So private charity does step in when the State moves out [1]

Written by **Tim Worstall** [2] | Saturday 1 June 2013

I thought this was a very interesting little story [3]:

> Massive cuts to social safety nets have led to "destitution, hardship and hunger on a large scale" in Britain, with more than half a million people now forced to rely on food banks for sustenance, key poverty charities have warned in a report.
>
> Welfare changes and mistakes by Jobcentre Plus staff are causing delays in benefits and errors or sanctions, which push vulnerable people into precarious situations, the report from Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam warns.
>
> The charities want an urgent parliamentary inquiry. "The shocking reality is that hundreds of thousands of people in the UK are turning to food aid," said Mark Goldring, Oxfam's chief executive. "Cuts to social safety nets have gone too far, leading to destitution, hardship and hunger on a large scale. It is unacceptable that this is happening in the seventh wealthiest nation on the planet."

A number of reactions are possible: the one that they hope to engender is that we must spend more through the State to alleviate such problems. Although it has to be said that that's not terribly persuasive as they're blaming screw ups by that very State for a goodly portion of the problems.

We could also agree (as I certainly do) that in a country as rich, both compared to history and to the current globe, it is ridiculous that people, absent mental or drugs problems, are going hungry. There is indeed enough wealth around to make sure this does not happen.

The really interesting line though is this:

> Food banks may not have the capacity to cope with the increased level of demand.

From which we can deduce that food banks are currently coping. Which leads us to an extremely interesting conclusion.

One of the major screaming matches in this whole "whadda we do about the poor and or incapable?" is that one group tells us that only the State can possibly take responsibility and thus we'd all better cough up our taxes and do as we're told. We also have those who insist that without the State exactions we human beans are empathetic enough that we'll, purely charitably, provide what we think those poor and or incapable need. Now look at what the argument being put forward here is:

> As the State withdraws from providing some things to the poor and or incapable food banks, those purely voluntary organisations, are taking up the strain. This therefore proves that the State must provide all.

It's not an argument that works, is it? It's very much evidence for the other side of the shouting: that private charity is indeed, possibly only at times, a viable alternative to State provision. For you really cannot use

the growth of private provision as an argument that only State provision can work which is what is being tried on here.

No, I don't therefore conclude that therefore there should be no State provision. Only that the existence, the recent growth in, food banks show that the alleviation of poverty, hunger, is not something that is necessarily entirely a State competence. For we've actual evidence that as the State retreats that charity does indeed move in.

blog comments powered by Disqus [5]

Source URL: http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/welfare-pensions/so-private-charity-does-step-in-when-the-state-moves-out

Links:
[1] http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/welfare-pensions/so-private-charity-does-step-in-when-the-state-moves-out
[2] http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5778
[3] http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2013/may/30/food-banks-oxfam-parliamentary-inquiry
[4] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript
[5] http://disqus.com