UN Committee as constituting 'a serious violation of the dignity of the child' (CRC, 2002: para 35).

A similar imbalance applies to children's participatory rights, which have, in general, been better developed for looked after children than for others. Although there is growing official acceptance of children's right to participate in decision-making that affects their lives and there exists a wide range of examples of consulting children, especially at local level, the overall record is still patchy. As a Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on young children's citizenship (Neale, 2004) showed, there is still a long way to go in promoting what Daiva Stasiulis has described as 'the child citizen as an active participant in governance' (2002: 509).

#### All or some children?

One of the criticisms made by Fawcett et al. (2004) in their study of New Labour's policies for children is that not all children have the same strategic significance as future citizen-workers for the 'social investment state'. They point in particular to disabled children and young people who, they argue, have not been targeted 'for intervention to the same extent that other groups can be seen to have been targeted. One reason for this', they suggest, 'could be that disabled children do not fit into the social investment state as either "threats" to civil order or "opportunities" for promoting a more market-friendly society' (2004: 123).

However, this may be changing as, in response to criticism, the government has committed itself to improved support for families with young disabled children through childcare and early education and attention to their additional needs. All national evaluations of children's services will 'assess the impacts on families with disabled children, and recommend specific actions to address barriers to their inclusion' (Strategy Unit, 2005: p. 11). Francine Bates, chief executive of Contact a Family, has described the commitments in the strategy as 'remarkable' and as having the potential to make a radical improvement in the lives of disabled children and their families. However, she warns that

'there may be many a slip between now and the target dates, realistic though they are, given the distance to travel'. She points, in particular, to government reluctance to ringfence the necessary funding, so that it has 'left itself precious few levers to get local authorities and health services to deliver improvements on the ground' (Bates, 2005).

Gypsy and traveller children are also marginalised within the 'social investment state'. This reflects the second class citizenship status of the gypsy and traveller communities. Although they are invisible in the statistics, there is evidence to suggest that this is a group of children at particular risk of poverty. This, Cemlyn and Clark argue, reflects their 'wider relationship with the dominant settled society and the discrimination and denial of human rights across a range of aspects of day-to-day living' (Cemlyn and Clark, 2005: 154).

The children of asylum-seekers constitute an even more neglected group. Save the Children have published a series of reports detailing the difficulties faced by children seeking asylum either with their parents or on their own. One of these reported on a study of children who had been detained for purposes of immigration control. It revealed the damaging effects on the children's health and education, emphasising, in particular, that 'the greatest negative impacts are on mental health' (Crowley and Lester, 2005: ix). The report's primary recommendation is that 'if the Government is serious about protecting and safeguarding the interests of children in the UK, then asylum-seeking and other migrant children must be treated as children first and foremost', with 'their interests and needs represented by the Commissioners for Children and Young People' (op. cit: ix-x).

Another study, in Wales, talked to asylum-seeking children living in the community. The report 'highlights the fact that despite their obvious vulnerability, children seeking asylum face constant discrimination, and it illustrates (in children's own words) how their rights are violated and routinely infringed by a state that seems to have forgotten that they are children' (Hewett *et al.*, 2005: 1). One of the study's recommendations is that 'asylum-seeking families and separated (unaccompanied) children should be treated on the basis of equality with the general population in terms of welfare benefits' (op. cit.: 7). This is echoed in the election manifestoes published by the Child Poverty Action Group (2005) and by End Child Poverty. Both point to the –undocumented – high risk of poverty faced by this group of children. The latter points out that the situation of these 'very vulnerable children...has worsened since 1997' (End Child Poverty, 2005: section 7; see also Burchardt, 2005; Fitzpatrick, 2005).

The Save the Children (Wales) report underlines that asylum-seeking children are 'in need of care and protection; moreover, they are a potential asset to our society and not a burden' (Hewett *et al.*, 2005: 1) However, this is not how they are treated (Stanley, 2005; Malikzada and Qadri, 2005). One might speculate that they are not seen by the Government as constituting a good investment in the social investment state, in part because it does not see them as legitimate long-term residents and future citizens.

### Children and parents

While the prioritisation given to children has been welcome, it has, in some ways, been at the expense of their parents (see also Henricson and Bainham, 2005). Great emphasis is placed on parenting and the responsibilities of parents. Although this has been backed up with some support services, as observed already there is also a strong whiff of authoritarianism in the measures adopted to ensure that parents (typically mothers) turn their children into responsible citizens. Henricson and Bainham warn of the possible human rights implications and suggest that ‘the attribution of blame to parents for their children’s behaviour up to the age of 16 underestimates children’s independence and overestimates the ability of parents to control the behaviour of young people as they grow older’ (2005: 103).

As Scourfield and Drakeford point out ‘while governments may talk of “parents”, the impact of policies that impose home-school agreements, fine the parents of truants or require the parents of children appearing before the courts to attend parenting classes falls quite disproportionately upon mothers, not fathers’ (2002: 627; see also Gillies, 2005). A national study of social landlords’ use of legal remedies to control anti-social behaviour revealed the ‘punitive approach’ taken by both social landlords and the judicial system “to women-headed households who fail to control boyfriends’ and/or teenage son’s behaviour” (Hunter and Nixon, 2001: 395). Hunter and Nixon recount that

analysis of the empirical data shows that women were more likely than male or joint tenants to be the subject of complaints about anti-social behaviour, despite the fact that in the majority of cases the behaviour complained about was committed not by women, but by men. In these cases, both landlords’ and the judicial response was unequivocal. Regardless of the difficulty and in some cases, the impossibility women experienced in controlling the behaviour of their teenage sons or boyfriends, they were deemed responsible for the behaviour and were as a result evicted from their homes (2001: 406-7).

They suggest that the findings ‘reveal there to be an important gender dimension to the problem of anti-social behaviour, which has not been acknowledged by either policy-makers or practitioners’ (*ibid*: 409). This links to the related issue of the insufficient attention given by government to the (gendered) relationship between financial deprivation and the ability of parents to fulfil the parenting responsibilities expected of them. It is a gendered relationship because of the continued gendered division of labour in which women still carry the main day-to-day responsibility for the care and upbringing of children; this is obscured by the gender-neutral language of parenting (see Featherstone, this volume).

The Women’s Budget Group recently published a report, which argues that ‘the well-being of children cannot be divorced from that of their mothers’ (WBG, 2005: iii). The link lies, on the one hand, in issues that stem from women’s role as the main carers of children and main managers of poverty and, on the other, in the inter-relationship between women’s weak labour

market position and child poverty (Lister, 2004a). A central element of the case is that 'the stress of poverty can undermine parental/maternal capacity to perform effectively the parental role, which is identified by the Government as crucial to its child poverty strategy' (WBG, 2005: iii). Both 'quality of parenting' (Hodge, 2004) and effective job-seeking, identified by government ministers as key in this context, can be adversely affected by hardship and the stress that it can cause. The report's primary message is that 'tackling women's poverty is critical to the long-term success of the Government's child poverty strategy as well as being important in its own right' (WBG: v).

It is important to emphasise 'in its own right' here. Lobbying organisations have to take strategic decisions as to how to couch their messages in ways that will resonate with policy-makers. The Women's Budget Group highlighted the links between women's and children's poverty as a way of getting women's poverty on to the government's poverty agenda. However, the organisation is also clear that women's poverty matters 'because of the effects on women themselves' as well as 'because of the effects on their children' and of course not all women living in poverty necessarily have children (WBG: 2).

There may be lessons to be learned from the Canadian experience where the discourse of child poverty has dominated policy-making on poverty longer than in the UK. A Status of Canada Women report argues that the discourse has served to make the structural causes of poverty less visible; to encourage a response motivated by pity for the helpless child alongside a mentality of blaming adults/mothers; and to displace women's issues generally and women's poverty specifically. The report suggests that 'rather than connecting the plight of children with the costs of parenting labour, child poverty discourse separates mothers from children and obscures the persistently gendered nature of caregiving labour and its consequences for women as a group' (Wieggers, 2002: 56; see also Stasiulis, 2002; Dobrowolsky, 2004; Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004; Morrow *et al.*, 2004).

Connecting child poverty with 'the costs of parenting labour' has implications for both sides of New Labour's guiding principle of 'work for those who can, security for those who cannot'. On the 'security for those who cannot' side of the equation, it raises the issue of the financial support provided for non-employed parents which, unlike support for children, has seen no real increase in value and which has thus fallen further and further behind average earnings. As well as the general adult rates of out-of-work, income-related benefits there is also a particular issue of the rate paid to young mothers and to mothers-to-be (Mayhew and Bradshaw, 2005). This whole question is beginning to emerge as a policy issue including for children's organisations, like the Child Poverty Action Group, who argue that family income needs to be looked at in the round.

With regard to 'work for those who can', as the Women's Budget Group argues, the Government's welfare-to-work programme needs to be linked to a gendered employment strategy. This should 'address women's disadvantaged labour market position and the obstacles faced by low-income

mothers who want to move into paid work, while also being sensitive to the wishes of mothers on benefit who prioritise their children's care over paid employment' (WBG, 2005: v). The wider question of low pay, which affects men as well as women (although to a lesser extent) is also still an issue, despite the introduction of the minimum wage.

Henricson and Bainham argue that the respective interests of parents and children would be better recognised and reconciled in policy within a rights based framework. Rights, they suggest, 'flush individual and collective entitlements out into the open. They create expectations of a balance of interests that cannot disappear so readily as it might under a discretionary welfare model of government investment (2005: 110).

### **Beyond social investment: human rights, well-being and social justice**

The critical analysis of New Labour's social investment approach to child welfare developed here should not be read as a statement that all of its policies for children are reducible to the social investment template. Nevertheless, this template does provide a dominant frame for its agenda for children, which is not rooted in the values of organisations working in the field. A study of national voluntary organisations by Fiona Williams and Sasha Roseneil found that, while, on the one hand, many organisations do adopt a social investment discourse strategically, on the other, they

largely share a discursive centering of the child, which stands at some critical distance from New Labour's social investment approach to children. Many, though not all, were advancing considerably more holistic frameworks for thinking about the care and well-being of children and more radical frameworks for promoting social justice and equality for children than the government and, most important, were operating with an idea of children as moral subjects, rather than merely as the objects of policy intervention (2004: 208).

This suggests a degree of consensus around the need to temper the futuristic and instrumentalist social investment approach, in the interests of children's well-being and recognition of their status as child-citizen members of our society as well as a broader social justice agenda (see also Prout, 2000).

That broader social justice agenda has to be a gendered agenda, which both acknowledges the links between women's and children's well-being and recognises women's claims for justice in their own right. As the Status of Canada Women report advises, 'it is important that women's equality remain a separate claim based on fairness and social justice' and that women's and children's agendas are not conflated, even though they may overlap given the 'actual interdependence between the lives of women and children' (Wieggers, 2002: 91, 92). As hinted at in the introduction, there is also a danger that too great an emphasis on the interdependence of women's and children's lives can obscure gendered interdependencies that involve men also. A gendered social justice agenda transcends the public-private divide, as social injustice does not stop at the front door. It involves a politics of both recognition and

redistribution, embracing the cultural and symbolic (including 'voice') as well as the socio-economic (Fraser, 1997, 2003).

A social justice agenda for children likewise transcends the public-private, involving both recognition and redistribution. I have argued elsewhere that 'the Government's emphasis on children as investments needs to be balanced by a more explicit appeal to principles of social justice and to the human rights of children *qua* children' (Lister, 2004b: 59). This includes respect for children and their voices (see also Williams, 2004a, 2004b).

Moreover, the current emphasis on children's life-chances needs to be rooted in an equal concern with children's well-being and flourishing *as children*. Micklewright and Stewart suggest 'four key functionings that...a child needs to lead a "good life"', which reflect the concept of children's well-being and development in the UN Convention: 'material well-being, health and survival, education and personal development, and social inclusion/participation' (2000a: 7). Save the Children (2005) recently called for a regular UK-wide survey of children's well-being.

The New Economics Foundation's *Well-being Manifesto for a Flourishing Society* ends with the declaration that 'all policy-makers should ask "What would policy look like if it were seeking to promote well-being?" This should be one of the defining questions of politics in developed countries' (Shah and Marks, 2004: 17). It is a question that, linked to the ideal of gendered social justice, could do much to reshape the agenda for children (girls and boys) – and also women and men.

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<sup>1</sup> A different version of this paper will also be appearing in J. Lewis (ed.) (2006) *Children in the Context of Changing Families and Welfare States*, Edward Elgar.

<sup>2</sup> The low priority given to women's concerns was epitomised in Tony Blair forgetting to appoint a deputy minister for women and equality in his post-2005 election reshuffle and then making this position (for the second time) an unpaid post.

<sup>3</sup> For an account of a similar process in Canada see Jenson (2001). However, it should be noted that the government has established a task force, headed by Trevor Phillips, to look at the fundamental causes of inequality and there is now a requirement on public bodies to promote 'race' equality, which will be followed by a duty to promote disability and gender equality.

<sup>4</sup> Nearly half of ASBOs issued since they were introduced in April 1999 were against juveniles (0-19, April 2005). Concern has been voiced by children's organisations and by Liberty that the policy is criminalising children's misbehaviour. Moreover, there is now talk of 'baby ASBOs' for children below the age of criminal responsibility (*The Independent*, 10 October 2005).

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<sup>5</sup> One exception is the recurrent concern about girls out-performing boys at school (see Scourfield and Drakeford, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> The importance of play is, on occasion, acknowledged, see for instance an article by Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in *Community Care* (Jowell, 2005) and the Big Lottery Fund has announced a new £155m funding programme for innovative play facilities in England, focused on areas where facilities are poorest.

<sup>7</sup> Norman Glass is a former senior Treasury civil servant who led the interdepartmental review out of which Sure Start was developed.

<sup>8</sup> I have explored elsewhere the relationship of children to citizenship (Lister, 2005).