

Review in the Morning Star by John Green

Injustice –why social inequality persists By Daniel Dorling Policy Press Hdbck. £19.99

This book is a must read for all those looking for an evidence-based demolition of free-market capitalism. It is a fine complement to *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, by Wilkinson and Pickett. It is a combination of passion, compassion and astute factual argument.

Dorling, who is Professor of Human Geography at Sheffield University, argues that there are five tenets underpinning injustice in our society: elitism is efficient, exclusion is necessary, prejudice is natural, greed is good and despair inevitable. He amasses a whole gamut of compelling facts and statistics to make his case. These tenets were central to the Blairite agenda and Con-Dem agenda. Dorling provides us with one of the most incisive analysis of society's ills to be published for a long time.

He argues that in affluent countries 'social injustices are now being recreated, renewed and supported by new sets of beliefs which need confronting'. His central thesis is that inequalities in our society are more rampant than ever, despite our living in an era of labour saving technology, abundance and wealth. This fact, he says, demands a complete change in the thinking we all to some extent hold.

'Greater equality is easily possible,' he writes, 'even in the US. In 1951 the communist- hating soon-to-be consumer society and nuclear-powered USA taxed the rich at 51.6% on earnings.' Today the rate is between 10-30%, although Obama has recently undertaken a redistributive budget in an attempt to haul the country out of recession – only a year earlier an unimaginable step for a US government. Here in Britain, on the contrary, our government is doing the opposite.

Incredibly, 'in countries like Britain people last lived lives as unequal as today, measured by wage inequality, in 1854 when Charles Dickens was writing *Hard Times*,' he says. Inequality is plastered over by having more police to enforce state power, building more prisons and prescribing more drugs. Interestingly, too, the most unequal of rich countries were the most willing to go to war since 1939. That's another way of taking people's focus away from inequality and injustice at home.

Dorling, though, is adamant that injustice and inequality can be successfully fought, but it requires rethinking and concerted action by the supposedly powerless. Almost every time there has been a victory for humanity against greed, he writes, it has been the result of millions of small actions mostly undertaken by people not in government. 'Resistance has always been most effective when exercised by those taught that they were the most powerless.'

He is in no doubt that 'the human condition is fundamentally social and the modern preoccupation with individuality is really just a fantasy, a form of self-delusion.'

In conclusion, Dorling makes no attempt to offer facile solutions or utopian vistas, but says we can change this system if we all take some responsibility and don't leave it up to others. In other words those in power can only continue to hold and abuse that power because we let them. He also illustrates how easy it would be to redistribute wealth, given the will to do so.

In this book he combines his skills as a human geographer with a sound understanding of economics and sociology. He has an easy, informal, yet authoritative style – essential reading for everyone concerned with social justice. END 560 words John Green

*If you are interested in more musings by JG, you may wish to look at:
www.mappingutopia.co.uk*