

What God thinks of measures that affect the poor

I have written before on the economic strategy of the current Tory government and the time that has elapsed since has proved the point that I made; cuts will not stimulate growth in a depression. I also mentioned some of the terrible effects that this strategy was having, even then, on the many services that had been axed and the damage being done to infrastructure and communities, to say nothing of vulnerable people. However, in this month (April 2013) the worst of the benefit cuts take effect and I wish to summarise what this actually means to the poor. I will then show what God thinks about this.

Effect on the rich

Before I do that I wish to show what has happened to the rich and the influential.

The most obvious thing is that the top tax rate has been changed from 50 to 45p, in a time of recession and low fiscal income no less. This benefits 267,000 people who earn more than £150,000. Furthermore, it benefits 13,000 people earning £1m an average of £100,000.¹

The cruelty of giving money to the rich at a time when the working poor, the disabled and the workless are having cuts to their already pitiful income is beyond belief.

George Osborne seemed to have no qualms in sending arrogant signals when, just before the budget, he was more active in Europe than usual defending the right of bankers to have large bonuses, being out of step with just about everybody. He failed; but it showed us where his priorities lie.

Yet more signals come from the acts of this government in response to the failings of establishment figures. The Mid Staffordshire hospital crisis led to about 1200 unnecessary deaths, and much unnecessary suffering, resulting from an authoritarian management ethos that cared nothing for patients. The chief executive managing this for a significant part of the period was promoted to be head of the NHS. Despite calls for his resignation from everybody; from doctors, nurses, the public and patient lobby groups, this government defended him.

There have been several other cases where top establishment figures have been protected, despite their iniquities, negligence and incompetence, whereas the ordinary person always feels the full force of the law.²

But back to the effects of cuts on the poor.

¹ According to a Labour Party statement in the Commons by Ed Balls.

² A recent study has actually proved what I saw in commercial experience; that is that those who scramble to the top of large organisations (like banks) are not the cream of the crop. Far from being the best at their job, they are usually (not always) the most psychotic and selfish people. The popular notion (applied by the government) that we must pay exorbitant salaries and bonuses to keep such people is a nonsense. Managers should be chosen on their actual merit and ethos, not because they have finagled their way to the top by stealth and base tactics.

The effects on ordinary working families

Cumulative effect of coalition measures

Labour claims that households will be £891 a year worse off now that the cumulative benefit cuts and tax rises have come into effect today (6 April). However, the respected Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) have published figures showing that the cumulative effects on a one earner family with children, since the coalition came to power (in 2010), is that they are £4,000 worse off in the next 12 months. This government has wiped out £4,000 pa. from low earning families at the same time that it gives £100,000 to millionaires!³

Bedroom tax

Effect on the disabled

The introduction of this policy was a shambles, requiring a number of U-turns published in a ministerial statement dated 12 March 2013.⁴ It was clearly another ill-thought out strategy. It was also publicly misrepresented; for instance David Cameron stated, in Prime Minister's Questions on 6 March 2013, that *'people with severely disabled children are exempt and people who need round-the-clock care are exempt...'* but the regulations at that time provided no such exemptions. As a result, a judicial review application has been issued on behalf of the disabled in a directions hearing at the High Court on 5 March because there are strong reasons to exempt the disabled on human rights and equality grounds.⁵

In addition, the Equality Act of 2010 has been breached since the impact of the regulations on disabled people has been ignored and the government has failed to consider the need to mitigate the impacts of the regulations on disabled people – who are also generally less able to fund the shortfall or to downsize.⁶

The availability of discretionary housing payments (DHP's) is not sufficient mitigation of the impacts on disabled people, especially as there is unlikely to be sufficient funding to meet the shortfall for all disabled claimants who need help. The extra resources the Government has committed to provide for DHP's only reflect the need to help disabled people with extensive adaptations to their home and foster carers.⁷

Economic effect

The principle of this policy sounds reasonable but the problem is in the implementation. Not only has the government completely ignored the vital needs of the disabled, but its stated economic benefits are flawed. Instead of saving £500m a year it appears that it is likely that this measure will cost more money because there is a shortfall in appropriate smaller premises for people in underused social / council homes to relocate into. If people move into the private sector to save losing benefit, their Housing Benefit claim will be much greater than living in council accommodation.

For example: according to Ashley Crumbley, chief executive of Wigan and Leigh Housing, which manages 22,000 social housing properties on behalf of Wigan council, *'the 'bedroom tax' will not produce savings to the public purse in the region it serves. With some 4,500 tenants affected and little social housing stock available it means it is inevitable households will be forced*

³ Channel 4 news; 6.4.13

⁴ This provided exemptions for adult children on deployment with the armed forces and approved foster carers.

⁵ For example Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The particular needs of disabled people may need the extra room – for example, because a disabled partner or child cannot share a room or because a room is used for storing disability-related equipment. Another point is the need of disabled people to live near relatives or carers who provide vital support.

⁶ Jane Young; We are Sparatcus.com, 9.3.13.

⁷ Sue McCafferty; Loaves and Fishes, We are Sparatcus.com

to move into the more expensive private rented sector.’ He estimates that the welfare bill could go up by £500,000 per year in Wigan alone.

Channel 4 News spoke to a single mother in Southampton, who faces a 14% reduction in housing benefit for the home she shares with her two children. Her rent is currently £365 per month for a three-bedroom house with a social landlord, but she could claim £664 per month for a smaller two-bedroom property with a private landlord. What sense is there in making two children share a room at a cost to the taxpayer of £299?

Furthermore, social landlords expect a significant portion of tenants not to pay their increased rents once their housing benefit levels go down, and therefore anticipate increased costs in dealing with arrears and evictions. Further social landlord costs will be incurred by disabled people leaving specially adapted homes in order to move into smaller properties that require specialised adaptations.

Wigan and Leigh Housing say the significant costs it faces will need to be offset by savings, meaning schemes to build new homes will be axed. It says it now plans to build 2,200 fewer new homes over 30 years, the equivalent of more than one home per week not being built. It also suggests an increase in homelessness costing £10m.

Key facts

- Cumulative effect - a one earner family with children is £4,000 worse off in the next 12 months since the coalition came to power. [Source: Institute for Fiscal Studies.]
- The government has wiped out £4,000 pa. from low earning families at the same time that it gives £100,000 to millionaires! [Source: Institute for Fiscal Studies.]
- There are insufficient social housing options to allow people to downsize due to lack of house building by government.
- The bedroom tax will certainly cost more money in key areas of the UK. It will increase Housing Benefits, inflate costs to social housing groups and also promote homelessness. [Source: Wigan and Leigh Housing.]
- The policy unfairly affects disabled people more than anyone else yet there are no provisions for them.

The effects on the disabled of welfare cuts

Information

Old benefits chiefly affected are disability living allowance (DLA) and employment and support allowance (ESA). DLA is paid to 3.2 million disabled people and is not an out-of-work benefit. DLA is replaced by personal independence payment (PIP). There are two types of ESA: contributory ESA and income-based ESA. Income-based ESA is a means-tested benefit; Contributory ESA, is not means tested, but it is only available to people who've paid a certain amount of National Insurance contributions.

The principle behind the government cuts is that the welfare budget is too high with too many claimants. However, one reason for so many claimants was the fact that Margaret Thatcher pushed thousands of unemployed people (notably miners) on to disability benefit to cynically reduce the unemployment figures. Another reason is that many more people fell into stress (which occupies 70% of doctors time) as a direct result of the changes to employment also caused by Thatcher, such as forcing public sector workers to effectively do what previously were two jobs. The Tories cannot have it both ways.

DLA / PIP

Liz Sayce, chief executive of Disability Rights UK, said: ‘*the Department for Work and Pensions [DWP] expects that 428,000 disabled people who currently get the higher rate mobility component will lose it altogether or receive the lower amount. This means that many will lose their car under the Motability car scheme so they will no longer be able to get to work or get out and*

*about. We are very concerned about the impact of PIP, which could see thousands of disabled people become institutionalised in their own homes.*⁸

One can immediately question a policy which will force disabled people out of work through transport issues and lead to potential on-costs through their being forced to stay indoors.

Errors made by the government

Before introducing the changes, the government consulted the public and produced a report for Parliament claiming that disabled people broadly supported the changes. The objective was to cut the disability living allowance budget by 20%, despite the fact that only 0.5% of claims are fraudulent. By its own figures the government knew that the proposals would detrimentally affect genuinely disabled people. [Thus the government itself affirms that the cuts are cynical; they are not targeting fraud but are deliberately cutting benefits to those who need it.]

However, in response a disability rights lobby group published a report based on Freedom of Information requests (*'Responsible Reform'*, also called the *'Spartacus Report'* on Twitter) which showed that the government claims of disabled support were misrepresentations and claimed that the DWP misled the Commons. Note this, the DWP's claim that disabled lobby groups supported the measures is false. None of the disabled charities that the DWP had consulted were 'Disabled People's User Led Organisations' [DPULO]. Disabled people and disabled people lobby groups affirm a significant difference between a disability charity and a DPULO.

Fears of charities regarding cumulative cuts

The charity Scope claimed that hundreds of thousands of disabled people would be worse off because of the new benefit cuts; 3.7 million disabled people will lose a total of £28.3bn by 2018.

A study by Demos for Scope investigated cuts to disability living allowance (DLA), employment and support allowance (ESA), housing benefit and the so-called 'bedroom tax'. It appears that one disabled group gets hit over and over again, just after the government made a big fuss of the disabled at the Paralympics.

Demos shows that 26,000 people have their ESA capped at 1% before losing their ESA and DLA, which will cost them up to £4,600 per annum. 3,000 people will be hit by six different cuts, losing £23,300 by 2018.

The changes to ESA, which requires passing a brutal process to claim, means that contributory ESA will only last one year. Thus someone with cancer who has a partner earning more than £7,500 pa. would lose all income after 12 months and both people would have to live on that £7,500. The Lords were debating an amendment to lift this limit in March but I am not aware of any changes yet.⁹

Demos Deputy Director Claudia Wood said that disabled people were bearing the brunt of the government's welfare cuts: *'What's shocking is that the government doesn't assess the likely combined impact of these changes, only the impact of each change individually. However, many disabled families are being affected by combinations of four, five and even six changes.'* [See later for more detail.]

Richard Hawkes, Chief Executive of Scope said, *'It's a bleak picture. It seems incredible that just a little over six months ago we were talking about the Paralympics having changed the way we*

⁸ Channel 4 News; 8.4.13.

⁹ Channel 4 news; 9 March 2011.

*see disability. What's happened?*¹⁰ On Radio 2's Jeremy Vine programme on 8 April, Hawkes argued that the effect of the government's change from DLA to PIP would mean that 600,000 people would lose benefit. This was the effect of PIP being driven to cynically save 20% of the disabled benefit budget with no medical foundation and no care about its effect on the sick. This is despite the fact that less than 1% of DLA claims are fraudulent. Since the government admits that over 99% of DLA claims are genuine, why is it seeking to harass genuine disabled claimants?

The effect on Universal Credit claimants and disabled children

An enquiry, headed by Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, affirmed that many poor people would be negatively affected by the introduction of universal credit, which replaces much of the benefits and tax credits system from 2013.¹¹

A report, *'Holes in the Safety Net'*, compiled by Disability Rights UK, says that 100,000 disabled children stand to lose up to £28 per week compared to benefits to which they are entitled under the current system. It also claims that instead of making work pay (the government's objective) it will make it harder for disabled people to stay in work.

Families with a disabled child receiving DLA may obtain additional support through child tax credit worth £57 a week. Under the Universal Benefit system this is halved to £28 a week, unless the child is receiving the high rate component of DLA or is registered blind. The government itself estimates that this loss will affect 100,000 disabled children.

Baroness Grey-Thompson said, *'Many households with disabled people are already struggling to keep their heads above water. Reducing financial support for families with disabled children, disabled people who are living alone, families with young carers and those who are working, risk driving many over the edge in future.'*

Disabled people on benefits do not live in luxury, despite Daily Mail headlines. One disabled person affirmed that in 2010 his weekly income was £67 short of the amount the Joseph Rowntree Foundation recommends for a minimum standard of living. The government's proposals actually reduce this amount.

The cumulative effect of cuts – impact assessment

Despite many press reports detailing the terrible damage that cumulative benefit changes make to disabled people, the government has refused to perform any check to assess this. A petition (War on Welfare Petition) called for the DWP to carry out an impact assessment but the government refused, saying that it was too difficult. This was despite the fact that the petition had double the necessary 10,000 signatures to merit an official government response.

To prove that this was a lie, the think tank Demos did it themselves showing, as noted earlier, that disabled people will lose £28.3bn over five years. This is despite the government's claim that the disabled are being protected. Author of the report, Claudia Wood, noted that, *'meaningful results can still be achieved with a little effort.'* With a civil service, the government could do it even easier.

Ahead of 1 April, when many of the cuts announced in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 came into force, Demos modelled a series of cumulative impact assessments across 15 disability benefit reforms. 3.7 million disabled people would experience a reduction in income, and by 2017 (when the government intends to shave a further £10bn off the benefits bill) they will have lost £28bn in benefits as a group.

Explaining the cumulative effect, report author Claudia Wood said,

¹⁰ Channel 4 news; 27.3.13.

¹¹ The new benefit will replace 'job seeker's allowance', 'income support', 'tax credits' and 'housing benefit'.

At one end of the cumulative impact scale, 88,000 disabled people currently claiming employment support allowance (ESA) will feel a double whammy of a 1% cap on uprating and a 12-month eligibility limit. At the other end of the scale, at least 1,000 disabled people (possibly up to 5,000) will face six separate cuts to their benefits income. By the time the next round of cuts are due in four years, they will be £23,300 worse off per person.

In between these two groups are about 120,000 disabled people facing a triple cut, and 99,000 a quadruple cut. These combinations represent at the very least a loss of £6,309 per person by 2017. The worst loss of £23,461 per person by 2017 will be experienced by those unfortunate enough to lose their eligibility for disability living allowance and ESA, and who are reliant on other benefits that will only increase by 1% because of the rating cap or by the consumer prices index (CPI) instead of inflation.¹²

Wood stated that these figures were underestimates as other cuts (cuts to child benefit, the independent living fund, social fund or council tax credit) also had an impact but there was insufficient data to assess them.

Not only did the government refuse to do any checks, but the minister in charge (Mark Hoban) refused to answer a question about it in Parliament raised by Michael Meacher MP and refused to meet with the lobby group Spartacus.¹³

Many have pointed out that the net effect of these cuts will be deterioration in the health of the disabled leading to higher cost in the NHS as they get hospitalised. For instance, cutting the Independent Living Fund will institutionalise people, sending them into expensive care homes. Disabled people currently working full or part-time with care assistance, or travelling in disabled cars, will get institutionalised with the knock-on effect of putting carers out of work and loss of revenue for the car and fuel industries, plus the costs of hospital or residential home care. It makes no economic sense.

Changes to work capability assessments (WCA)

The government is making the assessment examinations for the disabled to be much more rigorous and more frequent. However, many of these changes appear to have little medical foundation but are designed to merely save money at the expense of the suffering of the truly sick. This is despite the existent appalling track record of ATOS that has received cross-party condemnation in the Commons.¹⁴

New harsh restrictions without consultation

For example, now that PIP replaces DLA,¹⁵ anyone who can walk just twenty metres will not qualify for help with mobility. This is less than the distance most disabled parking bays are from the door of a supermarket. Hundreds of thousands of people will no longer get a

¹² Claudia Wood; *The Guardian*, Wednesday 27 March 2013.

¹³ On 21 March 2013, Labour MP Michael Meacher obtained an adjournment debate (limited to 30 minutes) to raise the fact that DWP Minister Mark Hoban had refused to meet with himself, fellow Labour MP Tom Greatrex and Sue Marsh and Kaliya Franklin [of the disabled people's group Spartacus] to discuss the Work Capability Assessment proposals. Meacher said that, in 40 years of parliamentary experience it was unprecedented for a minister to refuse point blank to meet with a delegation of people directly affected by parliamentary measures. Hoban missed the debate but Esther McVey, the Minister for Disabled People, deputised in his place. She used debating tricks to waste time, erect straw men and tell lies until the time was spent, causing an uproar amongst thousands of disabled people watching it live. Spartacus are not unreasonable zealots (as portrayed by Hoban) but have appeared on BBC debates and have suggested reasonable improvements to WCA in discussions with other members of Parliament. The foreword to the Spartacus Report, *The People's Review*, (which offended Hoban and was used as the excuse to avoid them) was by Professor Peter Beresford OBE, BA Hons, PhD, AcSS, FRSA Dip WP Professor of Social Policy Brunel University.

¹⁴ With about 38% of appeals at tribunal leading to overturned decisions, ATOS is hardly cost-effective (it gets hundreds of millions from government contracts), but its harsh measures has led to many suicides.

¹⁵ This took effect on 8.4.13.

mobility allowance and, therefore, will not qualify for a Motability car. The original 50 metres distance is widely recognised in relation to other disability benefits and in guidance on architectural environments, to represent a minimum functional level of mobility.

On 8 April 2013 lawyers [Leigh Day and Public Law Solicitors] announced that they are taking legal action against the Government on behalf of three disabled clients who are challenging the decision by Ian Duncan Smith, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, to bring in more stringent measures to qualify for mobility benefit. They currently qualify for DLA and the mobility element and use adapted vehicles. They argue that disabled people were denied the opportunity to comment on the new proposals or explain how the restrictions in benefit would affect them (a benefit brought in by a Tory government).

Proceedings have been issued against the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Ian Duncan Smith, claiming that the new regulations regarding the PIP payment are flawed and unlawful. They argue the policy-making process failed to properly consider the practical impacts the withdrawal of the benefit will have on people with significant mobility impairments. Rosa Curling, from the Human Rights team at Leigh Day said, *'The Secretary of State has a legal obligation to consider such impacts before deciding whether to limit access to this benefit.'* Karen Ashton from Public Law Solicitors added, *'What is at the heart of this legal challenge is fairness. The extra costs of getting out and about for those who have severe mobility problems can be huge... the Government failed to mention the reduction to the 20m threshold in their consultations with disabled people and so those who are potentially affected have not had the chance to explain how devastating the consequences will be.'*¹⁶

The government has also left out the phrase *'safely, reliably, repeatedly and in a timely manner'* from the PIP regulations. This means that if a person can do something just once, or can persevere in acute pain to do it, they might not get help and can't even challenge it at tribunal.

Everything is being done on the basis of saving money with no consideration of the knock-on effect on disabled people.

Suicides

In the last 18 months Channel 4 news (and other news outlets) averred that many disabled people had committed suicide as a result of benefit administration errors, brutal assessors and fears about cuts (notably in ATOS examinations).¹⁷ For instance, Richard Sanderson, an unemployed helicopter pilot, who stabbed himself twice in the heart. He had been informed that his family faced a £30 a week cut in housing benefit and he feared this would leave his family homeless. Paul Willcoxson, of Corby, Northants, left a suicide note explaining that he was worried about benefit cuts when he hung himself. Poet and writer Paul Reekie, killed himself at his home in Edinburgh in June 2010 after his housing and incapacity benefits were stopped. One lady, Elaine Christian, 57, of Hull, killed herself simply through the fear of facing an impending ATOS health assessment to determine her benefit claim.

Disabled lobby groups fear that if 3.7 million disabled people lose some or all their benefits, this number will explode. Vulnerable people must be protected by society not threatened and penalised for being sick.

Key facts

- DLA – fraudulent cases are only 0.5%.
- Savings to be made are 20% across the board.

¹⁶ Accessofficer; We are Spartacus.com, 8 April 2013.

¹⁷ See Patrick Butler; Do cuts kill? guardian.co.uk, Wednesday 16 November 2011 11.14.

- DLA - 428,000 disabled people who currently get the higher rate mobility component will lose it altogether or receive the lower amount. [Source: DWP statistics.]
- DLA - 600,000 people would lose benefit. [Source: SCOPE.]
- Someone with cancer who has a partner earning more than £7,500 pa. would lose all income after 12 months and both people would have to live on that £7,500. [Source: Demos.]
- DLA - anyone who can walk just twenty metres will not qualify for help with mobility. [Source: DWP reforms.]
- ESA, DLA - 26,000 people have their ESA capped at 1% before losing their ESA and DLA, which will cost them up to £4,600 per annum. [Source: Demos.]
- DLA - 100,000 disabled children stand to lose up to £28 per week. [Source: Disability Rights UK.]
- Cumulative effect - 3.7 million disabled people lose some or all their benefits, losing a total of £28.3bn by 2018. [Source: Demos.]
- Cumulative effect – Up to 5,000 people will be hit by six different cuts, losing £23,300 by 2018. [Source: Demos.]
- Cumulative effect – many will lose at least £6,309 per person by 2017. [Source: Demos.]
- Cumulative effect – Some will lose £23,461 by 2017 (those who lose their eligibility for DLA and ESA, and who are reliant on other benefits that will only increase by 1% because of the rating cap or by the consumer prices index (CPI) instead of inflation.) [Source: Demos.]

The effect on the deaf

The National Deaf Children's Society claims that the personal independence payment (PIP), which begins trials on 8 April, will hit deaf youngsters unfairly. It affirms that the majority of deaf youngsters who get DLA will not now be eligible for the PIP when they turn 16.

Parents are now contacting the charity expressing despair and fear about how they will cope in the future. The money received from DLA is used to fund extra tuition to help their child keep going to school, or to fund health visits.

For example, Bethany Eason is a 15-year old who needs the DLA to fund travel costs to the specialist cochlea implant centre in Manchester which is an hour away from her home on the Wirral. She said, *'I feel really upset and annoyed that I won't get benefits, " she says. "It's vital for a part of my life. Having to go to Manchester is something I need to do otherwise I will struggle with my hearing.'*

This change comes hard on the heels of already diminishing support due to lack of funding in councils. The charity conducted a survey found that one in three English councils is cutting back on support to deaf youngsters, such as providing specialist teachers of the deaf who go into schools to give one-to-one help to hearing-impaired pupils. Jo Campion from the charity stated that this is already having an impact on attainment and causing fear in parents for their children's future.

The charity has started a campaign called 'Stolen Futures' because the life chances of deaf youngsters are under threat by this government's measures.

Key facts

- PIP - will hit deaf youngsters unfairly. The majority of deaf youngsters who get DLA will not now be eligible for the PIP when they turn 16. [Source: National Deaf Children's Society.]

Interim conclusion

We could continue to analyse the effects of various benefit cuts, but no doubt, this will preoccupy the news media and documentary makers in the next twelve months as the effects become better established in actual case histories. I believe we will see shocking examples of horror stories caused by these policies bringing devastation to families and friends of the disabled.

The point is certainly made that the government, either by design or by foolish incompetence, is attacking the weakest, poorest and most vulnerable in society at the same time that its cuts to local councils have removed all safety nets and withdrawn essential care services. Never has there been a time in modern history when it has been so precarious to be sick or disabled.

God's requirements for governments

One rule for all

The Lord demands that those who rule must take care of the weak, vulnerable and needy in society – whoever they are; there must be no class of people outside of state support. Even in Israel, this applied equally to the foreigner residing in Israel and the sojourner passing through. For instance, the six cities of refuge were equally for the foreigner and traveller as for an Israelite (Num 35:15). 'One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you,' (Num 15:16). There is no question in Scripture of there being one rule for some and a different rule for others; everybody has the same obligations, responsibilities and benefits.

Justice must be impartial and righteous

A second Biblical principle for rulers was that government rulings must be impartial, just and righteous. 'You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbour,' (Lev 19:15). It was essential that the little people were fairly represented as well as the rich and influential. 'You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's,' (Deut 1:17). In fact, God pronounces a curse upon the governor who neglects the poor and weak: 'Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow.' (Deut 27:19).

Care for the poor

If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. Deut 15:7-8

For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.' Deut 15:11

You shall not oppress a hired servant *who is* poor and needy. Deut 24:14

This is just a small sample solely from the legislature of Scripture. Much more could be added from the prophets.

Throughout Scripture it is the wicked, the unrighteous and murderers who oppress the poor (Job 20:19, 24:10, 14; Ps 10:2, 9, 37:14; Isa 32:7), while the righteous protect and nourish them (Job 29:12, 16; Ps 112:9).

God's judgment on those who ignore the poor

Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard. Prov 21:13

He who oppresses the poor to increase his *riches*, and he who gives to the rich, *will surely come to poverty*. Prov 22:16

He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses. Prov 28:17

There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, and whose fangs are like knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men. Prov 30:14

If he has oppressed the poor and needy, ... Shall he then live? He shall not live! If he has done any of these abominations, he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him. Ezek 18:12-13

Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just *and* taking bribes; diverting the poor *from justice* at the gate. Amos 5:11-12

The blessing of those who care for the poor

Blessed *is* he who considers the poor; the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. Ps 41:1

He who has mercy on the poor, happy *is* he. Prov 14:21

He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given. Prov 19:17

He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor. Prov 22:9

The king who judges the poor with truth, His throne will be established forever. Prov 29:14

The warnings of God to rulers

Your princes *are* rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them.

Isa 1:23

The LORD will enter into judgment with the elders of His people and His princes: 'For you have eaten up the vineyard; the plunder of the poor *is* in your houses. What do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the faces of the poor?' Says the Lord GOD of hosts. Isa 3:14-15

Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, *which* they have prescribed to rob the needy of justice, and to take what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and *that* they may rob the fatherless. What will you do in the day of punishment, and in the desolation *which* will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? Isa 10:1-3

Thus says the LORD: 'Execute judgment and righteousness, and deliver the plundered out of the hand of the oppressor. Do no wrong and do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.' Jer 22:3

Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by *being* righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor. Dan 4:27

Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just *and* taking bribes; diverting the poor *from justice* at the gate. Amos 5:11-12

It is interesting that the sin of Sodom began with ill-treating the poor.

Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: she and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. Ezek 16:49

It was only after this they Sodom committed abominations and suffered God's terrible judgment,

And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw *fit*. Ezek 16:50

We have said enough. It is crystal clear that the rulers of a nation have an obligation under God to look after the poor and provide for the needy, whether they acknowledge God or not. However, this nation not only supposedly honours God, but its judicial system was based upon Biblical law; even Parliament itself owes its origins to Bible believing people.¹⁸

My advice to David Cameron is listen to the word of God that you profess to obey,

¹⁸ There is even a statue of Oliver Cromwell standing outside the House of Commons in Westminster. The statue was designed by Hamo Thornycroft and erected in 1899.

O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by *being* righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor. Dan 4:27

Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Zech 7:10

'What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?' Says the Lord GOD of hosts. Isa 3:14-15

Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees ... to take what is right from the poor of my people, Isa 10:1-3

To conclude this section, I quote the Lord's command to Bible believers:

Plead the cause of the poor and needy. Prov 31:9

Christians are obligated to speak out and defend to attacks on the poor and needy within their sphere of influence. This is a command that is widely ignored, for which we will be judged.

Conclusion

The level of maturity of a society is reflected in the way that it treats its own vulnerable people. Throughout history, even barbaric empires, who conducted brutal warfare, had a deep sense of responsibility for their own sick and old people. The most primitive tribes have always revered old people for their wisdom and cared for them, even treating them with honour. The Japanese traditionally worshipped them when they die. Yet this government is doing everything in its power to trample down sick and weak people, from the very youngest children to the oldest disabled person. This is a severely depraved society run by a heartless and anti-Christian government.

I never thought that I'd live to see a day when a nation that formerly boasted in its Christian credentials and background would launch an attack on the weakest people in society, forcing some individuals to such extremities that they would kill themselves in despair. All to save a few pounds, that (in many cases) actually saved money in the long run.

Worse still that this policy was driven by economic woes that resulted from the greed and malpractice of bankers who have received fat bonuses and none has gone to prison. The financial crisis that drives the strategy of cuts originated with the deregulation of the banks and the promotion of greed by Margaret Thatcher. It was exacerbated by the Thatcherite policies of Tony Blair and further financial deregulation and encouragement of debt by Gordon Brown. Top bankers then acted negligently, corruptly, wickedly, and selfishly, with gross hubris, and caused the near collapse of the country. For this they got fat bonuses. The current government defended such bonuses in Europe at the same time that the welfare cuts to the weakest and poorest in society were being rolled out to help the country recover its financial balance.

Shame on this evil government.