

The Guerrilla Thinktank Presents



## THE FUTURE OF JOHN HUMPHREYS?

How popular prejudices are manufactured by tabloid untruths in the liberal media

by Robbie Smith

This document is not an argument against welfare reform, the desire for full employment or an argument for one ideology against another. This document analyses the bias in one BBC tabloid documentary and articulates a counter-point.

That documentary is *The Future of the Welfare State with John Humphreys*.

# The Welfare Budget

“70 years ago a document of monumental importance sparked a social revolution, it gave birth to the welfare state and what has become a massive benefits bill. That bill has gone up in the last 10 years by nearly £60 billion.” - John Humphreys, in the opening statement of *The Future of the Welfare State with John Humphreys*

## 'has become a massive benefits bill' – MISLEADING!

From table 1:

- Welfare is at a post-war low, as a % of public spending
- In 2010, Welfare as a % of GDP was lower than 1970, 1980 and 1990
- The 2010 welfare budget is similar to 1950

## '£60 billion in 10 years' – MISLEADING!

From table 2:

- Without context £60 billion sounds very high. GDP increased by £477 billion!
- £60 billion includes all benefits, including 32% that goes to higher earners<sup>1</sup>.
- The increase of 1.36% of GDP occurred since 2008, due to economic stagnation and rising unemployment.

**I suggest that the opening statement seeks to propagate a popular myth that the welfare bill is 'spiralling out of control'.**

Table 1) Welfare budget 1920 -2010

Year	% GDP	% Public Spend
1920	2.61	7.9
1930	5.43	18.5
1940	4.13	13.9
1950	6.93	19.3
1960	5.87	16.7
1970	8.10	19.4
1980	10.48	23.5
1990	9.26	26.3
2000	6.05	17.3
2010	7.39	16.0

Source: <http://www.ukpublicspending.com>.

Table 2) Welfare budget, GDP, Growth and Unemployment – 2006 – 2010

Year	% of GDP	GDP £billion	% Growth	% Unemployed
2000	6.05	976	-	5.4
2008	6.03	1448	0.6	5.6
2009	6.81	1395	-4.9	7.6
2010	7.39	1453	1.7	7.8

Source: <http://www.ukpublicspending.co.uk> and <http://portalseven.com>

1 <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/neilobrien1/100043679/50-billion-of-welfare-spending-a-third-goes-to-people-on-above-average-incomes-do-we-really-need-this/>. Throughout the documentary Humphreys solely concentrates on the unemployed and low earners and ignores middle-class universal benefit recipients.

## **Benefits Culture / History of Unemployment**

“She sees her self as a victim and maybe she's right. A victim of the benefit system, the benefits culture that we have created over the decades. How else can you explain so many people in this neighbourhood out of work?” - John Humphreys, about a benefit recipient in his home town Cardiff

**The premise that 'the benefits culture' causes unemployment is FALSE!**

Humphreys justifies his argument with these earlier statements:

“Here's one way the benefits system has changed in my lifetime. This is where I was brought up, Splott in Cardiff. Poor, working class district. Respectable. Poor...”

“In those days [1950s], everybody, if they could was expected to work and they did.”  
“Today, one in four people in this area is on some kind of benefit.”<sup>2</sup>”

**Yes, unemployment is higher today than the 1950s.**

**But, unemployment is lower today than the 1930s, before the 'welfare state'!**<sup>3</sup>

Even when unemployment leads to mass starvation it does not decrease unemployment.<sup>4</sup>

**Unemployment is caused by political and economic factors.**

---

<sup>2</sup> I would be interested to know the source of the 1 in 4 figure given in the documentary.

<sup>3</sup> Unemployment in Cardiff was 20% or higher through most of 1930s. Today, combining job-seekers, the sick and disabled totals 16% in Cardiff.

<sup>4</sup> One example, the Irish Famine 1845-1852, where one million died of starvation, despite enough food to feed all of the Irish people. "If the Irish once find out that there are any circumstances in which they can get free government grants, we shall have a system of mendicancy [begging] such as the world never knew". - Sir Charles Trevelyan, assistant secretary to the UK Treasury

## **Jobs Availability**

“Are there really no jobs here in the centre of the capital of Wales?”

“In fact, in September there were more than 1600 jobs advertised in Cardiff.”

- John Humphreys

“There are jobs out there...in April this year there were half a million jobs.” - Julie Gillam, A4e training centre, Middlesbrough

***Jobs ADVERTISED***  
**is NOT EQUIVALENT to**  
***jobs CREATED.***

Newly created jobs reduce unemployment.

To grossly simplify:

$$\text{Jobs Advertised} = \text{Net Jobs created} + \text{Staff Turnover}^5$$

When net job creation is zero or negative, jobs advertised reflects staff turnover.

---

5 For example, if average UK staff turnover is once every five years, then approx. 6 million working people will change job every year. If half a million jobs are advertised each month, they are mostly taken by half a million working people (6 million /12) changing jobs.

## Sick and Disabled numbers

Dr Sharon Fisher of the Wellbeing Centre:

“Unbelievable. Two and a half million people on Incapacity Benefits in the UK, [shaking head] unbelievable!”

Professor Steve Fothergill, Sheffield Hallam University:

“What we started to do 20 to 25 years ago is hide very large numbers of unemployed people on incapacity benefits.”

**Humphreys propagates the myth that most people claiming incapacity benefits in the UK do not have a long-term sickness or disability.**

There is a way to test this premise. If there are too many people claiming incapacity benefits in the UK, then the disability claimant figures should stick out like a sore-thumb compared to other nations.

I researched this two years ago by comparing OECD nations, with 2008 statistics.

The table below shows that the UK disability claimant count is higher than other countries but not much higher than the OECD average and lower than the US.

When measured in some kind of context, compared against mental health sufferers the UK incapacity count is NOT high. Please see graph 1 at the end of this document.

**The numbers of incapacity benefits claimants in the UK reflects the high numbers of people with long-term sickness and disability.**

Charities such as Time To Change<sup>6</sup> are investing huge amounts of time and resources into fighting the stigma of mental health. Prejudicial views propagated by the likes of John Humphreys hinder that fight.

<b>Nation</b>	<b>% Disability Claimants</b>
Canada	5.14
France	5.38
Germany	6.07
Italy	4.80
Japan	2.39
United Kingdom	7.48
United States	9.19
OECD	6.74

Source: OECD

---

6 <http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/>

## Bias / Work Capability Assessment

Throughout the documentary, there was a deliberate bias towards those in favour of tougher conditions for poor welfare recipients.

This bias can be highlighted by the part of the documentary on Incapacity Benefit.

Humphreys interviews:

- Dr Sharon Fisher.
- Professor Steve Fothergill

Humphreys is refused permission to film a Work Capability Assessment medical so interviews an incapacity benefit recipient about her problems. This is not impartial.

This gives the **MISLEADING BIAS** impression there are no policy-makers, politicians or organisations deeply concerned by the WCA and cuts to disability benefits.

In fact he could have talked to any of these people or organisations to broadcast criticism of the WCA and provide impartiality:

- **Disability Benefits Consortium, representing 41 charities.**<sup>7</sup>
- **Members of the Work and Pensions Select Committee.**<sup>8</sup>
- **Professor Paul Gregg, Bristol University**<sup>9</sup>
- **The General Medical Council**<sup>10</sup>

In fact, in the documentary:

- 14 people were named and titled with captions. Of these:
- 9 spoke from their professional experience in a particular job.
- 5 men were interviewed for an authoritative overview of welfare policy.
- 4 were in favour of reducing welfare protection, the other was neutral.
- **No person was broadcast offering an authoritative counter-argument.**

**This bias conflicts with the BBC's remit to be impartial and I suggest it is prejudicial to people with disabilities.**

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.disabilityalliance.org/dbc.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/jul/24/atos-faces-critical-report-by-mps>

<sup>9</sup> Paul Gregg is interviewed in the documentary about single mothers. John Humphreys could have easily broadcast Gregg's (the architect of the Employment and Support Allowance) concerns on the ESA reforms:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/feb/23/government-reform-disability-benefits>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/aug/13/atos-doctors-improper-conduct-disability>

## PUBLIC OPINION AND THE MEDIA

# I'm not a

Why Americans  
HATE welfare  
Race, Media, and the Politics of  
Antipoverty policy  
– by Martin Gilens

ISBN: 0-226-29364-5

# but...

Throughout the documentary, results are shown from an Ipos Mori poll for the BBC conducted in September 2011. Humphreys correctly states public opinion is pressuring politicians in all the main parties to be tough on welfare. He also correctly attributes British opinion similar to that of US opinion.

**What Humphreys fails to ask is: how is public opinion formed?**

Public opinion can be well informed. But public opinion can also be ill-informed based on residual prejudices, handed down from generation to generation and maintained by prejudicial media.

Yale professor Martin Gilens study shows that it is the liberal media, considered reliable and impartial, that can skew the public heavily in favour of prejudicial opinions.

It is not necessarily because liberal editors and journalists are consciously prejudiced. As they broadcast and publish for selected prejudicial audiences, they inadvertently promote stereotypes that are derived from century old propaganda.

**In the US, racial stereotypes of 'lazy' blacks transmute from pro-slavery propaganda into modern public opinion about welfare.**

**In the UK, Victorian class prejudices separating the poor into 'deserving' and 'undeserving' are propagated in exactly the same way.**

## **The Beveridge Report**

The Beveridge Report (William Beveridge, 1942) sought to end the 'five giant evils' of the age. This was achieved post-war through a massive public spending policy, financed by Government borrowing.

In the documentary, John Humphreys focused on ending one evil but, due to his ignorance and prejudice, succeeded in promoting the other four.

*END:*

**idleness**

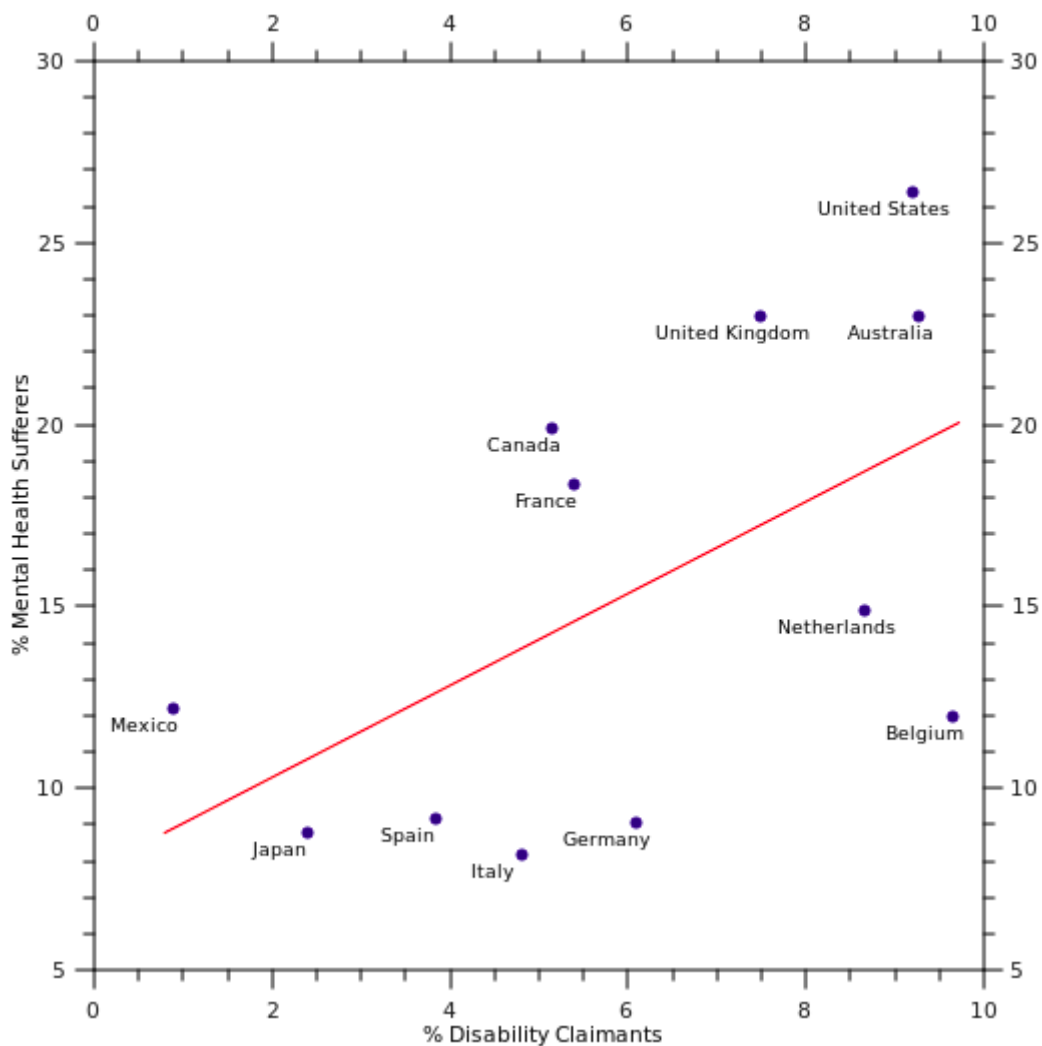
**disease**

**IGNORANCE**

**Want**

**Squalor**

## Graph 1) Mental Health Suffers against Disability Claimants, 2008



Source: OECD, WHO, [Equality Trust](#)

This graph shows, by drawing a trend-line, that when compared to all mental health sufferers, the number of disability benefit claimants isn't high in the UK.

If politicians genuinely want to protect the disabled and reduce disability benefit claims, they need to address the underlying causes of long-term sickness.

**There is a correlation between mental illness rates and inequality.<sup>11</sup>**

---

11 The Spirit Level, Wilkinson and Pickett