

THE
EQUALITY
EFFECT

Improving life for everyone

Danny Dorling is a Professor of Human Geography at the University of Oxford. He has also worked in Sheffield, Newcastle, Bristol, Leeds and New Zealand/Aotearoa. He grew up in Oxford and went to university in Newcastle upon Tyne. He has published over 40 books including many atlases and: *Population Ten Billion* (2013); *All That is Solid* and *Inequality and the 1%* (2014); *Injustice: Why social inequalities still persist* (2015); and *A Better Politics: How government can make us happier* (2016).

The Equality Effect was written with the help of a great many people. It grew out of a much shorter book: *The No-nonsense Guide to Equality* which was published by New Internationalist five years ago. This fully updated and greatly extended version is kindly illustrated by the cartoons of Ella Furness. Ian Nixon carefully redrew all the figures. Andrew Kokotka designed the cover. Anna Barford, Noel Castree, Theresa Hayter, Aniko Horvath, Bob Hughes, Sebastian Kraemer, Carl Lee, Brian Martin, Avner Offer, Chris Philo, Simon Reid-Henry and Sally Tomlinson all either made comments on various drafts and/or on the concept of this book; I am grateful to all of them. David Gordon, Tina Gotthardt, Ben Hennig, Tom Mills, Kate Pickett, Nigel Waters and Richard Wilkinson helped with advice and comments. Alison and David Dorling both helped to iron out the English, the argument and the structure, and David valiantly fact-checked and grammar-checked it all again and again, suggesting many more new additions. Dan Raymond-Barker is marketing the book and agreed its full-length format given how much more we now know and can include than we knew just five years ago about equality. Finally, this book would not exist without its editor, Chris Brazier, who helped me plan the book from the outset, improved the text and co-ordinated its production. Even something as small as a book cannot be created without a great many people contributing to the joint endeavour. Human beings have always worked best in groups. Groups work best through the equality effect.

To those who desire more

THE EQUALITY EFFECT

Improving life for everyone

DANNY DORLING

Illustrations by
Ella Furness

Foreword by
Owen Jones

The Equality Effect **Improving life for everyone**

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Foreword by Owen Jones

For too long – outside the circles of the political left – ‘equality’ has often been seen as an abstraction, a wishy-washy concept. To some, equality is something out-of-touch do-gooders spend their lives talking about. But the case for greater equality – as this book wonderfully shows – is hard-headed. Greater equality is good for all of us. Societies with greater equality tend to do better on a whole range of metrics: from their educational performance to their well-being, from levels of crime to financial stability. Higher levels of inequality breed mistrust, segregation and division. They are bad for aspiration: whether for your children to have a better life than you had or for your own chances of finding a secure job in communities where the old industries have been stripped away.

The distribution of wealth matters. Britain’s ruling Conservative government once promised that ‘we’re all in this together’. Even if that were true, this Labour Party poster from the 1930s sums up why equality of sacrifice does not mean quite the same for everyone.

But the West’s ruling ideology justifies and rationalizes inequality. Those at the top deserve to be there, so this ideology suggests, because they are more intelligent, more capable, harder working, and so on. Those at the bottom are lazy and feckless and thick. The truth is this: wealthy business owners depend on the state to provide infrastructure like road and rail; to fund research and development which can be appropriated for innovative products; to provide an education system to train up their workforce; to sustain law and order to protect their property;

EQUALITY OF SACRIFICE?



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to subsidize low wages with in-work benefits; and so on. Without the largesse of the state, innovation – which is appropriated to make profit – is impossible.

And then there is the fact that some are born with odds stacked against them from day one. The birth weight of a child from a poorer background is lower than a child from more affluent circumstances. Some are born with more ‘cultural capital’: parents with a broader vocabulary, in houses full of books, who are better placed to help with homework. Repeated studies show that children with more affluent parents have much broader vocabularies from an early age than those born into poorer families. Living in an overcrowded house damages educational prospects, health and wellbeing. A poor diet, or hunger, equally damages your potential at school. The stresses of poverty can inflict significant damage.

Years before the financial crash, living standards in the US and the UK stagnated, even as corporations posted healthy profits. What did that mean? It meant workers took on more personal debt to sustain their living standards, damaging the economy. The government had to spend more money on in-work benefits, all at a cost to the taxpayer – money that would have been better spent on services and jobs and houses. It was damaging to the worker, to the taxpayer, and to society as a whole.

Equality matters: the wealth that is collectively produced by the hard graft of workers, supported by the contribution of the state, should be far more equitably distributed. This is not just the right thing to do: it’s for the good of society as a whole. Here is a book which details – with irrefutable evidence – both the damage caused by inequality, and the benefits we all derive from living in more equal societies. We should all learn from it – and, above all else, act on it.