

The Institutionalisation of Anti-Poverty Policy in the Social Partnership Process

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Perceived Problems with Anti-Poverty Policy and Social Partnership

- Policy seems more appropriate to an earlier period
- Disappointment that more has not been achieved at a time of relative wealth
- Frustration that a process which has involved the voluntary and community sector has not been more effective
- Policy stickiness and lack of receptiveness to new ideas

Understanding Social Partnership?

- Social Partnership as a key part in a policy paradigms – and the implications of this
- Models of Ideational change explain paradigm shifts in policy regimes and the key features of policy paradigms
- Examples of paradigm shift
- Was the setting up of Social Partnership in 1987 part of a Paradigm shift?
- Anti-Poverty Policy's place in the paradigm

Changes in Policy Paradigms

- Adoption of Keynesian Economic Policy post WWII
- Shift to Monetarist economics in late 1970s/early 1980s
- Change in women's legal, economic and social status in the 1970s
- What features do they share?
- Change is punctuated equilibrium not incremental

Key features of a paradigm shift

- Crisis & perception that existing policy regime cannot provide policy solutions
- Uncertainty over definition of core problem & potential policy solutions
- Period of contestation and negotiation
- 'new' policy ideas both redefine the problem & potential solutions
- If ideational challenge is successful
 - new policy regime is institutionalised
 - policy making proceeds within that framework
 - the ideas it contains act as cognitive locks

Social Partnership a Paradigm Shift?

- Economic crisis of 1980s – failure of policy
- Political parties engage in search for a solution
- Alternative solutions contested in 1987 election
- Post election institution of a new policy regime of which partnership is part
 - Government led
 - Budget before negotiations – set context
 - NESD document sets out principles
 - Public spending cuts
 - Growth to deliver jobs
 - Moderate pay increases - Tax reform
 - Social policy

The PNR – defining the paradigm

- **The contents of PNR**
 - Tight control of public finances
 - Economic growth via supply side measures
 - Increased employment solution to poverty
 - Tax reform – reduction of income tax – anti-avoidance measures
 - Narrowing of social policy tools
 - marketisation of key areas of social policy– housing and health
 - Maintains value of social welfare – rationalise system - Avoidance of 'poverty traps'
 - Education linked to social inclusion and to economic development
 - Consultation with relevant groups on social policy issues

Developing the paradigm

- International competitiveness key policy goal (of which control of public spending is a part)
- Poverty policy residual category– subordinate to competitiveness
- Employment the solution to poverty
- Absolute poverty not relative poverty key measure
- Elaborate institutional process of consultation

Agreements since 1987

- **Anti-poverty policy confined by this paradigm**
 - **Welfare**
 - Minimum needs met – absolute poverty. Avoids 'poverty traps'. Employment as solution
 - **Health**
 - Minimal commitments to equal access with no action plans.
 - No recognition of poverty – ill health linkages
 - **Housing**
 - Seen as a market problem, very limited commitments to direct provision of 'social housing'. Not linked to poverty
 - **Education**
 - Stronger linkages of education to disadvantage.
 - Also linked to economic development and capacity to secure jobs
 - Improved participation and need to target disadvantage promoted
 - However many initiatives are not targeted at disadvantaged eg general PTR reductions, focus on 'young' classes,

Current Phase/Structure of Paradigm

- Social partnership important aspect of states policy paradigm – lack of alternatives
- Policy regime in state led, government plays a key role in partnership. Government policy and budgets have primacy.
- Is State attachment to partnership seems out of proportion to benefits? Abandoning one aspect of regime, opens paradigm to critique
- Anti-poverty policy critical issue in Sustaining progress – lack of progress – re-structuring of the voluntary and community pillar – weakens consensual nature of social partnership

Conclusion

- Social Partnership part of a strong policy paradigm
- Anti-Poverty policy content has been institutionalised in this paradigm as a residual policy and defined by a market orientated approach to policy solutions
- Anti-Poverty Process has been institutionalised as a broad, complex system defined by weak consultation
- Significant incremental policy reform is unlikely in this system