

Decarbonising the welfare state

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This lecture argues that climate change poses many challenges to contemporary welfare states in the global North: it will raise extra demands for ‘traditional’ social policy measures, add new demands to manage high carbon consumption, generate new fiscal requirements for climate adaptation and mitigation policies, and pose new distributional agendas. In addition it may threaten the core policy goal of economic growth, on which Western welfare regimes are founded. To address these challenges two scenarios are set out, one assuming continuing economic growth and one based on a zero growth economy. The first scenario embraces: green taxation plus adjustments to social security systems; new eco-social investment; decarbonising existing social services; changing consumer behaviour; and utilising synergies. It is probable that redistributive welfare regimes and coordinated market economies will find this transition easier to make. The second, zero growth scenario would entail unifying the redistribution of income, carbon and time and a second de-commodification of the welfare system. This would require a radical transformation of all existing welfare regimes.

¹ This presentation is based on a paper jointly written with James Meadowcroft.