8 Delivering Social Inclusion

How far will Labour succeed in delivering social inclusion? Blair would prefer this question deferred for ten years, but at least a provisional assessment will be needed before the election in 2001 or 2002. As the policies are put in place, it is possible to ask what kind of inclusion Labour seeks to deliver, what the criteria of success would be, and how likely it is that the policies will achieve this. None of the discourses has a well-developed set of indicators of social exclusion, partly because the centrality of the term in British politics is so new – and partly because to clarify the definition would undermine the very flexibility of the concept which makes it politically useful. Because the meaning and imputed causes of exclusion differ in RED, SID and MUD, so too will some of the indicators of success in producing greater inclusion. The prospects for inclusion depend on which discourse you are situated in. Both provisional and later assessments can be made in Labour’s own terms, and against other understandings of social exclusion and other criteria. Success in combating exclusion will be as contested as the concept itself. The most obvious critical yardsticks are those implied by RED, and the main part of this chapter considers the prospects for welfare to work and the Social Exclusion Unit from the different standpoints of RED, SID and MUD. Questions are also raised about the nature of the ‘social’ in social inclusion, and about unpaid work, transport, participation in common institutions and political inclusion – and the contradictions and tensions between aspects of inclusion.

WELFARE TO WORK: THE VIEW FROM SID

There are aspects of both welfare to work and the remit of the Social Exclusion Unit which are consistent with RED, SID and MUD. The welfare to work programme has widespread support. For RED, involuntary unemployment is one important cause of poverty; for SID, work in itself delivers inclusion; for MUD, work is a moral necessity to counter dependence. In the broadest sense, all would interpret the programme as successful if it: reduces the number of people dependent on benefit; moves the people concerned into socially useful paid employment which delivers self-esteem, social relationships and a
reasonable standard of living; provides high quality, affordable care for their children; reduces poverty; reduces social security spending, thus releasing more money to be spent on health and education; and does so without coercion. Pigs might fly. The difference between the discourses lies in the priority given to these various aims.

From the perspective of SID, the most important indicators of success would be a rise in labour force participation rates, especially for the target groups of young people, lone parents and people with disabilities; and a drop in the number of workless households among those of working age. Falling registered unemployment is not an adequate measure of the success of the New Deal, since it excludes those forced off the register and a range of people deemed economically inactive. In 1997, the unemployment figures fell sharply, and there were no longer 250,000 young people eligible for the New Deal, but roughly half that number. This was partly due to the effect on the count of the Jobseeker's Allowance, but also to a real drop in youth unemployment. Falling registered unemployment was forecast for 1998 as the New Deal came into effect. The test of rising participation rates avoids the measurement problems associated with unemployment, but it is complicated by how far any change can be attributed to the welfare to work programme itself. Evaluating changes against a background of changing economic conditions is not so easy.

There is a further complication to relying on unemployment rates as an indicator of exclusion. Unemployment rates are higher in France and Germany, and Labour, like the Conservatives, attributes Britain's lower recorded unemployment – and that in the USA – to the greater flexibility of the economy. But the USA has a much higher proportion of its male population in prison. If incarceration rates and unemployment rates are taken together, the difference between Europe and the United States lies principally in the proportion of young (predominantly black) men in jail. While levels of imprisonment in Britain are not comparable with those in the US, they are high by European Standards. This has implications for benefit budgets. The proportion of GDP spent on social security in the UK, as in the USA, is relatively low compared to France and Germany, but the costs of social security payments for the unemployed must be balanced against the greater costs of incarceration. While unemployment is the key form of social exclusion for SID, the greater social exclusion of imprisonment is neglected.

Rising participation rates are more important to SID than the numbers passing through the programmes who find some form of