**Book Review**

**Frank Field: *Politics, Poverty and Belief; A Political Memoir*, Bloomsbury, 2023.**

Frank was the second Director of the Child Poverty Action Group, succeeding Tony Lynes in 1969 and serving until he was elected MP for Birkenhead in 1979. He does not cover his work at CPAG in much detail in this Memoir. But those of us who were on the CPAG Executive know that he transformed the organisation. He does briefly cover the two big campaigns he fought: the press release in 1970 announcing that the ‘Poor: Worse Off Under Labour’; and the leak of Cabinet Minutes by the heroic Malcolm Wicks (we later discovered) that revealed that Prime Minister Jim Callaghan and Chancellor Dennis Healey were seeking to renege on their commitment to child benefits to replace Family Allowances and Child Tax Allowances. One thing I first learned from his book about the latter episode was the role of Tony Christopher of the Inland Revenue Staff Association who persuaded the Prime Minister that the staff would not be able to cope with changing tax codes at such a late stage. For a fuller picture of that period of CPAG history we have to rely on the splendid oral history of CPAG by Pat Thane and Ruth Davidson (2015) <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/assets/icbh-witness/cpag1970s80s.pdf>

Which sadly Frank did not want to participate in.

As well as CPAG and the Low Pay Unit campaigns for the minimum wage, Frank was a pioneer of the idea of selling council houses to their tenants. He later regretted that Margaret Thatcher had adopted the idea but without using the revenue to build more houses.

What he does not cover is curious. Later when writing about his role in establishing the low pay unit he says “One of my blessings has been the gift of working with talented staff” in relation to his work with Chris Pond. But he was responsible for appointing these staff. At CPAG there was Ruth Lister, who succeeded him. Also Virginia Bottomley! He also established the Citizens’ Rights Office with Henry Hodge, Stuart Weir, Paul Lewis and many other luminaries of welfare rights. After 1979 Frank was briefly appointed as a Minister for Social Security by Tony Blair but fell out with Harriet Harman his Secretary of State. He does not mention this episode. He does not tell us about successful campaign to oppose Gordon Brown’s proposal to abolish the 10p tax rate

The rest of the book is really devoted to his campaigns in Birkenhead and Parliament on child hunger, modern slavery; his ousting from the Labour Party and Birkenhead my Momentum and his faith and values.

The book was written when Frank was already very ill and although it is interesting and readable I don’t think it does full justice to his huge achievements in life. But thank you Frank.

Jonathan Bradshaw