

dynamics of democratization. Its identification of the role of professional reform movements seems likely to inspire further investigations of this phenomenon in other cases and contexts, and may well stand as a germinal contribution.

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Frances Ryan (2019), *Crippled: the Austerity Crisis and the Demonization of Disabled People*, London: Verso, £14.99, pp. 240, pbk.  
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It may seem as though it was a lifetime ago, but the 2012 Welfare Reform Act in the United Kingdom set out a complete restructuring of the British welfare and social security system under austerity, alongside vast cuts to budgets for social care, and other services that many disabled people rely upon. Frances Ryan's new book documents (with numerous harrowing case studies, statistics, and reports) the impact that austerity, and resulting changes to social policy, has had on disabled people.

Throughout, readers are taken through issues ranging from housing, poverty, work and independence (not an exhaustive list) – each with its own chapter. The book focuses on the idea that disabled people have indeed been demonised under austerity, in numerous ways, to allow for the justification of austerity cuts. Here Ryan explores the devastating impact this has had on disabled people's lives. The work is reminiscent of Deborah Stone's text, *The Disabled State* (1984) where Ryan draws upon how powerful government rhetoric is, and how disabled people are subsequently categorised and treated by the state's welfare system, and are then thrust into deeper poverty. This assessment of how disabled people are categorised, and the impact that changes to welfare can have on impoverished groups, is highly significant. Standing on the shoulders of giants, it builds on what Stone asserted some 35 years ago, thus making a very valuable and much needed contribution to disability studies.

Returning to the book's contents, Ryan describes the crucial role that the media plays in the perception of disabled people claiming welfare. The Right uses these perceptions as justification to overhaul the welfare system, depriving people of fulfilling basic needs. According to one study discussed by Ryan, 650,000 people with a long-term condition live in destitution: a level of poverty so severe that they cannot meet their basic needs (p. 20). On the global stage, the U.K has become the first state to be investigated for breaking the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRPD) where they found 'Grave and systematic' human rights abuses under austerity (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2017).

A general theme attained throughout is the excellent link between this political rhetoric and how disabled people's everyday lives are impacted. The case studies Ryan uses to illustrate the data put disabled people as the central focus: they put a human face on the crisis, that everyone can understand and relate to in this austerity climate. As a result, the discussion in this book is very timely and desperately needed. For several years, disabled people have been protesting that their lives under austerity hark back to a Victorian era of destitution. Finally, Ryan's text effectively compiles years and years of research and evidence that this is the case.

Exploring some of the people's stories in the text, Bessie is 51 and has to wash her clothing by hand, because her washing machine has broken down, and she is unable to pay to fix it. When Ryan visits her a couple of years later, she has had to ration her heating and lighting to around £4 a week. She should have specialist meals, but the loss of her lifetime DLA award means she cannot afford it. Another person, Susan, could not afford heating, and went to bed with her dog at 7pm for warmth. She has lost 4 kilos in 5 years, because she requires a specialist diet, but cannot afford it. She eats porridge instead. In Ryan's book, the intertwining of harrowing case studies works superbly to add a very human element to what can sometimes feel like empty theorisation in studies on welfare, social policy and austerity. Ryan's book delivers a grim and astute critique of disabled people's lives in austerity Britain.

One minor criticism is that very little of the book explores the fact that some changes to welfare policy, such as the work capability assessment (WCA), were implemented under the previous Labour government, and that extra cost benefits like Disability Living Allowance (DLA) were implemented under a Conservative government. However, Ryan does counteract this by rejecting a common issue with previous literature. This issue is the assertion that disabled people in the U.K have had a previously positive and progressive relationship with the government, and within social policy.

Additionally, the striking chapter on children also deserves to be highlighted, with the backdrop of the U.K SEND crisis protests, about better funding for disabled children's education, whilst also making it more inclusive, and would be of particular interest to anyone in that area. This too was raised as an issue in the U.N. report, and, once again, Ryan expertly blends case studies and statements from families with disabled children, about their experiences of the education system currently in place. In all chapters, it becomes apparent that disabled people, under austerity, are marginalised and seen as a problem, a drain on the public purse. The social cost is one where disabled people are totally dehumanised (p. 192).

The implications for this text, for scholars interested in the impact of austerity policy, disability studies, and perhaps extending to policy makers themselves, is that Ryan's text makes for compulsory reading. The detailed account Ryan provides, of how austerity policies have impacted disabled people, is clear cut. It provides a comprehensive insight into a world where disabled people are suffering, and left to a cruel and uncertain future, whilst austerity policies continue to hit some of society's most impoverished people the hardest. What this book achieves is a comprehensive synthesis and criticism of disabled people's hardship under austerity: 'it is a product of a society that, despite its protestations, has not come to grips with disability' (p. 10).

## References

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