

The Role of British Labour Governments in Activating the Corporate Social Responsibility

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Abstract

The paper deals with the role of government as a driver to the Corporate Social Responsibility. The paper examines with evidence recent British Labour governments (Blair governments) that push business organisations to adopt social responsibility through various policies including ministerial leadership; stimulating new and existing business associations; subsidising CSR activities and organisations; and the use of regulation. It clarifies the results with reference to a wider societal governance crisis which Labour governments decided to resolve with CSR beside variety of other measures. It concludes that CSR needs to be understood as part and parcel of a wider system of national societal governance incorporating government institutions, business organisations and non-governmental organisations.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Labour British Government.

الملخص باللغة العربية

البحث حول دور حكومة العمل البريطانية في الدفع بعجلة المسؤولية الاجتماعية للشركات. من خلال البحث نرى بدلائل كيف أن حكومة العمل البريطانية التي أدارها توني بلار ألزمت الشركات بتبني المسؤولية الاجتماعية من خلال مختلف السياسات. هذه السياسات تضمنت القيادة الوزارية المباشرة، تحفيز المنظمات الجديدة والقديمة ودعم أنشطة المسؤولية الاجتماعية للشركات والمنظمات. ويخلص البحث إلى أن المسؤولية الاجتماعية هي جزء لا يتجزأ من نظام أوسع في المجتمع ويجب دمجها في منظمات الأعمال الحكومية وغير الحكومية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المسؤولية الاجتماعية للشركات، حكومة العمل البريطانية.

Introduction

From the late eighteenth through the nineteenth century industrialisation and urbanisation changed the face of Great Britain. The social and environmental consequences of this were administered in a number of ways. Legislation provided a regulatory framework for such issues as product and labour process standards. Trade unions, operated on a free collective bargaining basis gradually emerged as the main driving force for extending and protecting the workers' rights. The government in Britain provided assistance to the poor, but it was unable to adapt to the task of providing assistance to mass urban society. Into this gap stepped philanthropy¹, often premised on religious values. Few companies had responded at that time to such approach like Cadbury's and Lever Brothers became corporate philanthropy.

From the beginning to the middle of the twentieth century, Britain saw a major growth of state provision in areas which corporate and other forms of philanthropy had previously engaged. This was manifested in public employment, sickness and old age insurance systems; taxpayer funded educational provision; taxpayer funded health provision, the provision of basic utilities of water, energy and communications' systems. These services were in large part created of the national government. So, the scope for a direct role of business in responsibility for society appeared to narrow to a form of philanthropy. This was mainly in the form of charitable donations.

The last twenty years have seen dramatic changes in the social role of British business such that CSR has grown to become more explicit. This development and the place of CSR in British societal governance can be better understood in the context of a crisis in the system of governance which was so dramatic. One part of the strategy of successive government in response to this has been the encouragement of CSR.

This paper sets out to describe an important driver; government in developing the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in societal governance. Current theoretical and political debates and activities conducted at the national and international levels, suggest a widespread interest shared by government, industry, civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) regarding the role of government and business for the natural environment, social development and social inclusion.

This article addresses the role of Blair governments in the remarkable growth and institutionalisation of CSR in Britain over the last twenty years. It contends that the mainsprings of this governmental interest in CSR are in governance deficits that government and the wider society experienced over this period. It concludes that CSR needs to be understood as part and parcel of a wider system of national societal governance incorporating government institutions, business organisations and non-governmental organisations. What role could government play in CSR? It is the objective of this research to explore the role of