Talking therapies: good for people and politics?

May 2011

Professor Dennis Hayes and Dr Kenneth McLaughlin will challenge the Con-Dem government's campaign to broaden access to talking therapies.

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg recently announced **£400m of government funding** to be put into ***talking therapies***, designed to re-train the mind to think more positively. Putting aside discussions about this money being re-routed from other NHS budgets which are facing big cuts themselves, there is a problematic trend that increasingly presents economic or political problems as medical and personal ones. By ***exaggerating*** the ***relatively small number of mental illness cases*** that require specialised intervention, to say that the incidence of mental ill health affects about ***one in four people***, more resources are sought but does it necessarily follow that an increase in therapeutic interventions is a universal good?

Professor Dennis Hayes will question why an army of professionals including teachers, social

and community workers, trade unionists, charity workers, politicians and even police officers have given up their jobs and turned into incompetent therapists who are
manipulating
the
emotional lives
of children and young adults. With a particular focus on the educational sphere, he will question what we are doing to children and young people, with teachers seemingly failing to educate them or offer material support, instead
creating a new generation of hapless and hopeless individuals
who can't cope. Dennis will argue that today's therapeutic professionals should change their ways and stop playing with kids' emotional lives.

Dr Ken McLaughlin, senior lecturer in social work at Manchester Metropolitan University, will outline his view that guidance to improve the nation's mental health, categorising us as
evermore vulnerable
and/or mentally disordered, is premised on the assumption that
we are all victims on the edge of breakdown
. Ken will argue that this trend invites professional authority to diagnose our problems and guide us in achieving their resolution. Further, he believes that this process undermines our ability to identify and overcome personal and societal problems on our own terms, and that attempts to broaden out therapeutic intervention to evermore sections of society does little to help those who are in need of professional help.

Nick Clegg describes his commonly held view that "***everyone knows someone*** who has had to deal with anxiety, depression, eating disorders or other problems. They are so often overlooked and ignored because there is a stigma attached to them compared to physical health problems. What I would like is that stigma removed".
Mind
, the mental health charity, explains on its website that there is a great deal of controversy about what mental health is, what causes it, and how people can be helped to recover.

This Salon discussion will attempt to identify and confront the trend in politics, of generalising therapeutic intervention well beyond the scope recently seen as appropriate, and often seen as ***supportive***
. If you are a teacher or professional working with young people, or interested in the future direction of contested politics, come along and see if Dennis and Ken's arguments ring true. If they don't, explain to them how they have got it so wrong!

Listen again (not miked so variable quality)...

Speakers' introductions - click on the Play button: {mp3}speakers-therapy-intros{/mp3}

** Apologies, but the recorder stopped recording before the end of Dennis' introduction. It was suggested by some that such a discussion should not be recorded along the lines of therapeutic sessions. That reflects a degraded view of what public discussion should be today and is certainly not the reason for the recording not being available. Thankfully the discussion did make clear that the Manchester Salon is not the place for a therapy session, but one for critical and robust debate. **

Background readings

Talking Therapies , from mental health foundation website

The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education by Kathryn Ecclestone and Dennis Hayes,

published by Routledge June 2008

Social Work, Politics and Society: From Radicalism to Orthodoxy by Kenneth McLaughlin, published by Policy Press July 2008

No health without mental health , Department of Health YouTube video ft. Paul Burstow 01 February 2011

Nick Clegg and Paul Burstow unveil new mental health strategy , Steve Middleton's Liberal comment from Salford, 03 February 2011

The future of mental health care in austerity Britain , Kate Belgrave, Guardian, Comment is Free, 26 April 2011

Gordos (Fat People) , reviewed by John Hutchinson, Manchester Salon April 2011

Following the discussion, speaker Dr Ken McLaughlin wrote an article ' The unhelpful myth that we're all a bit mad '
published in spiked online 13 June 2011.