Funding the Future

Milburn will fail because that is what his inquiry was ...

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The first half of this week is set to be dominated, politically, by Alan Milburn's review on NEETs, which is the acronym used to describe young people not in employment, education or training. There are now one million such young people under the age of 25, and the government is obsessed with what to do about them because of its desperate desire to cut what it calls the welfare budget, which should properly be described as social security.

Starmer was so keen on achieving this goal that more than a year ago he asked former Labour Health Secretary Alan Milburn to undertake a review and make recommendations as to what to do.

There are a number of fundamental points to bear in mind when considering what Milburn is likely to say.

Firstly, he was tasked with cutting costs to the government. We can be certain, as a consequence, that he will be offering significantly reduced financial support for young people in need.

Secondly, he is a neoliberal to his core, and a protégé of Blair, and both characteristics probably had a significant influence on his appointment to this role. Since we know that neoliberals believe that it is the task of markets to solve problems because, they assume, government is incapable, nothing that we should expect from this report will be about solving the problems that young people face, most of which will have been created by the demands of increasingly standardised employment processes which those with disabilities and neurocomplex needs are unable to fulfil.

Thirdly, expect that the money that will be taken from young people with needs will be given to businesses so that they might, supposedly, create all the jobs that the government demands, without any performance criteria probably being attached to the requirement that they do so. A massive bung will, therefore, be heading in the direction of bigger businesses, to be paid for by young people who are amongst the most vulnerable people in our society.

Fourthly, as is always the case with neoliberal thinking when it comes to the interaction between the government and the business community, expect the whole thing to be based upon some berating of prior government decisions, some changes to supposed incentives, and the vain hope that, as a consequence, markets will respond optimally, and return to a state of what Milburn will describe as equilibrium, and the employment problem will go away. In other words, the assumption underpinning this report will be that government action has taken the employment market out of its optimal position, and if only we could remove the impact of those government actions, all will be well again.

Fifthly, really do not believe a word that will be said. Like a whole generation of ministers who served under Blair and Brown, Milburn has never acted in the best interests of anyone but business, and that is what will be happening here. Young people will be offered some token gestures of financial support, which are less than those that they enjoyed before, the presumption being that they have someone else to look after them based on belief in the neoliberal idealised family life, and not a hint of systemic change to reflect the real needs of young people in the workplace will be expected or demanded, meaning that the inquiry that was meant to address this problem will not change anything.

This, I suspect, is all that you will need to know about the Milburn report. Milburn will fail because that is what his inquiry was set up to do