Continuity or Change? Disability Policy and the Rudd Government

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This article reports on shifts and continuities in policy relating to disabled people and the administrative apparatus of federal disability policy under the Rudd government (2007–10). It begins with a brief historical overview of disability policy in Australia. It then gives particular attention to highlighting the contentious and dramatic changes to disability policy which were instigated by the Howard government (1996–2007). Following this, attention is focused on the major developments in disability policy and administration with the election of the Rudd Labor government in 2007. Through this discussion, we demonstrate the ways the altered vocabularies, practices and instruments of the state have manifested in relation to disability policy in Australia, ultimately shaping opportunities for either inclusion or exclusion at the national level among disabled people.

Keywords: Disability, Policy, Rudd Government, Australia.

Introduction

This article traces the beginnings of disability policy in Australia from the early 1970s to the present. In particular, it explores the radical reconfiguration of disability policy under the Howard government (1997–2007), and the extent to which discursive and material continuities or changes can be identified in disability policy under the Rudd government (2007–10). Like other areas of Australian social policy, disability policy has been subject to significant change in past decades as a result of global and national imperatives and ideologies. While older discourses of paternalism and charity and their associated practices appear to have been superseded by those pertaining to rights and citizenship, and an emphasis on responsibility and obligation, this is not the case. As Drake (1999) suggests, the field of disability policy is more marked by subtle continuity rather than a clear demarcation between the 'old' and the 'new'. This has been particularly the case for the Australian disability policy environment (Goggin and Newell, 2005). In this article, we demonstrate the ways the altered vocabularies, practices and instruments of the state have manifested in relation to disability policy in Australia, ultimately shaping opportunities for either inclusion or exclusion at the national level among disabled people. The analysis reveals that while there have been significant moments of discontinuity, there has also been subtle continuity over this time.

Gaining recognition: disability in Australia (1972–96)

It was not until the period of the Whitlam government (1972–5) that disability policy was first addressed as a national social policy priority. Even though the Commonwealth government had held responsibility for the administration of the disability pension since the beginning of the century (Invalid and Old Age Pensions Act 1908 Cth), the provision of disability services was largely *ad hoc* and provided through large institutions and asylums which, in many instances, were run by charitable organisations (Dickey, 1987). Consequently, the Handicapped Person's Welfare Program (HPWP) and the associated legislation (Handicapped Program Assistance Act 1974 Cth) were highly significant developments with innovations such as funding for service provision by non-government organisations providing accommodation and/or care to disabled people (Commonwealth Department of Social Security, 1975).

HPWP continued with the subsequent election of the Fraser Liberal−National Coalition government (1975–83). Indeed, despite efforts to restrain public spending, fiscal support for the HPWP continued to grow throughout the Fraser government's term in office (Clear, 2000). This was undoubtedly related to growing international and national attention focused on disability, as well as shifting societal and cultural norms and beliefs about the rights and entitlements of disabled people. Illustrative of the changing environment was the United Nations endorsement of the Declaration for the Rights of Disabled Persons 1975 and the proclamation of 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP). In response to these global developments, the Australian government implemented a number of initiatives instigated by committees, which directly included disabled people for the first time (IYDP, National Committee of Non-Government Organisations, 1983). The formation of such groups signalled a significant transformation in the disability policy-making process, recognising disabled people as policy subjects rather than simply policy objects. A further illustration of an altered policy context occurred in 1983 when Senator Chaney, the minister responsible for disability, took the unusual step of writing to the national representative body for specialist disability services, the Australian Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled (ACROD), stating that an 'independent body was needed to represent the views of disabled people as consumers' (ACROD, 1982: 14). Here, Australia followed international trends, where increasingly national governments were recognising people with disability as the principal representatives of their broader movement (see Driedger, 1989).

Despite Senator Chaney's recommendation, it was not until the period of the Hawke Labor government (1983–91) that Australia's first national representative body for disabled people – Disabled People's International (Australia) – was established. The organisation's receipt of a government grant marked a period of large gains for disabled people, particularly in terms of policy representation (Meekosha, 2002). After extensive lobbying, the Hawke government implemented nationwide public consultations to review the HPWP and its governing legislation. Over 3,000 people participated nationally (Commonwealth of Australia, 1985), and, for the first time, the final recommendations included the direct views of disabled people.

The extensive consultation with direct service users of publicly funded disability services resulted in the speedy repealing of the HPWP's governing legislation (Cocks and Stehlik, 1996). In its place, a raft of new legislation emerged. First came the passage of the Home and Community Care Act 1985 (Cth), followed by the Disability Services

Act 1986 (Cth) (DSA). The DSA subsequently became the primary legislative framework for the administration of disability services across Australia (Dempsey and Ford, 2009). The principles and objectives enshrined within the DSA were largely consistent with growing international trends that articulated an 'ordinary life' for disabled people (Ward, 2006: 253–4). Community care replaced large institutions and the eventual phasing out of disability sheltered employment services was promised (Clear, 2000). For disabled people, these initiatives were central to debates emerging around issues of citizenship, equal opportunity and inclusion. New models of employment support within the open labour market were central to these demands (Clear and Gleeson, 2001), following the growing influence of user-led service provision (see Barnes and Mercer, 2006). In response, the Hawke Cabinet endorsed the creation of numerous demonstration projects across the country, experimenting with alternative disability support models of care and work, all via the non-government sector (Department of Community Services, 1989).

In the end, the extensive involvement of disabled people within the policy process was harnessed by the Hawke government to gain support for its plan to restructure the administration of disability services across jurisdictions. Disability advocacy organisations had continually illustrated the divergence of service quality across the federation. The Hawke government's restructuring plan, along with the subsequent governance of all services under the DSA, was presented as the principal means of redress (Disability Advisory Council of Australia, DACA, 1991). A five-year administration agreement was reached between all States and the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth maintained responsibility for the disability pension as well as assuming charge of all disability labour-market programs. Other services were transferred to the States. Advocacy, however, remained a shared commitment (Yeatman, 1996). As a condition for the transfer of the relevant Commonwealth funding resources, all states were required to enact complementary legislation to ensure that State-administered services were governed consistently across jurisdictions (Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, 2007) – a key demand of advocacy groups involved in the negotiations.

The Hawke government's broader agenda to restructure the Australian labour market instigated a national review of all social security programs (Soldatic and Pini, 2009). Greater emphasis on labour-market participation for social security recipients as a means to control growing welfare expenditure was flagged as the primary driver. Disability payments were not exempt, and after a thorough review (Cass *et al.*, 1988), the invalid pension was replaced with a new Disability Support Pension (Social Security (Disability and Sickness Support) Act 1991). The principles embedded in the new Disability Support Pension (DSP) reflected the growing prominence of neoliberalism and its attendant concern with re-regulating the nexus between the social security system and the labour market in that the aim was to move disabled people from welfare to employment (McElwaine and Ford, 1994). At the same time, some key measures were enacted to mediate the potential challenges of an open labour market for disabled people. This included extensive investment in non-government disability specialist employment organisations for the provision of labour-market support (Lindsay, 1996) and the passing of complementary anti-discrimination legislation – the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

Roulstone and Barnes' (2005) suggestion that recent global disability policy trends have resulted in contradictory effects for disabled people resonates with the Australian disability policy experience. Despite several years of intensive program development and

investment, during the 1990s and into the twenty-first century the participation of disabled people within the Australian labour market remained extremely low. Numbers on the DSP continually climbed (Park, 2005), and reforming large segments of the disability services sector in line with the DSA principles was proving to be unworkable, particularly in the area of sheltered employment (Lindsay, 1996). Service national representative bodies, such as ACROD, mounted extensive campaigns against the most progressive areas of reform, particularly those areas that promoted the dismantling of sheltered employment services in favour of labour-market inclusion (Lindsay, 1996). Services pushed through this campaign even though the dismantling of sheltered employment services was a key demand of the Australian disability movement. Parmenter (1999) suggests that the success of this campaign was largely due to the exclusion of families and traditional disability service providers from the reform process, establishing an acrimonious policy-making environment rather than one of collaboration for effective policy change. Even with a $15 million investment over a five-year period (Ronalds, 1990), the sheltered employment lobby won reprieve from the reform agenda (see Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, 1992), and subsequently repositioned itself as a significant actor within the disability policy-making process (Newell, 1996).

Under Keating's prime ministership (1991–6), neoliberal ideals such as beliefs about the primacy of the economy and market came to influence all areas of government responsibility, including social policy fields such as disability (Clear, 2000). A year after the release of Working Nation, which clearly articulated a central role for economic policy in forming notions of citizenship and participation (Bessant *et al.*, 2006), a major review of the Disability Employment Program was instigated (Baume and Kay, 1995). The recommendations of the review reflected the growing orthodoxy surrounding neoliberalism in that attention was focused on the need to strengthen the relationship between the DSP and the labour market. In line with this agenda, all disability labour-market programming was realigned. Despite the Australian disability movement's campaigns to close down sheltered employment, under this new espoused model, sheltered employment services were now seen as a viable employment option for disabled people deemed 'unable' to compete in a highly unregulated employment market (Baume and Kay, 1995). In the final months of the Keating government, the review's recommendations were used to initiate discussion about new funding formulae that promoted notions of individualisation, performance outcomes and competitive contracting (Department of Human Services and Health, 1995). Even though these key tenets of neoliberalism had, by this stage, influenced myriad federal policy areas (Ryan, 1995), disability policy had thus far largely escaped this influence. It was under the Howard Coalition government (1996–2007) that disability policy was most dramatically reconfigured to accord with neoliberal ideology.

Reconfiguring the disability landscape: the Howard years of government (1996–2007)

Despite the ubiquity of neoliberalism in the industrial West over recent decades, there have been considerable divergences in how this ideology has become manifest in policy (Harvey, 2005). This is evident in terms of disability policy, for while neoliberalism has informed changes in countries such as the United States (Erkulwater, 2006), the United Kingdom (Roulstone and Morgan, 2009) and Canada (Chouinard and Crooks, 2008), it has

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been adapted differently according to the peculiarities of the different national contexts. The intensification of neoliberalism in Australia which occurred during the Howard administration is illustrated by the marginalisation of consumer representation from the policy process, the widespread adoption of privatisation, including the engagement of the community sector in state–market contractual relations and the reworking of the welfare and labour-market nexus (Carney and Ramia, 2002).

Disability advocacy and policy representation

Community representation within the policy process was one of the principal areas of reform targeted by the Howard government (Maddison and Hamilton, 2007). Disability advocacy was not exempt, and within its first term the Howard government implemented a review of the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) (FaCS, 1999). Although contentious, the review's findings (see Cooper, 2001) reflected the Howard government's ideology of individualism, as well as its belief in the family as the primary site of social support (Jakubowicz and Meekosha, 2002). Recommendations focused on increasing the representation of families while diminishing the collective involvement of disabled people within the policy process. A plethora of consumer representative bodies was subsequently reconstituted, disbanded or newly formed. For example, in 2003 a new government advisory board known as the National Family Carers' Voice was established (People with Disabilities, 2003), while in 2005, the Disability Advisory Council was disbanded. Established during the Hawke era, the body was replaced by a new carers' advisory council, dominated by the interests of families and carers. In effect, the direct views of disabled people were largely removed from disability policy debates, while families and service providers were given broad support for their agendas.

In its last two terms in office, the Howard government explored regulatory avenues to more fully disengage with community advocacy organisations (Maddison and Hamilton, 2007). It canvassed ideas such as taxation reform for organisations' charitable status, the curtailment of advocacy through funding agreements and new contractual relationships which required disability advocacy organisations to report any forthcoming media coverage of government initiatives (Mendes, 2009). Funding for systemic advocacy was substantially reconfigured to focus on individual delivery alone. The NDAP was again reviewed (Women with Disabilities Australia, 2006) and the recommendations proposed radical reforms, encapsulating prominent neoliberal positionings against collective advocacy. At the time that the Howard government was voted out of office, the relevant department was exploring a range of implementation strategies to address the review's recommendations, including the removal of ongoing funding, the introduction of annual competitive tendering in a fully open market and the rendering of individual advocacy only permissible. Contradictorily, under the Howard government, Australia simultaneously became one of the first countries to sign the newly formed United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2009).

Reorganising the welfare–labour-market nexus: employment and social security reforms

For the Howard government, the key priority in terms of disability policy was embedded in the broader agenda of welfare reform (Reference Group for Welfare Reform, 2000).

While a significant number of commentators, including Carney (2006), have focused on the key legislative changes that radically reshaped the DSP eligibility criteria from July 2006, the re-regulation of the welfare–labour-market nexus was highly dependent on restructuring disability employment support. The government's intention for such reform was first articulated by the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Newman, in a 1999 speech at the National Press Club, in which she distinguished between two classes of citizens with disabilities – those who could not work at all and required ongoing access to government-funded disability pensions, and those who could participate in a rapidly expanding part-time labour market (see also Newman, 1999). In short, the premise was that funding for employment supports and participation would be targeted to the 'most able of the disabled' (Evans, 1989: 242), while simultaneously restricting access only to people with high support needs.

Over a four-year period, the Howard government worked to progress its radical agenda for disabled people through parliament (see Department of the Parliamentary Library, 2001, 2002, 2003). At the same time, it refused to implement the findings of the Productivity Commission's (2004) review of the Disability Discrimination Act *1992*, which recommended strengthening the anti-discrimination measures in the area of employment (Australian Government, 2005a). It was not until it had gained control of the Senate that its ambitions were realised (Department of the Parliamentary Library, 2005). Within days of the government regaining office in October 2004, the disability employment program was split across two departments. Responsibility for disability open employment services and the DSP was moved to the central administrative arm responsible for the Howard government's planned industrial relations reforms – the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). Further, as part of the 2005/06 Budget, the Treasurer announced a major restructure of the DSP, cutting the key eligibility criterion in half – from a thirty-hour work test to a fifteen-hour work test (Australian Government, 2005b). From July 2006, new entrants to the DSP were required to engage in mutual obligation activity similar to the Howard government's 'work for the dole' program.

The legislative changes to the DSP passed through parliament within 24 hours of the Howard government's controversial Work Choices Act 2005 (Cth), effectively re-regulating the welfare–labour-market nexus. Even though disability advocacy organisations across the country developed extensive community awareness campaigns to lobby against the changes (Disability Participation Alliance, 2005), there were few gains (Mendes, 2008). Promises to protect existing DSP recipients prior to the July 2006 implementation were not fulfilled in practice. All disabled people in receipt of the old DSP who volunteered for work underwent a new assessment in line with the redeveloped DSP eligibility criteria and were subject to the legislative requirements of mutual obligation (ACROD, 2007). Thus, despite the efforts of disability advocacy groups around the country, little was gained from these campaigns and a new world of disability supports awaited them (Soldatic and Pini, 2009). In the final year of the Howard administration, Australians with disabilities, carers and the large network of disability service providers actively expressed their concerns about the growing inequities and disparities emerging across Australia, with Labor Party parliamentarians instigating and convening the Senate Inquiry into the primary government funding and coordination mechanism for the provision of disability services and supports across Australia (Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, 2007).

Real, symbolic or imagined? New directions under Rudd

Prior to its election, the Rudd Labor Party released an extensive disability and carers' policy which focused on social and economic participation and support for disabled people and carers, new forms of inter-government agreements in the area of service provision and the development of an overarching national governing strategy for disability services – The National Disability Strategy (Australian Labor Party, 2007). Using the findings emerging from the Senate Inquiry into the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement (Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, 2007), the election platform suggested transforming the disability service system that had emerged in the later years of the Howard government and the dearth of available supports that resulted. Since the 2007 election, there have been some symbolic as well as material changes in the disability policy field which could be read as gains and losses for the disability community.

For example, in July 2008 the Australian government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), but simultaneously downgraded the disability portfolio from ministerial level to that of a parliamentary secretary. The architecture of the policy arena for disability has also been affected at a federal level by the establishment of a Social Inclusion Agenda and related Unit within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, with a key priority of the agenda focusing on the labour-market participation of disabled people. In the following sections, we revisit the two key areas of disability policy reform under the Howard leadership, and outline the extent to which there have been changes or continuities in these fields since the election of the Rudd government. Following this, we turn to a potentially new development in disability policy under the Labor government, that is the introduction of a disability insurance scheme.

Public consultation, policy representation and community advocacy

The Rudd government's Social Inclusion Agenda has placed a heavy emphasis on inclusion, participation and public consultation, noting that 'the capacity to influence decision-makers on issues of community importance' is a central marker of such inclusion (Frawley and Digby, 2009: 1). Hence, it is not surprising that the re-activation of disability advocacy organisations across the nation has been central to the disability policy process since Rudd's election. One of the Rudd government's first actions on taking office was to withdraw the tight media controls imposed upon community advocacy services installed during the Howard years of government (Macklin, 2008). Further, within its first two years of office, the Rudd government allocated an additional $500,000 for the expansion of disability advocacy service provision across Australia (Australian Government, 2008b).

These efforts cohere with Parliamentary Secretary for Disability, Bill Shorten's (2009) public rhetoric of empowerment, human rights and participation. Claims such as 'disability is the last frontier of practical civil rights' (Shorten, 2009) suggest that the Rudd government constructs disability in a significantly different way from its predecessor, and signals that disabled people may enjoy a different relationship with government under Labor. This has already been evidenced by the plethora of consultation initiatives, involving disabled people, which have been instigated to examine issues such as disability exemptions under the Immigration Act 1957, the development of a new disability and the arts program to promote the active engagement of people with disability in Australian

cultural life (National Arts and Disability Strategy Working Group of Australia's Cultural Ministers Council, 2008), and the re-development of disability employment and labour-market inclusion strategies (Australian Government, 2008a).

Disabled people have also been brought into the public realm of federal policy-making by the Rudd government via the newly formed National People with Disabilities and Carers Council. One of the first tasks of the council was the commissioning of a report to investigate the daily experience of discrimination, exclusion and material deprivation (National People with Disabilities and Carers Council (NPDCC), 2009). The resultant report, *Shut Out*, was commissioned as part of the Rudd government's election platform to develop a National Disability Strategy. The strategy aims to provide an overarching governing framework for the design, development and delivery of disability services across all jurisdictions within Australia. The title *Shut Out* highlights its key theme; that is, while the majority of Australians with a disability may no longer be 'shut in' within large institutional settings, they remain 'shut out' from public life as a result of ongoing exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation. The report has received extensive media coverage and broad support from the Australian disability community, building momentum that disability groups can harness to redefine and reimagine the Australian disability landscape. While the government has supported the report (Australian Government, 2009e), its findings are a direct challenge to the current government-funded disability service system as it suggests new funding mechanisms and service delivery models.

Welfare reform, disability and labour-market participation

There has always been a level of ambiguity surrounding the Rudd government's position on the Coalition's welfare-to-work reforms. During the election process, Rudd (2007) did not question the extensive changes to the DSP eligibility, but merely identified 'short-term training programs' as the 'missing element' within the Howard government's welfare-to-work reforms. Since taking office, the Labor Party has not attempted to modify these reforms. Indeed, the Rudd government's stated support for the findings of the *Pension Review Report* (Hamer, 2009), which gives primacy to active labour-market participation over notions of human rights or social justice, suggests that such modifications may not be imminent. The government's limited response to the review's recommendations for people receiving a DSP was merely to increase allocations to current recipients (Australian Government, 2009c). No changes to the key eligibility criterion altered under the Howard government – the fifteen-hour work test – nor were unwinding the mutual obligation requirements for many disabled people forthcoming.

In a similar respect, an analysis of the Social Inclusion Strategy reveals it is narrowly focused on unemployment as the primary criterion of social exclusion, with minimal recognition for broader issues of structural disadvantage (see Levitas, 1998). In terms of disability, the strategy has resulted in a review of the disability employment support services (Australian Government, 2008a), the re-branding of sheltered workshops as social enterprises (Shorten, 2009) and new approaches to increase the participation of disabled people within the open labour market (Australian Government, 2009a). Support for disabled people emerging from this agenda reflects the Prime Minister's pre-election comments outlined above targeting training investment and employment

supports. Injecting over $1.2 billion into disability employment supports for the next five years (Australian Government, 2009b), the new initiatives aim to unpack the expansive and complex funding practices of non-government services implemented during the Howard era. The investment, however, is highly targeted, seeking mostly to capture disabled people who no longer qualify for a DSP due to the diminished fifteen-hour work test. In line with the Third Way neoliberal welfare-to-work initiatives that arose during the Blair government, the Rudd government has also strengthened the anti-discrimination measures within the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. While contested by some parts of industry as a means of redress (see Shorten, 2009), these changes echo the Productivity Commission's (2004) recommendations, and have been applauded by the Australian disability community (Women With Disabilities Australia, 2009). Overall, the central aim of these legislative reforms is to strengthen market participation and support the Rudd government's social inclusion agenda of moving people off welfare and into work. The primary point of differentiation between the Howard welfare-to-work reforms and those of the Rudd government is the Rudd government's increased focus on training and increased funding for disability employment supports. However, the two new distinct categories of disability that divided out the disability population during the Howard era have remained, and the Rudd government's disability employment investment, while extensive, has directly targeted the most 'able of the disabled', thus further entrenching narrow notions of social participation to the economic realm.

Disability Social Insurance: the next big idea?

The establishment of a no-fault disability insurance scheme has been mooted as one of the 'big ideas' to emerge from the 2020 Summit (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2008), and has since received support from the Prime Minister (Rudd, 2009), large interest groups (see Australian Medical Association, 2009) and the Australian disability advocacy and services sector (see National Disability Insurance Scheme, 2009). As Steketee (2009) suggests, the idea of a no-fault insurance scheme to cover the ongoing additional support costs of living with a disability was first considered during the Whitlam era, but did not make it through parliament due to the political upheaval at the time. Many within the disability community, however, now view this as the principal way forward for the disability service sector (Baker, 2009), with some even suggesting that there really is no other alternative as the current system is unsustainable, inequitable and in crisis (Bonyhady, 2008). The primary difference the espoused National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) proposals seek to establish is access to disability support services as a social entitlement. By way of contrast, the current system is based on eligibility criteria, which vary across jurisdictions. To date, details of the scheme have been sketchy, but proposals put forward resemble Australia's Medicare system whereby all Australians would contribute through the taxation system (NDIS, 2009). Dr Rhonda Galbally, Chair of the National People with Disabilities and Carers Council and primary advocate of the *Shut Out* report, has argued that given that the disability support system already costs over $6 billion annually, an insurance scheme, although seemingly radical, should be viewed in the same light as the changes to superannuation in the late 1980s, when it was realised that the ongoing costs of the aged pension were largely unaffordable from centralised budgetary government allocations (Galbally, 2009). Nationally, momentum has grown.

A national petition supporting an insurance scheme has been established on the NDIS website and has, to date, elicited over 1,000 signatories, along with a flurry of media interest (for example, Corrigan, 2009; Horin, 2009). Questions still remain, however, regarding the criteria for access, the level of supports to be provided, and the areas to be included as entitlements. As critic Erik Leipoldt (2009) has noted, debate has focused on how to supply more of what is currently available rather than on re-designing the system. For example, there has been no discussion of how services could be reconstructed so that greater democratic control is given to disabled people to enable them to become active citizens controlling, directing and designing the supports that are a necessary part of real social processes of inclusion, rather than simply being recipients of care.

Conclusion

The overview of disability policy in Australia presented in this article reveals that there have been some important and positive changes under the Rudd government, particularly in terms of consultation and advocacy. While these illustrations may be dismissed as part of the 'cult of collaboration' that has emerged with the neoliberal turn in public sector management (O'Flynn, 2009), the positive implications of inclusion in policy-making should not be underestimated. At the same time, the Labor administration's rhetoric about citizenship, participation and inclusion for disabled people is largely premised on their active engagement in the labour market. Moreover, similarly to UK social inclusion developments, it is only those individuals with extremely high support needs who are entitled to state support as a right of citizenship (see Ramon, 2008: 118). This is consistent with the neoliberal ideology which underpinned the Howard government's significant and controversial transformation of disability policy. It is also emblematic of a construction of the disabled citizen which obscures or elides recognition of longstanding discriminatory barriers to equal opportunity. Thus, there are clear consistencies between the Howard and Rudd governments in terms of their configurations of 'disabled people' and 'the State' which suggest an alignment of policy nomenclature and foci in the area of disability and greater potential for continuity rather than any substantial change.

Since Julia Gillard assumed the Australian prime ministership from Rudd in June 2010, disability policy has continued to reflect both instances of change and continuity. In terms of the former, for example, Gillard announced in January 2011 that, for the first time since 1997, the joint role of Race/Disability Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission would be separated. The establishment of a singular Disability Commissioner is both symbolically and materially important for disability policy development nationally. At the same time, Gillard has announced that the disability support system is currently being examined in light of Labor government reviews of the pension (Hamer, 2009) and tax (Henry 2010) systems in Australia (Anderson, 2011). Like that of the Howard and Rudd governments, the central concern has been the interface between the DSP and the labour market. An extensive review of the disability classification framework has been undertaken to further tighten eligibility for the DSP. Other disability supports have also been targeted with the principal aim of diminishing access (Bramble and Kuhn, 2010). Thus, early analysis suggests that the Gillard Labor government disability concerns are marked more by continuity rather than any substantive change.

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