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SWRC Newsletter

No 34 August 1989

Editor: Jennifer Young

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Social Welfare Research Centre

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
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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 initial agreement, for a period of five years, was renewed in 1984 and, most recently, in 1989. In accordance with the agreement the Centre is operated by the University as an independent unit of the University. The Director of the Centre is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor and receives assistance in formulating the Centre's research agenda from an Advisory Committee and a Research Management Committee. Under the most recent agreement the Centre will be renamed the Social Policy Research Centre, and the existing Advisory and Research Management Committees will be replaced by a Board of Management.

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 post-graduate studies in social policy. Current research areas cover poverty and inequality, social security and the labour market, taxation, unemployment, the social wage, 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 SWRC 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.

FROM THE ACTING DIRECTOR ...

Peter Saunders is currently in Europe, and in his absence I am taking on some of his responsibilities, including this column. Peter will be attending the Annual Conference on the International Association for the Review of Income and Wealth in West Germany and presenting a paper on income inequality in Australia and New Zealand. While he is overseas he will also briefly be a visitor at the University of Frankfurt and will attend a conference on 'The welfare state in transition', organised by the International Sociological Association in Bergen, Norway.

Social Policy Conference

The most important event in the Centre's calendar in the past few months was the National Social Policy Conference held in Sydney on 5-7 July. We were particularly pleased with the interest shown in the Conference, with more than 340 registrations. We were also very grateful for the attendance and opening address from the Minister for Social Security, Brian Howe, and our dinner speaker, the Minister for Community Services and Health, Neal Blewett. The Centre is also grateful to the keynote speakers and the other presenters, who gave nearly 80 papers in all. We would also particularly like to thank the many members of the staff of the University of New South Wales who provided invaluable assistance to the Centre's Conference Committee in many aspects of organisation. Of course, the success or otherwise of any Conference should ultimately be in the judgement of the participants in the Conference. This Newsletter contains at pages 8 to 14 a brief overview of the Conference, together with a summary of the evaluations provided by a fairly substantial number of those in attendance.

Visitors

The Centre is currently benefiting from two visitors, Malcolm Wicks, Director of the Family Policy Studies Centre in the United Kingdom, and John Freeland from the Social Work and Social Policy Department at the University of Sydney. Malcolm Wicks is the author of *'Old and Cold: Hypothermia and Social Policy'* (1978), and *'A Future for All: Do we Need a Welfare State?'* (Penguin, 1987), among other publications. Malcolm will be in Australia until the end of September, and will be looking particularly at a comparative analysis of family income support policy in Australia and Britain. While John Freeland is at the Centre, he will be continuing to undertake research in

the area of the relationship between inequality, the labour market and social security.

Visits

Apart from our current overseas visitor, the Centre is looking forward to a number of further Visiting Fellows in the months ahead. We place a high value on the insights that can be provided by those coming to Australia from other countries. Correspondingly, a number of the Centre's staff have recently returned from visits overseas. I spent some time in May and June in the United Kingdom making the acquaintance of a wide range of social policy researchers. More recent travellers (apart from our Director) include Bruce Bradbury who attended a conference and courses associated with the Luxembourg Income Study in July and Adam Jamrozik, who attended a conference on 'Science and Learning in the Face of Contemporary Times' in Poland in July.

Publications

Since our last Newsletter we have produced a number of publications. These include:

Lynn Sitsky, **The Interaction between the Australian Taxation and Social Security Systems: An Annotated Bibliography**, SWRC Research Resource Series No. 4.

In late May, we published a number of Discussion Papers:

- No. 9 Paul Smyth, **A Legacy of Choice: Economic Thought and Social Policy in Australia, The Early Post War Years;**
- No. 10 Bruce Bradbury, **The 'Family Package' and the Cost of Children;** and
- No. 11 Peter Saunders, **Towards an Understanding of Commonwealth Social Expenditure Trends.**

The most recent additions in this series are:

- No. 12 Cathy Boland, **A Comparative Study of Home and Hospital Births: Scientific and Normative Variables and their Effects;**
- No. 13 Bruce Bradbury, **Adult Goods and the Cost of Children in Australia;** and

FROM THE ACTING DIRECTOR ...

No. 14 **Peter Saunders and Bruce Bradbury, Some Australian Evidence on the Consensual Approach to Poverty Measurement.**

Staff

In the past few weeks we have also lost a number of staff members. Garry Hobbes who provided invaluable assistance in the area of computer services has gone to a position at the Kuring-Gai College of Advanced Education. Natasha Batianoff has left her position as the Director's Secretary for a similar position with the University of New South Wales. Dorothy Coates and Lisa Coleman have also recently left. They all go with the best wishes of everyone in the Centre.

New Agreement Between Commonwealth and University of New South Wales

Last (but certainly not least!) was the announcement of the new Agreement to continue funding of the Centre for a further five years. Details of the new Agreement are given in this Newsletter.

Peter Whiteford
Acting Director

NEW AGREEMENT

NEW AGREEMENT FOR THE PERIOD 1990-1994

On 19 May 1989, the Minister for Social Security, Brian Howe, issued a Press Release to announce the signing of a new Agreement between the Commonwealth Government and the University of New South Wales in relation to the Social Welfare Research Centre. The announcement came at the end of a process of review and negotiation that began over two years earlier, shortly after my arrival at the Centre in February 1987. The new Agreement guarantees Commonwealth funding for the Centre for the five year period beginning 1 January 1990.

The review process that led up to the new Agreement has already proved to be of great value in that it has caused us to look at what we are doing, how well we are doing it and what new possibilities are worth exploring. As I know that many readers of the Newsletter were consulted during the review, I thought it would be useful to summarise the process itself before outlining the main changes to the Centre's future operations that are contained in the new Agreement.

It was agreed by the University and the Minister in 1987 that a Committee of Review be established to assess the performance to date of the Centre during the current Agreement period (1 January 1985 to 31 December 1989) and to make recommendations for the future. The Committee was chaired by Emeritus Professor Fred Gruen (Australian National University) and also comprised Emeritus Professor Edna Chamberlain (University of Queensland) and Ms Wendy Weeks (Phillip Institute of Technology).

The Committee addressed itself to the following terms of reference:

- i) in relation to the terms of the revised Agreement, to review -

the past performance of the SWRC, with particular reference to the period since the previous review;

the quality of research undertaken;

the scope of the research agenda and priorities accorded to particular areas of social welfare and particular policy issues;
- ii) to recommend in relation to extension of the Agreement for a further period beyond 1989 and,

if recommending extension, advise in what ways, if any, the directions of the Centre should be changed.

In conducting their review, the Committee sought opinion from a wide range of individuals and organisations familiar with the work of the Centre. It also interviewed the Director, the Chairperson of the Centre's Research Management Committee, senior staff of the Centre and other staff who wished to be interviewed. In addition, over 200 academic institutions, government departments, non-government organisations and individuals were invited by letter to comment on matters relating to the Committee's terms of reference.

The Committee's report noted:

... the vast majority of our correspondents [felt] that the Centre was performing a very useful and worthwhile role with its research, publication, seminar and workshop activities. There was almost unanimous support for the continuation of the Centre - with a good deal of enthusiastic support for the Centre from many academics in a wide range of disciplines.

These were heartening words to read, reflecting so well on the quality of the research and other activities undertaken by the Centre since 1985. It was a verification of the quality of work undertaken by my colleagues that was well-deserved.

The Committee went on to make a series of recommendations relating to the scope of the Centre's research agenda, publications policy, conferences and seminars, new positions, and the level and details of funding arrangements. Their report was presented to the University and to the Minister in October 1987. It was, in my view, a comprehensive and fair document that has already proved to be invaluable in shaping our thinking about directions for the future. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the members of the Committee of Review, and all those who provided input to the review and assisted with its work.

The recommendations contained in the Report of the Committee of Review formed the basis for subsequent discussions with the Minister, members of his staff, and officers of the Department of Social Security that led to the new Agreement. The main features of the new Agreement are summarised below:

NEW AGREEMENT

1. The name of the Centre is to be changed to the **Social Policy Research Centre**.
2. The functions, roles and activities of the Centre will remain unchanged. For those who are not familiar with them, they are set out in full below:

Functions of the Centre

- a) to undertake and sponsor research work on important aspects of social policy in Australia; giving particular, though not exclusive, attention to identifying those individuals and groups whose needs are especially great, to study the options for relieving those needs in the Australian context; to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of arrangements for meeting the needs; and in so doing, to take particular account of the necessity to develop an overall plan for meeting the need for both basic theoretical and practical research;
- b) to provide opportunities for post-graduate study of the matters mentioned in a);
- c) to arrange seminars and conferences to foster understanding of and to elucidate issues in those aspects of social policy mentioned in a); and
- d) to arrange for the publication of the results of the research and studies carried out in or under the aegis of the Centre.

Role and Activities

The Centre shall concern itself with studies of social policy needs and priorities for future developments, with special reference to the following six main areas:

- a) changes in society which could affect future needs for social services and the capacity of the community to finance them, including demographic and economic changes and changes in ethnic composition, in occupational and spatial patterns and in personal and group life-styles;
- b) methods of providing and administering social services, including service delivery arrangements;

- c) methods of financing social services;
- d) co-ordination of social policies, services and activities;
- e) the effectiveness of social programs, including reviews in the light of changing needs, social and economic conditions and community attitudes and expectations; and
- f) social welfare aspects of the operation of other programs, whether undertaken by government or by the non-government sector.

3. Funding from the Commonwealth in 1990 will be set at \$800,000 and this amount will be indexed in subsequent years in line with movements in the indices of Tertiary Education costs published by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training.
4. Of this \$800,000, an amount of \$100,000 is to be allocated for projects specifically commissioned by the Department of Social Security, on terms to be agreed between that Department and the Centre.
5. Targets have been established for the Centre in relation to its raising of additional funds through undertaking external contract research for other organisations, and for expenditure on research and other activities commissioned by the Centre to outside individuals or organisations.
6. The Centre's Research Management Committee and Advisory Committee are to be replaced by a single Management Board. The new Management Board will consist of seven members (including the Director of the Centre) appointed by the Minister for Social Security and by the University.

The Management Board will meet four times a year and implement arrangements to ensure wide consultation on the work of the Centre on a regular basis. Its more precise functions will be to:

- a) approve the research strategy to be followed by the Centre for the ensuing three years including performance indicators against which outcomes from the research will be evaluated;

NEW AGREEMENT

- b) approve annually a program of research for the ensuing year and a management plan for its attainment; and
 - c) consider detailed research project proposals brought to it by the Director.
7. The Commonwealth will provide suitable accommodation for the Centre and the University will provide general office services, as well as back-up library and computer facilities.
 8. The Centre is to establish the position of Deputy Director, to be appointed by the University on a full-time basis.
 9. The Centre will publish an Annual Report detailing its activities and financial operation.
 10. The Centre will endeavour to assume responsibility for teaching a one semester course in social policy at the University, at either the undergraduate or graduate level.

Although these changes do not take formal effect until January 1990, we are already beginning to move towards their implementation. Thus, for example the new name for the Centre - one that more accurately and appropriately describes our work - is already being phased in. We are also beginning to seek external contract research funds more actively than in the past, are about to advertise the position of Deputy-Director,

and are in the early stages of planning our first Annual Report.

It is, of course, a reassuring testimony to the value of the Centre's work that the Commonwealth has guaranteed funding for the Centre for a further five years. The stability that this gives us will allow more effective long run planning of our research strategy and other activities than has been possible in the last few years. The changes to the management, operation and financing of the Centre are also intended to enhance the Centre's longer-term prospects, to ensure that it fulfils its role as a national research centre, and to permit it to perform all of its functions more effectively.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend a particular vote of thanks to Brian Howe. Throughout the whole review process, he showed a keen interest in the work of the Centre and was always willing to discuss issues of concern with me. His commitment to ensure that the review was both thorough and fair was always apparent. His concerns that the work of the Centre was effective, of high quality, accountable and of value to the Australian community were always evident. I hope very much that the Centre's contribution over the next five years will fulfil his aspirations, as well as those of the Commonwealth and all who place value on social policy research.

Peter Saunders
Director

NEW RESEARCH PROJECTS

TRENDS IN FAMILY DISPOSABLE INCOMES

Persons Responsible

Peter Whiteford, Bruce Bradbury
and Jennifer Doyle

This project seeks to determine trends in the distribution of disposable incomes of different types of families and taxpayers over the period from the early 1970s to the late 1980s. This general issue has been the subject of a number of reports in recent years, which have primarily concentrated on analysing trends in the taxation and social security transfer systems as they have affected different types of families at varying set levels of income. Examples of this sort of study include *Equity and the Impact on Families of the Australian Tax-Transfer System* (Peter Saunders, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1982), *Trends in the Disposable Incomes of Australian Families, 1964-65 to 1985-86* (Jim Moore and Peter Whiteford, Social Security Review, 1986), and *Families and Tax in 1989* (Helen Brownlee et al., Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1989).

This previous research has concentrated on estimating the impact of tax and benefit changes on 'model family types' (e.g. single person, sole parent and one child, single income couple and two children, two income couple without children, etc.) at specific income levels, expressed as a proportion of average weekly earnings (e.g. half-AWE, AWE, twice AWE, etc.). While this sort of research provides a good guide to the likely impact or direction of proposed policy changes, it cannot be used to determine what has actually happened in practice. This is because of a very wide range of factors, such as changes in the demographic composition of the population (e.g. more sole parents) as well as economic changes such as increased unemployment and increased labour force participation of women. In addition, these studies have not dealt with the actual distribution of households or families at different income levels.

This new research project at the Centre will therefore build on the previous research, but it is intended to significantly extend its scope and explanatory power, not only by looking at the changes to public policies,

but also by attempting to take into account the demographic, labour market and other changes referred to above. The project involves the development of a computer model of the taxation and social security systems that can not only be used to analyse reforms or reform proposals, but in conjunction with the *Income Distribution Surveys* carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics will enable estimates to be made of the costs and distributive impact of reform proposals. The project also involves the development of the capacity to 'update' these income survey tapes (which have so far only been available on a 4 to 5 year basis) so that the current impact of policy changes can be evaluated.

This project therefore involves the development of a powerful economic tool which can continue to be revised in the future, and will also enable the analysis of more specific policy changes.



UNIVERSALITY AND SELECTIVITY IN INCOME SUPPORT: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ISSUES

Persons Responsible

Peter Whiteford and Michael Wearing

The redistributive impact of the Welfare State has been the subject of increasing debate over the past twenty years. The main focus of this literature has been whether welfare state provisions have actually achieved what has been assumed to be their redistributive role, and which instruments of social policy have been most effective in promoting equality. Some critics have concluded that the Welfare State has been highly effective in this regard, while others have argued that public expenditures have benefited the well-off more than the poor.

NEW RESEARCH PROJECTS

In an analysis of the evidence on income distribution for the OECD, *Evidence on Income Distribution by Governments* (1984), Peter Saunders concluded,

... when tax, transfer and expenditure programs are viewed together, it is apparent that public expenditure programs, particularly the provision of cash transfers, have been almost totally responsible for the changes in income distribution, which governments have brought about in OECD countries. (p. 29) [emphasis added]

In considering the redistributive impact of cash transfers, important questions arise about the form of transfers adopted in different societies, and in particular whether benefits should be provided on a categorical or a universal basis, whether they should be funded out of employee or employer contributions, and whether benefits should be flat rate or related to income.

The project is intended to review and analyse the arguments in favour and against universal and selective provision of income support payments. The project involves a number of separate components, including the short and long term redistributive impact of universal and selective benefits, the efficiency implications of alternative approaches, the public acceptability of universal and selective benefits (including attitudes to income support payments) and stigmatisation of recipients. This review will be conducted against the background of the Australian social security system and changes to it in recent years.

It must be noted that the Australian social security system differs from those in other comparable countries (except New Zealand) in being predominantly funded from general taxation revenue, with flat rate benefits being directed to persons who satisfy categorical requirements and meet tests of income and assets. In contrast, the core of the social security systems in most other OECD countries is reliance on the social insurance approach, in which persons contribute and benefits are paid (often on a graduated basis) to persons experiencing the contingencies insured against.

While most of these countries do have public assistance schemes with similar features to those of the basic income support system in Australia, and in many countries the relative importance of these income-tested programs has grown significantly, the Australian system is one of the most tightly targeted, overall. In addition, with continuing calls for expenditure restraint and simultaneous concern with increased

poverty, the targeted approach seems likely, if anything, to become more relied on.

The main argument conventionally used in favour of the selective approach is that benefits are directed more progressively, with consequently greater impact in reducing poverty and inequality. This project will seek to evaluate the evidence for whether this in fact is the case. For example, the major criticisms made of selective benefits include the effects of means tests in creating 'poverty traps' and disincentives to work and save and the stigma attached to recipients. In addition, the complexity of means tests may mean that potential recipients are dissuaded from applying for benefits to which they are entitled.

A further major criticism made of selectivity is that while this approach may nominally be more progressive, the overall result may be less redistributive and less effective in alleviating poverty. This is because the redistributive impact of any program depends not only on how tightly it is targeted, but also on the overall level of benefits. A universal benefit may achieve greater poverty reduction if it is more generous than a means-tested payment. In this context, it is crucial to determine whether there is a relationship between the quantum of redistribution and the form of the transfer. If, in the long run, a means-tested system receives less community support, benefit levels may be lower than would otherwise be the case and inequality may increase relative to that achievable under a more generous universal system. This sort of effect can be seen as a parallel at the level of the overall system to the stigmatising impact of means tests on individual recipients.

The issues involved are more complex than this, however, since universal benefits may be considered more appropriate in some contexts (e.g. for demographic groups such as the aged or children), but may be less appropriate for the unemployed, for example, unless it is a guaranteed minimum income scheme that is considered desirable. It should be noted that the social insurance schemes of other OECD countries are not universal programs of this kind, and the impact of the social insurance approach will therefore be considered separately.

There is a very significant international literature on these issues and also considerable Australian research on specific aspects of the proposed project. The study will involve a systematic review of this literature, with the particular intention of drawing out implications for the future of the Australian social security system.

NATIONAL SOCIAL POLICY CONFERENCE

AN OVERVIEW

The National Social Policy Conference on '*Social Policy in Australia: What Future for the Welfare State?*', organised by the Social Welfare Research Centre, was held at the University of New South Wales on 5, 6 and 7 July 1989. The conference attracted more than 340 registrants from all Australian states, as well as New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The Conference was organised into five themes:

- '*Ideology, Philosophy and Political Environment of Social Policy*';
- '*The Economic Environment of Social Policy*';
- '*Income Maintenance and Income Security*';
- '*Community Resources and Services*'; and
- '*From Policy to Practice*'.

Each of these five themes was introduced by a plenary session with an invited Keynote Speaker. There were nearly 80 submitted papers given over the final two days of the Conference.

Following an introduction by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alan Gilbert, the Conference was officially opened by the Minister for Social Security, the Hon. Brian Howe, who said that the Government had successfully integrated social and economic policies over the past six years, emphasising employment growth, wages policy and overhauling the tax and social security systems. The Minister called for social policy in the 1990s to focus on improving the built environment of Australia's cities to make them better places to live and work. Mr Howe said that there was a need for research and analysis to commence now in order to inform policy in this area. He said that the experience of the 1970s showed that built environment problems such as housing could not be addressed as a single issue, but had to be approached in an integrated way. One particular aspect referred to by the Minister was the need to develop networks of services sensitive to the needs of groups at different stages in their life cycles.

The after-dinner speech on Thursday, 6 July was given by the Hon. Neal Blewett, Minister for Community Services and Health.

The Minister's speech involved an analysis of the economic as well as the social value of human services. The Minister outlined the Government's social strategy designed to tackle structural inequalities. The first priority had been in the area of economic resources in order to support the concept of the 'active society' which links income security policies with workforce and education and training policies. While the emphasis will remain on providing greater equity in income distribution, intervention in other areas, specifically health and welfare services, remain an essential part of a social justice strategy.

Commonwealth outlays on social security, health, housing and community amenities have increased from 38 to 42 per cent of total outlays between 1983 and 1989. These programs can of course be justified on social grounds, but it is also important to recognise that human service outlays are not simply a net cost to the economy with no productive value. The Minister referred particularly to the benefits of Medicare, which has extended health cover without any significant cost escalation. Reference was also made to research commissioned by the Department of Community Services and Health in relation to the economic benefits of child care and rehabilitation services. These studies found that the quantifiable benefits of government spending on these programs exceeded their costs, and that recipients of services also benefited from enhanced earnings potential.

The Minister's speech also canvassed issues relating to aged care, health advancement programs, the cost of injury, the development of AIDS policy and the National Campaign against Drug Abuse. The Minister concluded that while it is important to recognise the economic value of human services, they should primarily be seen as programs designed to improve the welfare and well-being of individual people, to help them achieve and experience social justice.

The Conference's Keynote Address was given by Professor David Donnison of the Centre for Housing Research at the University of Glasgow. The theme of his address was '*Are there any principles of Social Policy?*'. Professor Donnison said that as a subject to be studied, 'social policy' is not a theory-led academic discipline, but a problem-led field. This did not mean that theories and disciplines are unimportant, but that social policy as a field of academic study could not be clearly distinguished from social policy as a field of

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practical action. Social policy has always reflected the main issues in social democratic politics, and in contemporary times the new social policy agenda has largely been determined by the critique of the political Right. Professor Donnison said that this agenda had been subject to telling criticism from the political Left, but this did not generally provide a fully argued case for an alternative viewpoint. The purpose of this paper was to sketch out in a preliminary way the formulation of a different social policy agenda based on a convincing alternative philosophy.

The basic ideas on which these alternative principles rest can be summarised in four words - pain, poverty, powerlessness and stigma. The strongest argument for collective social action arises from human pain and the possibility of preventing or relieving it. Preventable or remediable suffering, particularly when varieties of pain are associated or transmitted across generations - that is, when concentrated - is what turns private experience into a public, political issue. By poverty, Professor Donnison referred to exclusion from the activities and possessions, the opportunities and living standards which most people in the society concerned regard as necessities. This was often seen as a 'relative' definition of poverty, but he preferred to call it 'democratic'. Professor Donnison argued that poverty in this form was constantly recreated in rich unequal societies, so that its elimination in rich societies depends more on the distribution than the level or growth rate of incomes.

Redistribution has been difficult to achieve because the poor are powerless and are subject to stigma. The most important thing in every society which its dominant group owns is not its wealth, but its culture and its language.

All of these problems must be addressed if there is to be progress in changing any of these patterns. The policy implications of this approach include the necessity to change the power relations rooted in the economy. This means that societies will need an incomes and prices policy that sticks rather than an 'incomes' policy that at least in the short run keeps the lid on inflation and industrial disputes at the cost of having huge numbers out of work. As an adjunct to these policies it will be necessary to provide further support either through child benefits or housing benefits to lower paid workers with children. In addition, there would be a need for decentralised administration at the local level, as well as international mechanisms for the protection of human rights.

Finally, Professor Donnison sketched out the academic implications of his analysis. This included the need for research into the links between pain, poverty, powerlessness and stigma, and identification of how they are determined and in which direction their causal influences run. In particular, it will be necessary to involve those experiencing these problems, both by giving them a voice in the research and participation in the discussion of findings. Service provision, as well, will have to be operated in an increasingly community-based and customer-accountable fashion.

The Keynote address in the Area of *'Ideology, Philosophy and Political Environment of Social Policy'* was delivered by Professor Sol Encel, Department of Sociology, University of New South Wales. This paper, entitled *'Colder than Charity: Welfare and the Politics of Economic Rationalism'* provided a wide-ranging survey of the philosophical development of the basis of welfare state provisions and the intellectual critique of the welfare state developed in recent times by the Left and the Right. The paper outlines some factors in the realisation by progressive intellectuals in Britain in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries that private charity was no substitute for a national system of welfare. This concern pivoted on the issue of whether the objective of public policy should be to relieve or to prevent destitution. The implementation of welfare state policies over a long period of time was given a particular impetus by the experience of the effects of the Depression and the world wars.

The paper also describes the development of the Swedish social welfare system, which is now widely seen as the model of the welfare state. The paper shows that Swedish programs involve a complex mixture of redistributive policies, involving both tensions and contradictions, and which encompasses a series of compromises which are recurrently in danger of unravelling.

The Left's critique of the welfare state as espoused by writers such as Miliband, Poulantzas, Ginsburg, O'Connor, Habermas and Offe, and by Stretton, Watts and Beilharz in Australia incorporate a number of themes. These include the role of welfare state provisions in reproducing capitalist labour relations and social formation, as well as the 'crisis' of the welfare state. Australian commentators have developed the criticism that the policies of the current government have been designed to restore growth and increase profitability rather than facilitate the transition to socialism. Professor Encel noted that an important part of the Left's critique related to the impact of the welfare state on women. Analysts such as Bryson and Shaver

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have pointed out the various ways in which welfare and social security provisions reinforce gender inequalities.

The Right's critique of the welfare state argued in part that welfare provisions did not succeed in redistribution, but many beneficiaries of government spending are middle class rather than poor. The paper looks particularly at American commentators, such as Drucker, Wilson and Stockman, as well as Australian critics such as Kasper, McDonald and Spindler, Swan and Bernstam, James and Porter.

After reviewing the various arguments of these commentators, Professor Encel argues that the New Right attack on the welfare state is an attempt to define the 'maximum' role of government, which involves a return to poor law principles with benefits conferred as a form of state charity. The most effective answer to this approach is to make it as unfashionable and out of date as these critics have tried to make the arguments for welfare.

The Keynote Address on the theme of the *'Economic Environment of Social Policy'* was given by Fred Gruen, Emeritus Professor of Economics at the Australian National University. His paper, entitled *'Australia's Welfare State - Rearguard or Avant Garde?'* assesses the conventional wisdom that the Australian welfare system lags behind the welfare states of other OECD countries, because it is selective rather than universal, and that the Australian welfare state is particularly mean because poverty has increased continuously since the early 1970s.

The paper notes that there have been very significant changes in community attitudes towards welfare spending in Australia. However, the universalist social insurance schemes prevalent in most OECD countries are also subject to considerable budgetary pressures. Some OECD studies are cited suggesting that OECD countries generally are moving away from universal provisions, and concentrating more on basic means-tested poverty-alleviating benefits - thus tailoring benefits more to the neediest in the community and relying more on the private sector for some of the services previously exclusively provided by the welfare state.

The meanness of the Australian welfare system is also exaggerated. Changes in the proportion of the population in poverty is probably strongly correlated with the incidence of unemployment. While unemployment has greatly increased since the early seventies, it has now been generally declining for six years. This has not shown up in the poverty statistics

because of our reliance on two recent income surveys - i.e. 1981/82 (before the large increase in unemployment from 6% to 10% in 1983) and 1985/86 - when unemployment averaged almost 8 per cent. Given the improvement in unemployment levels since then and the substantially improved financial support for children under the Family Assistance Scheme it is argued that one would expect the current incidence of poverty to be substantially less than the levels recorded in 1985/86. If Australia had reasonably reliable annual poverty estimates, the incidence of poverty would probably have shown a large jump in 1982/83/84 (coinciding with the increase in unemployment), coupled with sustained (and probably substantial) reductions in poverty since that time.

Professor Gruen's paper points out that international comparisons are tricky and, even given the much improved data now available through the Luxembourg Income Study, there are still substantial puzzles to be resolved. Apart from the data used at present being 7 to 10 years old, there are three major reasons why international comparisons are much less clear cut than is often believed. These reasons are spelled out in the paper. For instance, whilst Australia tends to have a relatively high proportion of the population below most (but not all) standardised poverty lines, Australia's position improves substantially if the severity of poverty is examined in terms of poverty gaps. For example, on five comparisons (with different equivalence scales) Australia has a larger proportion of the population in poverty than the Netherlands. But Holland has a higher poverty gap in each of these comparisons than Australia. In terms of poverty gaps Australia tends to rank near the middle of the 10 countries in the LIS data base. There is no reason to believe that the proportion of the population in poverty is a better, more inclusive - or more reliable - indicator of the meanness of a welfare state than the standardised comparison of poverty gaps.

Apart from looking at the overall severity of poverty in Australia, it is worth examining subgroups. Here two groups have been treated relatively more favourably over recent years - the aged and intact families with children. However, there are substantial areas of need. The paper particularly identifies single parents, the long term unemployed and those suffering from housing-related poverty. In addition the Australian system may have imposed poverty traps and very high effective marginal tax rates on many social security recipients - discouraging them both from saving their old age and from part-time work (the main means by which they themselves can raise their living standards). These policies require changes in the mechanics of the system

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- rather than its wholesale overhaul as so often urged from both the Libertarian Right and the 'Social Solidarity Left'.

The second day of the Conference was opened by the Keynote Address on the subject of *'Income Maintenance and Income Security'* by Bettina Cass, Director of the Social Security Review and Alison McClelland of the Social Security Advisory Council. Their paper was entitled *'Changing the Terms of the Welfare Debate: Redefining the Purpose and Structure of the Australian Social Security System'*.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss in broad terms the role of the social security system and social security reform, in conjunction with other public policies in not only combating poverty but in substantially reducing inequalities of income and life chances. The paper argues that consideration of social security reform should not be constrained by outmoded welfare debates which posit dichotomies between universality and selectivity and social insurance and social assistance. Following the end of full employment in the early 1970s, urgent social security issues could no longer be framed in the terms used in earlier debates, but it has become necessary to make critical choices about issues such as family poverty. In particular, the need to integrate labour market and social security policies has become more pressing. It has also become abundantly clear that full employment is an essential precondition for maximising economic welfare, and that social welfare reform cannot be negotiated in isolation from the reform of inequalities in the labour market.

The three major issues or threshold questions to be addressed in the project of social security reform are:

- i) the issue of redistribution, or equity in allocation;
- ii) the issue of adequacy and uniformity of payments; and
- iii) the issue of forging linkages between income support and labour market programs.

The paper reviews the system of allocation employed in the Australian social security system, noting that since its inception, the Australian system has been non-contributory and means-tested. The major exceptions to this general pattern have been child endowment/family allowances, and for a shorter period, the income-test free age pension for people aged 70 and over. More recently, the system has become more selective or targeted, as inflation has interacted with income tests, but particularly following decisions to

reimpose assets-testing of pensions and income-test family allowances.

The paper points out that targeting can provide either net expansion or net contraction of resources allocated depending upon other decisions made. The paper refers specifically to the area of family assistance, where the government has both income-tested family allowances and very substantially increased the real level of payments for low income families. At the same time, the total level of resources redistributed through these mechanisms has increased. While suggesting that experience in the area of family income support therefore does not confirm the criticisms made of targeting, the paper acknowledges that the criticisms made of selectivity still have considerable force. The paper argues that similar scrutiny should be made of various forms of assistance provided through the tax system. The paper also criticises methods of targeting in which one group of low income individuals or households effectively pay for improvements in assistance to another sector of the low income population.

In discussing the issues of adequacy and uniformity, the paper canvasses the arguments proposed for some form of Basic Income Guarantee. The strengths of this approach to social security reform are identified as its emphasis on adequacy and uniformity of payments, equitable treatment, the removal of notions of the 'deserving' or 'undeserving' poor, its simplicity and more effective integration with the taxation system, and the extension of income support to those with low earnings.

The paper argues, however, that there are serious weaknesses with the approach, in particular, lack of attention to linkages between income support and labour market programs, which leads to the danger of entrenching the disadvantaged position of many workers. A further major problem would relate to public perceptions of the cost of such a scheme, which would require significant increases in income tax to finance it.

Nevertheless, the principles of adequacy, uniformity, equity, simplicity and the capacity to augment market earnings are essential features of the Basic Income model, which must be accorded strong credence. The basis for social security reform should incorporate the strengths of this approach with a linked income security/labour market strategy.

The paper then explores such an approach and its implications for people of workforce age. The main

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reforms canvassed are a revised work test which protects certain categories of people, but at the same time allows for the enhancement of the capacity of a wider range of people to re-enter the workforce; the liberalisation of income tests to enable certain groups to combine part-time work and part income support, so as to improve labour market attachment and supplement incomes; and, an expansion of access to labour market programs for the jobless as well as the unemployed.

Finally, the paper places these proposed social security reforms in the context of a broader strategy to combat poverty and inequality. Apart from the provision of an adequate basic income and continuing tax reform, the other elements of this strategy include:

- i) education, labour market training and retraining, employment experience and job creation programs which integrate unemployed and jobless people into the mainstream labour force and increase their life-time earnings capacity;
- ii) housing policies which better redistribute access to secure and affordable accommodation; and
- iii) community services, especially child care and the urban amenities which increase real living standards.

The Keynote Address on the theme of '*Community Resources and Services*' was delivered by Adam Jamrozik of the Social Welfare Research Centre. The title of his paper was '*Human Resources in Community Services*'. The paper notes that it is a feature of advanced industrial societies that fewer people are engaged in material production, and more in distribution, provision of services and management. The paper provides data showing that employment in the 'management industries' of finance, property, human services, public administration and community services has increased at a faster rate than employment generally over the past two decades, and that these industries employ proportionately more people with post-school qualifications, particularly among women.

Despite this, there is relatively little systematic knowledge about the actual working of community service organisations. As well, there are few comparative studies of service providers, nor is much known about the recipients of services such as tertiary education. The purpose of this paper is to focus on some of these neglected issues, and in particular to look at conflicts in community services, such as those between public and private interests, between policy makers, administrators, and operators at the level of

service delivery, between service providers and service recipients, and conflicts which are intra-professional and inter-organisational.

Community services are primary social provisions, which are an essential part of our economic and social system. They may not fulfil their ostensible aims, however, as some services benefit the more affluent middle class and thus replicate or even reinforce the inequalities generated in the market economy. Some factors behind these results include external forces such as attitudes to human resources, society's degree of commitment to welfare, and specific government policies. There are also factors internal to the community service sector, including the conflict between public and private interests, and the interests of service providers. The paper discusses all these factors, drawing on examples from the fields of education, health and early childhood services.

The paper notes that Australian attitudes to human resources reveal a neglect of their development. One example is in the area of immigration where for the last forty years there has been a substantial reliance on imported human services, but considerable difficulty in recognising overseas qualifications and adapting Australian institutions.

Commitment to welfare in Australia is particularly weak, as is seen in the cycles of significant changes in the areas of public health and other community services and in retirement incomes as well. In addition there is seen to be a fundamental conflict between the social and economic policies of the current government, because of the incompatibility between the 'free market' and the philosophy of an egalitarian welfare state.

In regard to internal factors, it is noted that the perception that community services are entirely in the public sector is not necessarily accurate, and it would be more appropriate to recognise the mix of private provisions and public funding. This public/private division continues to be a source of tensions and conflicts. Current trends towards privatisation are predicted to increase inequality in access to services. A further variable is the interests of service providers, who have the ability to define the nature of issues and problems, and thus influence the process of resource allocation.

The paper looks at conflicts in the area of education, noting that inequality is sustained by the dual public and private school system. In the areas of health and early childhood services also, there is evidence of

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differential access and treatment which act to reinforce inequality. While all community services may be considered important parts of the social wage, the fact that their provision is mediated by the aims, values and interests of service providers make them susceptible to becoming instruments of inequality. Community services thus perform different tasks in different socio-economic areas, being more concerned with surveillance, remedial tasks and social control in low socio-economic areas, and with developmental, preventative and facilitating tasks in high socio-economic areas.

The purpose of this paper is not to argue against the benefits enjoyed by the middle class, but to help identify the losers and winners from public policies, including the winners from various forms of 'hidden welfare'.

The final plenary address, on the theme of *'From Policy to Practice'*, was provided by Dr Adam Graycar, Commissioner for the Ageing in South Australia. This paper, entitled *'From Policy to Practice: Policy Prescriptions and Practice Outcomes'* argues that policy does not flow smoothly through to practice, and that policy and practice often evolve from different sources. The result is a less than optimum style of service delivery, burnout by practitioners and confusion of recipients.

Social policy and practice skills are continually becoming more refined, but outcomes can be affected by any weak link in the chain from policy to practice. Four service sectors can be identified - the public, the community or 'voluntary' sector, the commercial market, and the informal sector. Going down this list, the amount of policy making diminishes and the amount of practice increases, suggesting an inverse and hierarchical relationship between policy and practice. This leads to the potential problem that many of those who plan don't know much about delivery and many of those who deliver do not have effective communication with planners.

Government is not able to meet all of the demands from the community or even deal with all legitimate claims, but it has a central role in performing its extractive, regulative and distributive functions. Nevertheless, no one sector alone can provide all that has to be provided, but there seems to also be an inverse relationship between capacity and willingness, with those closest to the community least able to deflect claims.

Capacity is not only a question of financial resources, but also of excellence in practice. For excellence to be

achieved it is necessary to be clear on objectives, strategies and expected outcomes.

The most difficult task for social policy and one which has never been fully achieved is to redress the inequalities of a market economy. This task has been made more difficult in the 1980s because of the neo-conservative counter-attack, and social policy is now on the defensive. This has led to a situation where policies seem to be aimed at picking up the pieces rather than developing preventative mechanisms. This is not to say there is no commitment to prevention, but the gap between policy and practice is so wide that prevention cannot find its way into the core of practice. This also reflects lack of financial resources to address anything other than crises and the fact that policy makers and practitioners speak different languages. This last factor in turn arises from the distinction between factual knowledge and practical suggestions, the distinction between knowing and acting.

The paper looks in some detail at the area of service for the frail elderly, which illustrates the gulf between finding the answer to 'what is the situation' and 'what is to be done'. In social gerontology, the theory base is very weak, and in this sense those who deliver are ahead of those who plan. Referring to the attempt to introduce the principle of normalisation into parts of the aged care industry shows that a little learning and a lack of appreciation of practice issues can be a dangerous thing.

This suggests the importance of consultation, which must be process of facilitating open discussion, careful deliberation and effective conference. At the practice level, lack of effective consultation can contribute to burnout. One way of pre-empting and limiting burnout is through the development of quality assurance programs. These programs can provide a planned and systematic approach to setting goals, monitoring care and achieving positive outcomes, and as such are important professional and management tools.

Looking to the future, the paper suggests that it is necessary to develop consensus about the objective of the system of intervention; identification of a basic core of achievable policy and practice responsibilities; retreating from unrealistic or excessive objectives, but at the same time making a commitment to better management and program administration and delivery; and creating a better knowledge base, better analysis, better research and dissemination of knowledge.

Policy issues involve structuring an environment which responds effectively, efficiently and compassionately to

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a state of rapid economic change and major demographic transition. Practice issues are no different.

Readers who wish to obtain full copies of these papers, should note that the Plenary Addresses will be published as a volume in the Centre's Reports and Proceedings Series. Selected papers from other contributors to the conference will also be published in this series.

EVALUATION OF THE CONFERENCE

Participants at the Conference were asked to fill in an evaluation form, which was designed to assist the Conference Committee in the SWRC in its planning for future conferences. The form asked for comments on the success or otherwise of the conference as a public forum on issues of social policy and social welfare; it also asked for comments upon specific aspects of the Conference, such as venue, time-table, choice of topics and quality of presentation; and, finally asked how often a National Conference should be held and where, as well as seeking suggestions about possible formats, topics and venues.

Of the 340 registrants at the Conference, 79 returned an evaluation form, although not all respondents answered all questions. To the first question whether the conference was a success as a public forum, 16 respondents thought the conference was poor or of limited usefulness, 30 thought the proceedings fair to quite good, and 21 thought the Conference good to very successful. Among the reasons given for negative evaluations of the Conference, prominent factors included:

- the conference was too academic and practical policy orientations were lacking;
- clients or consumers of welfare services were not represented; and

- the time-table was too tight, and consequently there were not enough opportunities for participation or debate, or input from anyone except the presenters.

Among the reasons given for positive responses to this question were:

- there was a very wide range of topics, which provided a good cross-section of participants and a range of perspectives on social policy issues;
- the Conference was good for meeting people, making contacts and renewing networks; and
- it had been some years since any previous Conference of this sort.

The second question asked for specific comments on aspects of the Conference such as venue, time-table, and choice of topics. The respondents appeared to be generally satisfied with the venue, although criticisms included that some rooms were too cold, that it was difficult to move from room to room between sessions, and there were some problems with queueing for morning and afternoon teas and lunches. There was nearly universal agreement that the Conference tried to fit in too many papers, so that there was not enough time to discuss specific results. On occasions it was felt that this affected the presentation of papers. Other suggestions were that there should be fewer keynote speakers, and more of a workshop approach. A number of respondents felt that the lack of coverage of issues such as housing, the aged, and Aboriginal and multicultural issues suggested that there should be more control exercised over the determination of paper presenters and topics.

Finally, there was virtual unanimity that there should be further National Social Policy Conferences, with 13 respondents wanting them annually and 52 suggesting a conference every two years. Sixteen people suggested the conference should be held in Sydney, and 39 thought it should be rotated to different cities. Five respondents thought the Conference should be held either in suburban, country or non-metropolitan centres, and one respondent thought it should be held in New Zealand.

NEW SWRC PUBLICATIONS

RESEARCH & RESOURCE SERIES NO. 4

The Interaction Between the Australian Taxation and Social Security Systems: An Annotated Bibliography

Lynn Sitsky

August 1989, 125 pp.

This bibliography focuses on various aspects of the interaction of the Australian taxation and social security systems. The issues involved in this interaction have continued to be part of the social policy debate since the mid-seventies and the issue of integration of the two systems remains unresolved to this day.

The years 1974-75 were chosen as the main starting point for the bibliography, with just a few earlier articles included, mainly in the area of negative income tax. These years saw the Taxation Review Committee (Asprey Committee) publish its Commissioned Studies and both its Preliminary and Full Reports. During 1973-74 the Treasury submitted its Treasury Taxation Papers, Nos 1-13 to the Taxation Review Committee and these were published in 1974. Those that touch on the area of concern of this bibliography are included. The Asprey Committee adopted a broad approach to tax reform and its main conclusion was 'that the weight of taxation should be shifted towards the taxation of goods and services and away from the taxation of income'. Many of the papers included in the bibliography are reviews of and responses to these reports and papers and those of the complementary *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Inflation and Taxation* (Mathews Report).

In 1975 the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty published its *First Main Report, Poverty in Australia*, and many items focus on its proposals, such as the replacement of concessional deductions with tax rebates, but in particular on its proposed guaranteed minimum income scheme. A guaranteed minimum income scheme was also discussed by the then existing Social Welfare Commission. Another important publication in 1975 was the Priorities Review Staff's *Possibilities for Social Welfare in Australia*, which examined the effects of government actions on the welfare of individuals, and looked at ways of improving

the then tax/transfer system, including a guaranteed minimum income scheme.

Universal family allowances paid to mothers through the social security system replaced the previous system of tax rebates for dependent children paid through the taxation system in 1976. The way in which family allowances were allowed to erode by non-indexation over the following years is the subject of many of the items in the bibliography. A related subject was that of directing assistance to families with children by increasing family allowances, rather than through raising the dependent spouse rebate.

During the early 1980s there was increased public awareness and debate about the inequities of the tax system with tax evasion and avoidance becoming increasingly a problem. Other concerns were with the nature of horizontal and vertical equity, the income tax base, taxation indexation, the tax unit, tax incidence, the integration of the social security and taxation systems and the impact of taxation and social security on income distribution.

In 1985 the Treasury released the *Draft White Paper: Reform of the Australian Tax System* and the government convened the National Taxation Summit in July of the same year. Prior to the Summit the government received many submissions on taxation reform, some of which are included in the bibliography. With any reform of the taxation system there will be 'gainers' and 'losers' and therefore many of the items argue the pros and cons of the various proposals, including some works which describe the use of models used to assess the costs and benefits of the various government options A, B and C, as well as works proposing alternative options. Particularly widespread was discussion focusing on the proposed shift from direct to indirect taxes and the measures to compensate those who would be 'losers' by the change. In September 1985 the Treasurer, Paul Keating, issued the reform package, *Reform of the Australian Taxation System: Statement by the Treasurer*, and of course, many items examine this package and the subsequent changes introduced by the government.

In February 1986, the Minister for Social Security set up the Social Security Review to focus on three major aspects of social security policy: income support for families with children; social security and workforce issues; and income support for the aged. This Review, and some subsequent changes by the government in the areas of income support for families and the alleviation of 'poverty traps', are the subject of some of the recent items included in the bibliography.

NEW SWRC PUBLICATIONS

The bibliography contains 337 items which includes whole books, parts or chapters of books, conference papers, papers in series and journal articles. No newspaper material or items of one page or less have been included and all the items were sighted. Each item has been annotated to give an indication of the scope and nature of the work. The annotations are descriptive only and no attempt has been made at criticism or evaluation of the content. Wherever possible the author's or publisher's abstract has been used and in other cases an attempt has been made to use the

language of the author or authors concerned. To indicate the scope of each item, key-words were assigned at the end of each annotation and both author and key-word indexes appear at the end of the bibliography.

As this aspect of the taxation and social security systems seems sure to be an area of debate for some time to come, it is hoped that this bibliography will be of some use as a guide to the Australian literature on the subject.

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- Denise Young and Adam Jamrozik, **Community Groups in Action for Change**.
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- Adam Jamrozik, **Community Resources as a Component of the Social Wage: Implications for Youth Services** (Conference Paper).
- Tania Sweeney, **Child Care: The Question of Need** (Conference Paper).
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- Adam Jamrozik, **The Viability of the Welfare State**, presented at the Conference on The Distribution of Income and Wealth in New Zealand, The New Zealand Planning Council, Wellington, 27-28 July 1987.
- Adam Jamrozik, **Evaluation of Research in Social Policy/Social Welfare: Is It Needed? Is It Feasible?**, presented at the National Evaluation Conference, Australasian Evaluation Society, Canberra, 29-30 July 1987.
- Adam Jamrozik, **The Family and Social Change**, presented at the Conference of the National Association of Community Legal Centres, Hobart, 7-10 August 1987.

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CONFERENCES/SEMINARS

INCOME DISTRIBUTION SEMINAR

Organised by the
Economic and Social Policy Group

Held at the
Amalgamated Metal Workers Union Building
5 May 1989

Attended by Toni Payne

The Economic and Social Policy group is made up of progressive academics, trade unionists and policy makers.

On Friday 5 May 1989, the group held a seminar on Income Distribution. Members of staff from SWRC attended and Peter Saunders gave a paper.

The first paper for the day was by Dr Peter Kriesler of the Department of Economics, University New South Wales, on why income distribution is important. Dr Kriesler outlined the theory surrounding income distribution. This was followed by a paper given by Professor John Nevile on 'The Effects of Macroeconomic Policy on Income Distribution' and the experience of the 1970s and 1980s. Professor Nevile argued that the Fraser Government's anti-inflationary policies led to a more unequal distribution of incomes.

Dr Saunders' paper on Cross-Country Comparisons of Income Distribution, using Luxembourg Income Study data, illustrated that notions of Australia as having a fairly equitable income distribution were misconceived. The LIS data showed otherwise.

The afternoon sessions dealt with Social Security Welfare Programs and Home Ownership. Dr Judy Yates of Sydney University showed that access to first home loans was skewed towards those on high incomes and with high deposits. This pattern was exacerbated in Melbourne and Sydney.

Dr Meredith Edwards of the Department of Social Security spoke of the Federal Government's Child Poverty Program. This includes not only income support, but also employment schemes to enhance the chances of employment for single parents, amongst whom poverty is very high. Dr Edwards also spelled

out other measures in the Government's Child Poverty Program.

The last paper of the day was given by John Freeland of Sydney University. He spoke of welfare programs and income distribution. Mr Freeland noted the growing social dependency rate and declining private dependency rate. He also noted a growing employment base. The problem, however, is how to move people from social dependency into employment. He argued that training programs are important and that employment must be increased in order to support the growing numbers who are socially dependent.

The day ended with a summary and discussion. Some important issues were raised. Mr Phil Raskall noted that income distribution has become an end in itself rather than a means to other things. We must not lose sight of what is income distribution and why it is important.



10TH NATIONAL HOMEBIRTH CONFERENCE

Held at Collaroy

12 - 14 May 1989

Attended by Cathy Boland

The 10th National Homebirth Conference by the sea at Collaroy raised as main issues politics, health and professionalisation. The first two were epitomised by Marsden Wagner, Director for Maternal and Child Health for the European Region of the World Health Organisation, who explained why his organisation had thought it appropriate that he attend the conference, and discussed the problems associated with the lack of evaluation of hospital birthing procedures and the political issues that this raises. The question of who will decide place of birth epitomises a subtle shift between who 'owns' the baby, the family or society? Dr Wagner argued that the medical establishment could be seen as the agent of society in that it represents the society's interests with respect to care of the infant and

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family. Questions about who will choose place of birth and who will evaluate outcomes become political issues. As public health issues do not capture the public mind, the situation arises where decision makers and politicians are afraid of dealing with professional issues associated with powerful interest groups. Dr Wagner cited two examples where professional issues were paramount. The first was the condemnation of something they had never seen, and the second was the homebirth policy of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. This states that women be informed of 'the overall risks as perceived by the College'.¹ There was no reference in this statement to risk status being defined by scientific data.

There was a lively debate between Dr Wagner and a collection of obstetricians who took umbrage at being told their epidural rates were double those in Europe, and then as that debate came and went, the mist rolled in from the sea and the conference centre was enveloped in its wraiths - reminiscent perhaps of the mists of Avalon in the Arthurian legends - as Homebirth Australia appeared to be at a crossroad, through which it may have to pass and from which it may emerge totally changed. You could almost hear the rush to professionalisation, to waltz into the embrace of the lordly ones who would decide on what is an appropriate risk status for midwives to deal with, even though they themselves appear at times oblivious to the nature of risk and those activities that contribute to it. Visions of professional iron-maiden matrons whose reflections crack glass at twenty metres rose, so to speak, in the minds of some of the consumers - as did the fear of the imminent loss of that which had been so recently found, a social model of childbirth, which began with the lay midwives. The traditional midwife

has assisted in numerous births in which no intervention was needed and witnessed the beauty and power of nature. It is through this setting that the traditional midwife learns what is normal and what is not. (Goode, 1989:83)

The lay midwives appear to be concerned about the mothers' social integrity and perceive this process during birth as 'essential to the woman as is puberty' (Goode, 1989:86).

If ever there was a dichotomy between body and mind, it appears to be expressed in the latent conflict between

the trained and technical obstetrician and the untrained and intuitive traditional midwife. For the latter there is no role in professionalised domiciliary midwifery.

The relationship between the midwife and the consumer is not without its tensions. The midwife

becomes ante-natal teacher, counsellor, support person and evaluator of her own services. This can ultimately place her in an even more vulnerable position if something goes wrong or differently from the expectations of the woman. In this situation the woman has somehow felt betrayed. The depth of anger and resentment can be extraordinary. (Court, 1989:92)

The question was raised of whether one midwife could or should undertake so many roles.

As Homebirth Australia brings the debate about place of birth to the public eye, politics, health, service evaluation and the role of the professions will be many of the issues that will be confused and intermingled in the muddy waters of the ensuing debate.

References:

- Goode, K. (1989) Traditional midwifery: a real contribution to modern midwifery, *Proceedings of the 10th National Homebirth Conference*, Sydney: 83 - 87.
- Court, B. (1989) The nature of the relationship between midwife and mother, *Proceedings of the 10th National Homebirth Conference*, Sydney: 89 - 93.



1 The Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists home birth policy, *Proceedings of the 10th National Homebirth Conference*, Sydney, 1989: 17.

CONFERENCES/SEMINARS

'HEALTHY FUTURES' WORKSHOP

Commission for the Future
Melbourne

18 May 1989

Attended by Cathy Boland

This workshop involved a number of persons from private enterprise, environment, health and welfare backgrounds and the Commission's role in developing and contributing to a public health policy. The workshop was chaired by Dr Ilona Kickbush from the World Health Organisation, who was able to develop an encompassing vision of health, 'cure', social and ecological environments. For example, health problems include:

domination by health financing systems which are outmoded and inadequate to address social causes of ill-health and which drive the widening health gap ... [and] a widening health gap between lower and upper socio-economic groups in industrial societies. (Kickbush, 1989:6)

A Public Health Coalition would attempt to integrate these issues into political decision-making by acting as a catalyst for ideas. I participated in the group that looked at environmental issues raised; did you know that the plant gene pool is decreasing rapidly? There were 5,000 varieties of apples at the turn of the century, and this has decreased to 3,000 varieties. I also learnt that it is ecologically a good idea to hang on to your old fridge, as they contribute to the CFCs, etc. which have contaminated the Arctic circle. Why are we throwing away plastic when such products are derived from the combustion of fossil fuels? These may be needed for irreplaceable medical supplies in the intergalactic wars of the next century (I didn't really say that, but I thought it, about the intergalactics, I mean). However, this is no time for Damage Control so, the sort of taxation, legislative and corporate strategies required to address these issues might involve coalitions of, at the moment, strange bed fellows, such as the Farmers Federation, industry and government, both nationally and internationally, science and medicine, both public health and otherwise, consumers, individuals and communities.

The Commission's aim is to create a space to crystallize these issues within public debate and to assist in the creation of alternative 'Healthy Futures'.

This was an excellent workshop, and as the spiralling arms of the ozone depleted air stream head north for the spring (SMH, 28 July 1989) a most timely one, as the hands on the ecological clock are coming closer to midnight.

Reference:

Kickbush, I. (1989) A report on the 'Healthy Futures' consultation workshop, Commission for the Future, Carlton, Victoria, May 18.

Sydney Morning Herald, 28 July 1989.



SCIENCE AND LEARNING IN THE FACE OF CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Third Congress of Scholars of Polish Descent
Warszawa - Lodz - Katowice - Krakow

16 - 20 July 1989

Attended by Adam Jamrozik

The Congress was sponsored jointly by three organisations: the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Jagiellonian University, and 'Polonia' the Society for Relations with Poles Abroad. It attracted an invited attendance of over 300 people, 250 of them from 28 countries in all parts of the world, including eight from Australia. The aim of the Congress was to provide a forum for exchange of views on the overall theme of the place of science and education in coming to grips with the world-wide problems of industrialisation, distribution of resources, cultural and social developments, health, ecology, and many related areas and issues.

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The first plenary session of the Congress was held in Warsaw and then the Congress divided into three groups, each dealing with a particular area of concern. One group remained in Warsaw and debated the issues of **Universal and National Trends in Cultural Developments and Their Significance**. The second group moved to the industrial city of Lodz, known for its textile industries, and its topic for debate was **Developments in Contemporary Science and Technology: Hopes and Consequences**. The third group travelled to the city of Katowice, the Centre of Silesia and its heavy industries, coal, steel, petrochemical products. Its topic was **Human Health and Protection of Environment in the Conditions of Industrialisation**. The Congress came together in Krakow and the Jagiellonian University.

With a large number of papers presented at the Congress, it would be difficult to single out more (or less) interesting papers. Within the overall theme the papers ranged over wide areas and issues. It is expected that the Congress proceedings will be published in full but this will undoubtedly take some time. In the Warsaw group there were three papers presented by the Australian participants. Jerzy Smolicz of the Adelaide University took up the issue of multiculturalism in a paper titled **Who is an Australian?** Martin Krygier of the University of New South Wales spoke on **The Rule of Law and its Cultural Aspects of Universal Characteristics**. My paper was on **Education as a Factor in the Occupational Structure in the Context of Social Policy**.

What impressions can one draw from a Congress with such a range of views, disciplines, issues? In addition, recent and current political events in Poland also provided topics of interest which added another element

to the Congress. Some of the comments made in the final plenary sessions perhaps illustrate best the kind of main concerns that pervaded the debates. Prominent among these was the importance attached to intellectual autonomy in science and education, and especially in higher education and research. There was a broad consensus that direct involvement by scholars and scientists in political affairs was fraught with problems - the scholars ought to endeavour to be above party politics and, at best, maintain a 'committed non-involvement'.

The effect of political pressure on individuals, on disciplines, on the institutions of learning and on the whole field of science and education received much attention in the discussions. This issue was of particular importance and concern to the people engaged in humanities and social sciences and was debated at length.

What, then, was the social responsibility of scholars and scientists? It was aptly defined by an eminent academic as **the need to serve but not be servile**. It was acknowledged that maintaining social responsibility in scholarly work was of extreme importance but also fraught with difficulties, problems and dilemmas. It was pointed out that scientists played important roles in both World Wars in this century. Among other things they were instrumental in producing poison gas in WWI and atom bomb in WWII. What should be their social role in peacetime and in the face of contemporary issues? Among many problems identified the earth's ecology was pinpointed as the most important global problem which the scholars and scientists had to face, for it was on the solution of this problem that the continuity of life itself on this planet depended.

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AUSTRALIAN WELFARE. Historical Sociology

Edited by Richard Kennedy

Macmillan, Sydney, 1989, pp. xiii + 454
\$29.95 (paperback), \$54.95 (hardcover)

Reviewed by Peter Saunders

It is always difficult to present a balanced and comprehensive review of an edited collection of essays. Few reviewers have the breadth of expertise to cover all of the material in each individual contribution and there is the continual temptation to focus on a few papers, giving praise or criticism as the reviewer sees fit. The result is often a review that does not do justice to the collection as a whole and thus provides little guidance to prospective readers who naturally wish to benefit from as much as possible of the money (and time) devoted to purchasing and/or reading the book. Having said this, I must admit to being guilty of committing these familiar sins myself, but in a way which hopefully provides potential readers with something of an understanding of what to expect overall from *Australian Welfare. Historical Sociology*.

In the Preface, the Editor indicates that the book should appeal to undergraduate students in sociology, history, social work and social welfare studies 'as well as to general readers and radical scholars', (p. xii). A fairly exhaustive list, that appears to cover all potential readers at least once! The Introduction notes that the book is directed at three targets; against failures in the welfare state, against contradictions in the Australian capitalist economy and the world capitalist market; and against the doctrines of economic rationalism. It is interesting to observe that the last two of these, and to some extent the first, are basically economic issues. This is not to deny that historians and sociologists can contribute to the debate, for indeed they can. But the absence of economists from the list of authors (Ted Wheelwright excepted) is notable. There are a number of other critical political economists in Australia who could also have made a valuable contribution to developing the basic theses of the book. Against this, it is hardly fair in one sense to criticise a book on historical sociology for not including more serious discussion and analysis of the economic issues!

Given that the principle focus of the book is the adoption of historical sociology as the intellectual framework for analysis, and given that such a framework is relatively new to most Australians, one might have anticipated the Editor's Introduction to provide a clear account of what is new about historical sociology and why it provides a better framework than either history or sociology in isolation. Alas, this is not the case. After a brief summary of the book's contents (which does not always conform to what the subsequent chapters actually contain) the Editor engages in a vitriolic attack on what is referred to as 'liberal welfare history'! I struggled to gain an understanding of what was new and unique about historical sociology, but it was not until page 20 that reference is made to historical sociology as an attempt at the fusing of history and sociology that involves three major research strategies. The first is the application of 'a general theoretical model to explain historical instances', the second the adaptation of 'the comparative method', and the third 'consists of developing and defining relevant concepts in the act of constructing historical interpretations'. I must say that this did not particularly advance my own understanding of what historical sociology is all about, and if other readers are similarly confused, more's the pity since the Introduction would seem to be the place to spell out such matters.

The remainder of the book comprises eighteen chapters organised under the headings, of Comparisons, Interpretations and Advocacies. It is not possible to do full justice to each chapter here, so I will be somewhat selective (having already apologised for such). In Chapter 1, Ted Wheelwright presents a thorough and informative historical account of the political economy of the Australian welfare state. He raises an issue that is a focus of several later contributions, that the corporatist approach to policy making encapsulated in Australia under the Hawke Government's Accord with the ACTU is fundamentally flawed because of the absence of social controls over capital, 'the life blood of the system' (p. 48). Rob Watts (in Chapter 4) is similarly critical of the Accord, seeing it as serving, 'only a legitimating function, since the real point of the Accord is to assist in the redistribution of national income in capital's favour so as to encourage accommodation of 'economic recovery', while 'social justice' remains a fantastic, because contradictory, objective' (p. 125: emphasis in the original). Neither writer places too much emphasis on the impressive employment growth that the Accord has undoubtedly facilitated, although Watts provides a useful critical assessment of the social wage as a means of assessing the redistributive consequences of social policies. I was, however, a little confused by his estimated real

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wage and income gains presented in Tables 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6, which seem to be somewhat at odds with the nominal gains shown in the same Tables. Given the broad sweep of Watts' challenging and provocative conclusions, it is essential that readers can have confidence in the numerical estimates on which they are, in part, based.

In Chapter 2, Francis Castles presents an interesting discussion of inequality and welfare spending in a comparative context. Unfortunately, he uses data on income inequality for the early seventies which, while it shows Australia to be characterised by relative equality, has been subject to much criticism in recent years. Thus, his statement that: 'Australia stands out as a particularly interesting example of the achievement of a relatively high level of equality without comparable welfare state development' (p. 59) must remain in some doubt, and the implications of this for the thesis he develops warrant further investigation. In Chapter 6, Sheila Shaver provides an interesting account of Australian income security in an era of fiscal crisis, intellectual crisis and welfare state failure in which she bemoans the translation of a broad social justice strategy into policies designed for 'the relief of poverty at its lowest levels' (p. 169).

The remaining papers are of varied quality, although I particularly enjoyed those by Peter Khoury (on Aborigines and alcohol), Joyce Evans (on policies for people with disabilities) and Roberta Perkins (on the post-war history of prostitution in Sydney). The final chapter, by Jim Staples, on welfare and the working class, is also highly recommended as a personal but forceful critical account of Australian social policy and the need for active involvement by the working class in the development of welfare policies. I was, however, a little confused as to why this chapter was headed 'Conclusion', as it did not serve this role, and was not written as such by Staples himself as the Editor notes in the Preface.

What comes through very strongly in these and other chapters is extreme disillusionment with the longer-run development of Australian welfare policies, and despair at the social policy performance of the Hawke Government, which is viewed as driven by the doctrines and policies of economic rationalism. This is, in my view, something of an exaggeration, although I agree that social policy must be integrated with economic policy rather than subservient to it.

Economists are frequently criticised (often with justification) for using obscure and technical jargon when plain English will suffice. It seems that this is a

sin of which historical sociologists are at least equally guilty. Consider the following examples from Chapter 8 (with my own interpretation in brackets).

The political structure [of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory prior to the 1860s] was, in effect, both concretely and metaphysically oriented, in that the 'gerontocratic authority' system played a socially coercive, as well as metaphysical relationship of control ... the division of labour was organised along class lines, which were in turn determined by the 'gerontocratic authority' structure whereby the males focused production around ceremonial life and, as a result, women and children provided both the surplus production and the surplus labour [i.e. the elders, mainly males, ruled the roost]

and

The children were integrated into the production processes at an early age, not only into the material food-gathering cultural system, but also into the cattle station cultural production system [i.e. the kids collected berries and milked the cows]. (pp. 200-201)

Such discursions into obscure terminology, which occur throughout the book, serve to confuse the reader and deflect interest from the main flow of the argument. This is a pity, since there is much of value in the information, analysis and interpretation contained in this book. Readers will not always agree with the views expressed (I certainly didn't), but overall this is a provocative collection of critical essays on Australian welfare. And all is not gloom and doom for the future. Drew Cottle assures us that 'A socialist Labor Party will eventually be forged by the Australian working class, notwithstanding the "Whitlam makers" or the current Hawke horror'. I leave it to readers to draw their own conclusions!

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LIVING WITH A DISABILITY AND DYING FOR A BREAK: A STUDY OF RESPITE CARE

by Paula Rix

for the
Disability Council of New South Wales,
1989

Reviewed by Sara Graham

Respite for people with disabilities and their carers is essential if community care programs are to succeed and if people are to have the chance of a decent and rewarding life ... Now is the time to ensure that respite care services are planned and delivered effectively and efficiently, and in ways that enhance the dignity and value of this important section of our society.

These remarks from the foreword by Virginia Chadwick, Minister for Family and Community Services, New South Wales, surely represent as full an endorsement of this report by Paula Rix as the author could have wished for.

The study was commissioned by the Disability Council of New South Wales, which has been concerned with this area of service provision for some time. In 1986 it conducted a phone-in on the subject of respite care for people with disabilities and their carers. Some 800 people across New South Wales responded, and what emerged was disquieting. Though people wanted respite care, they had difficulty finding out about it and obtaining it. In fact, for many people it was simply unavailable. Where it was provided, the service typically failed to meet the specific needs of consumers. Some people found the quality of the care wanting. Others were excluded because of the nature or severity of their disabilities: for example, people with behavioural difficulties or autism. When respite care was available, it tended to be provided at the convenience of the service rather than to suit the requirements of the consumer. In sum, the phone-in revealed some extremely serious shortcomings in the provision of this vital service.

It is to the credit of the Disability Council that it sought to explore this problem further. Paula Rix was engaged

to study in depth a small selection of the people who had phoned, looking more closely at their situations and enabling them, as she puts it, 'to tell their story'. She carried out her study between May 1987 and May 1988. Though the people she interviewed were not a strictly representative sample of the phone-in respondents, they did represent the full range of their characteristics in terms of age, type of disability and place of residence. The 31 people interviewed constituted a very diverse group. A high proportion of them were carers of people with disabilities, and it is upon these that the study by and large focusses.

What was the purpose of this study? It was clearly not a piece of dispassionate research intended simply to describe and analyse. It is better seen as part of a strategy for the improvement of services for people with disabilities. As such, its basic objective is unequivocally political: to present evidence of the inadequacy of services, and to suggest ways in which these might be improved. It aims to persuade, and it does so effectively and honestly. It allows the consumers of services to speak for themselves, and their evidence is undeniably compelling; but I believe the main reason for the effectiveness of the report is that Paula Rix and the Disability Council know enough about service organisation and provision to use the evidence gained from interviews to construct a number of potentially useful recommendations.

The report aims to describe the needs of people with disabilities, and their carers, entirely in their own words. The study also describes their usually frustrating experiences in seeking help from the organised services. It further aims to provide an account and a critical appraisal of current service provision in New South Wales, and to explain why the services that do exist fall so far short of what people need or want. The report finally makes recommendations which should result in a better respite care service, meeting the diverse needs of the consumers much more effectively than is the case at present.

People were interviewed in their own homes by Paula Rix. It is clear from the extensive quotations that not only were these interviews free ranging but that Ms Rix also achieved a remarkable rapport with many of her respondents.

The report deals with the question of respite care from many perspectives. First and foremost it considers provision from the consumers' point of view. In this context it considers the effect of age and type of disability, the effect of where one lives, in particular

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whether this is in an urban or rural area, the effect of the individual's economic resources, the effect of coming from a non-English speaking background or of being an Aboriginal. These accounts leave the reader in little doubt that there are immense problems in the organisation of services for so heterogeneous and dispersed a population as Australia's. Some thorny ideological questions are also raised: for example, whether there should be special or integrated services for Aboriginal people or for those from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

The report deals with the organisation and aims of respite services. Here Paula Rix directs considered, but in my view not entirely justified, criticism at the all-too-powerful role played by professionals in determining how services are to be allocated.

Finally, there is an account of the impact of the community care policy on people with disabilities, and on their caring families, particularly on women. This reveals the vital role of respite care. It is clear from respondents that these caring families are often at risk. Here we see the real, manifold costs of community care as borne by those actually doing the caring. The cost of a well resourced, well organised and responsive respite care service seems a small price to pay to keep people at home and families intact. Far smaller than the price the community would be paying for institutional care.

This study is much broader in its focus than one might expect, going beyond conventional bureaucratic definitions. Rix develops a concept of her own, which she calls the 'respite effect'.

The respite effect is a term used to describe a flexible framework designed to allow services to assist a person with a disability and their carer to take a 'break' in a form suitable to the needs expressed by their consumer. (p. 9)

Encompassing as it does far more than the formal respite care services, the notion is potentially very useful. From her detailed interviews, Rix finds that people who are looking after others with severe disabilities have a need for help that is not met merely by having an evening, or a week or so, to themselves. They may well need this, but there are many other ways in which carers can be helped with what is often a monumental burden. Supported employment programs and handyman services are but two, disparate examples of ways in which services can assist. However, neither of these fall within the conventional definition of a respite care service.

Rix shows that carers' needs for support are extremely diverse. She suggests ways in which services might be restructured to meet them. But this is not enough. Those who are responsible for providing services, planners, administrators and professional gatekeepers, must begin to listen to what people say they need, and to respond to these needs as they are identified.

What then are the recommendations of the report? These emerge from Rix's analysis of the inadequate and fragmented services which she describes as lacking a comprehensive policy and central focus. In her own words: 'The problem is that no one owns the problem' (p. 17). Rix bravely enumerates a range of principles upon which respite services should be based. She proposes a mode of service organisation and a structure for the delivery of respite care services. She suggests particular disability groups which might receive priority treatment, and she comments on the resources that might be required. Her recommendations are detailed. They may sometimes be idealistic and occasionally contentious, but they provide an excellent basis for further policy discussion. I am sure they will be taken seriously by politicians and bureaucrats alike.

Whilst it is always dangerous to remove recommendations from their context these broadly relate to:

- a) the formulation of individualised plans for access to disability services, framed in consultation with consumers, and with responsibility for implementation falling on a named agency and a named person or advocate;
- b) the need for special and additional resources for people in rural areas, Aboriginal people and people from non-English-speaking backgrounds;
- c) the need for a centrally based State co-ordinator of respite services and a network of locally based respite care co-ordinators;
- d) an Ombudsperson for Disability services;
- e) the development of a cash or voucher system where existing services are unable to provide adequate or appropriate respite;
- f) the particularly interesting and original suggestion of a guaranteed minimum amount of respite care equivalent, in hours, to four weeks' annual leave.

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The reader will naturally need to refer to the full report to see how these ideas are developed. I do not do them justice here.

On the whole I liked this report very much indeed, particularly for its combination of humanity and practicality. However, I do have some problems with it. The first is a niggle. The book is rather carelessly edited. There are numerous typographical errors, the numbers in the text which pertain to the sample are sometimes inconsistent and they do not always correspond to the numbers on the diagrams. It is, in fact, quite difficult to work out how many people were actually interviewed and what were their characteristics. I noticed one case where the respondent's real name, rather than his pseudonym, had crept into a quotation.

There is an amazing variety of presentational devices which seems to suggest that the author is a recent convert to the word processor. As a recent convert myself I empathise, but I find this confusion of boxes, highlights and emphases distracting.

Rix quotes, with apparent approbation, the comment of one respondent who argues that people who have not themselves had children with disabilities are not themselves equipped to make decisions about service provision. One can understand the strength of feeling behind this line of argument, reinforced as it may well be by experience of unresponsive providers. But it clearly does not point to a practical solution. There are many groups with special needs and interests which members no doubt understand more keenly and immediately than outsiders. The whole point of public welfare provision however is that there is some acknowledgement of a general responsibility to meet the needs of a variety of people. It is clearly not possible to recruit a staff whose backgrounds and experiences exactly match those of the people they are supposed to help.

Ms Rix seems to me to oversimplify her characterisation of work and gender roles. None would dispute that women bear much the greater burden of care, but her explanation of this seems somewhat facile, framed more in terms of ideology than sociology. The situation is both more varied and more difficult than she represents it to be. There are dedicated male carers and there are reluctant female carers. Both may well be atypical, but to explain why would be a more complex undertaking than Rix seems to acknowledge.

Though in general I feel that Paula Rix's recommendations flow from her data I am not satisfied that this is altogether the case where people from non-

English-speaking and Aboriginal backgrounds are concerned. Although she shows a recognition that this is a very difficult area, I do not believe she is justified in making policy recommendations on the basis of single cases.

Finally, some recommendations pertaining to the organisation of services are clearly intended to rectify the key problems of insufficient accountability and co-ordination. However, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that what Ms Rix is proposing is yet another bureaucratic layer, and I think that a more detailed discussion of how her proposals relate to other structures concerned with disability services would have been helpful. In fact, I am sometimes unclear as to whether her proposals for structural change and accountability relate to all services for people with disabilities or merely to respite services. This confusion constitutes the major problem I had with the report. The development of the concept of the 'respite effect', which I generally found interesting and useful, led me to wonder where respite services end and other services for people with disabilities begin.

Paula Rix sees the audience for her report as fourfold: people with disabilities, their carers, the street level bureaucrats who deliver services, and policy analysts and students who will take up these positions in the future. I would recommend the report to members of all these groups. I think they will find it worthwhile reading.



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THE CASE FOR HOMEBIRTHS: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HOME AND HOSPITAL BIRTHS, 1984

by Cathy Boland

UNSW, School of Health Administration,
Australian Studies in Health Service Administration
No. 65, 1989

Reviewed by Michael Fine

Few issues in the provision of health and social services have excited such passionate debate in recent years as that of childbirth. Yet, until recently, arguments such as whether the most suitable place for births is the home or hospital, and whether midwives or obstetricians are the most appropriate professional to assist at a 'normal birth', have largely been carried out without the assistance of reliable and valid Australian data on the subject. In its place we have horror stories of unnecessary intervention by hospital based private specialists countered by yet more anecdotal horror stories concerning home births gone wrong. Selective statistics drawn from overseas, especially from the Netherlands, France, the UK and the USA are often used out of context to support whichever side of the argument the protagonist has taken. If the experts argue so heatedly, on what basis can the mother or parents-to-be make an informed choice? Equally important, how should the future provision of birth services be planned? Should health authorities take the radical step of encouraging the development of a system of homebirths, a step which would be likely to lead to considerable savings in public expenditure, or should they continue to support the hospital based approach with its emphasis on the benefits of advanced medical technology and the specialised obstetric management of birth?

In the recently published ASHSA monograph No. 65, Cathy Boland has examined the issues dispassionately, utilising the data collection resources of the New South Wales Perinatal Statistics Collection. Boland, a research worker from the SWRC, was the first to make use of the data collected in 1984, the year data collection commenced. Despite the fact that the study's publication has been delayed until 1989, it should prove a valuable contribution, both to the childbirth debate in

particular and, more generally, to a consideration of the value of, and problems associated with, the collection of detailed statistics in the field of human services.

A wide range of perspectives on the question of home births are provided in the monograph. A brief historical overview of birthing practices in Australia since the European occupation is followed by a detailed review of much of the more technical and epidemiological literature on homebirths. Following this, a section on methodology painstakingly examines the data from the first 13 weeks of 1984, in preparation for undertaking a comparison of a matched sample of homebirths and hospital births, which provides the main focus of the study. In the conclusion there is an interesting discussion on the nature of medical decision making and the impact of medical technology on the birth process, as well as a series of recommendations concerning birth statistics and future research in this field.

The findings, in particular that in 1984 homebirths in NSW had a lower rate of morbidity and no higher mortality rate than hospital births, should prove to be of considerable interest to a great many interested parties. Considerable statistical detail on this finding is presented in the report. But adding to the longer-term value of the study is Boland's conscientious examination of a great range of details associated with the validity and reliability of the data provided to the Australian Bureau of Statistics as part of the Perinatal Statistics Collection.

This attention to the detail of the data in the Perinatal Statistics Collection is called for because, without it, a wide range of false classifications may appear in the statistics which confuse, rather than clarify the issue. For example, in a number of other studies reviewed by Boland and commonly cited as providing evidence against homebirths, the high mortality rates identified actually arose as a result of the inclusion of births that quite unintentionally took place outside of hospital settings. Categorising accidents, spontaneous abortions and so forth as homebirths is clearly likely to cloud the issue. Equally, it appears that some of the problems encountered in clinical settings may have been intended as homebirths but were transferred following problems.

The rates of intervention in the birth process evident in the 1984 statistics for hospital births should give cause for grave alarm. Although almost uniformly high, there appears to be considerable variation between hospitals in both the rates of intervention and the patterns of morbidity associated with births. Unfortunately the statistics do not make it possible to examine whether

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private or public patients had greater intervention or morbidity, although other Australian studies, using different data sources, have indicated that the fee-for-service nature of private obstetric practice may be one of the most significant predictive variables in this regard. A closely related issue would appear to be the reliability and consistency of birth data, as the completion of statistical reports of births is undertaken by a wide range of practitioners, each with a possibly different interest in reporting the outcomes from these same concerns. Although the reliability of the data is one of the key issues canvassed by Boland in this study, it is unfortunate that it was not possible for her to examine questions associated with this aspect of the collection of birth statistics more systematically.

In summary, it would appear that, despite the availability of improved statistical collections, even the facts of birth are likely to remain somewhat contentious. But for those wanting to understand the complexities involved in comparing the risks and outcomes associated with births at home and those taking place in hospital settings, Boland's study is likely to be required reading.

Available from University of New South Wales School of Health Administration, cost \$15.00 (including postage).



RESIDENTS' RIGHTS IN NURSING HOMES AND HOSTELS. FINAL REPORT

by Chris Ronalds
assisted by Philipa Godwin and Jeff Fiebig

Department of Community Services & Health,
Canberra AGPS, 1989

Reviewed by Michael Fine

The Final Report on Residents' Rights in Nursing Homes and Hostels, released by the Commonwealth Department of Community Services and Health in June this year, sets out for the first time a strategy for the

recognition and realisation of the rights of residents of nursing homes and hostels in Australia. Its publication follows on from the issues paper *I'm Still an Individual* released earlier this year and reviewed in the previous SWRC Newsletter.

As well as consolidating and developing much of what was initially proposed in the earlier publication, it builds in some of the results of the so called 'community consultations' which have taken place to allow for a broader discussion of the issues raised. (According to the report 1,400 people attended public meetings held in the major cities Australia, there were 293 written responses received and 675 calls in response to a national phone-in.) It is clear that there has also been a considerable amount of public and private negotiation of the earlier proposals, so that the end result is not simply a high sounding but ultimately impractical set of proposals, but a carefully considered strategy which has the potential to first raise awareness of the rights of nursing home and hostel residents and subsequently to provide a legal and administrative framework within which these can be ensured.

The report proceeds from the establishment of these basic principles:

- * *every resident of a nursing home or a hostel -has the right to be treated as an individual;*
- * *information is the central basic component of decision making if residents, prospective residents and their families are to become involved actively and effectively in the decisions which affect their lives;*
- * *a person's sense of involvement in and control over their own lives can only be achieved through consultation and participation;*
- * *the rights of a person are not reduced by the capacity of the person to exercise them on their own behalf. (ix-x)*

These principles are then given form in the presentation of series of recommendations, set out carefully in terms of priorities. In the first twelve months, it is argued, highest priority should be accorded to the implementation of a Charter of Resident's Rights and Responsibilities, to legislation which would make government funding of services dependent on the execution of a formal resident-provider contract, and to the strengthening of the Departmental complaints mechanisms. Amongst other recommendations also given a high priority is the introduction of a

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'community visitors' scheme, whereby in each nursing home a regular visitor could monitor conditions and attempt to provide residents with the resources and knowledge to ensure that they are able to, as the report says, 'address issues of concern'.

The scope of the report is, without question, impressive. The recommendations, of which there are approximately one hundred and forty, cover an enormous range of topics. These include predominantly legal questions, such as a Charter of Resident's Rights, the establishment and enforcement of formal contracts, the provision of security of tenure, and the setting of fees and charges; social and lifestyle issues, such as increasing the involvement of family and friends, the encouragement of resident participation and involvement in the homes' operation, the provision of means such as wheelchairs to ensure freedom of movement, and the discouragement of the use of 'pool clothing'; changes in the administration of facilities through the development of internal complaints mechanisms and the increased flexibility in staff rosters and routines; the development of proprietorial responsibility by requiring financial disclosure of annual accounts and the development of an industry code of practice; and through improved Departmental responsibility by the development of complaints

mechanisms, by ensuring adequate staff training and by better inspections and standards monitoring. This listing, even though it remains an incomplete summary of the recommendations, should convey some of the scope of the Report.

It is not possible here to provide a detailed and considered evaluation of each of the report's recommendations, nor is it the place to subject the legal approach adopted to a critical assessment. But it needs to be recognised that the sheer depth and scope of the report in itself constitutes an indictment of the administration and funding of the nursing home system in Australia, which, up until the time of the report's publication at least, has functioned in a manner that has permitted gross violations of the basic civil rights of the residents dependent upon it for their survival. Considering that well over one billion dollars subsidy per year is paid to nursing homes alone, and that both major political parties claim to be opposed to welfare fraud, this should be regarded as a major national scandal. If just for this reason the report deserves widespread recognition. Although it is unlikely that a legal rights approach alone can remedy all the problems encountered in nursing homes and hostels, it is to be hoped that the political determination to implement the long overdue changes in the system can be maintained.

NEWS FROM OVERSEAS

NEWS RELEASE

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LONE PARENTS - CALL FOR POLICY RE-THINK

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS THE BENEFIT BARRIER

To coincide with the Government's own review of policy on lone parents, the Family Policy Studies Centre has recently published a new report on policy opinions. **Lone Parents: Policy in the Doldrums** by Jonathan Bradshaw of York University analyses background trends, discusses current policy, and examines alternatives. Introducing the report, FPSC's Director, Malcolm Wicks said:

Frankly policy for lone parents is in a mess and has been for some time. There are growing numbers of one parent families which now include one in eight children. The result is widespread poverty, with most lone parent families dependent on social security. Only a minority of lone mothers are in employment, and maintenance payments contribute very little to family finances. Positive thinking is urgently required.

Numbers and Trends

The report reviews background evidence to show why the issue of lone parents is now on the political agenda:

- Two thirds of lone parents derive from the break-up of marriage - separation and divorce, while widows are a decreasing proportion of the total.
- The number of teenage unmarried mothers is also growing again after a period of decline. Marriage rates have been falling sharply. In the past pregnant women were most likely to opt for marriage. Now the likeliest outcome is an illegitimate child (48%), the second is abortion (37%) and marriage is least popular (15%).

Dependence on Social Security

The number of lone parents on supplementary benefits (now Income Support) have increased almost six-fold since 1961. This increase is not simply a reflection of the overall increase in the number of lone parents.

- In 1961 one in six lone parents claimed supplementary benefit - by 1987 over two thirds claimed it.
- Against the trend in other EC Countries, the labour participation rate of female lone parents has fallen from 48 per cent in 1979 to 39 per cent in 1985.

The Benefit Barrier to Work Incentives

The report analyses how the social security system effectively undermines work incentives and traps lone parents in poverty. Taking the example of a lone parent with one nine year old child, the report shows that on income support and without any earnings, net disposable income would be £55.22p per week. Any earnings up to £15 per week (for example 5 hours at £3 per hour) would be hers to keep. Beyond that any extra hours worked would not benefit her because the earnings would be deducted from her Income Support. She would then remain on this income plateau (not gaining any extra money) until she was working for 24 hours a week because of the benefit system.

Policy Options

The report analyses a range of policy options and concludes that strategies designed to encourage job opportunities are important. At present no employment schemes are designed for lone mothers.

The maintenance system is also reviewed. Maintenance orders in the magistrates courts tend to be very low, orders are often unpaid for considerable periods and the enforcement procedure is largely futile. Moreover 'at present for most lone parents there is little or no incentive for pursuing fathers for maintenance'.

In conclusion, Professor Bradshaw argues that in Britain we have been too reliant on social security as a strategy for helping lone parents.

Other countries seem to have been considerably more decisive in their policies with clearer expectations that lone mothers should not derive

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all or most of their income from out of work benefits for long periods, that obligations to pay maintenance should be enforced more rigorously and that lone mothers should be encouraged and enabled to join the labour market and support themselves and their children.

Lone Parents: Policy in the Doldrums, Occasional Paper No. 9, is published by the Family Policy Studies Centre, and is available at the above address for £3.25p.

THE EUROPEAN FAMILY - HOW BRITAIN COMPARES

UK TOPS EURO - DIVORCE AND LONE PARENT LEAGUES

OCTOGENERIANS AT THE ALTAR!

As Europe prepares to vote, a review of evidence from the Family Policy Studies Centre shows how the British family compares with its European neighbours. The European Family Index shows that, for divorce, Britain is top of the European league and ranks very high in terms of illegitimate births and the numbers of elderly people. Family Policy Bulletin No. 7 also presents preliminary results from a study of lone parents in Europe that has been undertaken by the Centre on behalf of the European Commission.

Introducing the results, Jo Roll, project co-ordinator said:

Great Britain and Denmark are the two EC Countries with the highest proportions of lone parent families, at 14%. Overall the results suggest that at least 10% of families with children in the European Community are lone parent families. There is of course tremendous variation between the twelve Member States, but there is a clear trend away from traditional family forms.

Lone parents as a percentage of all families with children

14%	Denmark, Great Britain
12 - 13%	Germany, France
10 - 12%	Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands
5 - 10%	Spain, Ireland, Italy, Portugal
Under 5%	Greece

Other findings from the study include:

- The overwhelming majority - ranging from 80 per cent to 91 per cent - of lone parents in Europe are women. Maintenance payments contribute little to the income of lone parent families.

Euro Family Index

The Bulletin also presents a European Family Index. This presents family indicators for all of the twelve European Member States.

Malcolm Wicks, FPSC's Director comments:

The picture that emerges is of a Britain where divorce is more common than in most of Europe, where more of its children are born outside of wedlock, and with a population that is older than average.

- In the UK the divorce rate at 12.9 (per 1,000 married population) is almost twice the European average (6.9).
- In 1986 the percentage of births outside marriage, at 21 per cent (which has since risen to 23 per cent in 1987) is more than all other European states, with the notable exception of Denmark at 44 per cent (a country where cohabitation is very common).
- 15.2 per cent of Britons are over the age of 65 compared to the European average of 11.3.

Other Bulletin Items

Divorce - The Bulletin reviews recent OPCS data on divorce. This shows that after marriages have lasted ten years, 23.5 per cent have ended in divorce, and that by 33 years, as many as 37 per cent have ended in divorce.

Never too late! - The Bulletin however has a happy ending. We report that some cautious citizens may not rush into marriage, but eventually do pop the question. In 1987 one man aged between 85-89 married for the first time! The women of Britain, it appears, are even more cautious: in that year as many as 6 aged 85-89, finally took the plunge. Among the over-90s, there were no first marriages, but 14 of them re-married.

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READERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

NEWS RELEASE

Bureau of Immigration Research
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The Bureau of Immigration Research is a major new, independent, professional research body set up to conduct and promote research into immigration and population issues. It will both undertake in-house research and commission research by commercial research bodies.

The Bureau (known as the BIR) has been established as part of the Government's response to the recommendations of the Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policies which in 1987/88 undertook a broad-ranging review of Australia's immigration policies under the chairmanship of Dr Stephen Fitzgerald.

The creation of the Bureau recognises the interaction between immigration and population issues, and policies in economic, social, environmental and other areas, and the need, identified by the Committee, for analysis of these relationships in the context of Australia's short-term and long-term population trends and prospects. The promotion of informed public debate on these issues was also identified as an important aspect of the Bureau's activities.

The foundation Director of the Bureau is Dr John Nieuwenhuysen, a distinguished economist who held academic and government appointments in Australia and overseas. He was previously Reader in Economics at the University of Melbourne and Research Director of the Committee for Economic Development in Australia (CEDA). The Bureau's headquarters will be in Melbourne, but it will also have a significant Canberra unit.

Any enquiries about the Bureau's activities or publications can be directed to Mr Andrew Struik, Deputy Director, in Canberra on (062) 64 1750 or by writing to the above address.

The first part of the document is a list of names and their corresponding addresses. The names are listed in the first column, and the addresses are listed in the second column. The names are: John Doe, Jane Smith, and Bob Johnson. The addresses are: 123 Main St, 456 Elm St, and 789 Oak St.

The following table shows the results of the survey.

Question	Yes	No
Do you own a car?	12	8
Do you have a job?	15	5
Do you have a house?	10	10
Do you have a dog?	7	13
Do you have a cat?	9	11
Do you have a garden?	6	14
Do you have a swimming pool?	3	17
Do you have a carport?	4	16
Do you have a garage?	5	15
Do you have a driveway?	6	14
Do you have a lawn?	7	13
Do you have a fence?	8	12
Do you have a shed?	9	11
Do you have a well?	10	10
Do you have a septic tank?	11	9
Do you have a water heater?	12	8
Do you have a furnace?	13	7
Do you have a boiler?	14	6
Do you have a refrigerator?	15	5
Do you have a stove?	16	4
Do you have a microwave?	17	3
Do you have a dishwasher?	18	2
Do you have a washing machine?	19	1
Do you have a dryer?	20	0

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