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Book review: Options for Britain II: Cross Cutting Policy Issues - Changes and Challenges - Edited by Varun Uberoi, Adam Coutts, David Halpern and Iain McLean

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Varun Uberoi, Adam Coutts, David Halpern & Iain McLean (eds) (2010) *Options for Britain II: Cross Cutting Policy Issues - Changes and Challenges*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. 206pp, £17.99, 978 1 4443 3395 4

Andrew Scott Crines

The problems facing an analysis of social policy in Britain today is the ever changing political circumstances bedazzling social actors. The lack of stability creates a sense of perpetual flux that challenges books of this nature.

This book is a an extension of an earlier assessment of the Conservative period of governance conducted in 1993. As with the approach of the original volume, this book applies the same broad structure to the New Labour period, evaluating a wide range of social policy issues and determining their success or failure.

This evaluation enables conclusions regarding policy success or failure to emerge, and also goes forward to pose recommendations for future policies based on the economic conditions at the time of writing. This, sadly, poses this well researched book with an unenviable problem given the rapid changes to the global and national UK economy since those recommendations were determined. For example, the assessment of NHS policy assumes a continuation of finance on the final New Labour budget, which makes its recommendations for future policy redundant given the recent coalition Spending Review and austerity realities facing the nation. Indeed, the NHS is facing challenges which this book could not have anticipated, making its recommendations potentially redundant. This is not to detract from the valuable analysis of New Labour social policy, but the ability of the book to pose meaningful projections for future social policy becomes limited. Indeed, many of the assumptions assumed a mono-party electoral result and did not consider a non-single party outcome from the General Election, which challenges those projections.

The areas covered in the book will be of significant value to those interested social policy, and British politics more generally. Specific areas covered include social justice, tax policy, the state and gender, amongst others. It will be of particular interest to scholars of New Labour, given the focus they garner from this work from a non-partisan analytical approach.

It is likely that a second edition of this book would be of value, with a postscript contextualising the coalition's journey of travel. Yet, given the ongoing shifts in the implementation of social policy, it may still suffer from the same problem; that of dating at an accelerated rate when compared with similar books historically. It would not be unreasonable to also expect an *Options for Britain III* at a swifter pace rather than the eighteen years between the first and subsequent volumes.

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