Rethinking Poverty

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This book explores what a good society without poverty could look like and identifies policies and practices to support it. There is now widespread acceptance that neoliberalism has gone too far, while the welfare state established after the Second World War is in decline. Yet no alternative approaches have so far emerged. This book helps to fill that gap.

It is based on a five-year programme of research supported by the Webb Memorial Trust. Research partners include leading organisations such as Compass, the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), the Centre for Local Economic Strategies, the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), the Fabian Society, Bright Blue, Oxfam, the Smith Institute, Shelter and others, as well as a range of academics. We have also worked closely with the All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty. Barry Knight led this work. In this book he brings together the findings of the various strands of the research and suggests ways to take it forward.

This book has its origins in the work of a pioneering social reformer whose lifetime of research enabled much of the social advance of the 20th century but who is now largely forgotten: Beatrice Webb (1858–1943). Her Minority Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress 1905–09 was about more than just breaking up the Poor Law. It raised new ideas, which she developed with her husband Sidney, such as organising the labour market to prevent unemployment, providing a national health service and operating
universal social services. Working closely with their friend William Beveridge, they were highly influential with academics and senior politicians and laid the intellectual foundations for what became the welfare state.

To commemorate the centenary of the Minority Report, the Trust commissioned the Fabian Society to produce *The solidarity society: Fighting poverty and inequality in an age of affluence 1909–2009*. The book addressed the problem of poverty, which had persisted despite the progress of the previous 100 years. However, many proposals entailed increased state spending and, following the financial crash of 2008 and the austerity policies emerging from the 2010 Coalition government, it was unlikely that the book’s proposals would be taken up.

The Trust therefore commissioned two pieces of research: a review of social policy since 1945, undertaken by the Smith Institute, to identify which policies were effective in reducing poverty, and a series of essays from academics and practitioners in which they were asked to imagine what Beatrice Webb would suggest doing about poverty now. Following these publications, the Trust concluded that traditional social policy is inadequate to deal with the challenges facing the UK and produced a consultation document: *Beatrice Webb: A fitting legacy*. Its publication in 2012 set out the prospectus for the research described here.

The book reframes the debate about poverty and how a good society should eliminate it. We hope that this research, like that of the Webbs, will stimulate our partners and others to develop their ideas and help to create the society we want, rather than the society we have.

*Richard Rawes*
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**Notes**

FOREWORD

