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Contesting the austerity and 'welfare reform' narrative of the UK Government: Forging a social democratic imaginary in Scotland

Jay Wiggan

Abstract

Purpose

The narrative of successive UK Governments is that austerity and punitive welfare reform is necessary. This paper examines how the Scottish Government has articulated and communicated a counter hegemonic welfare state imaginary and unpacks the concepts and traditions it draws upon.

Design/methodology/approach

The study draws together a decentred governance perspective that emphasises ideational tradition for understanding (re)construction of governance (Bevir, 2013: 27) with a Critical Discourse Analysis method to examine how particular welfare interpretations and representations are carried into the policy and public arena. Scottish Government documents are deconstructed to interrogate the ideas and form of the emergent social democratic discourse and its relation to the Independence Referendum and shifting welfare governance.

Findings

In response to changing socio-economic-political contexts the Scottish Government has developed a distinct discourse of welfare modernisation. Fusing (civic) nationalism with social wage and social investment concepts rooted in British and Scandinavian social democratic traditions, their discourse conjures up imaginaries of a credible prosperous, egalitarian welfare state future. Depictions of poverty and weak economic performance as originating in welfare structures and claimants' agency are reinterpreted as consequences of the maldistribution of power and resources between groups and constituent countries of the UK.

Originality/value

The paper provides original analysis of the discourse used to communicate the ideas and traditions underlying the Scottish Government's welfare state vision. It is of value to those interested in how a social democratic governing party within an ostensibly liberal welfare regime has renewed its approach through weaving together particular social democratic concepts.

Introduction

Following the 2010 UK General Election the Conservative-Liberal Coalition UK Government introduced a package of policy reforms encompassing public spending reductions (austerity), liberalisation of public services and intensification of 'work first' reforms to social security and employment services (Osborne, 2015; Gamble, 2015). The Labour Party's vacillation between opposition to - and grudging endorsement (albeit with qualifications) of - these policies did little to disrupt the UK Government's promulgation of a punitive liberal-market narrative (Gamble, 2015; Page, 2014). At UK level discussions of poverty and lack of employment have become framed around the notion that state welfare institutions foster 'welfare dependent' attitudes and behaviour amongst individuals' (Author, 2015b). The election of a Conservative UK Government in 2015 has provided the opportunity to further entrench this conservative liberal-market interpretation of the relationship between the economy, labour market and social security policy and poverty (Spours, 2015).

For the Scottish National Party (SNP), returned as a majority Scottish Government following the 2011 Scottish parliament elections (Hassan, 2011) successive Conservative led UK governments since 2010 has presented a challenge and opportunity in Scotland. Public expenditure reductions have reduced the resources available to the Scottish Government and to low income households in Scotland reliant upon social security benefits (Scottish Government, 2014). Conversely, the imposition of austerity has fed into an anti-Tory political culture in Scotland and weakened the case for remaining in the UK. New political opportunities have subsequently arisen for centre left nationalists to carve out welfare visions and practice that are distinct from the UK Government. This was evident in the 'Yes to independence' campaign in the 2014 Referendum on Independence for Scotland (Mooney and Scott, 2015). While the vote for Scotland to become independent was unsuccessful the UK Government has since conceded the devolution of additional powers to Scotland, which have been taken forward in the Scotland Bill (HM Government, 2015). The UK Government retains authority over working age employment related benefits, but the decentralisation of other benefits and employment 'activation' policy to Scotland (Table 3) marks a break with the 1998 devolution settlement which retained a centralised hierarchical system of employment and social security governance (Minas et al, 2012: 288, Birrell, 2009; Simpson, 2016).

The article contends that devolution has provided opportunities for the Scottish Government under the SNP to contest and challenge the hegemonic conservative market-liberal discourse around welfare. The emergent complex, unsettled rescaling of authority from the UK Government to the Scottish Government post-independence referendum meanwhile is creating new spaces to further develop and embed alternative policy narratives and practices. This is informed by a decentred theory of governance which posits that resistance and disruption are an ever present, as governments often experience difficulty in directing the actions and preferences of other state and non-state actors. Actors within and outwith the state make sense of policy challenges and policy solutions through (re)interpretation of existing and proposed actions in the context of particular ideational traditions (Bevir, 2013; 2005). These may or may not accord with those of the government of the day. Different tiers of government, national or local civil servants, service users and street level bureaucrats may decide to ignore directions from the central state and/or seek to subvert or contest the rationale, content, or framing of policy (Bevir, 2013: 163). Governance then is temporally and spatially contingent as actors continually (re)define, challenge and remake how policy problems are understood and responded to by revisiting and reworking their political preferences and ideas in the face of new, or resurgent dilemmas (Bevir, 2013: 27-29).

The Scottish Government for example have contested the austerity and welfare reform discourse of successive UK Governments by developing an interpretation of the problem-solution dynamic that is rooted in social democratic traditions. This has involved drawing on concepts such as the social wage, once common in British social democratic discourse, weaving this together with contemporary European policy interest in social investment and the 'Nordic welfare model' (Jenson, 2010; Hemerijck, 2015; Ryner, 2007) to promulgate a new social democratic social investment welfare governance imaginary for Scotland.

Using a Critical Policy Discourse Analysis Framework (Hyatt, 2013) the article examines how ideas drawn together by the Scottish Government represent a re-weaving of threads of the social democratic tradition in response to new policy and governance challenges and opportunities. The study also unpacks how various discursive techniques are employed in the construction of this social democratic welfare imaginary to contest, disrupt, de-legitimise and displace UK Government representations of fairness, social justice, welfare dependency' and hence austerity and welfare reform (Garthwaite, 2011; Author, 2012; Briant et al, 2013; Garland, 2014). The paper is organised as follows: section one provides an overview of the emergent distribution of authority over social security and employment policy within the UK. Section two details the Critical Discourse Analysis method applied. Section three, four and five provides the analysis. The final section concludes.

Rescaling social security and employment service governance in the context of austerity

The devolution of some social security benefits and employment services to the Scottish Government under the Scotland Bill marks a fundamental breach with New Labour's 1998 Scotland Act which reserved authority for social security and employment services in Great Britain to the UK Government (Birrell 2009; Birrell and Gray, 2014; Author, 2015a). The Scotland Bill stipulates 'core' social security benefits, including their payment rates, conditions of entitlement and associated grounds for disallowance or sanction, will remain reserved to Westminster. However, a package of social security benefits that amounts to around 15% of total benefit spend in Scotland is being devolved, along with authority over the administrative arrangements for some core benefits and working age employment programmes for disabled people and some long term unemployed people. Scotland gains authority over payments to compensate for illness and injury associated with employment (Industrial Injuries Disablement Allowance); to benefits to assist with mobility or care costs (e.g., Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payment) and the various benefits of the Regulated Social Fund. It will also gain the authority to vary administrative arrangements in housing support payments, payment frequency and whether payment is made to one adult or split between two adults for each claimant household receiving the new single working age benefit - Universal Credit, which, having been introduced by the Coalition Government, is gradually being rolled out (Spicker, 2015; Scottish Government, 2015e) (Table 1).

The Scottish Government also gains authority over employment services for long term (12 months) unemployed working age claimants who would currently participate in the UK Government's employment scheme - the Work Programme. The UK government retains authority over employment services offered to claimants prior to entering the Work Programme (and its replacement) and those exiting without a job. Conditions of entitlement and the sanctions regime applied to working age benefit claimants for non-compliance will continue to be set by the UK Government and administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (Table 1).

This continued division of authority shows the UK Government's reluctance to relinquish control over labour market policy. Tension is likely, as claimants remain subject to mandated participation in UK Government initiatives prior to long term unemployment (Author, 2015b) and must continue to

satisfy conditionality regulations set by the UK Government. This potentially limits scope to depart from work first approaches and develop an integrated system in Scotland around early intervention and human capital investment. The rescaling of welfare governance is, it seems, intended to deliver constrained empowerment which facilitates local administrative variation, as practised in Northern Ireland (Author, 2015a). How this develops in practice will depend on the form and extent of the struggle in Scotland to push against and subvert such constraints.

A Critical Policy Discourse Analysis framework

The decentred theoretical approach and Critical Discourse Analytical method employed here provide a complementary framework for understanding the governance of social security and employment services. Decentred theory positions the state as an ensemble of diverse, divergent, competing practices and possibilities whose form at a given point in time emerges out of the political struggle between actors who (re)make and (re)construct activity, by a continual (re)weaving of their ideas in light of new (or the return of) distinct challenges (Bevir, 2013:70). How particular ideas are communicated and given meaning and taken into action in the political and policy arena (Diamond, 2013) is through discourse, understood to mean language, texts, images and social practices. Discourse is intrinsic to the (re) configuration of societal and policy realities, with the purveyors of a given discourse actively involved in manufacturing the very 'reality' they identify as preferable and/or claim is already in existence (Fairclough, 2001: 4).

Both Decentred governance and the form of Critical Discourse Analysis applied here then give primacy to the ideational, emphasising political agency and hence the malleability of policy and discourse (Bacchi and Ronnblom, 2014 and Howarth, 2010). Governance is consequently positioned as contingent, a temporal and spatial configuration of ideas, policies and problem representation (Bevir, 2005: 126) embodied in a particular sedimented, privileged discourse (Howarth, 2010: 312). The dominance of a given discourse though always remains partial. More/less prominent alternative interpretations of a policy 'dilemma' from within and outwith the ideational tradition drawn upon in the existing hegemonic narrative mean alternate, insurgent and/or submerged discourses may seek to contest, subvert and/or displace the privileged discourse (Fairclough, 2001: 1).

Discourse is positioned as co-evolving with, and co-constitutive of policy practice, as actors interpret 'material realities' with and through discourse, which in turn (re)constructs what policy reality is and (potentially) the form that subsequent practice takes (Jessop, 2004: 160). Barany's (2016) account of the conservative transformation of 'welfare' during the 1980s-1990s in the USA for example shows how the propagation of conservative discourse facilitated conservative policy changes. These in turn helped embed and (re)produce conservative ideas. In the US then a discourse similar to that propounded by recent Conservative led UK Governments helped secure a conservative welfare hegemony. Intriguingly Barany also identifies decentralisation to individual US states as one of the mechanisms enabling conservative led welfare reform and rhetoric to take hold (Barany, 2016: 205). By contrast the re-patterning of UK welfare governance seems to have created space, in Scotland at least, for rejuvenating social democratic narratives and visions of welfare state futures that contest and disrupt the embedding of a conservative welfare hegemony.

Table 1. Responsibility for key working age social protection and employment services between UK Government and Scotland

	United Kingdom Government (UKG) for Great Britain (GB) (England, Wales and Scotland)	Scotland
Benefits for unemployed, economically inactive/ low income employed and their administration	Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA); Income Support (IS); Employment Support Allowance (ESA); Working Tax Credit (WTC). UKG across GB for rates, eligibility, sanctions, delivery.	
New single working age payment	Universal Credit (UC). UKG across GB for rates, eligibility, sanctions.	Administrative flexibility over: payment frequency; split payment; housing element (e.g. bedroom tax and payment to landlord or claimant).
Assistance for low income families	Child Tax Credit & Child Benefit UKG authority across GB.	
Assistance with additional costs of disability/ illness	Disability living Allowance/ Personal Independence Payment. UKG authority across GB.	To be devolved.
Safety net cash/ in kind assistance	Social Fund Discretionary Support Abolished. Responsibility passed to English local authorities and devolved administrations.	Scottish Welfare Fund replaces Discretionary Social Fund. Local Authorities administer but guidance, training set by Scottish Government. Scotland Bill devolves authority over Regulated Social Fund benefits.
Assistance with housing costs	Housing Benefit & Discretionary Housing Payment* UKG authority over Housing Benefit across GB. DWP set limit on DHP, but devolved power to raise ‘cap’ to Scotland.	See UC.
Employment services	Jobcentre plus, Work choice, Work Programme and pre/post Work Programme schemes. UKG across GB for pre/ post Work Programme schemes and JCP.	Authority over equivalent replacement for Work Programme and disability employment supports will be devolved.
Skills & employability support	Responsibility with English local authorities and devolved administrations.	Skills Development Scotland. Ostensibly ‘training’ services for participants, but often activation/ job creation in practice.

Sources: Spicker (2015); HM Government (2015); Scottish Government (2015e); *see Berry (2014)

While discourse shapes, and is shaped by policy, an examination of select political and policy texts alone cannot represent policy in action which requires a broader empirical investigation. The deconstruction of Scottish Government political statements and policy documents is though commensurate with the objectives of this particular article to identify and understand the ideas animating the Scottish Government's welfare imaginary and unpack how the structure of this discourse works to challenge the narrative privileged by UK Government.

The tools employed to investigate the self-professed beliefs, values and interpretations of the Scottish Government and the means (language, image, practice) employed to propagate a social democratic vision of welfare policy and governance are drawn from the Critical Policy Discourse Analysis framework (CPDAF) developed by Hyatt (2013). Informed by a broader reading of critical discourse approaches (Hyatt, 2013: 837), the CPDAF disaggregates investigation into two distinct, but related, processes of analysis - *contextualisation* and *deconstruction* (table 1). Exploring contextualisation requires the researcher to establish the 'context' within which a discourse is generated, through identification of policy drivers or how actors interpret a policy problem, the associated ostensible policy goals and the instruments the actors select to achieve them. The setting of goals and preference for particular instruments inevitably involves some recourse to various forms of justification that Hyatt (2013: 839) categorises as the use of evidentiary; political or accountability 'warrant'. The evidentiary warrant refers to the use and misuse of empirical data, as actors seek to demonstrate their preferred interpretation, goals and instruments is based in a reasoned assessment of the evidence base. The political warrant involves an allusion, or direct appeal to more abstract concepts (liberty, choice, equality, the national interest) while the accountability warrant seeks to ground the reason for action in the existing inadequacy of policy outcomes or the potential consequences of a failure to act (Hyatt, 2013: 839).

The second stage of analysis is the deconstruction of the discourse of interest to unravel how relationships of domination are linguistically enacted and defended. A researcher may examine how the discourse is connected to and/or appropriates other texts and discourse to support its contention (intertextuality and interdiscursivity). They might identify how authors seek to align reader interpretations with their own through positive or negative statements and judgements about an issue or course of action that are more (inscribed evaluation) or less (evoked evaluation) overt. Similarly, a variety of different approaches to legitimising the discourse can be investigated, including how a discourse is legitimised through; authorisation (appeal to authority); rationalisation (appeal to usefulness of activity); moral evaluation (appeal to notions of what is desirable action/ outcome) and myths (appeal to narratives with broader societal resonance about the consequence of a given course of activity/ view) (Hyatt, 2013: 804-842).

Data selection

The data consists of official Scottish Government documents published during the period 2011 and 2016 (Table 2). The 2011-12 and 2015-16 Programmes for Government (PfG) are authoritative statements of overall priorities and preferences of the first year of a majority SNP administration and the period following the independence referendum with the prospect of further devolved power over social security under development. The analysis also includes the 2013 Independence White Paper, 2015 Economic Strategy and 2015 Employability Support consultation documents as these are discursively and/or textually interlinked with the 2015 PfG. Together these texts provide an insight into the social democratic ideational tradition drawn upon by the Scottish Government and the linguistic and visual repertoires it has used to contest the UK Government's representation of 'the problem' that necessitates their 'welfare reform' policy practice. Moreover, through

examination of these Scottish Government texts we can discern the construction of an insurgent discourse around welfare governance in keeping with social democratic interpretations of fairness, justice and respect.

Table 2: Critical Discourse Analysis framework (Hyatt, 2013)

Contextualisation	Deconstruction
<p>Policy Drivers</p> <p>Goals Levers Path</p> <p>Warrant</p> <p>Evidentiary Accountability Political</p>	<p>Mode of legitimation</p> <p>Authorisation Moral Evaluative Myth</p> <p>Evaluation</p> <p>Evoked Inscribed</p> <p>External connections</p> <p>Inter-textual Inter-discursive</p>

Source: author's collation of Hyatt's (2013) conceptual categories

Table 3: Title and publication date of source documents

Renewing Scotland: the Government's Programme for Scotland 2011-12	2011
Scotland's Future: your guide to an independent Scotland	2013
A Stronger Scotland: the Government's Programme for Scotland 2015-16	2015
Scotland's Economic Strategy March 2015	2015
Creating a Fairer Scotland: Employability Support: A Discussion Paper	2015
Creating a Fairer Scotland: A New Future for Employability Support	2016
Creating a Fairer Scotland: A New Future for Social Security	2016

The 'social wage', social protection and national renewal

The 'social wage' has featured periodically in policy and political discussion as a means to refer to and/or assess the value of assorted welfare provision to the individual citizen, though it is perhaps most closely associated with the 1974-79 Labour Government and its Social Contract (see Healey, 1975) This was intended to help manage the work-welfare-economy nexus by committing the then government to improvements in welfare services and benefits (social wage) in exchange for unions agreeing to voluntary pay restraint (Timmins, 1996: 316). Given the ignominious failure of the Social Contract during the 1970s (see Timmins, 1996) the deployment of the social wage concept by the SNP Scottish Government in their 2011-12 Programme for Government to frame its initial response to the Coalition's austerity and welfare reform package may seem somewhat peculiar. Yet the social

wage links the Scottish Government to a more corporatist and universalist strand of British social democracy, long repudiated by successive UK Governments, including those of New Labour. In Scotland this has enabled the SNP to differentiate itself from the Scottish Labour Party, which in 2012 indicated a preference for a more targeted approach to welfare state provision by calling into question the decision to fund aspects of the social wage, such as free bus travel and no university tuition fees (BBC, 2012; Scottish Parliament, 2012).

The plasticity of the social wage enables the Scottish Government to join together disparate income and service related policy interventions arising from devolved powers in health, social care, education, travel and local taxation policy. Committing to protect the 'social wage' of citizens confers cohesiveness and signals ideational commitment to an active state and fair society. The language of social contract also facilitates incorporation of 'the public' as partner in the protection of societal welfare, helping to subsume partisanship and evoke a project of national unity and (socio-cultural) divergence from the UK Government. A speech given to the Scottish Parliament in May 2011 by the then First Minister, Alex Salmond, represented the social wage as 'the pact, the promise, between politicians, public services and the public' and followed this up with the notion that this was recognition that;

"We are united in the effort to build a better nation – we are not individuals alone in a cold world, but a community united to protect all our people" (Scotsman, May 26th 2011).

The foreword to the 2011-12 PfG document, ostensibly penned by Mr Salmond, includes reference to the social wage in the fifth paragraph of the text, following a general reflection on the record of the previous SNP administration and outline of specific objectives for the economy and jobs. It is again highlighted after the foreword as point four in a summary of the twelve key commitments the Scottish Government is making (Scottish Government, 2011: 2-3). The reference to the 'social wage' in both the foreword and the key commitments section of the document indicate a decision to give the concept visibility and ensure it receives legitimation by the most senior political authority in the Government. Chapter two of the document is concerned with the approach and measures the Scottish Government will take to accelerate economic recovery and deliver job opportunities, with little discussion of social security issues directly (this contrasts with the priority given to social security in the 2015-16 PfG document). Notably, however, chapter two reiterates the importance of the 'social wage' and how this manifests materially through SNP policy, and the language used discursively connects the text with the speech given by the then First Minister.

"Unnecessary burdens on the people and communities of Scotland impact on their ability to flourish. We will continue to protect people and families during these difficult times. As we ask for pay restraint we are meeting core economic and social commitments through delivery of a 'Social Wage'. We have: frozen council tax bills; delivered a 'living wage' and provided a minimum pay increase for the lowest earners in the public sector; abolished bridge tolls and prescription charges; and, met our commitments on concessionary travel and free personal care' (Scottish Government, 2011: 13).

Reference to 'unnecessary burdens' inserts an indirect judgment on the validity of austerity and its socio-economic consequences (inscribed evaluation) and implies the Coalition is the obstacle preventing citizens from realizing their potential (evoked evaluation). The deployment of the social wage in the 2011-12 PfG foregrounds the Scottish Government as guardian of the welfare state, reinforces the ideological and policy cleavage that exists between the Scottish Government and the UK Government and implies this is also a divide between the UK government and the people of Scotland in general. Whether or not this is so, is for others to consider. The pertinent point is that

the Social Wage provides the Scottish Government with the means to discursively weave together judgments about material conditions resulting from British 'Tory' Governments and Scottish policy responses to this, while linking this to a social and economic future embedded in the supposedly distinct value Scotland attaches to fairness and social justice. It is notable that announcing the date for the publication of the Scottish Government's Independence White Paper, Alex Salmond contrasted Scotland's social wage, reflecting shared progressive values and priorities between the people of Scotland and its government, with Coalition Government tax cuts, privatisation, marketisation and a tolerance of inequality (Salmond, 2013). In signalling a 'defence' of social protection the social wage reminds citizens of the constraints of devolution and communicates that Westminster authority and its particular policy 'path' is the problem. Moral, rational and mythic modes of legitimation for, and rooted in, a social democratic policy path are consequently adjoined in a national project of resistance to Conservative led reforms and rejection of the desirability and feasibility of a British ('Unionist') road to social democratic social justice.

Social investment and constructing future welfare state imaginaries

The 2014 referendum on independence for Scotland provided an opportunity for the Scottish Government to articulate a vision of a future social investment welfare state whose orientation and underlying assumptions offered a distinct counter to the UK Coalition Governments market liberal safety net approach (Mooney and Scott, 2015: 9). The Scottish Government's elevation of a social investment narrative indicates its embrace of, and positioning within, the European social policy mainstream which, since the 1990s, has coalesced around 'Social Investment' (SI). As an ideal type the SI approach has emerged as a rejection of the supposedly excessive decommodifying effect of 'compensation' benefits in post war welfare states. The initial reaction to this manifests in market-liberal reforms that interpreted social protection spending primarily as a cost; an impediment to effective supply side policy and a drag on economic growth, that should be minimised and restricted to a 'safety net' (Hemerijck, 2015; Jenson, 2010: 62; Van Kersbergen and Hemerijck, 2012: 475). The premise of the social investment stance is that state intervention and comparably high levels of social protection spending can complement effective supply side policy, economic growth and welfare state sustainability, provided they are embedded in a life course perspective that concentrates spending on human capital as a form of 'preventative' investment. The assumption is that prioritisation and expansion of labour activation policy, lifelong education and training to upskill the adult labour force, and enhanced early years education and childcare interventions improves the capacity of individuals and families to manage emergent opportunities and risks associated with ageing societies, changing family forms, knowledge intensive, globally interconnected economies, and flexible, unpredictable labour markets. In turn this raises the long term growth potential of the economy, promotes social cohesion and undermines the conditions that give rise to social problems and high levels of 'compensatory' social welfare expenditure in the first instance (Jenson, 2010: 61; Cantillon and Van Lancker, 2013).

For social democrats 'social investment' as a term and concept provides a means to recuperate and legitimise state intervention and increased social expenditure, including that devoted to 'compensatory' benefits. Hemerijck (2015: 7), for example, posits that cash benefits remain important because the income buffer they provide underpins individual and societal stabilisation. This helps to protect the value of existing human capital by mitigating the erosion of skills, which in turn facilitates efficient (re)allocation of labour and capital by enhancing capacity to manage risk and take advantage of new labour market and economic opportunities. The Nordic welfare states, typically regarded as the most advanced social investment models and seeming exemplars of open

liberal economies, direct a substantial portion of welfare spending to services rather than cash benefits but retain comparably good compensatory support (Rothstein and Steinmo, 2013: 101).

It is not surprising that the 2013 Independence White Paper problematises the socio-economic policy of the UK Government. What is interesting is how the text advances policy drivers and warrants that direct the reader towards a social democratic case for independence. The text from chapter three, 'Finance and the Economy' provides an example of social and territorial justice linked in a negative, inscribed evaluation of the outcomes of existing policy paths and policy levers that implies transforming existing governing arrangements is necessary.

"Growth and competitiveness are important, however there is a growing recognition that the characteristics of growth and the distribution of its benefits are just as important.

Under the Westminster system Scotland is locked into one of the most unequal economic models in the OECD – with the UK ranked 28th out of 34 countries in terms of its Gini coefficient (a key measure of income inequality). Such inequalities have in fact widened rather than narrowed in recent decades. Such patterns are not only damaging in their own right, but act to constrain growth over the long term...

...The gap between rich and poor, the increasing concentration of economic activity in one small part of the UK, and growing imbalances in the structure of the UK economy all suggest that continuing as regional economy will hamper job creation in Scotland and reduce economic security in the long term" (Scottish Government, 2013: 89).

The citation of the relative (poor) position of the UK amongst comparable 'OECD' countries (an evidentiary warrant) together with assertion of negative economic consequences of failing to redress inequality (accountability warrant) foregrounds a 'scientific' case (evidentiary warrant) for adopting a new policy. Meanwhile the phrase 'locked into' depicts Scotland as a prisoner of Westminster's policy choices, unable to right the wrongs of inequitable distribution and the socio-economic cost from within the UK. Interestingly the pursuit of competitiveness and growth is critiqued, but largely on distributive grounds. The challenge then is less to productivist political economy than to the liberal-conservative form pursued by UK Governments. The text directs the reader to conclude that a fairer society requires remaking existing governance arrangements at the work-economy- welfare nexus and this is best advanced via independence.

Chapter three proceeds to outline proposals for employee representation on company boards and establishment of a National Convention on Employment and Labour Relations. A forum of social partners to deliberate on labour market, skills and wages policies. Support for a Fair Work Commission to oversee uprating of the National Minimum Wage is also reiterated (Scottish Government, 2013: 105). These policy levers imply the problem of inequality, job quality and availability is embedded in the existing institutional arrangements and power relations around labour administration. As Harvey (2015: 251) suggests, the development, support and embedding of a social investment approach in Scotland will need to overcome institutional constraints linked to the absence of bodies for mediating between and coordinating government, business and unions. If Chapter three provides an opening into the contextualisation of social investment as necessary, then Chapter four, Health, Well-being and Social Protection (re) frames 'welfare' as a desirable public good. The text rejects a safety net approach and recuperates cash benefits through repackaging welfare as the totality of cash transfers and public services people draw upon (Scottish Government, 2013: 160). Consequently the text re-presents social security as one element in a suite of (necessary) supports and services that allow *all* citizens to negotiate contingencies experienced over the life-

course. The text primes the reader to agree social investment is a credible concept and feasible policy option for Scotland through asserting the success (inscribed evaluation) of Nordic states (evidentiary warrant).

“The Nordic countries have shown that effective social protection systems, based on the social investment principle can help to reduce unemployment, increase earnings and spending power as economies grow.

The social investment model recognises that people require lifelong investments, made at different points in their lives. When these investment are made through the delivery of high quality services, enjoyed by all members of society regardless of income or background, the life chances of all members of society are improved. The social investment model fosters a culture that is more inclusive, more respectful and more equal. It also places the cash transfers that people traditionally think of as welfare – such as out of work benefits and tax credits- in a wider more cost effective and socially beneficial context when viewed over the longer term. Investments in childcare, education, health and active labour market policies will reduce reliance on, and also, the costs of the cash transfer parts of the welfare system.

A social investment approach will reap benefits for the whole of Scotland in the medium to long term...

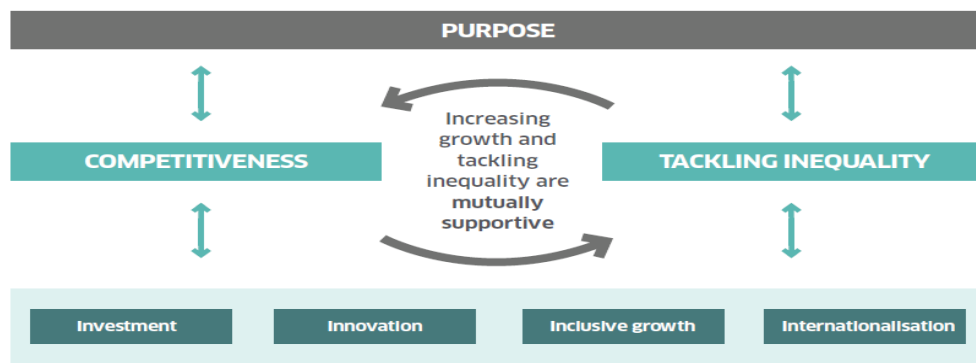
...The social investment approach creates a framework of guiding principles that will underpin the development of welfare policies but in order to deliver it, Scotland must have control of the full range of powers, and responsibility for all government revenues and expenditure. It offers an alternative approach to that being pursued by Westminster” (Scottish Government, 2013: 161-162).

This fosters a welfare state imaginary where economic dynamism, collectivism and resolving social problems are mutually supportive by foregrounding interdependence (all require support and all benefit), promoting inclusion, equality and respect as positive values (a political warrant), and linking these to long term reductions in socio-economic costs (rationalist mode of legitimation). The contrast with UK Government market liberal interpretations of ‘welfare’ as a costly, unproductive and unjust transfer of resources is stark.

“Britain is home to 1% of the world’s population, generates 4% of the world’s income; and yet pays out 7% of the world’s welfare spending. It is not fair to the taxpayers paying for it... Welfare spending is not sustainable and it crowds out spending on things like education and infrastructure that are vital to securing the real welfare of the people” (Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, 2015).

The Independence White Paper through the Scottish Government’s 2015-16 PfG, its 2015 Economic Strategy and the 2015 and 2016 documents on future social security and employability support services (Scottish Government, 2013; 2015a; 2015b, 2015c, 2016a, 2016b) all contain a more/less explicit reproduction and endorsement of social investment approaches providing a (inter-textual) consistent social democratic thread to their welfare governance narrative. For example the 2015 Economic Strategy and consultation on employability supports reproduce an image depicting social justice and competitiveness as complementary. Policies to support state welfare and an open economy are positioned as fostering a virtuous cycle of investment, innovation, poverty alleviation and growth (inscribed evaluation) (Image 1). The image also potentially implies that actors who reject such a desirable and feasible combination are either incompetent or unwilling to act in the collective interest.

Image 1: The visual inscribed evaluation: growth *and* social justice



Source: *Scotland's Economic Strategy* (2015): 8; *Employability Support: A discussion paper*, (2015c): 4. Image protected by Crown Copyright, licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

Inscribing fairness in the new welfare governance

The Scottish Government has recently outlined the distinct principles and values it claims will underpin the new welfare governance in Scotland. By implication these provide a critique of successive UK Government approaches. The text of the 2015-16 Programme for Government (PfG) invites the reader to draw the conclusion (evoked evaluation) that (Conservative led) Governments have instituted unjust, inequitable reforms that hamper benefit take-up, strip people of self-worth and fail to resolve social need.

“Our new powers over social security despite being limited in scope, will provide opportunities to develop different policies for Scotland which are fairer and help tackle inequality and poverty, in line with the core purpose of the Scottish Government. We will use these powers to develop a system which is; suited to the needs of our people and our country; underpinned by respect for the dignity of individuals; accessible, fair, and commands the full confidence of claimants and the organisations and services that support them” (Scottish Government, 2015a: 20).

A critique of UK Government policy as inequitable and misplaced is also made using an evidentiary warrant in the 2015 employability consultation (inter-textuality). Scottish Government research is referenced showing sanctions disproportionately affect claimants likely to experience employment constraints and least able to bear the financial costs of sanctions (lone parents, disabled people and young people) (Scottish Government, 2015c: 29). Lest doubt remain as to the Scottish Government’s view of UK conditionality, the text makes a clear judgment (inscribed evaluation) that; “...conditionality should be fair and proportionate. The current system is not” (Scottish Government, 2015c: 30). The denunciation of conditionality as unjust and disproportionate implies a breach of acceptable societal values providing a political warrant for reform attuned to (Scottish Government interpretation of) shared social norms of fairness as meaning equitable access to, and treatment by, welfare services.

The subsequent *Creating a Fairer Scotland: A New Future for Social Security in Scotland* and *Creating a Fairer Scotland: A New Future for Employability Support in Scotland* (Scottish Government 2016a; 2016b) position emerging governance arrangements as an (albeit constrained) opportunity to embed and develop policies that are in keeping with commitments to Dignity and Respect; Fairness and Equality and Co-production alongside value for money and the ‘evidence base’ (Scottish

Government 2016a; 2016b). Abstract values such as fairness can be, and are, embraced by other political parties, including the Conservatives, in their representation of welfare reform. What these documents do is appropriate these values and imbue them with a social democratic interpretation that Conservative led UK Governments do not share and, therefore will not inform the latter's policy. The Scottish Government are consequently able to challenge as morally problematic and ineffective the programme of reduced expenditure, residualisation and stigmatisation and the narrow reliance on financial incentives in employment programmes as the means to accelerate claimants into the labour market. A resistance narrative is joined to a social investment imaginary that reframes welfare governance around social democratic interpretations of fairness, respect, solidarity and user engagement that reflect concern with distributional issues.

“Our approach to employment support will not be driven solely by a need to reduce the Welfare Bill and to focus on those with the best prospects of moving into work. Instead we will aim to contribute to the broader range of economic and social outcomes by supporting those furthest from the labour market” (Scottish Government, 2016a: 7).

The discourse around a new social security settlement similarly posits that ‘social security should be regarded by everyone in society as an integral component of a fair and prosperous society’ (Scottish Government, 2015b: 10) and affirms income protection is a necessary investment if equality of opportunity for all is to be meaningful.

“Social security is an investment in the people of Scotland... Social security should help provide protection and act as a safety net in time of need. It should also aspire to provide a springboard and maximise the life chances of everyone, acting as an early intervention to give people the best possible chance” (Scottish Government, 2015b: 10).

In constructing the Scottish policy and political landscape as social democratic we might expect Scottish policymakers to rework their ideas in accordance with this in response to emergent problems. The most we can say at the time of writing is the proposed direction of employment and social security reform in Scotland is in keeping with social democratic preference for the state to foster labour market entry and mitigate unpredictable life risks.

Proposals for employment services are to place greater emphasis on fostering partnerships within and between public, private and third sector providers and for the state to take a more pro-active role in standard setting and monitoring to promote provider engagement with all labour market programme participants (Scottish Government, 2016b: 10-11). Headline social security commitments of the Scottish Government include proposals to; raise the value of Carer's Allowance to equal Jobseeker's Allowance; to abolish the bedroom tax and to use administrative flexibility in Universal Credit to facilitate claimant choice in payment frequency and whether the housing element is paid to tenants or social landlords (Scottish Government, 2016a: 17). The Scottish Government is also consulting on legislation committing it to eradicate child poverty by 2030. This follows the decision of the UK Conservative Government to repeal aspects of the 2010 Child Poverty Act including headline income measures of child poverty as it has shifted towards focusing on a more diffuse set of factors said to affect life chances. In contrast the Scottish Government propose to introduce income based measures in their child poverty bill (Scottish Government, 2016c) potentially giving the UK and Scottish Governments distinctly different metrics for measuring poverty and hence divergent representations of poverty, its causes and implied policy solutions. It is noticeable that aspects of the Scottish Government's (proposed) divergence in welfare governance is reminiscent, at least in part, to the orientation of the UK New Labour Governments. The belief in (if not the vigour of support for) social investment as key part of modernised social democracy is, of

course, something the SNP share with New Labour (Bevir, 2005; Leggett, 2007; Page, 2014). This raises a question we cannot settle here, of whether the Scottish Government's championing of a radical, yet credible Nordic welfare imaginary is primarily to mobilise and cohere support (Ryner, 2007: 64) and which in practice becomes a Scottish variant of the Third Way (Paterson, 2015; Mooney and Scott, 2015).

Conclusion: governance and competing discourses of welfare state futures

Bevir (2005) suggests actors approach new dilemmas arising from changing contexts by returning to their ideational heritage to draw together different strands of thought to reinterpret the new challenge and rework their response. The SNP has self-identified as social democratic since the mid-1970s and has long advanced the defence of territorial interests with an anti-Conservative Party, pro-welfare state message (Lynch, 2002 134; 2009; Maxwell, 2009: 121).

It is not surprising that as a minority administration in 2007 the SNP Scottish Government expressed the complementarity of social justice, economic prosperity and self-determination (Scott and Mooney, 2009: 387). Nor that faced with UK Governments' committed to austerity; social security residualisation, punitive conditionality and narrow work first employment programmes (Author, 2012; Slater, 2014; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 2015), the Scottish Government has drawn on the social democratic tradition to develop a more sophisticated version of this narrative in response. The analysis here shows the Scottish Government's discourse uses various political, accountability and evaluative warrants and modes of legitimation to (re) appropriate as social democratic, widely shared abstract values such as fairness, social justice and equity. Alongside this it reinterprets what the policy problem is so that this becomes the UK Government itself rather than benefit claimants. The latter are recuperated as one of 'us', rather than an external parasitic 'other' with social wage and social investment concepts inculcating a message of solidarity through pointing to our mutual interdependence, shared risks and the benefits accruing to all from 'welfare'.

For a centre left government keen to elide tensions between pursuit of social justice and commitments to low business taxation and light touch regulation (Scott and Mooney, 2009; Cuthbert and Cuthbert, 2009; Scott and Wright, 2012) Nordic social investment is understandably attractive as it brings together commitments to an open liberal economy and a more egalitarian societies. The pertinent point is that the analysis shows how, over the course of a parliament the Scottish Government responded to public spending retrenchment, the independence referendum and devolution of 'welfare' governance by developing a distinctive discourse, rooted in the social democratic tradition. The social investment imaginary has provided the means to endorse comprehensive welfare as necessary, affordable, productive and pro-business. The conservative liberal market welfare hegemony is consequently unsettled and recast as a temporally contingent arrangement, rather than an inevitable and fixed reality that extends remorselessly into the future.

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