The starting point of the Fabian Society’s *Paying for Progress* is the lamentable status of tax issues in current political debate. Tax is such a sensitive issue at elections that politicians are nervous about openly demanding the increased taxes which the public sector requires. They have good reason to be so: people regularly tell opinion pollsters that they would be prepared to pay more taxes for better education or improved health services yet as electors they refuse to return governments willing to levy them. During a time of increasing prosperity, society is becoming more unequal, and the public sector is falling behind the private. People need to become willing taxpayers so that these trends might be reversed.

How does the Commission on Tax and Citizenship propose this might be done? Restoring legitimacy to taxation demands a dual programme. First, people must know what their taxes have financed, instead of watching them go down the ‘black hole’ of the government coffers. This will be helped by a closer identification of taxes with particular services, such as health or education. However, a major obstacle is the popular mistrust of politicians, so a second requirement is for the independent audit of government spending, and the Commission propose an Office of Public Accountability. People will now become citizens, actively interested and well informed about what their government is doing with their money. The Commission believes this new relationship between state and society will sustain, among other things, a more progressive income tax as well as support a new capital receipts tax to equalize personal wealth.

Will it work? The view that more information about where taxes go will help to buttress consent for higher taxes can of course be questioned. Health and education are the examples usually cited to try and convince people to pay more taxes, but social security absorbs as much as both these put together, and is far less popular than the other two, not least because of organised fraud. Moreover, the more the emphasis is upon paying a tax and getting a service in return, the less the argument for redistribution – that some must pay more than others for the same service – can be convincingly made. The Commission wants to see Britain become a community in which the need for greater equality, and the obligations we have to our fellow citizens, are fully accepted. Yet the mechanism for doing this in the tax arena – greater information and audit of government – may turn up results which increase rather than decrease scepticism towards public spending. Some of the specific tax proposals, too, may further increase doubt rather than carry conviction. The idea that citizens might be able to fully understand the taxes they pay is perhaps undermined by the Commission’s thorough yet inevitably complex discussion of income tax, while the thorny issue of what deserves exemption in a capital receipts tax is less than satisfactorily resolved, especially in the light of the problems of capital transfer tax in the 1970s. Although this report is sub-titled ‘A New Politics of Tax’, one may be
forgiven for feeling that it wishes to re-visit the social democratic vision which perished in the 1970s. In that period, progressive income tax and redistributive capital taxes, based on explicit political argument and appeals to fairness, had withered under the attacks of special interests, distrust of the state and disbelief that they were in fact ‘fair’. A longer tradition of adversarial attitudes towards tax (which self-assessment is prolonging) seemed both a safer and healthier reference point than community and obligation. Paying for Progress is to be welcomed as a serious and substantial discussion of some of the large issues involved in taxation which may well have to be faced sooner or later by ‘New Labour’. However, it seems to offer a revival of a traditional view of tax and society without squaring up to the historical experience which destroyed that vision.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401226464


There are two outstanding features of Spicker’s general theory of the welfare state – its structure and its style. According to Spicker the structure of the book was initially intended to follow that of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus logico-philosophicus but instead of consisting solely of a set of ordered propositions, each of Spicker’s assertions is followed by a brief discussion. Here is the first problem in the concept. Spicker’s assertions are not logical proposition. ‘A picture is a fact’ (Wittgenstein, 2.141) is a proposition of an entirely different order from ‘Social policy should enhance both personal and social welfare’ (Spicker, III.3.a.iii). The first is a logical proposition that is intended to be empty of empirical reality; the second is a normative statement intimately connected with personal lived experiences. The pretensions of the structure of the book distract from its content.

What this book does is present a series of assertions about the welfare state. It is ordered in three sections ‘People and Society’, ‘Welfare’ and ‘The State and Welfare’. In each of these Spicker draws upon introductory texts and selected writings on moral philosophy, political theory, sociology, social psychology and economics to develop a series of ordered assertions about the nature of the welfare state and collective action. Each of these 203 assertions presents a deep mine for those of us scratching the surface for new undergraduate essay questions: ‘Welfare depends upon economic development’ (II.2.a); ‘Needs present obligations to other people’ (II.1.c); ‘Someone has to provide social protection’ (III.2.c).

The book is written with a clarity to be welcomed. As Spicker points out it is a mistake to think that impenetrable writing must be profound. It is not this clarity that is at fault but the consistency of his statements and the way in which he brushes over bold assertions without either justifying them or acknowledging that they are contentious. For example, we are treated to some fine distinctions about the nature of groups, of collective action and of moral obligations. But he then throws these to the wind. Groups and collectivities are reduced to nations and states. Discussing obligations he seems to have a ripple-outwards morality whereby we have a responsibility first to ourselves, then to family, then nation and then to others.
Throughout the book Spicker appears to try and be deliberately iconoclastic. Gender and sexuality are not identified amongst the major social divisions he asserts exist in modern society. Social division, he argues, is bound up with identity expressed in terms of ‘race’, ethnicity and nationality. He then seems to equate society with nation, and then nation elides with state.

I suspect his idiosyncratic views will cause offence. For example, arguing that there are moral codes that are retained long after they cease to be beneficial, he uses the example of rape and suggests that ‘there are rapes in which the element of abuse or exploitation is relatively marginal’ (p. 61). I could not understand how as a man, explicitly referring to heterosexual rapes by men of women, he could claim to know that sometimes the abuse of rape may be marginal. Perhaps Spicker would have been advised to take heed of Wittgenstein’s proposition 7, ‘What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.’

A good review should summarise a book for the reader. I can give you a sentence or two on a Marxist, functionalist, postmodern, or feminist theory of the welfare state but not on Spicker’s general theory of the welfare state which reads as a series of not entirely consistent assertions: some provocative; most interesting; and with a clear discussion. As a general theory it does not add up.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401236460


I don’t suppose there’s another academic discipline that likes to tell its story like Social Policy. This is partly because the name describes, not just the discipline, but a field of study involving the examination of how social and political processes have worked themselves out historically. But there is also a sense that the story embodies a theory of progress, which conditions the way the story is told and the events that are selected.

Kathleen Jones tells the story of British Social Policy as well as anyone. Beginning in the 1830s, she takes us through the important milestones and landmarks, pausing on the way to examine the Poor Law, public health reform, Victorian voluntarism, the discovery of poverty, the Edwardian welfare reforms, the Great Depression, World War Two, the Beveridge welfare state, the post-war consensus and its demise and the impact of the New Right, finally culminating in the prospects for New Labour. Despite telling a well-rehearsed story, each of the familiar events are re-examined in detail, with some established myths exploded. We are reminded, for instance, that the assumption about Victorian Christianity endorsing the class system derives from an omitted comma in Mrs Alexander’s hymn, ‘All things bright and beautiful’. Putting back the comma in the line, ‘God made them, high or lowly’, points to a fundamental human equality in the Creator’s original intentions, not an endorsement of inequality as is commonly supposed.

However, I couldn’t help feeling there was something missing. The book needs an introduction to justify the approach used and demonstrate some critical self-awareness. I believe the story of Social Policy is worth telling again because,
notwithstanding the conspiracy theorists, it is a testimony to corporate human compassion. The author doesn’t tell us why she thinks it’s worth telling. Neither does she tell us why, like Fraser (1973), she chose to begin in the 1830s, rather than, say, 1900 (Sullivan, 1996; Page and Silburn, 1999), 1870 (Thane, 1996), 1598 (Bruce, 1968) or 1086 (Midwinter, 1994)! This is where the unacknowledged theory of progress (or regress?) assumes some significance, for there is still a sense that the story is about how British social policy moved from the darkness of the Poor Law and rampant capitalism to the light of a universal welfare state and back again under the strictures of the New Right, ending with a final section that poses the frightening prospect of ‘The End of the Welfare State?’ (p. 208).

There are other features that readers should be aware of. Like most histories of social policy (with the exception of Thane, 1996), this is very much the British story, and there is scope for a study that considers how and why ours differs from other countries’ stories. We should also bear in mind that this is the story from the perspective of the main policy actors, not their intended subjects. Neither should we expect a comprehensive overview of all social policy sub-areas. Kathleen Jones is necessarily selective, though in ways that are indicative of general developments. She is also critical, but within limits. Broader critical perspectives are largely ignored. Race and gender issues, for instance, get short shrift (pp. 145–7).

That said, this book is to be commended for its concern for historical detail (though she slips over the year of Mrs Thatcher’s registration (pp. 176, 187)). But the author is particularly good at getting under the skin of the key players to enrich our understanding, and to make the book read like a story. Moreover, there are some useful Appendices, including a valuable guide to further reading, and biographical notes on the key characters that provide us with a veritable ‘Who’s Who’ of social policy over the past 170 years. This book definitely earns its place on first-year undergraduate reading lists, but alongside more critical perspectives.


DOI: 10.10.17/S0047279401246467

This book is one of few current texts to focus upon social problems and social policy. It is divided into four sections containing twenty chapters in total, the first section contains two introductory chapters, the second contains the majority of
contributions containing thirteen chapters, the third three chapters and finally part four with two pieces.

The first section introduces and defines the field of study for the reader. In chapter 1 Clarke covers differing sociological perspectives in relation to the study of social problems. He highlights the differences between what he defines as a realist approach, in which social problems are taken as facts to be investigated for underlying causes in order to develop appropriate responses to such problems. This in comparison to a constructionist approach, which begs the question as to how and why a problem has been so defined, seeking to unmask the meanings inherent in such a process of definition. Page’s contribution then gives a short history of the study of social problems from social administration to social policy, finally setting the analysis within an ideological perspective comparing the New Right and New Labour’s approaches to social issues.

The second section divides into four sub-groups covering the family, poverty and social exclusion, health and community problems. This forms the bulk of the book where an impressive range of topics are considered, some not so surprising, in relation to poverty, homelessness and lone parents, for example, but others more so, in particular Kelleher’s illuminating discussion of the problematising of Irish identity in England and the impact of this experience upon health care and the health of Irish people. The majority of the material takes a realist course in the exploration and investigation of the subject matter but each chapter provides a wealth of empirical data plus an impressive mastering of some of the key arguments by all the authors concerned. Many of the authors are well known in their field of study, for example, Jane Lewis upon family change, David Donnison on poverty and social exclusion. Parts III and IV are for me more interesting; Part III because it deals with the often ignored process of constructing social problems, Part IV because it addresses relatively newer fields for enquiry in studying social problems. Part III covers chapters on social work, racist violence and benefit fraud mostly in relation to the media representations of them as social problems. All three chapters successfully question the role of the media and in effect reverse the argument framing the media as problematic in the way it mediates the transmission of information on such important issues. For example, Murji and McLaughlin’s chapter describes the ambivalence of the media towards racist violence and its eagerness to embrace stereotypical images of young black men. However, it also records the sheer doggedness and tactical aplomb used by the Stephen Lawrence Campaign in challenging dominant conceptions of black people as problems, to effect limited change within the operational responses of the Metropolitan Police to race.

Part IV responds to some emerging agendas within social policy, dealing with consumerism and welfare, and food and the environment. Huby’s chapter on food and the environment for example restores and reworks the historical concern that social policy has had for researching the links between an adequate diet and poverty, as exemplified in the work of the social investigators of the nineteenth century. Her description of the way the food industry has wrested control over what we eat and the inadequate response of government raises important questions as to how we can democratise the production and consumption of food both nationally and internationally to alleviate food poverty.

The editors’ intention in producing this book was to provide a user-friendly
guide to the study of social problems and encourage readers to explore the issues encountered. This to a great extent is what they have achieved. Students will find all the chapters well set out with the generous use of graphs, diagrams and boxes to summarise key points to stimulate questions for future study and debate. I am sure that students approaching social policy, not only for the first time, will find much to engage and encourage them in this book.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401256463


This is a thought-provoking, passionate and apparently radical book. It offers a rich account of the origins, history and current state of social inequalities in Britain, as well as advancing a solution to problems of ‘Welfare Capitalism’. In this, Miller attempts to reconcile the principles of fairness and efficiency. An ambitious and timely book, no doubt.

Part I of the book includes a socio-economic model, based mainly on the work of the nineteenth-century US economist Henry George. The model is built on ‘Rent’ and defined as ‘the surplus in the national income remaining after all Wages have been paid to Labour and all Interest paid to Capital...’ (p. 7). Miller suggests a reform-plan to nationalise rent. Part II and chapters 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 in Part I give an impressive history of inequalities in wealth and health, aspects of welfare policy, taxation, rent collection and land ownership from pre-Norman times to date.

Miller makes a valuable contribution to ‘political medicine’, defined by him as a discipline that ‘judges the health consequences not of health policy, but of political and economic policy’ (p. 76). He unearths shameful evidence of inequality in health and life expectancy in Britain. Blair, and other advocates of ‘classless societies’ would do well to read this.

However, Miller’s attempt to integrate knowledge drawn from disparate disciplines into one coherent model and reform-plan proves over-ambitious. The book sometimes reads as an uneven (and poorly edited) collection of theory and history held together by the author’s firm belief in one principal source of inequity, namely rent. Although this forms a clear and singular line of thought, it is not necessarily based on a coherent or sound model. The reviewer faces a difficult task in assessing the author’s conclusions because the book has no conclusions as such. Conclusions are scattered throughout.

Miller’s main line of thought is as follows: inequality in health is rooted in the unequal distribution of wealth, mainly based on an *inequitable* distribution of wealth, the source of which, for Miller, cannot be either Labour or Capital (which are ‘earned’ and justly ‘private incomes’), but Rent (an ‘unearned’ and genuinely ‘public income’). Miller’s response is to replace taxes levied on Labour and Interest (as inefficient means) by the collection of full Rent by the state. This, he argues, will eliminate inequalities in wealth, and thus inequalities in health, and will provide sufficient resources for social policy without harming efficiency.
and economic growth. What Miller suggests is not just a tax reform which, itself, might be beneficial. He presents the full collection of Rent as a single, cure-all remedy to inequity. This raises doubts even for non-economist readers.

Although a distinction between inequality and inequity is crucial in Miller’s theory, he seems unable to disentangle the two issues. For Miller, ‘political morality’ means that ‘Good government pays equal regard to the welfare of all citizens, thereby ensuring equal consideration, and equal expression of that consideration, for the health of all’ (p. 76). Miller does not want to be seen as egalitarian, only equitable. He interprets returns on Labour and Capital as ‘rightfully’ private incomes, while Rent as a ‘surplus’ income is ‘public property’ because it is generated collectively by ‘pooled labour on a public and indivisible scale’ (p. 77). Miller’s argument concludes by asserting, though not demonstrating, that ‘access to unearned income in the form of Rent is ... to this day the basis of social class distinctions’. (p. 80)

This is a big jump, and the point at which the book’s passion and radicalism against the ‘over-privileged’ falters. The author is clear about the limits to his argument, and is explicit that he only attacks the remaining ‘Feudalism’ within ‘Capitalism’. He finds inequality unacceptable in-so-far as it is based on his interpretation of inequity. Miller seems satisfied that inequalities resulting from sources other than Rent are equitable: ‘This is not to say that there will be no inequalities of wealth and income in this great common class [an amalgamation of Labour and Capital]. But such inequalities as exist will be based upon just returns for the value of individual effort contributed to the wealth-producing process’ (p. 80). In this respect, Miller’s appeal will resonate with Blair et al., but it suggests an oversimplified view of economy and society and raises a number of key questions. Is the actual extent of other forms of economic rent (which, for Miller, are only ‘obscuration’ of the term) any less significant than Rent? Are resultant income differentials more equitable and why? Is it justified to dismiss the problem of income distribution between Labour and Capital (‘The difficulties in deciding what is fair and just are the stuff of industrial relations’ (p. 71))? What makes Miller, who is fully aware of the historical reproduction of class inequality, believe that removing private Rent ownership would end this reproduction?

The full implication of Miller’s reform plan on land ownership also deserve attention. He wants the full Rent to be collected by the state, to put ‘an end to Rent as private property’ (p. 179). But why does he not say that he wants to nationalise all land? His plan implies exactly that. By not yielding Rent, private land ownership would, de facto, cease to exist. Those who determine and collect Rent are the actual owners; the rest would only lease land. Will the state manage these scarce resources efficiently, effectively and free of corruption? Miller fails to address these issues.

Miller’s reform plan can be questioned from other economic perspectives (such as Adam Smith’s four canons of taxation, the size of income from Rent compared to public expenditure, etc.). Arguably, Miller’s arguments do not simply fall short of being radical. They might even be politically damaging by asserting that the primary source of inequity is Rent, or by reinforcing dogmas such as taxes levied on any other source of income always being counter to efficiency.

Even though there may be questions about Miller’s proposed solutions (and indeed, his particular definition of ‘the problem’), this book deserves to be read
by politicians, academics and students. It is an engaging source of argument, historical narrative and empirical data which can only enrich debate on the issues which it is concerned.

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DOI: 10.1017/S004727940126646X


This book addresses the broad theme of the politicisation of the family and the role of feminism in that process. Framed against the question of why the family has become such a contentious issue in the UK and US, the book offers an account of feminism’s engagement with the family and the political and scholarly reactions which it provoked. Sommerville has no doubt that the family, the role of women and feminism are situated in an economic, social, ideological and moral maze. Her analysis does more than justice to this belief.

The relationship between feminism and the family is set in a broad context. Sommerville begins her analysis with the position taken on the family by early political philosophers, such as Wollstonecraft, Harriet Taylor, Mill and Engels. She then moves on to consider some of the classic feminist literature, working for example in one of her nine chapters through key texts by Friedan, Greer and Firestone. Later chapters consider how public and political opinion began to cohere around the family. Partly in reaction to what feminists had to say and partly inspired by the media and the political agendas of different interest groups, the family was moved from moral battlefield to the formal political stage. She attributes the shift to public expenditure issues associated with the family and its capacity to unite widely differing constituencies around it. Sommerville’s analysis brings us up to the present day by considering recent feminist reflection on the profound changes which have taken place in relation to gender and the family. This discussion also includes the work of communitarians, social capitalists and others.

I liked this book and consider it to have many virtues. Moving between the US and UK, the author undertakes analysis of very different spheres of intellectual and political activity with apparent ease, covering philosophy, social theory, popular discourse, social policy and contemporary social patterns. Above all the book is rigorous in its search for the nature and roots of feminism’s differences with the family and in how feminist critique set in train a political mobilisation around the family which was drawn from sections of the population with quite diverging interests. Sommerville is not content to treat the pro-family movement as a backlash against feminism but rather problematises the fact that pro-family organisations, especially in the US, have had a genuine grassroots basis in a mass movement of women. This raises a set of fundamental questions for feminism and has forced it more than once to revisit its position on the family. For Sommerville this means drawing attention to contemporary dilemmas for feminism. Not alone are most women reconciled to a reformed nuclear family (the dual earner model) but analytic attention has shifted away from incompatibilities in male–female relations to the incompatibilities in the arrangement of work and family life.
Not only is this a good book but it is an important one. One of its accomplishments is to reveal much of the debate about the family in the last thirty or so years is an extended rejoinder to some of the original insights of second-wave feminism. Sommerville offers a complex analysis of the threads linking right-wing and other discourses on the family over a long period of time. She is illuminating also about why the family is problematic for the left. The book is especially interesting in its analysis of the similarities and differences between the US and the UK. In the US the pro-life movement and the Republican Party tapped into a broad-based concern about abortion and the family. While moral conservative in the UK were never so numerous, well funded or well organised as in the US, they were politically very significant. As a result the family became a mandatory part of political rhetoric in both countries. However, rhetoric has as we know an unpredictable relationship with policy and in fact in Thatcher’s Britain and Reagan’s US, a ‘pro-family’ approach never saw the light of day in policy. Part of the reason for this, as Sommerville explains it, are that the traditional family, being very costly to maintain, is beyond the purse of most countries and the fact that the New Right draws upon a very varied set of ideologies.

One of Sommerville’s feats is that she manages to keep both the family and feminism in sharp focus throughout. And she never loses sight of their complex inter-relations either. She adroitly manages to make sense of a very large sweep of time, a catholic literature and a broad set of relations and discourses. As a result the book has broad appeal and is a very comprehensive source of material on intellectual and political engagement with the family. It is well pitched for both a general as well as specific audience. It is, in addition, written with a style and clarity that render it suitable as a text for undergraduate courses on either or both the family and feminism.

The book is also very good on the substance of the feminist critique of the family. It highlights the strengths as well as the diversity of this critique. But Sommerville’s analysis is interesting also for how it goes beyond the feminist critique to, in the first instance, explore the reaction to it and, in the second, show how feminism altered its approach once it engaged with the political debate around the family which its critique had more or less set in train. Had feminists left the family alone one wonders how their message would have been received. But of course feminists could not (afford to) leave the family alone just as they cannot today. Sommerville’s greatest achievement in this book is to demonstrate how feminism’s fate is linked with that of the family, just as the family owes a huge debt to feminism for its re-emergence in contemporary sociology and social policy.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401276466

‘Soon afterwards Mrs Stubbs will return to retirement. Her husband is Sir Bill Stubbs, chairman of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority ... He is
already looking forward to daily ironed shirts and cooked meals.’ Thus did the *Evening Standard* (14 February 2001) celebrate, in a two-page spread, the achievements of a distinguished headmistress who, recalled from retirement, has successfully ‘turned round’ a difficult London secondary school. Never mind about her contribution to disadvantaged pupils’ education: what this wife should really be attending to is the unpaid work of the home, servicing her (presumably fit and active) husband. *Women Ageing* aims to challenge myths and stereotypes around ‘mid-life’ and older women. It is, clearly, needed.

All contributors have recent connections with Keele University, whose Vice-Chancellor, Janet Finch, contributes a foreword. Keele is well known for work on social policy and old age. The authors are academic staff or former postgraduate students. An initial chapter (Bernard, Pat Chambers, Gillian Granville) introduces the theoretical background to research on women and ageing, while the conclusion (Bernard and Phillips) addresses the implications of the book’s contents for social policy and service provision. There is a comprehensive review (Bernard and Harding Davies) of existing literature on women’s feelings about growing older. All other chapters report research and contain useful material on methodology. The topics covered are pre-retirement education (Julia Skucha and Bernard), carers combining paid work in ‘caring professions’ with caring for relatives (Phillips), women experiencing the menopause (Granville), older women undergraduates (Patsy Marshall), bereavement (Machin), widowhood in later life (Chambers) and carers in long marriages (Mo Ray).

A main aim of the book is to show how women experience ageing and to expose misconceptions about older women, a large and growing part of the UK population, who tend to be ‘invisible’ or ‘pathologised’. Low-paid women in part-time jobs have traditionally been left out of pre-retirement education, designed for ‘male-breadwinners’. Women’s employment status was trivialised: like Mrs Stubbs they were expected to leave paid work for their ‘real’ work of cooking and ironing. Research showed that such women actually prize their trivialised employment. Interestingly this book is silent on the biggest stereotype of all, the ‘granny’. The chapter on working carers establishes them as a heterogeneous group, not all negatively affected by combining unpaid care with economic activity. The book emphasises that men do caring and addresses gender issues sensitively in the paper on long-term marriages.

Widows appear feistier and more independent than popular stereotypes admit: the recipe for a lonely old age is excessive reliance on the marital relationship. Women fear ill-health, loneliness and dependency and are concerned to retain their identity, dignity and appearance. Mid-life women are under pressure to be ‘youthful’ and as they age, can find their activities and interests restricted by the absence of a male partner. *Women Ageing* has useful material on ageism, not least the chapter on mature women students, currently denied student loans if over 54, despite government exhortations around lifelong learning and remaining economically active for as long as possible.

This book is particularly interesting for its honest discussion of the process of getting together an edited book, intended originally to address women’s entire life course. Due to unavoidable withdrawals, the book ended up focusing mainly, though not entirely, on ‘mid-life’ women in the same group as the contributors, who found themselves having to face up to their own future. The authors obvi-
ously put in a substantial amount of academic ‘overtime’ to produce a collective and coherent end-product, no doubt with the deadline for the forthcoming Research Assessment Exercise flashing in lights inside their brains.

The collection concludes with implications for social policy and practice, especially important in the context of current major health and social services reorganisation. The authors acknowledge omissions in the scope of this book which, alas, contains some printers’ errors. Nonetheless, the Keele team can fairly claim to have advanced the feminist approach to gerontology. The book should be particularly useful to undergraduate and postgraduate students making special studies of gerontology, social policy and old age or social work. Apart from its obvious relevance to courses focusing on gender, it can be recommended to those seeking to raise their ‘gender awareness’ in the field of social policy. Old age, especially advanced old age, has failed to attract much interest from feminists. Women Ageing is a step in the right direction. May we now hope for Women Ageing a Lot?

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401286462

Jan Waterson, Women and Alcohol in Social Context, 2000, Palgrave, Basingstoke, xii+223 pp, £42.50.

This book attempts to provide a sociological analysis of women’s drinking practices. The approach taken is the one adopted in research into other health related behaviours, such as cigarette smoking, which emphasises the social context in which drinking takes place, and portrays drinking as a rational ‘choice’ in that context or set of circumstances. This approach stands in contrast to the one which portrays health-related behaviour in terms of individual responsibility and moral culpability. It builds on Ettore’s (1977) earlier work and focuses on women who were at the stage of the life cycle where they were starting to build their families. Thus, the initial discussion focused on drinking in the context of pregnancy and highlights the evidence that pregnancy is a catalyst for a change in drinking practice, i.e., mainly a reduction in heavy drinking.

The earlier chapters review and analyse the different approaches and explanation for drinking in women which leads into the analysis of the empirical data which make up the bulk of the chapters in the book. These data are derived from a study which involved qualitative, face-to-face interviews with sixty women who had recently attended an antenatal clinic. Evidence of their drinking practices prior to their pregnancies were collected so it was possible to divide the sample into heavy and light drinkers. However, the analysis in the earlier chapters showed that not only is there evidence that professional women are more likely to be heavier drinkers, but also that the link with socioeconomic position may be explained by the influence of two types of factors, i.e., those factors associated with the opportunity and encouragement to drink, and those relating to difficulties, where drinking may be use as a mechanism for coping. Hence, the sample was further stratified by socioeconomic position with half of the women coming from professional backgrounds and half from non-professional backgrounds, leading to four sub-groups of fifteen.
These interviews generated a wealth of rich data and each of the six chapters provided fascinating insights into different facets of women’s drinking practices as well as the pressures and issues involved with women’s daily lives. The first of these considers women’s own explanations of why there are differences in drinking habits between women followed by an account of their own involvement with drinking. However, one of the most interesting chapters examined the way occupation structures women’s opportunities to drink and showed how opportunity played the major part in encouraging positive drinking for pleasure and enjoyment. It clearly shows that professional women had far greater material and social opportunities than the non-professionals for heavy drinking. Heavy drinkers’ social lives were clearly linked with drinking and they were more likely to come from a family and cultural background that did not discourage alcohol use and which attached particular importance to social activities that might involve drinking. They enjoyed drinking, saw its positive benefits, particularly that it was relaxing, and valued their social lives, which drinking was a part of.

Previous survey evidence suggested that pregnancy and starting a family tend to lead to a reduction in heavy drinking. Waterson’s study provided only partial support for this, in that heavy drinking professionals rather than the heavy drinking non-professionals were able to maintain their levels of consumption into motherhood. This was because not only could professional women afford it but they had the support, networks and opportunities to maintain their levels of drinking.

Drinking to cope with difficulties was the other main theme and was used by both groups as a means of managing troubles. Both groups complained of the lack of social contact and professionals were the most dissatisfied with their social isolation. Non-professionals, especially the heavy drinkers, tended to emphasise other aspects of their lives, particularly the negative side of motherhood. The final chapters draw out the implications for policy and particularly for gender inequalities. Emphasis is placed on the need to develop a policy which can take on board the positive and negative side of drinking, as well as the need for policies to focus on the importance of links between drinking and emotional and mental health.

This is a well-written book. Its strength is that it is based on a rigorously analysed and presented data set from a small-scale, qualitative study. However, from a theoretical and methodological point of view it is less interesting. The methodology, in particular the use of terms such as ‘more likely’ based on a small, self-selected, possibly purposive sample, raises questions about the interpretation of the evidence. However, as an empirical study Waterson does for explaining drinking in women what Hilary Graham (1995) has done for women who smoke. What is required next to complement this study and provide a broader picture of the socioeconomic position and gender relationship in drinking, is an ethnographic study examining other family members drinking practice including men.


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The volumes, edited by Coffield, are the outcome of an ESRC project titled, 'The Learning Society: Knowledge and Skills for Employment'. The project began in 1994 and ran until March 2000. Initially, some thirteen projects were commissioned around the UK. Research reports have already been published and the intention of the above volumes is to provide an overview of the ESRC project. This project ‘showed remarkable prescience in that it concluded with a national and international burgeoning of interest in lifelong learning’ (vol. 1, p. 5). The publication of these volumes affords scope for the authors to present aspects of the findings of specific research projects, both in the context of relevant literature and the emerging terms of government policy for the promotion of lifelong learning.

Most chapters offer grounds for a critique of government policy. For example, Ball et al. – in a study of markets in the post-16 sector of an urban locale cast doubt on the viability of a ‘market’ strategy that has engendered ‘cut-throat’ competition between multiple providers, making for a variety of dubious actions and tactics (vol. 1, p. 62). Some students are valued and competed for, others are perceived to be less valuable and confront constrained choice. Riddell et al. examine the meaning of the learning society for adults with learning difficulties. Their ‘key informant interviews suggested that in practice services delivered by social work insulted people with learning difficulties from mainstream services’ (vol. 2, p. 64). A shortage of provision for post-16 students means that, colleges select students rather than vice versa’ (vol. 2, p. 69). Some aspects of provision for those with learning difficulties fulfill a ‘warehousing purpose’ rather than enabling a transition from training into employment, with clients participating in a succession of training schemes, thus negating the empowering, emancipatory prospect of lifelong learning. Both Ball et al. and Riddell et al. highlight the tension in government policy between ‘market’ provision and the promotion of access for vulnerable ‘consumers’.

In general, both volumes contribute to an understanding of the social context within which policy seeks to operate, highlighting the fact that individual dispositions towards education and training are the product of past social experience and current informal social networks. This social complexity tends to be lost sight of by an undue emphasis on human capital theory of the kind that informs much government policy and which regards education/training as a basis for economic growth and individuals as motivated to participate in pursuit of career investment. Certainly Labour has addressed these themes in strident, if not exclusive, terms, boasting a concern with wealth production, not wealth distribution; still less, overt redistribution. Since productivity is at the core of wealth generation – and UK productivity per head compares markedly unfavourably with that in the USA and some European countries – a strong government emphasis on education/training in human capital terms is set to continue. The problem with this is that lifelong learning policy is likely, both to lack sufficient awareness of social contexts, as cogently demonstrated by these accounts of the
Lifelong Learning project, and to be driven by economic imperatives, at the expense of goals of social emancipation that lifelong learning might otherwise serve.

The primary focus of the research projects was not to provide a sustained policy analysis: a task that would have confronted the difficulty of policy shifts over a six-year period and the varying project completion dates. Neither was it feasible to construct a spine of policy dimensions to act as a suitable general backdrop or abiding reference point. The nature of policy documents makes for difficulty in gleaning policy intent and meaning. Such documents are often written with an eye to Treasury consumption, especially in terms of Departmental bids for resources; to consistency with other Whitehall policies; to attain a good press; and, most especially in the area of education/training, to sustain the political presentation of the ‘modernisation’ project without alarming the financial markets. Much contemporary policy discourse on post-16 provision is an expression of the politics of ‘soft’ choices; another phase in the lineage of burdening state education with the supposed causality of economic failure. Despite these problems, the authors, at salient points, make significant connections between sociological findings and policy parameters. Also, Coffield’s introductory chapters to both volumes provide the reader with a good critical framework for policy interpretation.

The Report to Learn, edited by Nicaise, reviews research and commentary about educational disadvantage in Europe, though in geographical terms the data mainly refers to Flanders, the Netherlands, Scotland, Ireland, Catalonia and Portugal, reflecting the institutional locations of the contributors, whose work received financial support from the European Commission. An intent of the book is to re-establish equality and social justice on the policy agenda, thus compensating for the recent dominance of ‘efficiency’ in the education debate, largely driven by governmental perceptions of labour market needs and economic competitiveness. The authors consider various strategies for policy intervention to counter educational failure, including financial and material assistance; early childhood provision; parent/school relationships; curricular and teacher training reforms; alternative curriculum and pedagogical reforms; educational priority policies.

Essentially the book is an exercise in collation of data from divers sources that provides an overview of facets of European educational provision, offering synthesis and evaluative commentary within systematic presentation of policy pathways. Each chapter provides a useful summation of relevant literature. This provides a basis for informative cross-national comparisons rather than comparative analysis since, as the editor notes in relation to disadvantaged education groups, ‘[g]enuine comparative research in this respect at EU level is currently impossible because basic information is not available’ (p. 314). One of the recommendations of the book is that the EU should follow a proactive role in the collection and harmonisation of data. This deficiency in data applies in a more general sense to the terrain covered by the book, and inevitably the selective presentation of diverse material, while illuminating, succeeds in informing the reader by virtue of thoughtful presentational juxtaposition of findings rather than sustained deployment of integrated evidence, gained from a co-ordinated research project. Aside from providing a useful conspectus of contemporary
European research the book offers some strong counterpoint to prevailing orthodoxy, for example, arguing that teacher training should more readily embrace sociological analysis of deprivation. A view likely to be dismissed by an Ofsted mentality, but one consistent with the teaching of medical and social work students.

Torsten Husén, writing in 1974, foreshadowing the social changes that would probably ensure by the year 2000, constructed a case for a learning society. He anticipated the problems that an individual might have in defining his own identity and argued that fascism and other theories of salvation could make capital out of the collective reactions to maladjustment (Husén, 1974, p. 232).

It is the prospect of the social consequences of ‘maladjustment’, fascist or otherwise, that stands attendance on the contemporary debate about social exclusion and its remedies, which include lifelong learning. But how does a government, intent on reforming the welfare state around work, cope with ‘maladjustment’ without coercion or oppression? These volumes offer much substance for a defensible answer to this vital question.


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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401306463


The ILO and its extensive team of editors and contributors are to be congratulated for producing this encyclopaedic volume, which is a very welcome addition to the sparse literature on pensions and pension reform in a global setting. It is targeted at three broad groups of readers: social security practitioners, senior undergraduate and postgraduate students and those who want to understand the contemporary pension reform discourse.

The scope of this volume is extensive, to say the very least. The first chapter largely defines the technical terms and issues needed to follow the future argument, and concludes with a clear statement of the ILO’s perspective on pension reform: ‘Obviously there is no single design which fits all circumstances, and the question of what is the most appropriate design has to be weighed against other factors, in particular the need to provide universal coverage and good governance, which will determine where the most desirable [public–private provision] balance lies.’ This leads into chapter 2, which examines the public–private mix in developed, developing and middle-income countries and outlines the case for privatisation.

The next 12 chapters constitute Part I. They describe the structure of pensions schemes and their problems, in a way that ‘as far as possible avoids taking sides in what has become a controversial and sometimes heated policy debate’ (p. 1). All the relevant technical areas are covered: the forms of public provision, including a thoughtful chapter on social assistance, which had long been one of the ILO’s obvious blind spots (ILO 1984: 3–4); as well as pension financing,
coverage, and governance and administration. Then follows a discussion of an array of technical issues: contribution evasion, income redistribution, social security risks, economic effects and public finance consequences. These technical chapters are accessible even to those with a very limited background in social security.

Part II contains six chapters in which the ILO outlines its: ‘normative bases for pension programmes in terms of the replacement incomes which they generate, their desired universality, the extent to which they can assist in the avoidance of poverty, the extent to which they can guarantee an adequate retirement income and the degree to which they should be managed on a tripartite basis.’ They provide reluctant individualists’ normative basis for pension reform. It argues for extending pension coverage, for improving governance, management and compliance, for reconsidering the retirement age, and for developing a pluralistic design with flexible structures. Its concluding chapter calls for gradual reform based on achieved consensus.

The ‘Regional Briefs’ that follow the technicalities of Part I provide the reader with a wealth of national programme detail. Regional surveys are provided for Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East (but interestingly not including Israel, which has been designated a country in the Asia and Pacific region, as has Iran), Central and Eastern Europe and the OECD countries.

The technicalities of Part I are developed further in the final ‘Technical Briefs’ section. This looks at pension modelling, the ILO’s Social Security Conventions, pensions for public employees, demographic modelling and finally an exhaustive, not to say exhausting, statistical annex. The volume finishes with a very useful glossary and a not so useful bibliography, which concentrates on the official publications of the ILO, the ISSA, the World Bank, the IMF, and the OECD.

Those of us in the field will recognise that this volume represents the ILO’s long awaited best shot across the bows of the World Bank, challenging its hegemonic vision of the desirable future for pensions in the twenty-first century (World Bank 1994). It is the reluctant individualist’s response to the neo-liberal assertion that privatisation and the residual model are the only way forward for social security. The conclusion reached is the one expected (p. 392): ‘For many countries expenditure on social security pensions, and the revenue which is collected to pay for them, are now large and significant proportions of the national income and of government revenue. This sets a limit to what a country can afford. Conversely the low level of benefits and the small proportion of the population which is covered represents an obstacle to the achievement of better or more equitable income protection in old age. Reconciling these two constraints involves not only questions of normative values but, as the wave of pension reform around the world suggests, one which involves better coverage, governance and the design of pension schemes.’ The ILO’s pension-reform recommendation is a three-tier structure: a non-contributory universal anti-poverty state pension; a mandatory contributory state pension with a moderate replacement rate; and an optional supplementary pension that is ‘possibly privately managed and operated’ (p. 407).

This book is an invaluable addition to the academic literature (Midgley and Tracy 1997, Dixon 1999) for those looking to understand the practicalities and
structures underpinning the various approaches to pension provision and the policy issues that are central to any pension reform discourse.


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DOI: 10.1017/S004727940131646X


When Basic Income (BI) emerged as a serious proposal in the mid-1980s, one of the main issues raised by both supporters and critics concerned its unconditional nature. Why pay people for doing nothing? For the next ten years or so the BI debate was largely characterised by attempts to answer this question (Van Parijs, 1992, 1995; Fitzpatrick, 1999). The starting-point for *Basic Income on the Agenda* is the belief that the debate needs to move on. For although unconditionality will always be contentious, numerous justifications for it can be, and have been, given. Yet if BI is ever to be introduced the real question is whether its principles (of unconditionality, universalism and individual units of assessment) can be ‘sold’ to policy-makers and the general public. How might we get from the existing tax and benefit system to one based upon BI?

The editors thus set themselves the task of examining BI in terms of the ‘new social question’: how do we reverse the widening divisions between the securely employed and those who are either on the margins of the labour market or lack employment altogether? Different answers to this question are offered in different countries. In the UK, for instance, New Labour has emphasised selective redistribution (though only to a modest extent so far), the New Deal, employability, minimum wage legislation, tax credits and workfare. Meanwhile, under the guise of an ‘active welfare state’ it allows the principle of social insurance to sink further below the political horizon. So, the aim of van der Veen and Groot is to allow BI to engage with the main alternatives to it, alternatives such as tax credits and wage subsidisation that are increasingly popular across European welfare states. BI comes out of the analysis pretty well. Across a range of indicators (poverty reduction, job creation, etc.) it performs at least as well as other policies and, in some cases, considerably better. Yet for BI supporters this analysis may engender new doubts. For if the economic and social effects of BI would be similar to earned income tax credits, etc., then why prefer the former over the latter when the principle of unconditionality is so unpopular?

The 17 chapters of this book, based upon papers given at the Seventh International Congress of the Basic Income European Network, in 1998, all address this question in one form or another. One approach, popular with many of the contributors, is for BI to ‘piggyback’ on the shoulders of other policy
reforms. Imagine that a government is gradually introducing a patchwork of tax credits. Should BI supporters oppose this trend or should they offer qualified support in the expectation that those tax credits will eventually knit together into a *de facto* Negative Income Tax, i.e., a welfare system not a million miles from BI? Most of the contributors here favour such implementation by stealth: ‘the most direct route is not always likely to be the best one’ (Van Parijs, Jacquet and Salinas p. 80); ‘sailing against the wind must surely involve tacking’ (Quilley, p. 171). Some readers will recognise similarities between this argument and that of Jordan *et al.* (2000) where the logic of tax credits drives us towards a BI system that would, they insist, eliminate the defects of such reforms.

Now, while not for a minute doubting that compromise and pragmatism are inevitable features of social policy, there are dangers to this approach that are not adequately addressed in this collection. If BI supporters use existing reforms as a Trojan horse they may only find themselves being converted to the Trojan way of life. Take one example. Steve Quilley first talks about opposition to targeting and means-testing as ‘sacrosanct’ (p. 171) but then later asks the following: ‘Selectivity or universalism? Basic Income or means-testing? If we pose the questions like this, politics will always work against basic income’ (p. 185). Yet unless its supporters work against existing political priorities to some extent there is a danger, as Groot and van der Veen acknowledge (p. 218), that the less controversial aspects of BI will be appropriated by existing welfare systems, committed as they are to productivist values. I therefore cannot help feeling that we need a book which will combine the debate’s philosophical dimensions with an analysis of BI’s practicalities more effectively than this one.

Nevertheless, this volume is more readable than most collections based upon conferences and does move the BI debate one step farther on, though the shelf life of those chapters examining the national debates will be inevitably short. I hope that it will throw cold water on those who continue to insist that BI is a hopelessly utopian proposal, irrelevant to the welfare reforms of the new millennium.


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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401326466
The fundamental change in the shape and nature of social policy that was heralded, if not directly fostered, by the election of New Labour has already been subject to a variety of commentaries and analyses and further contributions to
debate continue to be published. Marian Barnes and David Prior’s short book is one such contribution. They assert decisively that New Labour’s approach amounts to a paradigm shift: to a new way of imagining welfare. They characterise the post-1940s Beverigian welfare state in terms of a ‘welfare democracy’ model, the post-1970s Thatcherite welfare state in terms of a ‘welfare market’ model, and the emergent post-1990s Blairist welfare state in terms of a ‘welfare ecology’ model. Barnes and Prior present a persuasive case for interpreting New Labour’s emphasis on responsibility, reciprocity, sustainability and partnership, in terms of a wholesale shift towards a more holistic form of policy-making in which not only are institutional barriers broken down, but so too are barriers between the spheres of public policy and private life. The book devotes specific chapters to describing the shifts that have occurred in education, social security and labour market policy, health provision, and domestic welfare. It concludes with a chapter that focuses on the new organisational settlement that is embodied in the plethora of community based policy initiatives that New Labour has promoted.

The greater part of the book amounts to what is perhaps one of the most measured and cogent apologias for New Labour’s approach that I have read: an apologia, it must be said, that is tempered by systematic critique only in the closing pages of the book, when the authors comment briefly on the consequences of New Labour’s retreat from universalism, the risk that marginalised communities will be unable to participate on the terms demanded by New Labour, the potentially oppressive nature of policy interventions that invade private relations, and the prescriptive nature of New Labour’s promotion of community based partnership. What is new, and I think valuable, in the book is the objective clarity with which it distils the positive essence, or at least the potential, of New Labour’s approach.

Although I would certainly urge anyone with a critical interest in theorising paradigm shifts to take a look at this very readable book, I do have some concerns about its usefulness as a teaching text. Barnes and Prior have, I presume quite deliberately, adopted a style in which they make very sparing use of references and it may be that the book is not primarily targeted at an academic audience. For example, where the authors are exploring arguments about the ‘colonisation’ of private life or the emergence of a ‘risk society’, there is no mention – let alone any bibliographical references – to the work of either Habermas or Beck. There is a risk not only that the undergraduate reader will be unable to distinguish between well-trodden derivative arguments and the original arguments of the authors, but that s/he might emulate a style that – for good or for ill – is systematically discouraged in higher education! This is a shame, because the book would otherwise provide an excellent and succinct introduction to key issues spanning virtually the whole of social policy.

Finally, for what its worth, I should say that personally I disagree with the premise of the book. I would interpret the New Labour project not as the embodiment of a new paradigm, but as a reworking of established paradigms: specifically, as a combination of a managerialist strand of economic liberalism and a socially conservative strand of communitarianism. While I entirely endorse the concept of ‘welfare ecology’ – informed by an ethic of care – as a counterfactual model or ideal, I disagree with the application of the term to the New Labour
project. The assumptions that drive New Labour’s economic and social policies are essentially productivist (i.e., they subscribe to the imperative of economic growth and a concept of work as productive employment) and remain, in my view, incompatible with welfare ecology. This objection, however, in no way detracts from the value of Barnes and Prior’s contribution to debate, which I welcome.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401336462

Globalisation has become the hegemonic term in the wide range of academic, policy and media discourses which address themselves to the current state of the world and its future direction. This linguistic consensuality extends from alternative lifestyle protestors in the streets outside intergovernmental summits to mainstream academics and government departments.

This hegemony has resulted from and fires further expansion of a huge volume of literature of many kinds and in many disciplines which threatens to overwhelm even the most assiduous student. The aim of Globalisation: The Reader is to map out and review this bewildering array of material in such a way as to draw out the principal issues and debates surrounding globalisation while providing the reader with tasters from the major primary texts.

This is an ambitious, difficult and worthwhile task which Beynon and Dunkerley attempt by providing a summary of the discursive field in a 38 page General Introduction, supplemented by no less than 112 extracts from the works of leading commentators. These certainly illustrate the key themes over which globalisation theorists and their critics debate: the compression of time and space accelerated by technology; the significance of territory and locality; the role of the nation state and supranational political forms; the concentration of ownership of electronic communication technologies and media production and transmission; and the impact on national and sub-national cultures and identities.

Perhaps, inevitably, in a task of this magnitude, there are problems with organisational clarity. The extracts are grouped into four Parts: A: Globalisation and Society; B: Globalisation and Culture; C: Globalisation, Media and Technology; and D: Globalisation and the Political Economy. There is very little discursive introduction to each of the four parts, forcing the reader to refer back to the General Introduction. The editors try to establish the links between the two by presenting the ‘mapping’ of the General Introduction through the views of and quotes from the extract authors. However, this produces a text so densely packed with references that reading is made difficult, as it is by the fragmentation into overly small sub-sections. This leads to a repetition of issues and an occasional confusion produced by references to the same author as supporting different sides of a debate.

The same issue of repetition and potential conceptual confusion for inexperienced readers applies to the extracts. Clarity and coherence may have been
undermined by the sheer volume of pieces. A judicious pruning and tighter grouping of perspectives, particularly of those dissenting voices which question whether there is such a thing as ‘globalisation’ in the strong version of the thesis, would more clearly set out for students the main ‘camps’ in this battle to define the character of the twenty-first century.

There are also questions about the position of Part D, Globalisation and the Political Economy, at the end of the volume. Its focus on the debates about the nature of politics and governance, the future of the nation state, the relation of developed to developing countries in the face of the accelerated movements of capital, commodities and labour in the global economy appear to this reader to follow on logically from the broad issues on globalisation and society raised in the opening Part A. Read together they would provide a broader contextualisation for the more specific issues of cultural consumerism, world tourism, media imperialism, information and communication technologies of Parts B and C which constitute the greatest substance of the book.

This brings us to the other problem with this book. The title suggests that it is the reader for globalisation. Yet there is virtually no discussion of global environment change, probably the area where there is least dissent, and the economic, political and general public policy dimensions are considerably outweighed by discussion on cultural aspects of globalisation. In fact, a more appropriate title might have been, Globalisation and Culture. Students of communications, cultural and media studies will find the book rewarding and useful, but those expecting a compendium which brings together a balanced representation of all the most significant dimensions of this characterisation of our times, will be disappointed.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401346469


Ian Gough’s latest book tackles some of the big issues of current social policy: the fate of social welfare in a period of globalisation. The approach is slightly more sideways than this introduction may make the book sound. The book is a drawing together of a range of articles and chapters written by Gough and others in the mid-1990s. These have been revised to make them fit together more comfortably and are preceded by a substantial introductory essay that establishes the core concerns of the work and the sequencing and structure of their presentation. The book is then divided into three parts. In the Part I (Capitalism and Welfare) Gough offers four essays that examine the relationships between capitalism and human need. These chapters trace out central analytic strands – the need for a political economy of capitalism as a basis for the study of social policy; the framework of human need (derived from his work with Len Doyal); the contradictions and limitations of capitalism in relation to meeting human need; and the changing forms and balances of power around capital in the process of globalisation.

The second Part (Comparative Social Policies and Welfare Outcomes) offers three chapters, one of which offers a systematic comparison of welfare variation,
while the other two focus on more particular case studies: the issue of ‘safety nets’ in Southern European welfare systems, and the changing fortunes of ‘enterprise welfare’ in Russia. The third and final part (Social Policy, the Economy and Alternative Futures) addresses two issues of economic and political controversy: the relation between welfare and national economic competitiveness; and the demand for a Basic Income as a basis for a progressive politics. In all three parts, Gough has important and challenging arguments to make. The shifting alignments of capital, states and social welfare in the last twenty years do deserve a more considered exploration than the apocalyptic claims usually made about globalisation. Gough teases out important issues about national political-institutional difference, about the changing conditions and capacities of capital, and combines these large analytic concerns with subtle and thoughtful attention to the variant forms of social welfare (particularly in the Southern Europe and Russian studies).

The book is rich, rewarding and – for me, at least – rather frustrating. There are two different aspects of this frustration. The first concerns the form of the book – assembling existing work into a composite whole has some risks. While careful editing and revision has reduced overlap and repetition, it is less clear that arguments and analyses progress, or are systematically developed through the book. The final section, for example, contains two rather divergent chapters – engaged in different sorts of arguments with extremely difficult positions (the neo-liberal challenge to welfare states and the claim that basic incomes could be the precondition for ‘real freedom for all’). But they don’t feel like an integrated argument about social policy futures.

At one level, this is an unfair criticism – this is the sort of book that it is, and it may be unreasonable to ask for more. In any case, it troubles me less than my worries and doubts about the forms of analysis and argument being put forward. I remain impressed but not wholly convinced by the Gough/Doyal theory of human need. It is put to good use here, but occupies an uneasy place between political agenda and comparative framework. But the core of the book is the laying out and development of a political economy approach to social policy. Gough is probably the best exponent of this approach to social policy, which makes it all the more frustrating to discover how narrow the political-economy view of social welfare, welfare states and social policies still is. The predominant focus on one set of social relationships; one structure of power, states that are viewed only through their articulation to capital and labour, and a view of welfare which foregrounds (though less exclusively than some) income transfer systems (rather than services), is too restrictive. To find the rest of life (that which lies beyond the immediate social relations of capital) still being referred to through the residualising terminology of ‘the extra-economic’ (p. 61) is depressing. If we are to take seriously (as Gough suggests we must) the view that economies are ‘socially embedded’ (after Polanyi) then we need a richer conception of the ‘social’ than this. I think there is much here for anyone engaged in the study of social policy in its current contradictory and shifting contexts – and I would recommend the book strongly. But it needs to be read for the limits of its world view as well as for its strengths.

JOHN CLARKE
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The British would do well not only to ‘chuck out the chintz’ as they are encouraged to do by the IKEA television advert but also their antiquated and inefficient ways of doing most things political, economic and social. Writing this book review in the middle of the foot and mouth epidemic, so soon after a number of rail disasters, it is difficult to look at Scandinavia and think we have got anything right. There was a time in the late 1980s and early 1990s when it began to look as though emulating the Nordic model was a thing of the past. More recent evidence such as that gathered for this volume would suggest that reports of its death were premature.

This study is a sequel to the editors’ Nordic Social Policy (Kautto, 1999) published in 1999. That volume sought to compare recent developments in social policy in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland. The present volume compares the Nordic experience with that of other European countries, in particular Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. One of the main questions asked is whether a distinctive Nordic model continues to exist and whether there is a degree of convergence occurring with other countries/regime types. It is to the credit of the editors and the contributors that these two questions are addressed throughout the book and with very great care.

Not all social policy areas are covered but there are chapters on income distribution, health inequalities, social care, gender and employment. Education and housing are, not surprisingly, excluded and old age pensioners and other areas of social insurance (with the exception of unemployment benefit) are not examined. You can’t cover everything. Much of the statistical data concludes in 1998 but some chapters struggle to get past 1995. This is inevitable in comparative work. The age of the data is particularly important for some aspects of Nordic social policy as changes in the late 1990s were of great importance. The editors explain from the outset that their approach to studying welfare is very much in terms of structural and institutional analysis. This – plus the fact that a wide range of issues and countries are dealt with – means that there is little room for political or cultural analysis. Not surprisingly there is a Nordic concern with the empirical and the positivistic. No postmodern navel-gazing here.

On the whole, most contributors agree that the Nordic model remains distinctive and that a degree of convergence has occurred. However, they qualify these claims with a careful precision. There are areas where the distinctiveness is either unclear or does not hold. Income distribution remains relatively equal but not for the young. For some health inequalities the Nordic countries fare badly. Nor is the provision of health and social care always superior. Nordic active labour market policies remain distinctive but there is no common Nordic path. As the authors are only willing to recognise, whatever the usefulness of welfare state regimes as ideal types, reality is much too messy to accommodate them unequivocally.

The same fine distinctions are made when it comes to the issue of convergence. There is convergence due to similar internal problems; convergence because of globalisation; convergence to a European pattern; convergence in the
plural rather than one clear-cut converging path. There is even convergence where it can be said that other countries have recognised the need to take a similar direction to Nordic countries – in the fields of child care and active labour market policy for example.

While it is clear from this study that the Nordic model remains not only distinctive but superior, little attempt is made to explain the phenomenon. A minor reference to the ‘politics matters’ school of thought is made at one point and one suspects that many of the contributors would endorse the importance in Scandinavia of social democratic values and the strength of the labour movement. But what of major historical and cultural differences? No mention is made of these. Perhaps this requires a further volume.

It is to be hoped that if this study and its companion do nothing else they will provoke a renewed interest in Scandinavian achievements.


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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401366461


Truism though it be, there is no doubt that employment remains the best protection against poverty. At issue is the question of regulation: whether regulation of markets or use of free market principles provides the best protection for workers against poverty and for societies against increasing inequality in wealth amongst their people. In recent times, deregulation principles have been applied in varying extents in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and other developed economies, including Australia. This edited collection of seven papers explores a series of questions debated amongst labour market economists and social policy analysts, using Australia as a case study.

The Australian labour market provides a useful case study for those interested in comparative policy because of its early and sustained regulation. At the turn of the twentieth century, Australia and New Zealand led labour market regulation through the use of industrial tribunals. Australia’s landmark Harvester Judgement of 1907 set a minimum wage principle, based on the needs of a male wage earner with a family of two or three children and setting in place industrial relations tribunals with minimum wage setting responsibilities. The Australian welfare state was from the end of the Second World War predicated on a policy of ‘full employment’, meaning unemployment rates no more than 4 per cent, a level not even in sight since prior to the 1970s oil crisis. This principle of full employment, however, is linked to the safety-net basis of social welfare. In Australia, entitlement is based on need and funded from general taxation revenue. That is, it is neither time nor insurance linked, but rather based on insufficiency of income. It has been supported by the wage regulation system introduced in 1907. This set of relationships has been increasingly eroded by
both conservative and labour governments, prompting debates on the tensions between efficient and equitable outcomes. The Howard coalition government has from its election in 1996 attempted to reduce further the role of the Industrial Relations Tribunal, replacing it as far as possible with enterprise bargaining. It aligned with the employer in the dispute between Patrick Stevedoring and the Maritime Workers Union, supporting the employer’s use of violence to suppress the union’s resistance to change. This charge to restructuring the stevedoring industry was unsuccessful, Patrick’s were eventually forced to negotiate with labour.

The issues now are about to deal with higher levels of unemployment, increasing inequality across the labour market, high rates of youth unemployment and inequities for women and older male workers. No doubt these issues are internationally understood. The authors of *Reshaping the Labour Market* are leading Australian economists with an interest in examining the following relationships: between regulation of the labour market and social welfare; between deregulation of the labour market and inequality; and between policy processes and equitable outcomes in terms of the well-being of workers. The editor, Sue Richardson, sets the scene well in a tightly and clearly argued case for regulation of labour markets, on the basis that there is no necessary incompatibility between equity and efficiency, quoting Sen’s view that market outcomes can be perfectly efficient and perfectly disgusting. She carefully analyses the role of the industrial tribunal, arguing that the distinctive feature of the Australian system has been the use of the wage system to provide an explicit poverty avoidance margin that in other countries was to become the responsibility of the state via social welfare.

Keith Hancock brings a wealth of experience to a chapter analysing the steps to deregulation in Australia historically and the arguments on both sides. He concludes that there is no compelling case for the necessity of deregulation to increase economic productivity. While this chapter is not comparative internationally, it provides a valuable depth of analysis. The focus then changes to the relationship between wage regulation and the employment of low wage workers. Using economic modelling and comparative analysis, Borland and Woodbridge draw attention to the diverse outcomes of regulation, which in Australia included narrowed earnings relativities, particularly for women and people of less education. Overall, they draw attention to the lack of knowledge that precludes anything but a ‘best guess’ at the effects of deregulation on the employment of low wage workers; while it may result in a modest increase by 10–15 per cent, they pose social policy issues: a greater reliance on social security and the significant shift in bargaining power towards the employer.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 take an empirical approach to three areas: the relationship between low wages, low family income and taxation transfers; the long-term effects of low wages; and the relationship between increasing the skills base of low wage workers, with reference to reducing long-term unemployment. The final chapter concludes that while deregulation may lead to a small increase in employment due to lower wages, it takes large wage drops to make a substantial impact on unemployment. As a result of the drop in income of low-paid workers, there will be increased poverty amongst the working poor. Gregory
et al. therefore argue for continuing central government intervention via job creation, training and other macro-policy strategies.

Overall, this book is a high-calibre analysis raising questions relevant in a comparative policy context. The empirical content is very interesting in demonstrating the complexity and diversity of the labour market and possible solutions to the problems of unemployment and equity. The weaknesses are some unevenness of the chapters in terms of depth and focus, and of the social interests of the contributors. As well, the volume lacks an overall conclusion of the vibrancy and strength of Richardson’s introduction. This would have been useful to the policy reader who may be overwhelmed by the technicality of some of the chapters and their arguments. This technically demanding book will be of interest particularly to economists, to those theorising about labour markets and their effects and to people interested in comparative policy. The editor claims an interest in the social policy dimensions of labour market deregulation, but that interest is unevenly reflected, argued most cogently by Richardson herself. Unavoidably, comparison is made with the work of sociologists such as Kirk Mann, where a focus on social justice is primary.

Fundamentally, labour market deregulation is a political act. Australia’s coalition government is committed to economic rationalism and the Australian Labor Party opposition’s policy is not clear – indeed, deregulation commenced in 1985 during its term of office. With a Federal election late in 2001 and the coalition government on the back foot electorally, it will be interesting to see whether voters will have a real choice: whether the espousal of deregulation will be maintained in the face of union and public disapproval, or whether the role of the industrial tribunals in social and occupational welfare will be strengthened. Richardson’s book provides ammunition for this debate.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401376468

Helmut Wollman and Eckhard Schroter (eds.), Comparing Public Sector Reform in Britain and Germany: key traditions and trends of modernisation, 2000, Aldershot, Ashgate, xii+388 pp., £45.00.

Whether the sweeping pace and nature of New Public Management based reforms are conceptualised as a rational adaptation to the conditions of the new millennium (Cutler and Waine, 2000), and as part of an unfinished revolution (Williams, 2000); or, as a questionable commercialisation of public services, an undermining of political control and an unwelcome restructuring (fragmentation?) of the welfare-society state relationship, they appear to be here to stay. As an ostensibly global phenomenon, steering and hastening the world of public sector reform in the last two decades, New Public Management (NPM) emphasises efficiency, managerialism, devolution and market orientation, thus making the public sector and civil service in different countries appear more similar (see Christensen and Laegreid, 2001).

In laying the ground for this edited volume, Wollmann and Schroter acknowledge in their Preface such masking of difference and comment on how their book avoids it: the reporting of much public sector modernisation portrays NPM-
driven changes as a secular trend which, particularly in the context of country comparisons, often risks looking only at the face value of ongoing public sector changes, without giving due attention to their embeddedness within deeply rooted political and institutional structures and entrenched administrative cultures. Any such ‘ecological fallacies’ are avoided in the book by providing clear and detailed explications of the comparison countries’ key political and administrative traditions. Indeed, the volume applies a decidedly political science approach, but in addressing the split between the ‘generalist’ and ‘specialist’ scientific communities, it incorporates contributions from public management experts and policy specialists as well as from political scientists.

The resulting book is a highly competent, detailed and sophisticated (yet very accessible) account of the range of issues concerning key traditions and trends of modernisation in British and German public sector reform. Wollmann and Schroter have carefully organised and coherently presented 17 specially commissioned chapters from 18 leaders in their respective fields. The contributions to this comparative volume – mostly originating from two recent Anglo-German conferences at the Institute of Social Sciences of the Humbold University – are well balanced between ten German and seven British accounts, with a North American concluding comment on explanations of success and failure in administrative reform.

The first part of the book (chs. 1–10) identifies, in the light of the NPM paradigm (see Gow and Dufour, 2000), four factorial clusters of British and German state traditions in examining the key institutional and cultural factors most likely to shape current public sector reform policies in the two countries. These four factors are broadly defined by Wollmann and Schroter (p. x) as, first, the underlying notion of the state and state–society relations in historical perspective. The ‘state’ as a separate legal entity (‘moral person’) is alien to English political ‘civil society’ thinking, but dominant in Continental European political thought (Johnson, ch. 2), exemplified in the particular German tradition of the classical administrative system, where state bureaucracy is older than democracy (Konig, ch. 3).

Second, Wollmann and Schroter suggest, given that the structural features of the government systems and the particular intergovernmental relations are likely to have a lasting impact on the substance and course of reform processes, that the influences of the unitary and federal state models deserve their closer attention. This is adroitly achieved by a comparative analysis of British and German institutional development (Wollmann, ch. 1); a detailed account of the role of ‘social federalism’ (‘unobtrusive devolution’) in tackling the UK’s regional nationalism whilst maintaining its strongly unitary state (Sharpe, ch. 4); and by discussion of the social and historical foundations of federalism and decentralism in Germany (Lehmbruch, ch. 5).

The third factor of state traditions broadly defined in the book is the public sector workforce. Derlien (ch. 8) considers and critiques the concept of the public service and presents a comparative reform history of the British and German cases; and the practical implications are analysed of the shift from administrative towards managerial culture in terms of the public service at both national and local levels in Britain and Germany (Ridley, ch. 7; Schroter and Rober, ch. 9). Cultural patterns that guide political and administrative behaviour constitute

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the final factor. Empirical data on political values and attitudes is explored by Schroter (ch. 10) to assess political support for public sector reform programmes in the UK and Germany.

The second part of the book (chs. 11–16) draws upon this earlier material about the institutional and cultural characteristics of the two systems to analyse, evaluate and problematise key trends of recent and current public sector reforms in the production and delivery of social services, towards generating ‘applicable and problem-oriented results’.

Excellent as this volume is on providing detailed and often insightful discussion of public sector reform in Britain and Germany, such an exercise, as Peters (ch. 17) concludes ‘may not be particularly useful in building more general theories about reform’ (p. 360). An additional contribution (or concluding chapter) would have been welcomed, attempting an empirically grounded theoretical overview of the effects of public sector reform on the fundamental functions of government (i.e., allocation, redistribution and regulation), in terms of its major goals of efficiency and/or justice (see, for example, Lane, 1997).

Clarke and Hoggett (ch. 11) offer an enticing glimpse of Hoggett’s writings on the new global discourse of ‘managerialisation’, as exemplifying ‘a form of unreflective [and unreflective?] modernisation which construes change as a “good” in itself. It is preoccupied with the “how” of things rather than the “why” and thus exhibits a shallowness in its use of value’ (p. 239). But the remit of Clarke and Hoggett’s contribution disallows space for developing any such more general theories about public sector reform per se. To an extent, this is undertaken – and the number of comparison countries expanded across three continents and over twenty-four OECD countries – in several other volumes also published in 2000 and which may be seen as complementary to Wollmann and Schroter’s book (see, Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000; Harrinvirta, 2000; Saint-Martin, 2000). Nonetheless, Wollmann and Schroter’s volume – albeit prohibitive to student book-buying budgets, priced at £45.00 – stands as a rigorous, highly informative and highly competent comparative account of modernisation in British and German public sector reform, and a most valuable addition to the literature.


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While successive British governments have borrowed much rhetoric, and some policies, from American ‘welfare’ programmes, the US Social Security system is less discussed or understood. Yet it carries on in its dignified way, immunised from much of the rough-and-tumble of US politics, surviving occasional campaigns for its privatisation, and guarded by venerable institutions. The National Academy of Social Insurance, organiser of the conference on which this book is based, is one such guardian. It lists among its directors and advisers many of the great names from Social Security’s era of expansion and development.

Sometimes the venerability makes this book heavy going. The conference contributors are underedited, and the tone adopted by sensible, ageing people reiterating their common beliefs, or, occasionally, politely disagreeing with ‘Ted’ or ‘Stuart’, can be rather wearing. The details of the political debate around Social Security are unlikely to interest British readers, and the homilies of Senator Kennedy and his colleagues are entirely missable, as are some of the contributions from senior administrators.

However, there are some interesting chapters. Loewenstein’s analysis of the costs and benefits of health and retirement-related choice is a highlight. Loewenstein uses a simple framework to analyse whether people really like having choices. He reports some provocative research findings on ‘decision anomalies’ and provides a brief but convincing account of our tendency to impose arbitrary restrictions on excessively complex decisions, our responses when we feel we lack expertise, and the costs in anxiety and regret which we may incur in making choices.

Robert Reischauer reviews the debate over proposals for individual retirement accounts, where (under some proposals) participants could have control over who manages their accounts, the assets they are invested in and the level of contributions they make. He frames the debate by identifying the purposes and consequences of choice, and argues that choice will lead to disparities in outcomes that will not just reflect the preferences and actions of participants, but will also arise from brute good or bad luck. It is questionable how sustainable these disparities will be: losers will seek compensation and look for others to blame.

For British researchers who have engaged in the debate on the future of National Insurance, it is striking that these commentators frame the issues in a different way. I can think of two main reasons why. First, in the UK we think of a shift from National Insurance to private insurance as a ‘saving’: a reduction in government expenditure and taxation. In the USA, employers must meet very substantial non-wage labour costs, particularly health insurance costs, which are not classified as taxation because they are not mandatory and are paid to private insurers. These costs are of sufficient magnitude that it is evident that their economic impact is commensurable with the burden of taxation. Far from believing that privatisation brings ‘savings’, it is conceivable to Americans that a national insurance scheme for health care could reduce employers’ costs.

Second, the problem of regretted choices has been obscured in the UK by issues around the giving of financial advice. In the miss-selling scandal, some people were given advice that was clearly wrong at the time it was given. This
has served to hide the much more general problem that financial advice can easily turn out to be wrong, even when it is given in good faith by a qualified person. Regulation of advice-giving will not guard pension scheme participants against falling annuity rates or stock market crashes.

This book provides an accessible discussion of some important policy issues. The contributors bring abundant experience to their subjects, and my impression is that the material is factually accurate and fairly represents the US debate. The level of the discussion would be well suited to final year undergraduates or Masters students on public and social policy courses, but the references are almost entirely American, apart from Uwe Reinhardt’s contribution on ‘International Perspectives on Health Policy Reform’.

For anyone who takes an ongoing interest in US social policy, the book is rather an indulgence. There is abundant material on US Social Security on the web, and there is not enough depth and detail in this book to save one having to search out supplementary electronic sources for anything but the most introductory enquiries. One has to ask whether there is any rationale nowadays for publishing conference proceedings in book form. The National Academy of Social Insurance has a tidy website (www.nasi.org), and they could just have put these papers on it.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401396460


One feature of American society which received considerable attention among liberal academics and even modest recognition on the political stage in the early 1990s was the growth in income inequality which had occurred during the 1980s and which had reversed the general trend of income distribution in the post-war period. To a limited degree the Clinton administration and Congressional Democrats did attempt to respond to this, most significantly through the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit in 1993 and also the increase in the minimum wage in 1996. Heymann’s book, however, highlights another ‘gap’ in American life which particularly affects working families but which, perhaps because it less quantifiable, has received less notice than straightforward income disparities. What Heymann describes is the growing gap between what working adults are explicitly required to do in the workplace and implicitly expected to do in the home against the reality of what they can actually do when having to combine the role of worker and carer.

She does this by most effectively integrating stories from in-depth household case studies with a clear presentation of the structural problems workers face when attempting to cope with the demands of work and also looking after vulnerable family members. Furthermore, while such issues can afflict families across the income spectrum the problems are likely to be exacerbated for those in low wage work. That is, not only do low-income workers have less to spend on arranging alternative care for children or infirm parents, they are also more likely to work anti-social hours and less likely to have fringe benefits such as...
health insurance or paid leave of any sort. Matters are even worse for those such as single working parents (and the welfare reform of 1996 meant that single parents of even very young children are expected to be working parents) and parents of children with special medical and/or educational needs.

A significant part of the problem of course is that public policy has not kept up with changes in society as the male breadwinner model of family life broke down. In fact one of Clinton’s first acts was to sign into law the Family and Medical Leave Act which granted working parents up to 60 days of unpaid leave a year to look after an ill child. Clinton was constantly keen to emphasise how this manifested his concern with the family; but, as Heymann points out, the very limited nature of this legislation reveals as much about how confined the public policy is as it did about the good intentions of the administration. One illustration of this is that the FMLA only applies to workers in businesses with fifty or more employees. Moreover, the fact that this is unpaid leave means that even many of those eligible will not be able to take advantage of the provision.

Thus even when the government has intervened to try to ease the burden on those combining the role of worker and carer it has done so in only a partial manner. In her concluding chapter Heymann does, nevertheless, maintain that it is incumbent on government to act to act to improve the lot of working families; and, as she points out, this requires more than simply mandating companies to allow workers more flexible working hours as this would likely create incentive structures for employers to discriminate against hiring people with young children or elderly parents. It is hard to disagree with this analysis, but it does perhaps highlight the principal weakness of the book as Heymann does not really address the essentially political question of why it has been so hard to update policy in line with societal changes. That is, she argues that some alterations which would make a real difference, such as changing the structure of both the school day and year so that children are not away from school so much while their parents are at work, would be relatively straightforward to implement. This, however, is to ignore how vested interests – including in this case groups such as the teaching unions – can mobilise to oppose such actions whatever their apparent rationale.

Overall then, the book might have benefited from a slightly deeper analysis of the ideological and institutional reasons for why change, particularly on the scale necessary, is so hard to bring about. On the other hand, Heymann provides a compelling and accessible account of just why significant reform is needed in an America where long hours for low pay and with few support services available is too often the norm. In particular, the case studies provide a matter-of-fact, yet simultaneously wrenching, chronicle of how many American families operate on a daily basis on the edge of social and economic dislocation.
adoption with an American couple, then adopted in the United States by a British couple, who brought the children back to the UK. Shortly afterwards, the children were removed from the family by the local social services and the legality of the American adoption was brought into question. The children are black and the couple white. The case showed how adoption, a seemingly narrow and specialist subject, raises issues at the heart of social policy. For example, when and how should the state intervene in family life? What are the boundaries in responsibilities and rights among parents, professionals and the courts? What are appropriate ways of tackling the poverty and deprivation that characterise parents who give up their children for adoption? How are differences in socially protective law and policy to be handled when people move from one country to another? Does trans-racial adoption represent multiracial harmony or is it based on racist practices?

In the context of this recent case, it seems apt for a British reviewer to be considering an American book on adoption. As it happens, inter-country and trans-racial adoption receive only passing mention in *Family Matters*. The author sets out to write a history of adoption in the United States. Having no previous close professional or personal interest in the subject, he became captivated by the question of secrecy and openness in adoption, which became the theme of the book. It briefly charts general developments in adoption up to 1900, then focuses on changes in attitudes, legislation and practice during the twentieth century with regard to communication between adopters, adoptees and birth families. Several aspects are considered, particularly the question of how and when adopters tell children they are adopted; adoptees’ rights to gain access to information about their origins; and birth mothers’ ability to keep in touch with the adoptive family. Three main phases are covered. Early open communication between birth and adoptive families gave way in the 1940s and 1950s to a period of restrictive laws and practices with regard to contact and access to records. For over thirty years now, this ‘secrecy’ has been challenged from many directions, leading to a partial thaw, but with still a presumption of minimal or no contact between birth and adoptive families.

The book is written in a clear and lively fashion. The writer is a professor of history, so a great merit of the work is the careful and detailed use of contemporary sources. Insights are provided into the past everyday practice of adoption workers through careful examination of a large number of case notes from one of the main agencies involved. Many other data sources are also used, including state and federal reports, statutes, testimonies of individual birth mothers, adopters and adoptees, statements by professional bodies and empirical papers. Although no explicit framework for analysis is presented, policy development is presented as a complicated interplay among different domains (family life, law, social work practice, state and federal policy). Influences on change and resistance to change are depicted as similarly wide-ranging: demographic and economic shifts; social attitudes and ideologies; wars and other major events; academic theory and research; interest groups; and individual lobbyists. The book shows the importance of such factors as legitimacy, feasibility, power, goal displacement, organisational inertia and professional self-protection, though they are not named as such. Perhaps, unusually, the book sees academic ideas and findings as having a significant influence on policy. The author is usually
balanced in approach, but is scathing about the input from Freudian perspectives, for their flimsy evidence and capacity to support opposing arguments with equal vigour.

On the whole the book seeks to understand the complex processes rather than pass judgement or reach conclusions about what is the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ approach to secrecy and disclosure. Arguments on both sides are subjected to critical scrutiny. It is also noted how measures introduced for one purpose may subsequently be misconstrued or diverted for a completely different purpose. Thus, it is observed that much of the initial thrust towards greater secrecy was justified in terms of protecting birth families, but this approach was later used to exclude birth mothers seeking more information or contact with their adopted children.

Carp has provided a lively and highly informative account of a central feature of adoption. Readers familiar with adoption are likely to gain additional knowledge and find some of their assumptions questioned about how particular laws and practices developed. Others can benefit from its thorough approach to analysing policy change. However, the book is very much written from a white American perspective. Highly disproportionate numbers of black and Native American children were adopted in the twentieth century. Their cultural traditions with regard to adoption and many other family matters were very different from those of European origins. The book barely mentions this. Also no attention is given to customary ideas and practices from Maoris, Australian Aborigines and others, which have fed into current thinking about adoption in the UK as well as in the Southern Hemisphere. As the internet case demonstrated, adoption is not just a local family matter.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401416461

Being neither a historian nor from a Community and Youth Work background I felt somewhat fraudulent at the prospect of reviewing this book. That is, until I realised I am a product of one of the chapters – the Village College system in Cambridgeshire, Impington, in my career pictured on the front cover. On further reflection, my work relating to sexually abused youth in the sex industry, culminating later this year in a book (with Alyson Brown) reviewing the university since Victorian times, clearly reveals that we have a very informed review editor. Perhaps as a consequence of these coincidences, I read it ‘cover to cover’ in one sitting, although I acknowledge this could be interpreted as a little disingenuous to the contributors and the editors, the contrary is the case. Some of the chapters are simply and beautifully written verging on prose in some cases. The reputations of those who have contributed go before them and they have managed to cleverly create social history into social commentary, unfettered by too much nostalgia.
The fifteen chapters are simply too many to comment upon individually but the breadth of the work is intellectually interesting in itself. Some matters have almost slipped from memory like the Edwardian Boys in Sunderland (Chapter 6), or some of the key figures discussed, who are virtually unheard of now (D’Aeth, Chapter 4). Other matters like gender (Chapter 7), still remain with us. We can usefully learn from these historical reflections about our present day existence and professorial practice.

But what of the origins of this book itself? This has clearly been driven by the editors of Youth and Policy, the same editors have edited this book. Over half of the chapters are based on workshop papers presented during the History of Youth and Community Work Conference held at Ushaw College, Durham in November 1998. There was clearly concern that youth and community workers are in danger of losing their ‘repertory of the past! The intentions of both that conference, and subsequently this book, are to help secure this repertory’, for ever! It certainly does that.

Several aspects of the book are creatively unusual. For example, dated language is often edited out of text, here it is retained as both central and integral. We hear about Ragged Schools Union (p. 27), Date Hog (p. 41) and Juvenile Reading Societies (p. 71). The inclusion of photographs adds another endearing element of key features on both the cover and at the beginning of each chapter. For the scholarly the bibliographies for each chapter are very thorough.

‘Fighting back from above’ (p. 17), ‘Fighting back from below’ (p. 17), Octavia Hill (p. 39), and Social Action (p. 165), are all indicators of how much vitality, integrity and impetus the exploration of these histories has given us at the beginning of a new century. Some of these values have been very well captured in one piece I recently read on the importance of community portraits (Timms, 2000) in professional and vocational learning.

I sense I have learned more about my school in Tony Jeffs’ admirable chapter on ‘Henry Morris and the Cambridgeshire Village Colleges’ than I did when I attended it. He explores the claim whether Morris invented the community school. As Jeffs observes, ‘This is an exaggeration; but it is not hyperbole to identify him as a major figure in the development of community education’ (p. 185). To read that one’s school is a ‘master piece’ and ‘one of the best buildings of its date in England’ really is a little spooky. Can you imagine? However, Jeffs observes that some of these Village Colleges have shamefully become grant maintained thereby making a contribution to the destruction of the local democracy they were created to preserve and enrich.

I wonder whether a slightly tighter adherance to identifiable historical periods may have been useful for the book, and a more formal conclusion could have given the book a more rounded feel. However, I am probably on the verge of being disingenuous, again, especially as there are compensating analytical terms like ‘bottom up histories’ and ‘policy lemmings’.

Ample is written about the early pioneers in this book, but they also have an influential role for the future. The elements of demise that Community and Youth Work faced are captured in the last two chapters, about the lost opportunities of the 1970s and then the consequences of the Thatcher era. It is for these reasons that current students, and not only those on Community and Youth Work course, will find this book useful. Therefore not only have the contributors
to the book identified their ‘repertory of the past’, but by so doing they simulta-
neously have identified the art of what is possible for the future.


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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401426468


Chapter 5 of this book describes how the Moyne Committee (1933) attempted to eclipse council housing by giving ‘public utility societies’ the lead role in supplying new ‘social housing’ and improving older property. It failed, but a similar initiative, started in the middle 1980s, was successful, albeit not via the mechanisms devised by its instigators. Tenant’s Choice and Housing Action Trusts, distrusted by tenants, had limited impact but local authorities, short of resources for repairs and improvement, began to opt for ‘voluntary transfer’. Between 1997 and 2000 only 600 local authority dwellings were built in England and, in 1999, New Labour introduced a programme to transfer 200,000 council dwellings each year to ‘registered social landlords’. At this rate of stock disposal council housing will soon be ripe for the final coup de grâce as delivered in the United States when, in 1993, vouchers were offered to encourage tenants to move out of public housing.

Why, following the ‘false dawns’ and ‘unequal struggles’ of the past, have housing associations now found a place in the sun? In a perceptive introduction, Malpass supplies some of the answers. Housing associations, he says, are ‘curi-
ous entities’: unlike private landlords they do not make profits and, unlike local authorities, their boards lack the legitimacy born of the ballot box. They are part of the proliferating ‘local spending bodies’ sector, receiving substantial sums of public money yet accountable neither to the ‘neutral judge’ of the market nor to the ‘voice’ of tenants. Moreover, housing associations do not qualify as a social movement. ‘It is much more helpful’, says Malpass, ‘to think in terms of several distinct strands of activity’ (p. 7). These traits have made them convenient and compliant vessels through which the major political parties have revised their housing policies whilst retaining dimensions of their core political ideologies. Between 1988 and 1996 the Conservatives blurred the distinction between private landlords and housing associations. Associations were exposed to the business risks of development and had to compete for diminishing state assistance. The 1988 Housing Act placed housing associations lettings under the same legal framework as ‘for profit’ suppliers and pushed association rents towards market rents with Housing Benefit ‘taking the strain’.

Because this book was written before the publication of the Housing Statement Quality and Choice: a decent home for all (DETR, 2000) only part of New Labour’s housing policy is revealed. New Labour is now smudging the distinc-
tion between housing associations and local authorities. Despite the current surplus of £1.5 billion generated by local authority housing in 2000/01 (Wilson, 2000), New Labour plans to create a level playing-field in ‘social housing’ by
pushing local authority rents towards those set by housing associations. Selected authorities will be allowed to set-up ‘arms length’ housing companies and, in Scotland, there is to be a single tenure for all ‘social’ tenants and one authority to regulate ‘social’ housing.

To return to the story of the Moyne proposals to replace local councils with housing associations. In 1992, Yelling supplied a detailed account of these events and, unlike Malpass, he placed them in the context of the Conservative attempt to contain ‘urban’ England and Labour’s preference for the ‘suburban solution’. Herein lies the limitation of Housing Association and Housing Policy. At times it is too close to an ‘official’ history of housing associations, described by Malpass as a ‘dynamic, expansionist and highly professional set of social businesses, well suited to play a key role in the modernised welfare state’ (p. 270). The ‘political economy’ of the associations and the social context and impact of their activities are underplayed. Thus, in an otherwise informative chapter on ‘multiple visions of housing reform 1890–1914’, the land issue – so important to ‘New’ Liberalism and Garden Cities – receives only one sentence. The account of the new financial regime of 1989, although excellent on the intricacies of its implementation, is sketchy on its social impact. It is also disappointing to find no examination of the role of the sixty housing associations led by ethnic minorities – surely important given that ‘welfare pluralism’ is one of the principal justifications of housing association activity.

The author informs us that an anonymous referee ‘wisely insisted that the original draft should be reduced substantially in length’ (p. xi). Perhaps the omissions highlighted above are on the cutting room floor and available for a future edition.


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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279401436464


These two books approach the same question; namely, the extent to which convergence in welfare regimes affects children. However, despite this common starting point, they also show interesting areas of divergence themselves. The study conducted by Link, Bibus and Lyons considers the extent to which policy trends relating to children can be said to share common tendencies between the US (or, more accurately, some states in the US) and the UK; whilst, on the other hand, the Mickelwright and Stewart study is concerned with attempting to
quantify the degree to which welfare outcomes for children are converging between EU member states.

This, in itself, raises some interesting issues concerning whether policy intentions or policy impacts gives us a better picture of the current and future state of child welfare. It could, for example, be argued that one approach tells us what has happened, whilst the other may be a better predictor of what is likely to happen.

Other questions, too, are generated as to whether it is feasible to talk of convergence between the UK and both the EU and the United States simultaneously. Inevitably, perhaps, detailed consideration of both books suggests a rather more complex picture than this, with conclusions which are by no means clear cut. Of the two, it is the European study which presents a clearer picture, and allows us to draw some conclusions, even if tentative and qualified. This is, at least partly, because it is better written, covering a substantial amount of data, and dealing with complex methodological issues with a degree of clarity. The study draws together material from a range of sources, covering specific areas such as child deaths, education, economic well-being, fertility and life satisfaction. This in itself is a helpful approach combining ‘hard’ indicators with more nebulous but equally meaningful measures such as individual contentment.

The study is able to draw some tentative conclusions about the ‘convergence’ thesis, suggesting, as the best research usually does, that the picture is mixed. Convergence can be identified in some areas, such as infant mortality, education spending, and interestingly, life satisfaction. On the other hand, continuing divergence is still found in areas such as child poverty and youth development. The authors conclude that these disparities may mask certain common themes, such as improvements against general indicators of health and well-being set against deterioration in areas such as poverty and exclusion. In other words, whilst standards of living in general are improving, inequalities persist and may even be worsening. Despite this, interestingly, the authors acknowledge the significance of the extent of ‘positive convergence’ in the area of life satisfaction among young people – understandable, perhaps, in the context of an overall improvement in European living standards.

Whilst the Mickelwright and Stewart book relies on an empirical evaluation of outcomes to address the convergence thesis, Bibus and Link concentrate on a comparison of common areas of policy between the UK and the US in order to consider the same question. This is supplemented, rather frustratingly, with an array of anecdotal evidence, the strength of which is difficult to assess. It is also slightly unfortunate that the authors rely on a colleague (Lyons) for the substantive section relating to the UK. This, in itself, makes for some unevenness in presentation. But more fundamentally, one is left with the question as to whether an analysis at the level of policy can tell us what we need to know about its implementation and impact. Should we equate ‘welfare-to-work’ schemes simply on the basis of shared language – it is undeniable that the UK government has borrowed this from the US in many instances (e.g., ‘New Deal’) – or should we also be concerned about the context within which this is implemented. Arguably, this would point to significant differences within the US, never mind across the Atlantic. In this context, one is left rather regretfully to conclude that we have learnt little about this central question. On the other hand, Karen
Lyons’ chapter on the UK government’s strategy to eliminate child poverty is helpful in setting out a clear picture of the programme, and progress so far, and this is certainly the most convincing part of the book as a whole.

Are we able to draw any more general conclusions about the notion of convergence based on these two books? A couple of thoughts, perhaps, arise. First, we must be cautious about global claims in this context. For example, the empirical evidence in the European context appears to point in different directions depending on the indicator chosen. In addition, recent experience close to home, in Scotland, suggests that moves towards devolution of power may generate a greater degree of divergence. This may also be the case in the American context, where individual states have considerable power to determine their own welfare policies. We must, therefore, be very cautious about claims to identify significant convergence between the UK and the US on the level of policy alone. Indeed, for my part, I believe that a truer picture can only be achieved by viewing policy change in the context of outcomes, including subjective measures of well-being, or ‘life satisfaction’. Of the two books here, it seems that the Micklewright and Stewart offers a more rounded picture in this respect.

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DOI: 10.1017/S00472794014346460


In 1976 Richard Wilkinson wrote a now famous open letter to David Ennals, the then Labour secretary of state of health and social security, highlighting the depth of British class divisions in health and challenging him to set up a government inquiry. To his credit Ennals rose to the challenge and commissioned a working group under the chairmanship of Sir Douglas Black. Four years later, as part of a deliberate attempt to undermine the report’s findings, the then Conservative government only made 260 photocopies of The Black Report publicly available. So began a long and exhaustive battle by many researchers, often in the face of a hostile government, to highlight the growing health divide in Britain and to explain the importance of material inequality as a root cause of that divide. The vast volume of literature and research that has filled this field over the last twenty years is daunting but The Widening Gap succeeds in presenting the evidence and the arguments with clarity and depth.

Using a simple technique, the authors highlight growing inequalities in health over the last quarter of the twentieth century. They compare the conditions of the million people in the fifteen parliamentary constituencies that have the worst mortality record with the million people living in the thirteen parliamentary constituencies having the best mortality record. This might be criticised by purists as too simplistic but I think to do so would be to miss the point. The contrasts are striking, disturbing and still have the power to shock. The danger is that when the data are presented in this way the problem may be interpreted as one of extremes rather than something that affects the UK as a whole.

One wholly cynical response is ‘if we bomb Glasgow then we’ll solve the prob-
lem’. However, taken as a whole, the evidence and research presented in this book demonstrate the extent to which inequality matters to all parts of Britain both in terms of the pattern of inequality and the causal mechanisms that lead to inequality.

Starting with Peter Townsend’s foreword the book contains a useful background to the Black report and the subsequent Acheson report commissioned in 1997 by the Labour government. In their introduction, the authors make their intention clear: to highlight the weaknesses of policies that promote wealth creation over redistribution and targeting rather than universalism. Following on from this, the book provides evidence of inequality using a geographical perspective (largely missing from the Acheson report). Comparisons of the extreme health areas are presented using a life-cycle framework starting with early life and moving through childhood to working life and retirement. The aim is to ‘show how in contemporary Britain unequal chances of death are interwoven, in social and spatial terms, with unequal chances in life, in terms of education, employment, income and wealth’ (p. 5). Incorporating the Breadline Britain surveys, longitudinal studies and long-term follow up of birth cohorts, the authors highlight the inadequacies of single factor explanations of health inequality and demonstrate the importance of cumulative lifetime social experiences on differences in mortality. Disadvantage in many forms cluster over the life course and although each form of disadvantage may appear individually to have a modest effect, taken together, they constitute an accumulation of class injuries. This insight is used to argue that policy interventions to reduce health inequalities are more usefully applied at wider determinants across the life course. The book goes on to chart increases in inequalities that have occurred since the 1950s. The evidence is clear. Life chances are becoming geographically polarised. Overall, the picture is one of general improvement in mortality but for some specific age groups and specific causes the picture is one of an increase in mortality rates in some areas. Polarisation of class and the limits of traditional class measures to take account of changes in the world of work are discussed and clearly explained. However, attempts to make links between patterns of increasing inequality and periods of conservative political administration during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (although appealing) seem to be an oversimplification of the relationship between social change and growing inequality in the second half of the twentieth century.

In the final part of the book arguments for an alternative policy agenda are developed. Here the authors push home their argument that inequalities in health are most effectively reduced by policies that alleviate poverty and reduce inequalities in income and wealth. The limits of area based policies are contrasted with arguments for national policies. The ‘progressive universalism’ of New Labour receives considerable criticism here. Unlike the Acheson report, which failed to cost its recommendations, this book updates the cost of the Black report and provides evidence of public support for poverty alleviation policies. The case for Basic Income policies is well made and the authors also emphasise the importance of benefits in kind (e.g., the NHS) for the poorest households in the UK. The lack of research into inequity in services such as the NHS is highlighted as is the need for research that determines the routes through which material disadvantage causes poor health.
Each chapter starts with clear summary points and data are presented using imaginative graphics to highlight the patterning of inequality. The chapters and appendixes can be useful teaching aids and are a rich source of information for researchers working in the field. This book will be of interest to academics and researchers working in social policy, sociology, social epidemiology, geography and other social science related subjects. It does two things well. It makes an excellent contribution to our understanding of health inequality in Britain and provides a useful contribution to the policy debate.

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