


There are 13 million disabled people in Britain. If we don't vote together, the DWP will tighten the screws on us

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James Moore 4/19/2017

Scope, the charity for disabled people, tweeted an [interesting](#) number when the general election was announced. There are, it said, 13 million disabled people in Britain. Some 89 per cent have said they will vote.

The reason that number is worth paying attention to is that if the 89 per cent are true to their word, and if they use their franchise to hold the Government to account for its [brutal](#) treatment of disabled people, it might just spell trouble for Theresa May's dreams of a three-figure majority.

Now, let me make one thing clear at the outset. I'm not about to say who you should vote for. Journalists too often do that. I would simply invite you to consider the Government's [record](#) when it comes to disability.

DWP asked disability benefit claimant why she had not killed herself

If I were to take on the role of prosecuting ministers over that, I would struggle to find somewhere to start. So long would be the charge sheet be that it would take a couple of days' court time just to read it all out. As I'm writing a column, not a novel, I'll simply draw your attention to just a few of the lowlights.

Take the Personal Independence Payment. The replacement for Disability Living Allowance was sold not as a means of imposing a cut, but as a way to get more money into the hands of the most disabled.



Then it turned out that those who have been left disabled through mental health conditions don't count. After an appeals tribunal made some pointed comments about the way the rules had been written, they were changed to exclude them at a time when May was telling us how seriously she took the subject.

Talking of those tribunals, just last month I [revealed](#) that they are being swamped with more than 50,000 appeals logged against decisions made by the Department for Work and Pensions between October and December last year. Nearly two-thirds of them are being upheld.

Disability cuts: People with mental health problems left behind as benefit changes take effect, by [admin](#)

Just last week the Press Association revealed that Capita and Atos, the profit-driven companies that carry out assessments used by the DWP to make its decisions, are set to be paid more than £700m for their five-year contracts against an original estimate of £512m. Talk about rewards for failure.

The process of applying is miserable, dehumanising and humiliating. Decisions are frequently perverse. A friend of mine with spina bifida was, for example, turned down. My friend can't walk at all. The decision was overturned on appeal, but the fact that it even got that far tells you all you need to know about the process.

Then there is the Employment and Support Allowance, paid to people who have conditions that are sufficiently severe to impact their ability to work. The DWP's plans to cut it as a means of "motivating" claimants to find work were savaged by the all party Work & Pensions Select Committee, which rightly pointed out that the cut was more likely to do the reverse by denying them the means to obtain equipment they might need to support themselves in employment.

The Government's workplace assessments seem to produce stories of terminal cancer or heart patients told to get down to their Job Centre Plus every few months.

Want more? How about the Government's promise to halve the disability employment gap by 2020. A manifesto commitment, it was quietly dropped when it had become very obvious that there was scant chance of it being achieved, not least because ministers didn't much fancy the idea of, you know, actually doing something about it.

Ministers for disability come and go through a revolving door. While in post, they pretend they care about issues such as access, or getting disabled people into work. They put their names to statements claiming Britain is a world leader, even though no less than the United Nations has said it is anything but. Then it's on to something else. Wait a minute, is that a photographer? Grab the guy in the wheelchair and let's get a pic of me smiling with him on my way out!

7 ways the Tories have 'helped' disabled people

Under this Government, disabled people are either paralympic saints, there to provide inspiration porn and yet more of those smiley photo ops, or they are burdens on the state who should just stay out of the way. Or they're not really disabled at all.

May has a habit of claiming she speaks for the country. If she follows that practice, she will interpret a victory as a mandate to do what she pleases and the thugs her Government employs at the Department for Work and Pensions will follow her lead. There are no rational arguments in favour of the policy programme they have overseen, and it is regularly roundly criticised by just about anyone with a voice. But that won't matter. It hasn't up until now.

The 13 million have a chance to change that narrative, if they are willing to say that enough is enough.

All parties employ psephologists to tell them who does what during elections, and to help them to tailor their policies. If they latch on to the fact that disabled people are starting to use their votes to push back against the treatment they are receiving, and if it starts to have an impact on results, then politicians will start to wake up.

Ministers need to be taught that there is a price to be paid for the way they have behaved. A sufficiently high vote against the brutal treatment meted out to people with disabilities by the Government could at the very least deny Theresa May the landslide she is hoping for. It might even force her to open up her eyes.

Her Government, and the previous governments of which she was an important part, have done what they have done because they have been allowed to. People with disabilities, and their families, and their friends, now have the power to say that they will no longer accept such disgraceful treatment.

It will be years before this opportunity comes around again. Now is the time to seize on it.