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SPRC Newsletter

SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTRE

No. 50 SEPTEMBER 1993 FREE.

EDITOR: JULIA MARTIN

THE MEANING OF SOCIAL POLICY - SOME REFLECTIONS

BY SOL ENCEL

At a two-day postgraduate research Workshop held at the Centre in July, students presented accounts of their work and engaged in lively discussions about a variety of issues, one of which was the nature of social policy itself. In this short article, I shall amplify some of the comments I made during the seminar about the obvious (but often unasked) question, 'What is Social Policy?'

Even in a research centre such as ours, devoted to the study of social policy, it is surprising to find that only one of the more than one hundred **SPRC Reports and Proceedings** is explicitly addressed to defining social policy. Robert Pinker's paper, *Theory and Ideology in Social Welfare* (R&P No.26) dates back to 1982 and has had no successors.

The first book-length collection of work done at the Centre was *Retreat From the Welfare State*, edited by Adam Graycar in 1983. The title implicitly identifies social policy with the welfare state, and the various chapters are mainly concerned with specific policies in a number of areas - child welfare, aged care, unemployment, family support, and housing. In his Introduction, Adam Graycar devotes only a few sentences to discussing social policy in general. In effect, he endorses the classic definition given by T.H. Marshall in his book *Social Policy* (first published in 1965), that social policy is about:

- the elimination of poverty
- the maximisation of welfare
- the pursuit of equality.

There is, however, a much longer discussion of social policy in one of the other chapters in *Retreat from the Welfare*

State, written by Vivienne Milligan. Although her contribution is mainly concerned with housing, one section presents

a theoretical argument about how social policy approaches, policy forms and policy effects are shaped by the character of the political process in capitalist society.



Above: There was a semantic difference in English between 'policy' and 'politics' by Shakespearean times

The theoretical framework she adopts is essentially Marxist and follows the general Marxist critique of 'welfare capitalism', which argues that social policy within a capitalist economic system is fraught with insoluble contradictions.

The role of social policy under these conditions is to provide a social and political framework which supports the

maintenance of capital accumulation and reduces the social tensions arising from capitalist exploitation. The capitalist system alone cannot maintain a necessary level of capital accumulation. State intervention is necessary, but it does not resolve the tensions and contradictions of capitalist society. It merely reproduces them in the form of conflicts between and within the economic and political spheres.

Ultimately, she concludes

the resolution of that contradiction which we understand as the welfare problem cannot take the form of public purchase and allocation of privately produced and controlled goods and services.

The Marxist critique, as presented by Milligan and many others, is cogent and comprehensive. If taken literally, however, it virtually removes the *raison d'être* of welfare policies. In a world where most of us accept the proposition that politics is the art of the possible, we are constrained to recognise that the objectives formulated

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The British Library

by Marshall are ideal propositions, and that the concrete achievements of social policy will always fall short of them.

THE 'VALUE SPECTRUM'

This is the implicit message of another classic writer on the subject, Richard Titmuss. In his posthumous collection of essays, *Social Policy* (Abel-Smith and K.

If taken literally, the Marxist critique virtually removes the *raison d'être* of welfare policies

Titmuss [eds] 1974), Titmuss distinguished three models of social policy:

- Residual welfare (the state intervenes only when market forces break down)
- Industrial achievement - performance (social needs are met on the basis of merit, work performance and productivity)
- Institutional redistributive (universalist services, non-marketed, provided according to need).

As Titmuss observed, these three models are broad approximations which represent the main points on what he discreetly calls the 'value spectrum'. Put more bluntly, they represent political positions, both within and between parties.



In Australia, the Liberal-National coalition subscribes in theory, if not always in practice, to the 'residual welfare' model; the Labor Party subscribes in theory to the 'institutional-redistributive' model, but as the result of cuts in welfare spending its policies have moved much

closer to Titmuss's second (industrial achievement) model.

I would like to emphasise the extent to which discussions of 'policy' are in reality discussions about politics. The relation between the two concepts is perplexing and obscure. Of the two, policy appears to be easier to define.

ENDS AND MEANS

Titmuss provides us with an elegantly brief statement when he describes policy as 'the principles that govern action directed towards given ends'. This is an eminently rational, or rationalistic, proposition which sidesteps the fact that many - possibly most - policy decisions are not made on a rational basis. This is where the distinction between policy and politics becomes particularly opaque and confusing.

We may note, in passing, that the linguistic distinction between policy and politics is characteristic of the English language and is by no means universal. Both words, of course, derive originally from Greek and Latin, but other European languages use the same word to convey the two meanings which, in English, are semantically differentiated.

In French, German, and Italian the same word does service for both meanings - *politique*, *politik*, and *politica*, respectively. The distinction was already in use in Shakespeare's day. In *King Lear*, he describes someone as a 'scurvy politician', and in *Richard II* he uses 'policy' to denote a considered course of action.

In more recent years, the differential use of these terms may be related to the growth of a professional civil service whose functions are, in theory, concerned with advice on policy but which is not involved in 'politics'. Another important writer on social policy, Martin Rein, is

critical of this distinction, arguing that we should avoid an excessively rationalistic view of policy-making.

Rein attacks the assumption that the problems of choice involved in social policy can be solved by rational and scientific procedures, like those which have gained such ascendancy in bureaucratic circles in Washington (cost-benefit analysis, program budgeting, and so on).

Rein goes so far as to warn us against succumbing to 'crackpot rationality', which he defines as the belief that 'policy sciences, armed with rigorous tools of objective measure, will rescue us from conflicting interests, conflicting means, and conflicting ends'. (Rein, 1970).

Policy propositions succeed not only because of their inherent rationality, but because their supporters can mobilise the numbers

In other words, policy decisions are always contingent upon politics, which exists precisely because of conflicts over ends and means. Social policy, like other policies, is subject to what the political scientist David Easton described some years ago as the 'authoritative allocation of values', a phrase he used to define politics (Easton, 1953).

Policy propositions succeed not only because of their inherent rationality or economic plausibility, but because their supporters can mobilise the numbers. Michael Hill, a recent British writer on the subject, departs from the understated Titmuss approach by declaring bluntly that social policy-making is a political process, and that attention must be given to the policy creation roles of politicians, civil servants, pressure groups and the electorate (Hill, 1993).

To examine social policy, therefore, we must always be alert to the political dimension of policy decisions, and their relationship to other aspects of government action or community pressures. Rein

Continued on page 11

NO POSTGRAD IS AN ISLAND...

The SPRC Postgraduate Research Directory and Workshop

BY NATALIE BOLZAN

Centre activity has recently focused on social policy research undertaken by postgraduate students throughout Australia.

With funding from the Department of Health, Housing, Local Government and Community Services, we have been developing a Directory of Postgraduate Research in the Field of Social Policy. As a further part of the Department's aim to build postgraduate research links, we held a student workshop earlier this year. The following is a brief report on these two ventures.

THE DIRECTORY

Earlier this year, we wrote to 700 university schools, faculties and departments in Australia requesting information about research in their department conducted by postgraduate students.

Around 500 responses have already been received from schools ranging from law, urban planning, and social work, to economics, history and communications. Such diversity demonstrates the range of disciplines and domains which can inform social policy research. The responses are being collated and will form the basis of a Directory of Postgraduate Research in the Field of Social Policy, which will be available later this year.

THE WORKSHOP

Fourteen students from around Australia participated in the Workshop for Postgraduate Students in the Field of Social Policy in mid-July.

Four academic advisers - Professor Jan Carter, Professor Sol Encel, Professor Neil Gilbert, and Professor Peter Taylor-Gooby - attended the two-day workshop. David Wilson, Alf Leslie and Liz Furler represented the Commonwealth Public Service, and the Centre was represented by Peter Saunders, Sheila Shaver, Sara Graham, Michael Fine and Natalie Bolzan.

Following a twenty-minute presentation of each student's research the session was thrown open to all participants for critique and discussion. Academic advisors summarised a morning or an afternoon session, distilling important issues and helping participants place often diverse research papers into a broader context.

The following postgraduate research-in-progress was presented at the Workshop:

- Elizabeth Brooke (La Trobe University) *Frail Older People and Community Care*
- Maureen Cleary (University of Technology Sydney) *The Governance and Management of Catholic Human Service Organisations in Australia: Changing Patterns and Dilemmas*
- Kerin Coulehan (Northern Territory University) *Yolngu Women in Darwin*
- Neil Drew (Curtin University of Technology) *Public Perceptions of Fairness in Social Impact: Towards a Substantive Theory of Justice*
- Douglas Ezzy (La Trobe University) *Job Loss, The Self Concept and Social Policy*
- Betty Gill (University of New South Wales) *A Study of the Ethical Dimensions of the Provision of Acute Health Care Services for the Aged*
- Paul Henman (University Of Queensland) *Computers in the Department of Social Security*
- Annie Holden (Griffith University) *Aboriginal Economic Development in Cape York*
- Morag McArthur (University of New South Wales) *Privatisation by Choice or Chance? Two Case Studies of Private Sector Involvement in Welfare Services*
- Elspeth McInnes (Flinders University) *A Case Study of the JET Scheme: The Reconstruction of Women, Work and Welfare*
- Brita Pekarsky (Newcastle University) *Methodology in the Economic Evaluation of Health Care*
- Tim Reddel (University of Queensland) *Towards Participatory Policy Development and Planning: An Exploration of Social Policy Development in Queensland*

- John Sinclair (University of New South Wales) *The NSW Government Policy of Deinstitutionalisation in Mental Health Services*
- Elizabeth Vagg (University of Tasmania) *Education, Retraining and the Workforce*

OUTCOMES

Many of the research projects directly or implicitly addressed the relationship between social policy and social change. They either presented or commented on



SPRC Workshop participants John Sinclair, Morag McArthur and Natalie Bolzan

social change, observed the intended and/or unintended consequences of change in social policy, or called for change to take place in current decision-making practices.

The value of an interdisciplinary approach to social policy research became evident through the histories of the participants and from the discussions and summary sessions. Postgraduate social policy research is regularly conducted across schools or departments, and projects originating in one discipline often develop into the territory of others.

The challenge presented by the workshop was how social policy researchers can bridge the gaps between the various disciplines which inform social policy research, and at the same time access knowledge which has traditionally remained within distinct disciplines.

Further discussion emphasised the importance of an ongoing relationship between the researcher and the policy maker. Such a relationship serves the dual purpose of 'reality testing' research of an applied nature, and informing and challenging bureaucracy when the research is of a more conceptual nature.

Stimulating and very rewarding, the workshop afforded a unique opportunity to bring together postgraduate researchers, academics and policy makers, all contributing their own valuable perspectives.



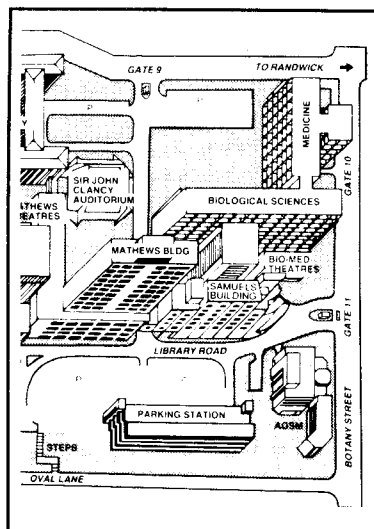
The Social Policy Research Centre (originally the Social Welfare Research Centre) was established in January 1980 under an agreement between the University of New South Wales and the Commonwealth Government.

The Centre is operated by the University as an independent unit of the University. The Director of the Centre receives assistance in formulating the Centre's research agenda from a Board of Management, and in periodic consultation with the community. The Director responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the operation of the Centre.

The Centre undertakes and sponsors research on important aspects of social policy and social welfare; it arranges seminars and conferences, publishes the results of its research in reports, journal articles and books, and provides opportunities for postgraduate studies in social policy. Current research areas cover poverty, inequality, and standards of living; social security, taxation and the labour market; the welfare state; and community support services for the frail elderly and younger people with disabilities.

The views expressed in this Newsletter, as in any of the Centre's publications, do not represent any official position of the Centre. The Newsletter and all other SPRC publications present the views and research findings of the individual authors with the aim of promoting the development of ideas and discussion about major concerns in social policy and social welfare.

The Social Policy Research Centre is located on Level Three of the Samuels Building. Enter by Gate 11, off Botany Street, University of NSW, Kensington Campus.
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FROM THE DIRECTOR

S O C I A L P O L I C Y R E S E A R C H C E N T R E

In virtually every regard, our third Social Policy Conference, **Theory and Practice in Australian Social Policy: Rethinking the Fundamentals** proved to be the success that we had hoped. It attracted around 500 participants, of whom around 45 per cent were affiliated to a tertiary institution, 40 per cent were from government and 15 per cent from community or welfare organisations.

Initial assessment of the evaluation forms suggests that most participants found the Conference to be enjoyable and of value. It was striking, however, that only about one fifth of the evaluation forms were completed, despite the considerable effort taken encouraging people to complete them during the course of the Conference. With such a low overall response, it is difficult to justify making major changes to the aims, content or structure of the Conference solely on the basis of those evaluations which were completed. This is a pity and does not do justice to those who went to the effort of providing us with their evaluation and comments. There probably is a case for some re-thinking of the Conference structure, and even its aims, before 1995 and we have already begun this process. If any of you have comments or suggestions you would like us to consider, please write to me and I will pass them on.

One thing, however, does seem clear. This is that there is a definite need for a regular Conference which brings together researchers and others interested or working in social policy. We have given most emphasis to the research dimension in past Conferences because that is where our expertise is greatest. Some have felt that this has excluded those working 'on the ground' in social policy. If so, this is unfortunate. I hope that we can ensure that future Conferences will continue to play a major role in bringing social policy researchers together, but that we can find ways to achieve this which allow all participants to benefit.

In the week immediately following the Conference, the Centre hosted a two-day Workshop for Postgraduate Students undertaking research in social policy. Funding of the Workshop was provided by the Commonwealth Department of Health, Housing, Local Government and Community Services (DHHLGCS).

The Workshop aimed to bring together a group of younger scholars and provide them with an opportunity to receive critical feedback on their research from established academic researchers and policy-makers in government. We were fortunate that three of the Plenary Speakers from the Social Policy Conference - Professors Jan Carter, Neil Gilbert and Peter Taylor-Gooby - as well as Professor Sol Encel from the Centre and Dr Elizabeth Ozanne from the University of Melbourne agreed to act as Commentators at the Workshop.

The Workshop (described in more detail in Natalie Bolzan's article on page 3 of this Newsletter) provided an excellent venue for a discussion of specific thesis topics as well as for the more general (and perennial) issues associated with the definition and scope of social policy and the relationship between research and government.

Sol Encel's article in this Newsletter will hopefully provide enlightenment to those who continue to struggle with, and be perplexed by, the definition of social policy. The fact that such articles need to be written reveals the fragmented and diffuse nature of the study of social policy. Yet the definition of social policy raises fundamental questions about the policy framework more generally, if only because it draws attention to the narrow frame of reference of some of the conventional theories, concepts and values which underlie current policy formulation. Questions about the scope and meaning of social policy are difficult and awkward, but that should not prevent us asking them, nor for continually searching for better answers.

I arrived back in Australia in early July, having spent a short time in Sweden. I had the good fortune to be invited to present a paper on inequality trends in Australia over the 1980s to an International Conference on the Distribution of Economic Well-Being, held near Göteborg in June. The Conference contained papers focusing on trends in inequality in a broad range of countries including, in addition to Australia, Canada, China, Finland,

France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uruguay.

What emerged from the Conference was a picture of increasing inequality over the 1980s in virtually all countries for which evidence was presented. The two notable exceptions were Canada and Finland, in both of which inequality actually declined over the decade. Since 1990, however, unemployment has risen markedly in both countries so that even this conclusion may no longer stand.

Two important points follow from these research findings which have relevance for Australia. First, the trend towards increasing inequality is not restricted to these shores. Second, more attention needs to be given to identifying the factors causing the rise in inequality, and to implementing policies which are most effective in combating their effects on the distribution of living standards.

VISITORS

■ In May, Professor Jonathan Bradshaw returned to the University of York. He left behind him a good deal of admiration for the breadth and intensity of his research, and many friends with fond memories of his visit.

■ In June, three Canadian scholars, Professors Meg Luxton, Julia O'Connor and Ester Reiter spent a brief period at the Centre participating in comparative research on gender and citizenship issues in Australia and Canada, funded under the Canadian Government's Program for International Research Linkages.

■ June also saw the arrival of Professor Peter Taylor-Gooby from the University of Kent for a one month visit to the Centre as Visiting Fellow for 1993.

■ We were also pleased to welcome Dr Miriam Barasch from the Falk Institute in Jerusalem who is spending several months with us.

Peter Saunders
Director

NEW PUBLICATIONS

S O C I A L P O L I C Y R E S E A R C H C E N T R E

Labourism Versus Social Democracy? Attitudes to Inequality in Australia and Sweden

SPRC Reports and Proceedings No.107

STEFAN SVALLFORS

This report compares Australian and Swedish attitudes to inequality using data from the 1987 International Social Survey Program, conducted in Australia and eight other countries and replicated in Sweden in 1991.

As a background for interpreting the findings, it summarises existing research on attitudes to inequality and redistribution and provides a sketch of the political economies of the two countries, including some figures on the actual amount of inequality and redistribution.

A number of indices are constructed and used to assess how various structural determinants such as class, gender, age and income affect attitudes.

The report also analyses how political choice is related to attitudes to inequality. Australia and Sweden are both small, industrialised nations highly exposed to world markets. Although the paths they have taken to attempt to ameliorate adverse effects from this exposure are very different, they display a substantial commonality in the way in which attitudes to inequality are structured.

New Wine in Old Bottles: Social Security in New Zealand 1984-1990

SPRC Reports and Proceedings No.108

MIKE O'BRIEN

This report describes how the monetarist policies of the fourth Labour government in New

Zealand affected social security between 1984 and 1990.

Changes in income level, the structure, the coverage, and the regulations associated with social security benefits reflected historical forces developing social security in New Zealand. The report examines how these changes were promoted and put in place, and how they related to wider income distribution questions during those years.

New Wine in Old Bottles also discusses the changes that would have come into place had the Labour government not lost the election in 1990. The benefit cuts made by the subsequent National Government were largely made possible by the changes introduced by Labour in office, when the climate was 'at best, lukewarm to beneficiaries'.

The author concludes that while there were some improvements under Labour, the changes generally brought about a deterioration in the position of beneficiaries vis-à-vis the rest of society.

Gender, Citizenship and the Labour Market: The Australian and Canadian Welfare States

SPRC Reports and Proceedings No.109

SHEILA SHAVER (ED.)

In June this year three Canadian scholars, Julia O'Connor, Meg Luxton and Ester Reiter visited the Centre, sponsored by the Canadian Government Program for International Research Linkages. They participated in a one-day seminar on gender and citizenship as they relate to women and women's work in Canada and Australia. This volume is a collection of the papers presented.

Julia O'Connor's paper, 'Citizenship, Class, Gender and Labour Market Participation in Canada and Australia' explores similarities and differences in the institutional frameworks shaping

women's paid employment in Canada and Australia.

Anthony King's paper 'The Dual Earner Couple: A Common Thread in Current Australian Policy Issues' documents the emergence of the dual earner couple in Australia and the changes brought about by this phenomenon.

In 'Double, Double, Toil and Trouble... Canadian Women's Experience of Work and Family, 1980-1993', Meg Luxton and Ester Reiter look at women's paid and unpaid work in Canada. It is followed by a brief commentary by Bruce Bradbury focusing on two issues: the effect of privatisation of government services on women's work; and the measurement of gains to women from increased labour force participation.

The final paper, 'Citizenship, Gender and Life Cycle Transition: Sole Parents Whose Youngest Child is Turning Sixteen', by Sheila Shaver looks at the transition of sole parents from social security to the labour force.

Women and the Australian Social Security System: From Difference Towards Equality

SPRC Discussion Paper No.41

SHEILA SHAVER

The basic framework of social security has shifted away from difference towards sameness in its treatment of men and women so that some groups of women are particularly vulnerable.

A new relation between state and market is emerging in which the family support functions of social security are less important than its role in providing a gender-neutral safety net.

The shift to a logic of gender equality in social security means that redress for social and economic inequalities now depends more fully on changing gender relations in domestic life and paid

employment. For many women these spheres remain the source of significantly unequal opportunity.

Male Wage Inequality before and after Tax: A Six Country Comparison

SPRC Discussion Paper No.42

BRUCE BRADBURY

This paper examines the distribution of the pre- and post-tax wages of prime age male workers in Australia, Sweden, West Germany, Canada, the US and the UK in the mid 1980s. The analysis includes an examination of the impact of income taxes and employer and employee social security contributions on the wage distribution.

The main conclusion is that Australia does indeed belong to a group of nations with low wage inequality. This conclusion holds irrespective of the wage measure used. The growth in wage inequality in Australia since the mid 1980s however, may require a revision of this conclusion.

The Fragmented Structure of Community Support Services: A Community Case Study

SPRC Discussion Paper No.43

MICHAEL FINE

This paper reports on the system of Home and Community Care services developing in a suburban community in New South Wales. The account focuses on the structure of the formal service provisions, identifying a number of features which directly affect the operation of individual services.

Overall, the system is characterised by a large number of small organisations struggling to preserve their autonomy and to operate within an insecure and continually changing policy environment. A number of broad suggestions for reform are canvassed.

PUBLICATIONS ORDER FORM

SPRC REPORTS AND PROCEEDINGS

- No. 107 Stefan Svallfors, **Labourism Versus Social Democracy? Attitudes to Inequality in Australia and Sweden**, June 1993, 76pp. \$9 RP 107
- No. 108 Mike O'Brien, **New Wine in Old Bottles: Social Security in New Zealand 1984-1990**, July 1993, 66pp. \$9 RP108
- No. 109 Sheila Shaver (ed.) **Gender, Citizenship and the Labour Market: The Australian and Canadian Welfare States**, August 1993, 128pp. RP109

DISCUSSION PAPERS

- No. 41 Sheila Shaver, **Women and the Australian Social Security System: From Difference Towards Equality**, June 1993, 36 pp. Free DP41
- No. 42 Bruce Bradbury, **Male Wage Inequality Before and After Tax: A Six Country Comparison**, June 1993, 40pp. Free DP42
- No. 43 Michael Fine, **The Fragmented Structure of Community Support Services: A Community Case Study**, June 1993, 28pp. Free DP43
- No. 44 Sheila Shaver and Jonathan Bradshaw, **The Recognition of Wifely Labour By Welfare States**, August 1993, 40pp. Free DP44

DIARY OF SOCIAL LEGISLATION AND POLICY

- 1992 Edition, 68pp, \$10 LP92
- 1980-1991 set for \$25.00 (includes postage) LP8091

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The Recognition of Wifely Labour by Welfare States

SPRC Discussion Paper No.44

**SHEILA SHAVER AND
JONATHAN BRADSHAW**

This paper compares the amount of support given by welfare states towards the maintenance of a wife engaged in housework and childcare in fifteen countries. In analysing the data, three models are used: the 'traditional' model where the wife is economically dependent on her husband; the 'modern' model where the wife or sole parent remains outside the labour market while she has young children; and the dual breadwinner model where the mother of young children is in full or part time employment.

While the evidence shows that welfare states do provide support to wives, both with and without young children and engaged in paid as well as unpaid work, the levels of support vary greatly between welfare states but that the variations are not associated with the generally discussed categorisations of welfare state types.

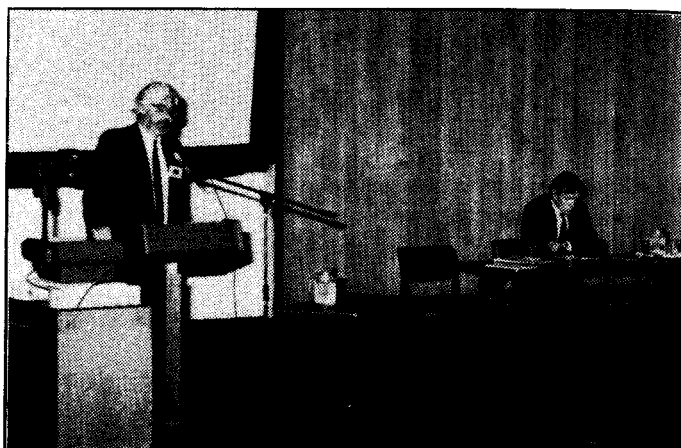
1992 Diary of Social Legislation and Policy

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
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RESEARCH • AUSTRALIAN
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RESEARCH CENTRE**

This is the latest edition of the Diary compiled by staff from the three publishing research institutes and the Bureau of Immigration and Population Research. It provides information, arranged chronologically, on policy and legislative changes for the calendar year 1992 in the areas of community services; education; employment and training; family law; health; housing; immigration; and social security.

Publications Order Form on Page 7

*Right: Peter Saunders
welcomes 1993
Conference delegates.
Seated at right is
Chris Fell, Deputy Vice-
Chancellor, UNSW, who
opened the Conference*



Plenary speaker, Jan Carter

Choosing the theme 'Rethinking the Fundamentals' for our 1993 National Social Policy Conference promised to bring forth a great variety of viewpoints among both paper-givers and participants - and, we are pleased to report, it did.

Several papers examined the fundamentals of theory. Others focused on case studies which raised the fundamentals of social policy as they arise 'in the field'. The conference streams - Work and Welfare; Family, Community and the State in Social Care; Social Policy and the Economy; Topical Sessions; Ideas, Ideology and the Welfare State; Inequality and a number of special topics - attracted papers covering issues as various as privatisation, unemployment, ageing, immigration, credit rating agencies and the 'cultural cringe'. Ninety-one papers in two-and-a-half days provided participants with a concentrated look at Australian social policy today.



From left to right at the Conference desk: Sue Byrne, Marilyn McHugh, Lynn Sitsky, Gloria Gervasoni, and a delegate phoning home.

1993 NATIONAL SOCIAL

S O C I A L P O L I C Y R E S E A R C H C E N T R E

POLICY CONFERENCE

There was considerable media interest in the Conference and it received wide coverage both in print and on radio. This level of interest is very encouraging and indicates that social policy still forms an important part of present debates.

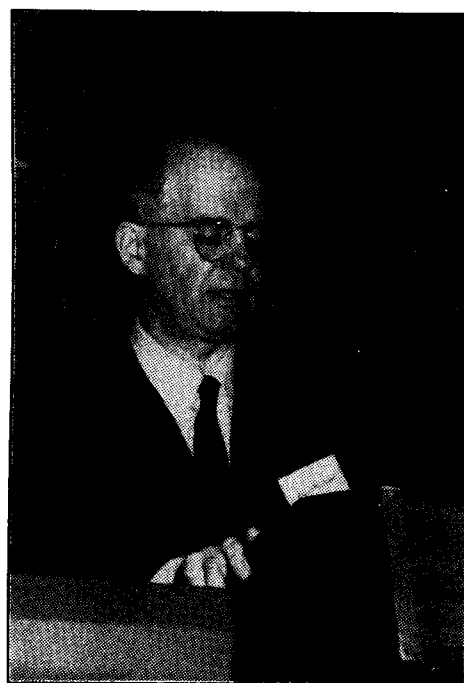
The Centre has just finished analysing Conference participant's evaluation forms. Reflecting on responses to our last conference in 1991, we tried to reduce the number of papers offered this year and allow more time for discussion. However, it appears from 1993's evaluations that participants want even more time for discussion. We will take this into consideration for planning our 1995 conference. Despite this concern, the majority of respondents found the conference 'very useful' or 'useful'.

Most respondents found the conference well-organised, and credit for this

goes to SPRC Deputy Director, Sheila Shaver; Conference Organiser, Marilyn McHugh; and Conference Secretary, Sue Byrne. Other members of staff, including those who diligently worked on our environmentally-friendly conference paper bag stuffing campaign, also deserve much praise for their efforts.

At present we are preparing the plenary papers from the Conference for publication next month in the **SPRC Reports and Proceedings** series. Forty-seven other papers are being considered for subsequent volumes and we hope to have these available by December this year. Please check December's *SPRC Newsletter* for details.

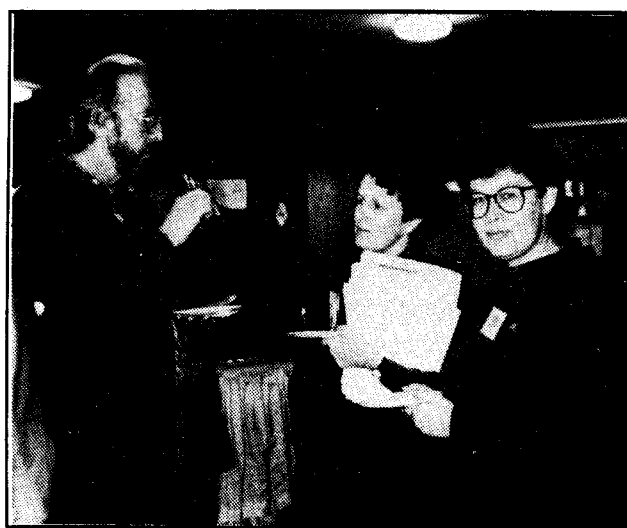
Our thanks go to the 500 participants and paper-givers who helped rethink social policy fundamentals and point to future directions to be covered in 1995.



Plenary speaker, David Piachaud



From left to right: Sara Graham, Neil Gilbert, John Lawrence, Sheila Shaver and Peter Taylor-Gooby



John May talks to Chris Harrington and Rose Melville

Books of Conference Abstracts are still available. Please telephone (02) 697 3857 for a copy.

BOOK REVIEW

S O C I A L P O L I C Y R E S E A R C H C E N T R E

YOUTH, FAMILY AND CITIZENSHIP

BY GILL JONES
AND CLAIRE WALLACE

Open University Press, Buckingham, 1992.
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Reviewed by Michael Fine

In what might otherwise have been a fairly standard text about the sociology of youth, Gill Jones and Claire Wallace have bravely attempted to bring together the subjects of the life course, the post modern family and citizenship in contemporary Britain. The result is an ambitious, dense text which proposes a new theoretical approach and provides a comprehensive overview of the field of British youth studies.

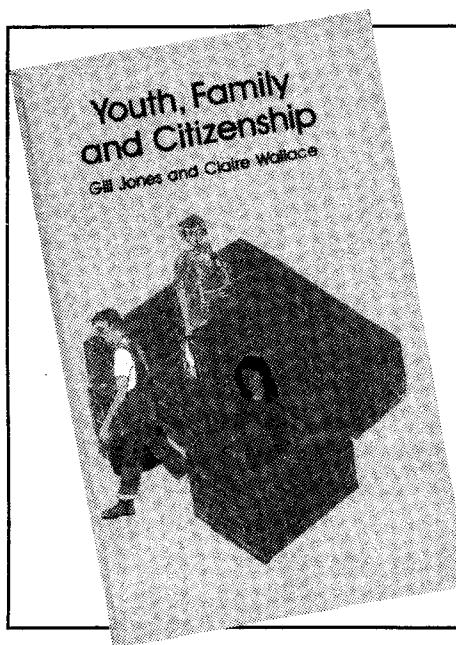
For most Australian readers it is the theoretical framework that is likely to prove the most interesting aspect of the book. Based on the concept of citizenship, this framework is used as a sort of comparative measure for understanding both youth and adulthood, and the relative states of dependence and independence which accompany them.

Jones and Wallace begin by examining how young people and their relationships with their families have been treated in the sociological literature, before going on, in the authors' own words, to

consider how far the traditional 'modernist' ideas and recent ideas emanating from post-modernism and/or high modernity can be applied to young people (p2)

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They then develop their own theoretical account, which considers the transition to adulthood in terms of the achievement of citizenship. Subsequent chapters then use this to examine how young people's relationships with their families have developed, and how they have fared with regards to the achievement of autonomous citizenship in the broader political, social and economic spheres of British society.



In their review of existing approaches to the study of youth, Jones and Wallace distinguish between what they term 'structuralist explanations' and 'individualist explanations'.

Structuralist explanations are so called because they emphasise the importance of social structure for determining what happens to young people as they become adults. Those which receive the most attention are Parson's functionalist theory, the so-called 'generation approach' as deployed by Mannheim, and social reproduction theories such as that used by Paul Willis, which emphasise the reproduction of social class inequalities.

These are then contrasted with the individualist explanations, notably the 'life course perspective', the 'individuation thesis' developed by Ulrich Beck who writes of the increasing uncertainty and individuation of post modern society, and the 'life trajectory' and 'high modernity' approach developed by Giddens in some of his most recent work.

The scholarship and conceptualisation of this initial chapter make for some quite exhilarating reading. That is, until the reader is briefly informed that the theoretical framework developed by the authors combines aspects of each of these six approaches together with the concept of citizenship and with attention to a range of other features.

Such a syncretic approach is said to have the merit of drawing attention to the impact of structural inequalities (social class, gender, race and ethnicity) as well as to the process of biography created by the negotiations of individuals acting within these structural constraints.

Perhaps the project the authors set for themselves was simply too ambitious. Or perhaps the underlying incompatibilities of the different approaches were not given sufficient recognition. Or perhaps, when accumulating such an amount of theoretical baggage, it simply proved too difficult for the authors to try to maintain some sort of consistent analysis.

Whatever the cause, the application of what appeared to be a promising, indeed exciting, theoretical framework appeared to me to often only increase the confusion experienced by those committed to trying to understated an already complex field. Where one looks to a theory to integrate and shed light on a range of technical findings, this approach too often seemed to add jargon and abstraction without sufficient corresponding enlightenment.

Yet the problems with the book were

not associated simply with the complexity of the theory used. Much of the confusion and difficulty I encountered in reading the book could have been obviated, I believe, if the authors had written about the research in a more engaging and less abstract way.

As it is, however, their preoccupation was with developing a totally comprehensive and unassailable thesis, and the real life problems and issues experienced by young people did not seem to loom large.

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Both the potential and the pitfalls of their analysis are readily seen in the authors' discussion of the achievement of youths' independence from the family.

In Britain, and most probably in Australia, the average age at which 'adulthood' is achieved, for example, varies with gender and class. Girls leave home and partner (indeed even marry) earlier than boys, while working class men and women tend to achieve independence from their parents earlier than those from middle and upper class backgrounds.

Explaining the paradox that the socially disadvantaged attain independence earlier than the socially advantaged leads the authors to distinguish between the acquisition of citizenship rights with age, and gaining access to them, and to a discussion of the distinction between achieving adulthood and the exercise of citizenship rights.

All of this discussion, of course, remains highly abstract, as if preoccupied with demonstrating subtleties about conducting analysis using the concept of citizenship.

Although I found their approach at times confusing and at others unnecessarily impenetrable, Jones and Wallace have provided a work which is likely to be of some interest to theoretical sociologists. I am, however, doubtful whether their approach will engage the wider readership that many of their ideas deserve.

THE MEANING OF SOCIAL POLICY - SOME REFLECTIONS

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extends his discussion to ask what contribution research on social policy can make, given that decisions are politically governed. He suggests three roles:

- advocacy for or against choices made on grounds other than research
- analysis of the most feasible and economical methods of implementing a given policy
- formulation of the issues to help determine what policies should be adopted.

Research, he adds, seldom contributes to the formulation of policy, but more commonly provides arguments against potential critics, or assists in developing specific plans of action.

I believe that one can claim rather more for research than these very modest roles. In particular, I would argue that the most important of all roles for research is to identify the problems towards which policies need to be addressed (and occasionally to demonstrate that demands for action are based on misconceptions about the nature of the problem).

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POLICY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The Israeli political scientist Yehezkel Dror has written a number of papers urging the need for what he calls 'foresight institutions' to perform this role of identifying problems. Social policy is, among other things, a response to social change, and one recurrent criticism is that the policy is slow to react to the changes. As Donald Schon of MIT once remarked, too many government policies of today are monuments to the problems of yesterday. This is undoubtedly one of the special contributions that research can make to policy.

In this short note, I have been unable to touch upon many other questions concerning the meaning and significance of social policy, such as its relation to other government policies (such as economic policy, population policy, industrial relations policy, and transport policy), the respective roles of bureaucrats, pressure groups, and politicians; the relations between facts and values, and so forth.

A great deal has changed since the Graycar volume was published, and perhaps a more concentrated look at these questions is timely.



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