

Modern day Britain: where deceased humans become 'waste products'

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A grotesque row that erupted between the borough council of Castle Morpeth, a small town in the northeast of England, and Howard Castle residential nursing home was recently disclosed in a report by the government watchdog, the Audit Commission.

Maggie Dodds, age 85, died last January in the nursing home. She had lived all her life in long-stay hospitals and care homes after being admitted to a psychiatric unit when she was 28. She had no known relatives. Her savings of £450 were not enough to pay the statutory funeral expenses of £665.

Under the 1984 Public Health Act, local authorities have an obligation to bear the funeral costs for those who die within their boundaries without relatives or the means to pay. But Castle Morpeth Borough Council refused to pay for a pauper's funeral.

It is not the council's Scrooge mentality over a few hundred pounds that is so striking, so much as the justification it gave for abandoning its responsibilities. Because the council paid the £300 weekly fee to the private nursing home for Maggie's care, Castle Morpeth argued that the dead woman's body was a 'waste product' of the nursing home's business, and it should consequently meet the cost of disposal under the terms of the Environmental Protection Act.

In its letter to the nursing home, the council stated, '... from a commercial viewpoint, residents of a home are its income-producing raw material. Ergo, from a purely commercial view, deceased residents may then be regarded as being the waste produced by their business.'

The policy of transforming the state from a provider into a purchaser of health care and social services from the private sector, pursued by Conservative and Labour governments alike, has been eagerly embraced all over the world. It has created a new breed of parasitic

corporations and enriched the stock market. In the process it has reduced people to the status of commodities in their lifetime and waste products when they die.

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