

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Cash not care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state**, by Mo Stewart, London, New Generation Publishing, 2016, 188 pp., £15.99, ISBN 978-1-78507-783-8 (pbk). Reviewed by Maria Berghs, De Montfort University

*Cash Not Care: The Planned Demolition of the UK Welfare State* is an impassioned appeal against the encroachment of neoliberal privatization and the dismantlement of the United Kingdom's welfare system. It is remarkable as it was written and self-funded by Mo Stewart, a disabled veteran and former healthcare professional. She began writing it after her own experiences over a two-year period with government authorities who questioned her rights to an increase of her war pension. She describes this experience as a 'battle for survival' (Stewart, 2016). The fact that a disabled war veteran uses that kind of language and was forced to begin to write back against her own government is shocking.

The book draws on research that Stewart began in 2009, investigating the political history and economic justification of the introduction of the Work Capacity Assessment (WCA) by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The book is set out over 10 chapters but each chapter can be read on its own. The style is not academic but explicitly takes the personal as political writ large. The book is thus pitched towards making Stewart's research accessible to a lay audience and chronically sick and disabled people in particular. Each chapter also contains boxes highlighting sections from academic articles, news items and opinion pieces that are relevant to the text presented, as well as satirical cartoons by Dave Lupton. There are also extensive appendices where the reader can find an overview of how Stewart's work was supported and who made it accessible online.

Stewart argues that since Thatcher, the UK has been witnessing a move of health and social care services towards neoliberal models whereby duties and rights of care have been slowly eroded, and she documents this. The chapters take us through the consequences of adopting an American social security system in which corporate insurance giants influence public policy. The effects on disability services, disabled people, veterans and long-term sick have been devastating. Under the guise of 'welfare reform', Stewart reveals policies implemented by the then coalition government in 2010 that began to scapegoat, vilify and ultimately cause chronically ill and disabled people's deaths. Chapters 7 and 8 are particularly poignant in illustrating the human costs of policy changes and how bureaucracy manned by incompetent people starts to erode basic human rights and ability to live in dignity. This is a bureaucracy that continues to profit from illness and disability by making people objects of charity, victims, dependent, or now scroungers.

In a post-truth world, the book also acts as a historical document of how politicians manipulated research evidence, cited statistics that suited them and ensured they were politically backed by non-qualified 'experts' that toed the neoliberal party line. For example, the espousal of the use of the biopsychosocial model that essentially argues that it is the psychological inclination of some people not to work that prevents them from employment, rather their impairments, chronic conditions, long-term illnesses or disability, is discredited. The model lay at the basis of evaluation of WCA and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) but essentially just blames people for not finding work and was later discredited by three academics as not being evidence-based policy (see Shakespeare, Watson, & Alghaib, 2017). It is noteworthy that it is Stewart who compiles this evidence linked to the WCA and that many academics who formerly supported versions of the biopsychosocial model are now doing a swift U-turn.

Stewart thus illustrates the rise of disability activism against austerity and neoliberalism, by disabled people themselves, using social media and online platforms. She notes that she has a huge debt to all those people who bravely started writing online, organizing themselves into organizations like Disabled People against Cuts (DPAC), and exposing what was happening during the WCA and then how successive policies eroded their legal rights. The book also charts the costs of undertaking this kind of activism and the different ethical decisions that Stewart was faced with and sacrifices that were made to ensure its publication. As such, this book will be of interest to a mix of people from students to academics, as well as practice and policy makers in a range of subjects from politics to history, social policy, health, human rights, economics and disability.

I hope that it also begins a conversation about why it is that disabled people have to become independent researchers to produce research of real social relevance. This is troubling and means that we have to ask ourselves questions about the politics and point of academic research, the priorities of funders, the capacity of voluntary organizations and charities to speak for those they represent and if all research is now increasingly linked to neoliberal policies. Mo Stewart's work is a testament that this does not have to be the case and we can speak 'truth to power', as Peter Beresford's foreword states. It is hard to read this book, but we all have to. It is going to become a classic in disability studies.

## References

Shakespeare, T., Watson, N., & Alghaib, O. A. (2017). Blaming the victim, all over again: Waddell and Aylward's biopsychosocial (BPS) model of disability. *Critical Social Policy*, 37(1), 22–41.

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**A fox crossed my path: creative therapeutic writing on a depressive illness**, by Monica Suswin, Sussex, UK, Cabin press, 104 pp., £10 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-9956882-0-9 <https://monicasuswin.wordpress.com/author/monicasuswin/>. Reviewed by Jeannie Wright, Associate Professor of Counselling

The first sentence of this gem of a book drew me in:

*A fox crossed my path* is about mental illness: my own over a period of 40 years.

It continues:

This mini book shows how *creative and therapeutic writing* has helped me come to terms with what has happened to me.

My only problem with the term 'mini book' is that it doesn't do justice to the combination of poetry, memoir and some very good ideas for creative and expressive writing about life experiences that this book is.