

Contents

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| <i>Introduction</i> | x |
|---------------------|---|

PART I: CONTEXTS

| | |
|---|----------|
| 1 Changing Perspectives on Social Policy and Social Work | 3 |
| Social work consists of more than merely implementing the law | 4 |
| How do social workers use social policy in their practice? | 5 |
| What changing contexts affect social policy and social work? | 6 |
| What are social policy, social administration, social security, social services, social care and social work? | 26 |
| How does social policy relate to social work? | 29 |

PART II: POLICIES

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| 2 Social Security | 37 |
| Policy context | 38 |
| Key policy changes and related issues | 45 |
| Implications for social workers | 53 |
| 3 Employment | 55 |
| Policy context | 55 |
| Key policy changes and related issues | 61 |
| Implications for social workers | 69 |
| 4 Housing | 72 |
| Policy context | 72 |
| Key policy changes and related issues | 74 |
| Implications for social workers | 89 |

| | | |
|----------|---|------------|
| 5 | Health and Community Care | 92 |
| | Policy context | 93 |
| | Key policy changes and related issues | 94 |
| | Implications for social workers | 107 |
| 6 | Family and Childcare | 110 |
| | Policy context | 110 |
| | Key policy changes and related issues | 112 |
| | Implications for social workers | 124 |
| 7 | Youth Justice and Criminal Justice | 127 |
| | Policy context | 129 |
| | Key policy changes and related issues | 137 |
| | Implications for social workers | 146 |

PART III: ISSUES

| | | |
|-----------|---|------------|
| 8 | Tackling Divisions and Inequalities | 151 |
| | Contexts | 152 |
| | Key aspects | 152 |
| | Implications for social workers | 171 |
| 9 | Organising and Delivering Social Services | 173 |
| | Policy context | 173 |
| | Key changes and related issues | 177 |
| | Implications for social workers | 184 |
| 10 | Financing Social Services | 186 |
| | Contexts | 186 |
| | Key aspects | 188 |
| | Implications for social workers | 197 |
| 11 | Who Controls Social Services? | 200 |
| | Contexts and key aspects | 200 |
| | Implications for social workers | 211 |
| 12 | Future Trends | 213 |
| | How have social conditions changed since 1981? | 213 |
| | Can government policies deliver improvements to the people? | 217 |
| | What are the implications for social workers? | 224 |

APPENDICES

| | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | Abbreviations | 229 |
| 2 | Key Dates: Legislation | 234 |
| 3 | Internet Addresses of Main Sources of Information on Policy and Research | 237 |
| | <i>Bibliography</i> | 239 |
| | <i>Index</i> | 263 |

Part I

Contexts

1

Changing Perspectives on Social Policy and Social Work

The idea that policy is an organised, coherent, worked out strategy which leads to a readily applied, straightforward plan for practice is attractive but mistaken. As an experienced social policy researcher says:

it is a view born of a rational, logical approach to the process of planning and policy formulation. Appealing as this view may be, the reality, especially in the field of social policy, is that it tends to be complex, messy and created within a dynamic environment of competing forces and tensions. (Spurgeon, 2000, p. 191)

It is in this context of arguments, differences of perspective, compromises, decisions made at the last minute, plans needing implementing yesterday, that policymakers and politicians construct the laws which empower social services and probation departments, for implementing by overworked managers and practitioners.

The resulting legislation gives practitioners their statutory duties, powers, responsibilities and functions. The Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 establishes the framework for social workers by requiring the local authority to set up and operate a social services department. Within this, particular legislation generates specific duties. The Probation Services Act 1993 requires probation committees in the area covered by each magistrates' court to appoint probation officers who are responsible for carrying out specified functions in the criminal justice system (see Chapter 7). Not surprisingly, given the context of conflict and negotiation in which the laws are framed, the resulting brief for practitioners is often full of dilemmas, uncertainties and contradictions.

Social work consists of more than merely implementing the law

Louis Blom-Cooper wrote in the introduction to the report of the inquiry he chaired into the death of Jasmine Beckford:

We are strongly of the view that social work can, in fact, be defined *only* (his italics) in terms of the functions required of its practitioners by their employing agency operating within a statutory framework. (Blom-Cooper, 1985, p. 12)

This is tantamount to asserting that practitioners implement the law. That is all they need to know, where to find the law. Why bother with social policy? This *legalistic* model of social work (revisited near the end of this chapter)

emphasises the need to work within the statutory framework, in contrast to a view that what really matters is social workers using their expertise to help clients. (Brayne and Martin, 1999, p. 15)

But, as we discuss at the end of this chapter, the relationship between social work and the law is more complex and problematic than this. Social policy, like psychology and sociology, offers even wider contexts on people's circumstances, sometimes contributing research which raises vital questions, at other times offering theoretical debates. All these elements make possible critical reflection on our part as practitioners, contribute to our expertise and engage our personal and professional values, activating a moral dimension on our work, a judgement about what sort of society we want and what contribution we believe social policy and social workers should make to it.

As if this is not complicated enough, outside the statutory duties of social workers lies the range of therapeutic, community-based and community work tasks in which some social workers get involved, which are not underpinned directly by legislation. These activities include some of the aspirations of critical practitioners – to encourage advocacy and empower clients, for instance.

So, the law is necessary to social workers; they have to abide by it and carry it out where necessary. But there is more to social work than implementing the law. Social workers are not simply lawyers, working on people's problems. Social workers draw on a range of social science perspectives and research in their practice. As part of this process, social policy contributes to the critical practitioner's grasp of the context of practice. Many years ago, Paul Halmos wrote about the need for the professional to encompass the tensions, conflicts, paradoxes and

contradictions embodied in the ‘personal’ and the ‘political’ dimensions of people’s circumstances (Halmos, 1978). Social policy and social work share these tensions and dilemmas.

Using this book

This chapter forms Part I of this book. It contains general maps of ideas about the links between social policy and social work. You, as a student or practising social worker, may prefer not to start here, but may go to one of the chapters in Part II. You can think of these as larger scale maps of particular aspects of policy. Or, you may consult Part III, pursuing an issue which slices through the other chapters. It will be helpful, though, at some stage to return to the questions dealt with in this chapter under the three main headings below: what changing contexts affect social policy and social work?; what are social policy, social work, social security and the other disciplines with ‘social’ in them?; how does social policy relate to social work? Before tackling these, we justify the need for all practitioners to have an up-to-date knowledge and critical understanding of social policy by posing a prior question: how do social workers use social policy in their practice?

How do social workers use social policy in their practice?

EXAMPLE

Mrs K is a divorced Asian lone parent who has restricted movement through an arthritic condition made worse by the cold. She lives in rented accommodation with her 16-year-old son who has a learning disability. Mrs K is entitled to housing benefit. She rings social services to complain that her application has been put into the pending tray because she is still living with her former husband.

The social worker who picks up the case visits Mrs K and soon realises that there is no food and no heating in the house and Mrs K’s son is too scared to go out. It emerges that he has been cautioned by the police for allegedly throwing a stone through a shop window, an offence he denies, saying a gang of boys keep harassing him, shouting ‘Paki’ at him, so he prefers to stay indoors. The social worker asks whether Mrs K’s former husband pays maintenance. Mrs K does not answer but her son interjects that his father, who is white, owns three shops, drives a Mercedes, calls his son an idle scrounger and gives them nothing.

The social worker realises that this case touches on the policies of the housing department, social security and youth justice. Mrs K may need health and community care services and her lack of everyday means of living adequately needs attending to. There are issues of racism, discrimination, poverty and family and child support. So, it is vital that the social worker feels confident about drawing on up-to-date knowledge and understandings in these areas, including critical research, to inform practice with Mrs K and her son. Social policy does not provide an answer, but may give us a sense of perspective, a context, which helps us to appreciate and interpret what is going on.

Not every case is as complex. But, as Anne Brechin argues in her important chapter which introduces critical practice, it is vital for practitioners to grasp the policy context of the cases they deal with and thereby improve their responses to the constraints and uncertainties which contribute to the complexities of many people's lives (Brechin, 2000, p. 25). This book is devoted to this task.

How can we keep up to date?

- As social workers, we need to keep up to date on the changing contexts of policy and policy changes. These often affect what happens to clients, for example, when they go into offices to seek benefits or services and there has been a change of policy. The social worker needs to be abreast of this and be proactive in work with the client, anticipating rather than responding.
- Books, articles in social policy and social work journals are a good up-to-date source. Another source are organisations offering information, some which are detailed in Appendix Three at the end of this book.
- It helps to take an informed daily newspaper, or a good Sunday paper and maintain files of recent press cuttings. In a period of rapid change, it helps to subscribe to key social work journals and weekly magazines such as *Community Care*.

What changing contexts affect social policy and social work?

Social policy and social work both show signs of the disruption to the welfare state and welfare services which has occurred since the 1970s.

This has eroded, if not actually destroyed, the policies and those health, social work and social care practices derived from them, which were established in the 1940s, and which evolved through the significant social, economic and political changes of the 1950s and 60s.

At the same time, debates about what welfare is, who should have it, whether some services should be free and if so on what basis should this be decided, have broadened, as the language and concepts informing welfare policies and professions have been subject to critical scrutiny. While politicians from the New Right from the late 1970s have questioned the assumptions justifying state provision of health and social services as a right for all, on the basis of need, those receiving services have organised to express collective preferences and challenge established concepts, policies and services. The traditional power relationships between the state and the citizen, people and their welfare, professionals and 'clients' or 'service users', managers and practitioners have been challenged successfully. Children and parents now attend case reviews, service users represent their own views at policy and management levels in the work of the Care Commissioners.

Academics, researchers and practitioners express concern that the centre of gravity of social policy has shifted to the political Right since the 1970s and identify threats to the identity and survival of social work. Undeniably, changes are occurring, but there is little consensus about which are the most significant of these and it is almost impossible to predict how likely they are to persist.

Ideas context: no consensus about values and goals

There is little doubt that welfare services have changed massively during the twentieth century, but it is a more open question as to how far the ideas and values informing the shaping and delivering of these services have been affected by these changes. Debates about this draw on a vast and rapidly growing body of research evidence, as well as the more subjective sources of personal opinion, experience and beliefs. The subject matter of welfare – people's lives – may be subject to independent critical analysis but is prone to value judgements and assumptions based on opinion. To make this more complicated, no simple dichotomy between research and personal experience and prejudice can be drawn. Critical perspectives on social research attest to the inherently problematic nature of traditional, so-called scientific research, often mimicked by social scientists, while qualitative research methodologies are prone

to attack by adherents to experimental research for not meeting the basic conditions for the carrying out of respectable research.

A welfare revolution: illusion or a reality?

Another way of posing this question is to ask how revolutionary the massive changes which have occurred in the social services during the twentieth century have been, in terms of their impact on people. Before the First World War, social services were embryonic. In the decade following the outbreak of the Second World War, the welfare state was conceived and set up. The National Assistance Act 1948 replaced the nineteenth-century Poor Laws and instituted the basis on which social services for adults are still provided. The Children Act 1948 represented the first recognition of the duty of local authorities to provide comprehensive services for caring for children who lacked a normal home life. In the 40 years after the Second World War, all aspects of social services were the targets of an unprecedented mass of legislation, much of it creating new powers, duties and responsibilities for social services agencies.

During the last decades of the twentieth century, a second revolution in social policy could be said to have taken place, as many welfare services were reconstituted and privatised and markets were created for the purchase and delivery of services. Local government was subjected to transformation, not just through the creation of unitary local authorities, but also involving the shift from local government to local governance by complex arrangements involving the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Have these changes significantly improved the quality of life of specific groups of people? On the whole, those who already have wealth and are higher earners have fared well. Welfare policies during the twentieth century have left the living conditions of many worse-off people largely unchanged. Chapters 2 to 7 of this book provide evidence that unemployment, inadequate housing, deficient health and community care, low incomes and problems associated with poverty still particularly affect people experiencing physical or learning disabilities, older people, people with mental health problems, lone parents, those with less earning capacity, children in poor families and families living in resource-starved urban and rural districts where access to welfare services is far from adequate. Poor people are still likely to be viewed with a mixture of sympathy and suspicion, depending on the extent to which they are regarded as trying to help themselves. Stereotypes of the beggar, the orphan, the 'morally careless' pregnant young girl, the 'mad'

person, the disabled person deemed less capable, or the older person regarded as 'past it' are still dominated by prejudices rather than informed by the realities of their circumstances and the experiences of people themselves. The focus on the undeniable changes in welfare services, and how they are organised, managed and delivered, diverts attention from the unchanging realities of being poor, being a lone parent, experiencing mental health problems, becoming older or living in a society which discriminates against people who are different, whether through class, age, gender, ethnicity, disability or other social divisions.

Up to a third of people in Britain still live in poverty. Many children, especially those living with lone parents, experience poor housing, long-term poverty and inadequate education, health and childcare provision. The gap between rich and poor people at the beginning of 2000 was as great as in 1900.

Demographic context

There are some changes which are less matters of judgement and personal value and more subject to objective measurement. The population of Britain, for instance, has increased overall, but some areas, notably inner cities and some rural regions, have experienced decreases in population, particularly of economically active, better-off people. In 1901, just over 38 million people lived in the UK. By 1961, there were nearly 53 million and by 1997 this figure had increased by a further 12 per cent to 59 million. However, in this latter period, whereas the population of Northern Ireland increased by 17 per cent, that of England increased by 13 per cent, Wales by 11 per cent, whereas the population of Scotland actually fell by 1 per cent (Office for National Statistics, 1999, p. 30).

During the twentieth century, the burden of caring has shifted considerably within families and households. More people are dependent and a smaller proportion are in the workforce. Whereas in 1961, about 12 per cent of the UK population were aged 65 and over and 4 per cent were over 75, in 1997, these figures had risen to 16 and 7 per cent respectively (Office for National Statistics, 1999, p. 31).

Even in the demographic context, there are myths. For instance, it is often said that only since the waves of immigration from the Caribbean and Asian countries from the 1960s onwards, Britain has become a multi-racial society. But the reality is that immigrants have figured largely throughout the history of this country. In the mid-nineteenth century, more than a million Irish people were driven by potato famines and

poverty to seek a home elsewhere, while almost as many died at home. In the late nineteenth century, Jews and others from Central and Eastern Europe settled in towns such as Manchester, Hull and Leeds. Britain again provided a refuge for Jewish people in the 1930s and 40s. Ugandan Asian people and the so-called 'boat people' from Vietnam settled in smaller numbers from the 1970s. From the 1990s, refugees and people seeking asylum arrived from Central, Southern and Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

International context: globalisation and post-devolution welfare

During the social and political upheavals in Romania and former Yugoslavia in the 1980s and 90s, there were cases of British people travelling to those countries, obtaining orphaned or abandoned children and bringing them back as adopted. Concepts, policies and practices regarding adoption, children's rights and parental responsibility differ widely in different countries. In January 2001, controversy followed the purchase from an Internet adoption agency by Alan and Judith Kilshaw of six-month-old twin girls in Arkansas, USA, taken into care when they arrived at the couple's home in northern England. While it is illegal in the USA to purchase children directly for a fee, adoption procedures often are more abbreviated than in England and a private adoption for a fee paid to the agency can be obtained in Arkansas, provided the relevant authorities and courts are satisfied with the arrangements and the adoptive parents have been resident in that state for a minimum of 30 days.

Devolution

These cases show that social policy and social work in post-devolution England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales cannot be isolated from welfare policies and legislation in other European countries forming the European Union (EU) (Cannan et al., 1992) and the wider social, political, economic and policy contexts provided by the USA as a major world power and other more and less developed countries. Influences on British social policy occupy concentric spaces: macro (global), mezzo (European) and micro (local). At the *macro*, global level, there may be a growing tendency towards international standards being set and sustained. At the other extreme of the *micro* level, the impact of devolution in the UK may mean that local conditions are in the process of fragmentation as the four countries of the United Kingdom – England,

Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales – gather momentum in expressing their separate identities through policy and practice.

Europe

Between global and national entities, at the *mezzo* level, the EU plays an increasingly influential role in British social policy. European government and legislation superimpose a further layer of duties, powers, responsibilities and roles on central and local governments in Britain. These include a huge mass of laws and regulations relating to the Single European Market and the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty, covering many areas of employment protection and the promotion of equality.

Despite Britain's proximity to the rest of Western Europe, historical, cultural, political and economic factors contribute to the distinctive differences between Britain and its neighbours (Adams et al., 2000). There is evidence, however, of some convergence in welfare policies and levels of welfare spending, 'as lower spending Mediterranean countries with left-wing governments increase provision and Northern governments retrench' (George and Taylor-Gooby, 1996, p. x).

The creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951, the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) in 1957 and the European Economic Community (EEC) (1957) began the process of social, economic, financial and political convergence in Europe which led in 1994 to the replacement of the European Community (EC) by the EU. The EU is run by the Executive Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the Court of Justice. The powers of the European Parliament, whose elected members consider issues in a similar way to the parliament in Westminster, are considerably less than those of Westminster. In contrast, the pronouncements of the Court of Justice are binding on member states.

In some senses, the EU operates as a supranational entity, with its own political structures able to make policy and law and impose them on individual member states. In the main, though, member states pool their sovereignty in most areas of policy, retaining the right to make their own decisions about what they do (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1997, p. 163).

Britain and the rest of Western Europe are undergoing a period of major adjustment in the wake of the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) at the end of the 1980s and the expansion of the EU as former communist states negotiate entry. Such expansion heightens debates about whether greater monetary, economic and policy integration is desirable. Despite the persistence in Britain of a significant

cohort of conservative politicians who resist closer political and policy integration on the grounds that it would undermine national sovereignty, there are strong economic and business pressures towards Britain harmonising more closely with Brussels and reformist pressures towards interventionist economics and social policies, stronger protection of people's social rights and needs (through the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty 1991) and minimum wage and maximum working week legislation (through the EC Working Time Directive). There is also the ideological argument that isolationism and nationalism are inconsistent with progressive democratic and social policies aiming to transcend divisions, maximise equality and achieve monetary and financial union.

There are internationalist and nationalist pressures both pulling European countries together and, in some senses, fragmenting their distinct, separate identities. Within some countries, as support for regional government within England shows, there are campaigns for sub-national identities, independence and government.

The USA

Historically, economic and social policy in Britain has been influenced greatly by developments in the USA, in the early years of the Thatcher government. Milton Friedman, a US economist committed to free-market principles, was used in the 1980s by Conservative politicians to justify the monetarist policies of the Thatcher government, one goal being to reduce the role of the public sector in providing health and social services and encourage private and voluntary providers to enlarge their contributions. This political proximity between these two countries was furthered by a convergence of views, the so-called 'special relationship', between the Republican President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Globalisation

Globalisation is a recognised feature of economic and social systems, as well as social policy and the delivery of welfare services (Mishra, 1999). Björkman and Altenstetter observe that in health policies 'the diffusion of policy ideas is truly global' and there is 'considerable evidence of cross-national borrowing of reforms – or at least (re)labelling of reform proposals – in order to obtain beneficial results' (Björkman and Altenstetter, 1997, p. 1). They agree with Maynard, however, that

it is remarkable in all health care systems how policy formation reflects fashion and beliefs rather than the knowledge base ... The reluctance of physicians to be 'confused' by facts in their everyday practice is paralleled by the reluctance of

'policy makers' to be informed by evidence when 'redisorganising' health care systems in pursuit of perfection ie. equity, efficiency and cost control. (Maynard, 1995, p. 49, quoted in Björkman and Altenstetter, 1997, p. 1)

These observations are applicable to the social care, social services and social work fields, many of whose services are attached to, or form part of, healthcare provision.

As important as the transnational nature of ideas about social policies, the persistence of massive global inequalities of wealth, income, political and economic power makes it ironic that no statutory body has been set up charged specifically with the pursuit of global improvements in associated services. The nearest approach to this is the United Nations (UN), an intergovernmental organisation (IGO) whose members are individual nations. In contrast, there are nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) whose members include groups and private individuals. In 1909, there were 176 NGOs and 37 IGOs, these totals increasing to 4830 and 272 respectively (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1997, p. 146).

United Nations

The UN is the best known IGO, with the broadest range of economic and social responsibilities, only a minority of countries, such as Switzerland, not seeking membership. It grew from the somewhat pathetic initiative of the League of Nations whose major purpose, collective security, was intended to prevent a repetition of the catastrophe of the First World War. The UN was formed in 1946, after the collapse of the League of Nations. The UN's purposes include maintaining international peace and security; developing friendly relations between nations based on principles of equal rights and self-determination of people; solving economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems; and promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms through international cooperation and harmonising the actions of nations to achieve these goals (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1997, pp. 148–9). Its enactments include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950), Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1967), Inter-American Convention on Human Rights (1969), Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981), Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984), Convention on the

Rights of the Child (1989), Convention on the Elimination of Political, Economic, Social, Cultural, and Civil Discrimination Against Women (1991), Declaration on Principles of International Law on Compensation to Refugees (1992). In addition, the UN has sponsored conferences raising international awareness on many issues affecting social policy, including ageing (1982), crime prevention and treatment of offenders (1985), drug abuse (1987, 1992), child protection (1990), housing (1996) and social development (1995) (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1997, p. 160).

Any international association of states is no stronger than the motivation towards cooperation of its contributing members. The principal weakness of the UN is the lack of legal power in its resolutions and the lack of political and organisational structures to enable it to achieve global governance in any meaningful sense. It is easy for members and non-members to weaken it by turning their backs on it.

Complexity of international context

Whatever uncertainties exist about the political future in Europe and the USA, it is likely that social policies in Britain will continue to be influenced by those in other countries, particularly Europe and the USA, and international associations such as the UN.

The area of children's rights illustrates the extraordinary complexity of legislation and policies at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. At the micro level, the British government passed the Children Act in 1989 and the Human Rights Act in 1998. At the mezzo level, there are decisions in the European Court of Human Rights, for example in the case of *A. v. the United Kingdom*, 1998, which found against the UK, that the law failed to protect a child from inhuman or degrading treatment and therefore violated Article 3 of the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950. At the macro level, there are the UN declarations of children's rights, referred to above. On occasions, the interpretation of these different enactments may not harmonise, and may actually conflict.

Organisational context: tensions between state and local government

The responsibilities of central and local government for the personal social services changed considerably during the twentieth century, and these changes accelerated in the second half of the century. Notably, legislation governing services for adults, including those receiving

community care, older people, disabled people, people with mental health problems and children and families, has increased the powers, duties and responsibilities of the state and local authorities for ensuring the delivery of a vast and complex range of services.

The last years of the twentieth century saw relations between central and local government changing, as central government laid down increasingly specific standards for the delivery of quality health and welfare services, to be inspected and monitored through the Social Services Inspectorate of the Department of Health.

Local government also experienced a shift from the tradition of the local authority largely monopolising the organisation, management, provision and delivery of services, to a style of governance involving the public, voluntary, private and informal sectors. The local authority became the enabler, as commissioner and *purchaser*, with other agencies as *providers* of an increasing range of services, particularly for adults and in significant areas of family and childcare.

Unitary local authorities were created under the local government reorganisation of 1995–8 (see Chapter 9), amid some concerns about whether the smaller unitaries would be disadvantaging those requiring social services, by not being equipped to provide an equivalent range of choice of services as the larger unitary authorities. Craig and Manthorpe (1999a, 1999b), in their evaluation of the reorganisation, pointed out that the then Conservative government advocates of unitary authorities tended to adopt the argument that ‘small is beautiful’, stressing the enhancement of opportunities for citizen participation and involvement by elected local councillors in decisions affecting planning, resourcing and service delivery. Robin Sequeira, director of social services for Dorset until local government reorganisation in April 1997, noted that the smaller unitary authorities could expect more involvement by elected councillors in the day-to-day running of social services. From the viewpoint of professionals and clients, this might be a mixed blessing (Sequeira, 1997, p. 8).

Government control over what local authorities did was exercised not only through the content of their work but also through the way it was resourced from the purse of the state. Central government control over local government was enhanced by tighter monetary regulation. Various funding arrangements, such as those associated with economic regeneration, were subject to central government approval. Local provision was restricted by capping arrangements which restricted choices available at local level. Local government was financially vulnerable in the sense that central government could withhold funding over and above local rates and council taxes and thereby exercise sanctions over the nature and level of appropriate provision.

Historical context

The changing focus of debates about what welfare provision should be made, how much should be provided by the state and how much in the voluntary, private and informal sectors reflects broader shifts in normative values, rooted in political, economic and social trends. Between the 1940s and 2000, there have been three significant watersheds in politics and welfare policy: the significant wave of legislation setting up the welfare state in the 1940s, the partial dismantlement of the welfare state under Thatcherism in the 1980s and the partial synthesis of these ideas in the so-called third way of 'New' Labour from 1997 onwards.

While the first two periods represented turning points for politics and social policy, it would be a mistake to regard them as revolutionary, or as totally new departures, largely disengaged from preceding events. Historians and social policy analysts may emphasise the rapid changes which often separate one era from that which precedes it. However, they often point to continuities which enable rapid change to take place. These seemingly contradictory themes of change and continuity are both necessary to an understanding of changes in politics and social policy.

Beveridge: the birth of the welfare state?

Social work and social services both lie at the heart of the most significant and influential innovation in social policy in the twentieth century, that of the welfare state. This term conveys the impression of a grand plan or holistic set of welfare laws by a munificent state. In some ways, though, the welfare state was never a homogeneous entity, but rather a succession of legal provisions which arose from the complex processes of policymaking, reflecting the range of beliefs of politicians and others involved in bringing in legislation. It was never a prior agreed plan, leading to a generally agreed body of prescriptions becoming law, which met a set of goals with agreed criteria by which its success or otherwise could be evaluated.

The term 'welfare state' was not widely used until the 1940s. The most positive accounts of it present it as:

a system of social organisation which restricts free market operations in three principal ways; by the designation of certain groups, such as children or factory workers, whose rights are guaranteed and whose welfare is protected by the community; by the delivery of services such as medical care or education, so that no citizen shall be deprived of access to them; and by transfer payments which maintain income in times of exceptional need, such as parenthood, or of interruption of earnings caused by such things as sickness or unemployment. (Fraser, 1984, p. xxi)

It refers to a disparate and at times somewhat confused group of legal enactments, measures, policies, practices and their consequences for individuals and groups of people. According to T H Marshall, for instance, its social security provisions were aimed at providing everybody with the guarantee of a minimum, while its setting up of the National Health Service aimed to provide an optimum level of service (Marshall, 1970, p. 92).

People born during the Second World War have lived through a half century during which the idea of the welfare state has had currency. But beyond that, there is no general agreement about its birth, maturity and dissolution. The welfare state was not conjured from the morass of hardship and disaster of the Second World War. The war certainly contributed, shaping and highlighting certain societal inadequacies and promoting the passing of certain laws. But many historical factors led to its creation, some linked with traditions and forces whose origins cannot be located entirely in the twentieth century.

The Beveridge Report (1942), despite the above comments, is undeniably one of the most influential social policy documents of the twentieth century. Before the war ended, Sir William Beveridge had spelled out his ideals for a full employment society (1944). Beveridge's political affiliations were left of Centre but with liberal rather than Marxist inclinations. In many ways, Beveridge would have had an easy dialogue with Tony Blair over the diagnosis of social ills. Beveridge was no revolutionary. He synthesised many of the existing beliefs and trends of liberals of his day. His ideas came at a period in Britain's wartime history when the mass of people wanted to build a new society.

Some social policies proceed by pragmatism and small, incremental changes. In contrast, both the making of the welfare state in the 1940s, and the unmaking of the welfare state in the 1980s and 90s, have resulted from the coincidence of a huge swathe of social policy changes across the health, social security and welfare services. The spirit of radical reform which gathered impetus through the mass, dehumanising experiences of millions of people during the war was partly the sentiment of 'never again'. There was widespread regret that the First World War had neither been the gateway to a social utopia nor the war to end all wars. Partly also, some people had broader aspirations. Nowhere was this idealism expressed more clearly than in the Hutton Press edition of the magazine *Picture Post* for 4 January 1941, on sale not only in Britain but also distributed to forces overseas. The list of chapter headings is indicative of its scope: A Plan for Britain; This is the Problem; Work for All; Social Security; The New Britain Must be Planned; Plan the

Home; The Land for All; A Plan for Education; Health for All; A Real Medical Service; When Work is Over; this last, incidentally, written by the novelist and playwright J B Priestley. The editorial of this *Picture Post* rooted the rationale for this in the war effort:

Our plan for a new Britain is not something outside the war, or something *after* the war. It is an essential part of our war aims. It is, indeed, our most positive war aim. The new Britain is the country we are fighting for. And the kind of land we want, the kind of life we think the good life, will exercise an immense attraction over the oppressed peoples of Europe and the friendly peoples of America. What we have done in this number is simply to rough out a plan. We have tried to outline a fairer, pleasanter, happier, more beautiful Britain than our own – but one based fairly and squarely on the Britain we have now. We have not imagined away South Wales or Tyneside, or our confused system of education. We have tried to show how they can be reconstructed – or at least to *begin* to show it. This new and better Britain could, we believe, be realised – given goodwill – within ten years... We believe that, after this war, certain things will be common ground among all political parties. It will be common ground, for example, that every Briton – man, woman or child – shall be assured of enough food of the right kinds to maintain him in full bodily health and fitness. It will be common ground that we must reform our system of education – so that every child is assured of the fullest education he can profit by. It will be common ground that our state medical service must be reorganised and developed so as to foster health, not merely battle with disease. (*Picture Post*, 4.1.41, p. 4)

By and large, this optimism was realised in the legislation passed by the Labour government (the Education Act 1944 was the precursor) which swept into power in 1945 (National Health Service Act 1946; Welfare Services Act 1947; Children Act 1948; Criminal Justice Act 1948; National Assistance Act 1948), ousting the wartime leader Winston Churchill.

Thatcherism and the New Right: end of the welfare state?

Derek Fraser's authoritative historical study of the evolution of the welfare state had a short postscript added in the second edition, headed 'The Decline of the Welfare State 1973–83?' (Fraser, 1984, pp. 250–3). It might seem obvious that it took more than a century for the principles and policies embodied in the welfare state in Britain to be expressed in the legislation of the late 1940s, but less than a quarter of that time for it to be dismantled in the closing years of the twentieth century. But the assumption that the welfare state was born in the 1940s and destroyed by the Thatcher government should not be accepted uncritically. Has the cluster of legislation from the 1940s been 'reified' (treated as a fact) with hindsight into 'the welfare state'? Should the Thatcher government

take all the blame for dismantling this apparatus? Surely, the foundations for its undermining were laid during the preceding Labour government (1974–79) and the task was completed by the Blair government (1997 onwards), in its rejection of much of the thinking of the New Left? The ‘New Left’, incidentally, is a term used by some to refer to Marxists, black power and radical feminist theorists, adherents to anti-psychiatry and critical social policy analysts (Page and Silburn, 1999, pp. 100–1).

Critics of the welfare state Pressure to reduce the so-called monopoly of services supplied by the welfare state, which apparently denied people freedom of choice, came after the 1960s from ‘neo-liberal’ economists and the Institute of Economic Affairs, who attacked what they described as the welfare consensus of the 1940s and 50s. There were critics on the Left, too, such as Peter Townsend, who argued that the welfare state had not yet achieved its goal of abolishing want, poverty and the redistribution of wealth (Fraser, 1984, p. 251). Whereas the New Right wanted to develop selective benefits as the way out of the perceived welfare ‘crisis’, the Left wanted to strengthen universalistic benefits.

The momentum of the Thatcher government from its accession to power in 1979, in implementing monetarist policies and cutting public expenditure, was increased by the policies of the preceding Labour government. Throughout the entire 1970s, there was a notable

sharp decline in capital expenditure in the major areas of education, housing and health ... [a] police pay rise, the extension of police powers in strike-breaking and the formation of para-military squads. Even in the citadel of Thatcherism – monetarism – it is possible to suggest that current practice is simply a more rhetorical version of a trend initiated under previous governments. (Taylor-Gooby, 1981, p. 19)

There is no doubt, though, that Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government gave these New Right policies an unprecedentedly high profile.

Ironically, the emphasis of Thatcherite social policy on an expanded role for the voluntary and informal sectors, as part of a conservative re-emphasis on the mid-Victorian notion of self-help, benefited the advocates of welfare pluralism. They were keen to explore the viability of ‘participative alternatives to centralised social services’ (Hadley and Hatch, 1981, pp. 170–5) through voluntary and informal activity. Ironically, too, the extensive privatisation of public services and the civil service under the Conservatives, which gathered momentum

during the 1980s, and the marketisation of local authority services and key areas of the health and social services, such as community care, were embraced by the Blair government of 1997 onwards. The centre of gravity of the Labour Party had shifted a long way from the days when Labour served the trade union cause first and foremost and regarded itself as the enemy of 'capital' in the form of industrialists, entrepreneurs, business managers and professionals, as well as many middle-class people.

New Labour and the 'third way'

The size of the two landslide victories of New Labour in the 1997 and 2001 general elections took most commentators by surprise. They reflected the success of Labour in detaching itself from its exclusive roots in the interests of the working class, its unique links with certain sectors of trade union movements, especially those in mass production industries, and its expressed commitment to left-wing socialism. Tony Blair and a group of New Labour colleagues reformulated policies with the aim of winning support from a substantial body of what might be described as 'haves' rather than simply the 'have-nots' among traditional Labour supporters. Thus Labour attracted many middle-class voters who had not felt able to support a left-wing Labour agenda, and yet who were disaffected with Tory politics.

New Labour claimed to offer a way between the 'extremes' of conservatism and socialism, beyond the traditional, 'old' Labour politics of confrontation between the trade union sponsored working classes and the ruling capitalists, industrial and business entrepreneurs, portrayed by socialists and Marxists. The Blair government attempted a difficult balancing act, trying not to alienate the traditional working-class supporters of Labour while attempting to recruit support from what was called 'middle England', those who constitute the middle classes, who might otherwise have given their allegiance first to the Conservatives or Liberal Democrats.

The ground had been prepared by John Smith, leader of the Labour Party in opposition, when he set up the Commission on Social Justice in 1992 on the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the Beveridge Report (Beveridge, 1942). The Commission reported under its chairperson Gordon Borrie in 1994 (Commission on Social Justice, 1994).

Borrie Report

The report of the Commission on Social Justice was published in 1994 shortly after the death of John Smith, leader of the Labour Party, and,

significantly, contained the following panegyric on its cover by Tony Blair, who succeeded him and led Labour to victory in the election of May 1997: 'Essential reading for everyone who wants a new way forward for our country'.

Borrie occupied the transitional period between what became known as Old and New Labour. The Commission's membership was a demonstration of the ability of New Labour to bring into the consultation process theorists, pragmatists, radicals, researchers and activists in the voluntary sector. Borrie focused on how to shift from a so-called dependency culture to supporting people in need, while developing the culture of self-reliance and partnership in provision between the state and voluntary, private and informal sectors.

Social welfare reforms under New Labour

Blair's third way contained sufficient former Labour policies to retain the traditional Labour vote and sufficient also to attract people who might otherwise have committed themselves in the ballot box to the Liberal Democratic or Conservative parties. Far-reaching reforms of the social services were in prospect, even though in the immediate wake of the general election, the Queen's Speech which opened the new parliament followed the Labour Party manifesto in not mentioning social services. This contrasted, for instance, with the high profile given to details of intended measures to combat youth crime (Douglas, 1997, p. 11). Yet the Green Paper of March 1998 provided a set of proposals for the comprehensive overhaul of the welfare state (Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Welfare Reform, 1998). This was followed by the White Paper in November of the same year (Secretary of State for Health, 1998). A Labour government consultation paper published in 1998 (Ministerial Group on the Family, 1998) aimed to complement these proposals on service provision, in what Jack Straw claimed was the first ever consultation document on the family. This affirmed the government's commitment to the family as the foundation of society (Ministerial Group on the Family, 1998). The consultation document set out a commitment to better financial support for families, better advice on parenting and the prevention of family breakdown, and better services to families with problems. The rationale was partly that a stronger family would promote greater independence from costly state-provided services. At a deeper level, while the Blair government took tight control of the work of civil servants in central government departments, there were continuities with the contract-based market ideology created by the Thatcher government in central government

departments traditionally dominated by civil servants. Thus, the Social Care Group of the Department of Health (DH) had the stated aim:

to improve the quality, reliability and efficiency of social services in England ... [as] one of the three key business areas within the Department of Health, working alongside the NHS Executive and the Public Health Group. (DH/SSI, 1999, *The Work of the Social Care Group*, DH at <http://www.doh.gov.uk>, 26.5.00)

The picture is more complex because that part of the DH concerned with the personal social services was distinctive in having close links with agencies and practice, and also in its research and grant-giving functions, with social policy and social work departments in universities. This culture of formal partnership and informal interaction had been built up since the days of the Social Work Service of the DHSS in the early 1970s and interwove personnel who had moved around the triangle linking practice, academic work and the DH in London, the regions, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Tackling shortcomings in quality of social services: 'Quality Protects' Quality assurance procedures in the social services were enforced from the early 1980s by central government, under the umbrella of the Audit Commission and the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), which grew from the former Social Work Service of the DHSS. These arrangements reflected public and political reactions to a succession of scandals in social services, shown in demands for increased accountability and control of social services staff, including social workers, who by then had a very poor public image (Franklin, 1999). In Wales, the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales developed a performance management framework for social services departments which incorporated performance indicators, Joint Review inspections and regular monitoring (Social Services Inspectorate, 2000a).

Quality Protects (QP), a three-year £375 m programme, was launched in England by the Secretary of State for Health on 21 September 1998 with the aim of transforming social services for children. Local authorities were expected to demonstrate by 2002 their success in meeting specified key performance targets, improving the wellbeing of children in need and looked after children (that is, those for whom the local authority is directly responsible). Management Actions Plans (MAPs) had to be devised indicating how children's services would be modernised and progress reported to the DH. In October 1999, new sub-objectives were published for children's services, under the umbrella of

Quality Protects. One target was to reduce repeated child abuse and neglect by 10 per cent by 2002 (see Chapter 6). The intention to bring in HM Inspectors of Schools to inspect daycare and childminding had been announced in March 1998.

These measures for quality assurance meshed with the contract culture established in the early 1990s with the implementation of the NHS and Community Care Act 1990, under the banner of promoting best practice at the 'best value'. A new Best Value Inspectorate was established to oversee and inspect all local services, with the government intervening promptly to tackle any serious or persistent failures in performance. The regime of compulsory competitive tendering was abolished, and new national performance indicators were set in place, against which the efficiency, cost and quality of services were to be judged.

The White Paper (DH, 1998a) published in November 1998 set out the government's proposals for the reorganisation of the social services in England and consultation documents were published in 1999 on the regulation of private and voluntary healthcare in England and for the regulation and inspection of healthcare and social care services in Wales. A spate of further publications followed. The Local Government Act 1999 introduced the principle of 'best value', increasing the accountability of local authorities by requiring more clearly stated objectives; specific criteria for measuring performance and outcomes; the involvement of citizens in the community, including people receiving services, in assessing the quality of services; and efficiency in using resources.

In April 1999, the Department of Health (1999e) issued a consultation document, *A New Approach to Social Services Performance*. This stated the intention to approach the performance of social services departments more proactively than previously. Forty-six performance indicators (PIs) were put forward as the means to achieve this. Here, as elsewhere, the specification of PIs was regarded by critics as neglecting the tension between purchasing the 'best value' service and maximising the quality of services. Also, the focus on PIs associated directly with practice emphasises the quantitative aspects of services rather than qualitative dimensions, which are crucial, for example, when research, monitoring and perceptions of users and carers need to be taken into account. For example, typical PIs included the stability of placements of looked after children and whether children are reregistered on the Child Protection Register. They also neglect issues associated with educating, training and supervising staff and resourcing services.

Seventeen local authorities were named in November 1999 as 'failing' and, at the launch of new performance assessment tables by John Hutton, Minister of Health, were made subject to special measures and performance indicators.

The Care Standards Bill, introduced to parliament by the Labour government in 1999, heralded a major departure from arrangements dating from the Registered Homes Act 1984 which would be repealed in its entirety. The Bill proposed regulation of community homes, voluntary adoption societies, local authority fostering and adoption services and welfare aspects of all boarding schools and colleges of further education taking children. The resultant Care Standards Act 2000 created new, independent, regulatory bodies in England and Wales for social care and private and voluntary healthcare services. The English body would be known as the National Care Standards Commission. In Wales, this body would be an arm of the National Assembly for Wales. At the same time, new, independent councils were to be set up to register social workers, set social care standards and regulate social workers' education and training in England and Wales, keep an up-to-date list of people judged unsuitable to work with vulnerable adults and reform the regulation of residential, domiciliary and daycare, fostering, adoption and childminder provision.

To some extent, welfare reforms after 1997 were the product of wider concerns of the Labour government, beyond social services, about how to reduce the huge, crisis-level volume of spending on state benefits for people with chronic problems associated with ageing and disability. There was also a crisis in social services. The term 'crisis' may refer to the slow, insidious impact of chronic problems such as lack of resources and financing (see Chapter 10). Or, as happened after the inquiry into the abuse and death of Maria Colwell in the early 1970s and the wave of subsequent scandals and inquiries, there could be said to be a growing crisis of credibility of social work and in the provision of welfare services. There is a crisis from the vantage point of those politicians disenchanted with social workers, impatient with nurses and viewing doctors' complaints about working conditions as unreasonable. There is a crisis from the standpoint of those professionals who feel undervalued, undertrained and underpaid. Patients, clients and service users, who feel they often receive less than adequate services, may also perceive a crisis.

The main achievements claimed by the prime minister by 2000 were not in the personal social services, but in the areas of employment, social security and education:

The New Deal has helped create nearly 100,000 new jobs in metropolitan areas. The Working Families' Tax Credit and Minimum Wage are making work pay for

millions of people on low incomes. Schools have sharply improved standards in literacy and numeracy particularly in deprived areas. (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000b, p. 5)

One of the linking themes was the initiative aimed at tackling social exclusion, through the setting up of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) (see Chapter 8). In September 1998, the SEU published a report proposing the need for a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal, based on policy development in 18 intersecting areas, with two goals:

to bridge the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of England; and in all the worst neighbourhoods, to achieve lower long-term worklessness; less crime; better health; and better educational qualifications. (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000d, p. 5)

Eighteen Policy Action Teams (PATs) (Table 1.1) were set up, each having a Ministerial Champion but bringing in a range of ‘outside experts and people working in deprived areas to ensure the recommendations were evidence-based and reality-tested’ (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000d, p. 5). The reports of the PATs were summarised (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000d) and fed into a consultation report (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000b) (see Chapter 12) and summary (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000c) published early in 2000, the responses to which would feed into the government’s National Strategy intended to be published later in the year. Some areas which cut across many PATs, notably minority ethnic issues (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000a), were given particular attention during the consultation process in 2000.

As the Blair government began its second term of office in 2001, it did not escape criticism in the light of evidence of the enduring problems of poverty (see Chapter 2). The government claimed that the priority in the

Table 1.1 Policy action teams

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Jobs | 10. Arts and Sport |
| 2. Skills | 11. Schools Plus |
| 3. Business | 12. Young People |
| 4. Neighbourhood Management | 13. Shops |
| 5. Housing Management | 14. Financial Services |
| 6. Neighbourhood Wardens | 15. Information Technology |
| 7. Unpopular Housing | 16. Learning Lessons |
| 8. Antisocial Behaviour | 17. Joining it up Locally |
| 9. Community Self-help | 18. Better Information |

second term would be improving the quality of public services, notably education and health.

What are social policy, social administration, social security, social services, social care and social work?

We have spent much of this chapter using terms with ‘social’ in them. It is now time to specify what we mean by them. Perhaps the subject of this book could be defined in a sentence: social work is politics and policy made local. This simplification contains some truth but ignores vital distinctions. The terms ‘social policy’ and ‘social work’ seem simple yet refer to disciplines, fields of study and practice of great complexity. There is no consensus about what they are, no agreement about the perspective from which they are best viewed and no single preferred way to research, teach or practise them. People from a range of political persuasions are engaged in them and it is not surprising, therefore, that they are often the subject of strenuous debate, controversy and conflict. Since the nineteenth century, there has been a growing vocabulary of terms used to refer to the ‘social’ perspectives informing research, theorising, politicking, policy, provision and professional practice. There is often confusion about their meanings.

Social policy

This is the term applied to the study of the development, implementation and impact of policies which influence the social situations of people. Social policy may be defined as a discipline in the social sciences, as a field of study, or as ‘social action in the real world’ (Alcock et al., 1998, p. 7). Social policy is not a static discipline. Its change since the 1970s from the study of social administration to policy studies reflects growing independence from liberal perspectives, a developmental focus and political affiliations with Fabianism and social democracy, rather than the Right or the socialist Left.

Social administration

In the 1960s, Kathleen Slack of the London School of Economics (the first director of the LSE was William Beveridge whose Beveridge Reports

in the 1940s provided the foundations of the welfare state) acknowledged the difficulties of defining the meaning of social administration, as social policy was then called. She suggested two common uses for the term ‘social administration’ – as a subject of study and as a process ‘directed to the solution of social problems, the promotion of social welfare or the implementation of social policy’ (Slack, 1966, p. 9). This process, she acknowledged, ‘is furthered by the use of different methods or techniques designed to reach a decision, promote some action or establish a precedent’ (Slack, 1966, pp. 9–10).

Social security

This is the term used to describe those arrangements made for the support of people in financial need, as examined in detail in Chapter 2.

Social services

Kathleen Slack commented on the confusion over the meaning of the term ‘social services’, raising questions about whether they included all services for the community, or only those for children and families, mental health services and elderly people (Slack, 1966, p. 11). In the process, she highlighted the work of Richard Titmuss as portraying the widest view. Titmuss drew attention in 1955 to the tendency over the previous 50 years for more and more areas to be drawn into the definition of social services, as ‘collective provision for certain “needs”’ (Titmuss, 1976a, p. 40), in contrast with its former limited territory in poor relief, sanitation and the control of public nuisances. Despite what he perceived as the elasticity of the boundaries of the social services (p. 40), Titmuss clearly specified three sectors as its constituents: social welfare, fiscal welfare and occupational welfare (p. 42).

Kathleen Slack states that the social services include:

national insurance, assistance and family allowances, health services, physical and mental, education, housing which must be linked with town and country planning, maternity and child welfare, care of the deprived and the delinquent child and of the adult offender, youth employment, youth work and community welfare, welfare of the family, the disabled, aged and the homeless, legal aid, advice and information services. (Slack, 1966, p. 13)

Slack indicates a further list of services – private pension or superannuation schemes, industrial or employers’ welfare, and fiscal policy in the

form of income tax rebates in respect of dependent children, aged parents or education costs – for which Titmuss makes a strong case for inclusion in the social services:

on the ground that it is the aim of a service, not the administrative method or the institutional devices employed to achieve the aim, which justifies its being regarded as 'social'. (Slack, 1966, p. 13)

Finally, Slack asserts the need for the study of social administration to include relationships between the content of the subject and cognate disciplines such as social history, psychology, economics and sociology (Slack, 1966, p. 14). Her view is that researchers and students of social administration and social services consider matters such as conceptions of poverty and sentencing policies and practices in the light of different theoretical perspectives (Slack, 1966, pp. 13–14).

Social care

This has come to mean the broad field of services offered to people in need – often assumed to be people in residential and daycare, older people and people with disabilities – by local authority social services departments in England and Wales and social work departments in Scotland, although the latter also are responsible for probation work. As discussed in Chapter 9, in many parts of these countries these departments are being combined with other services. In Northern Ireland, services are delivered through health and social services boards.

Social work

This is a prominent yet intrinsically contested profession. Social workers carry out some of the most demanding tasks of individual and social protection in the whole of society, yet, like the social welfare field in general, are often subjected to vilification in the mass media, as though they, and not the inherently uncertain and problematic situations in which they work, are the problem (Franklin, 1999, 2000). Social work is highly visible in the welfare systems of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The reasons for this are many and complex. Since the Seebohm Report (Seebohm, 1968) and the subsequent Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 which set up social services

departments in England and Wales, it has been situated in the personal social services which themselves have been subjected to massive changes in structure, function and organisation. Increasingly, since the mid-1970s, specialist social work has been provided by voluntary agencies, notably in childcare, such as National Children's Homes (NCH), Barnardo's and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). Social work is a troubled and, some would say, troublesome profession. Social work is a political profession, if for no other reason than its close association with the transformation of welfare which has preoccupied politicians for more than half a century since the Second World War.

Social work occupies an ambiguous position in the welfare system, thoughtfully analysed by Geoffrey Pearson (1975). Is it a key agent of social control, from a Marxist perspective, functioning as the iron fist in the velvet glove of welfare? Or is it a potentially subversive empowering agent on behalf of the individual citizen, or a vulnerable or excluded group? Social work, like the welfare state, can be regarded as an activity in terminal decline as other professions encroach on its territory and its practitioners are abused, deskilled and deprofessionalised. Or, it can be regarded as an activity which is subject to transformation as the welfare systems change which provide a major context for its practice, research and theorisation.

How does social policy relate to social work?

The terms 'social work' and 'social policy' carry meanings to do with the way they are approached and the theoretical vantage points or perspectives of the people who study and use them. The study of social policy, like the practice of social work, is inseparable from politics, which means that critical thought and critical practice involve our personal and professional beliefs and values. They affect our ideas about how to define social policy and social work.

We have to acknowledge, also, that other external factors contribute to the social construction of the subjects called social policy and social work. They are not simply a personal matter for the individual. In some ways, while the current study of social policy does not differ significantly from social administration in the 1960s, the world has changed greatly. For instance, the centre of gravity of the study of social policy shifted from the political middle ground of liberalism and Fabianism since the 1960s, to incorporate socialist, feminist and Marxist perspectives from

the 1970s. Later, during the Conservative government of 1979 to 1997, Thatcherism was born and the term 'New Right' came into the foreground. Many people shifted towards an acceptance of ideas about the strengths of the market philosophy and the free-market approach, notably sponsored by the right-wing Adam Smith Institute, and away from support for socialism, particularly the more explicitly Marxist and communist forms of socialism.

Different perspectives on politics and welfare policies

It is difficult to create a simple division of something as complex as people's political beliefs and values, expressed in social policies. In practical terms, there are as many sets of beliefs as there are people. Our political beliefs are inseparable from our views about how far the state should meet people's welfare needs. The link between social policy and party politics helps to remind us that the vast range of political affiliations are reduced to two main political parties in England, Labour and Conservative, with the Liberals somewhere between them. From the many attempts by academics over the past 30 years to codify perspectives on social policies, three are selected here, which to some extent mirror what is going on in politics at the time of their publication: George and Wilding, Anderson and Powell.

George and Wilding (1976) wrote before Thatcherism was born, when Labour were in power and Marxism was a critical force. They identify four ideological perspectives on social policies, from the individualism (the state relies on people to look after their own welfare) of the extreme political Right to the full-blooded collectivism (all people can expect, as of right, that the state will meet their needs) of the extreme Left.

Fourteen years later, when the Conservatives had been in power for more than a decade, Communist USSR had collapsed and the Berlin Wall was being dismantled, *Anderson* distinguished three perspectives on social policies in the welfare field and the state: conservative, liberal and social democratic (Anderson, 1990). The *conservative* approach reinforces class and power divisions and inequalities and views intervention by the state as a last resort. It supports traditional family forms and advocates a benefits system buttressing the role of women as mothers rather than as workers outside the home. The *liberal* approach relies on the marketplace as the main bearer of welfare services, supports means testing and private as well as state-funded social insurance.

The *social democratic*, some would say *socialist*, approach supports the principles of universalistic services and equality for citizens. It works towards abolishing inequalities and achieving a high standard of living for all, the total cost of welfare being borne by full employment.

Powell, writing in the year New Labour enters a second term of government, distinguishes the third way of the Blair government from the equality-focused ideals and emphasis on state provision and nationalisation of the Old Left and the preoccupation with free markets, privatisation, competition and deregulation of the New Right (*Powell*, 2000, p. 42). He suggests the third way is not new, not coherent and implies it is a pragmatic 'pick-and-mix' of political and policy ideas, borrowing from both Old Left and New Right (*Powell*, 2000, p. 57) (see Chapter 12).

Social policy provides perspectives on the context in which social work is practised. But the relationship between social work and social policy is far more intimate than the oft-quoted truism that policy provides the context for practice. The reality is that policy infuses practice and practice affects policy in complex and diverse ways. Linked closely with this is a simplistic perception that the major part of social workers' responsibilities is simply the discharge of the law. In support of this, it may be argued that five laws provide the main legal reference points of social work in the new millenium: the Mental Health Act 1983, the Children Act 1989, the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Yet the law sets the contours of practice rather than specifying everything social workers do.

Shared territory of social policy and social work

We have seen that although social policy and social work cover distinct territories, they have much in common. They share concepts, draw on many common theories, perspectives and disciplines, use similar language and terminology and occupy neighbouring and overlapping positions in systems of social welfare. Social work is a closer neighbour to social policy than most other disciplines, yet this very proximity makes it more difficult to clarify the relationship between them.

The nature of society is reflected in its social problems and policy is reflected in the nature of social work. Social work has been greatly affected by policy changes, notably in the second half of the twentieth century and the early years of the new millenium. In the 1940s, social

work as a generic entity was not even foreshadowed in the children's services set up as part of the inauguration of the welfare state. Fifty years later, although the theoretical and research reference points for social services and social work provision have changed incrementally, the language of policy reflected in service delivery has undergone a sea change. This is exemplified in the key words in the statement that social work demonstrates *diversity of provision* in a *mixed market* which is *contract-based*, the slogan '*quality protects*' informing the practice of *best value* maintained through *competitive tendering*.

Social policy, legislation and social work

Social work is linked with social policy through the legislation which implements policies. The relationship between the law and social work is rightly the subject of debate, the main parameters of which became particularly clear after the publication of *The Law Report* (Ball et al., 1988) which recommended improvements in the teaching of law in social work qualification programmes. Two models representing the polar positions of this debate about the relationship between law and social work are Louis Blom-Cooper's advocacy of legalism and Olive Stevenson's support for the ethical nature of care. This dichotomy highlights the intrinsically contested territory of the seemingly most straightforward aspect of social work – how social workers should practise, in the light of their powers, duties and responsibilities as laid down in legislation.

Legalistic model

The view quoted at the start of this chapter, that social work can be defined purely in terms of the statutory duties of social work agencies, has been criticised for encouraging local authorities to prioritise their statutory work and cut back on other areas, focusing on intervention rather than encouraging client participation and empowerment, leading to procedure-following rather than a service user orientation. It gives the impression that social workers are more powerful than in reality; it promotes the false view that all practice proceeds from the law; it implies that major social problems such as child abuse and delinquency can be abolished simply by passing a law which social workers carry out; and it conceals the constraints on practice and heightens the myth that implementing procedures is good practice.

Ethical duty of care model

Stevenson argues that debates about the quality of law teaching on social work courses arise from more fundamental questions about the nature of social work. She views law as only one component of the mandate of social work to carry out an ethical duty of care, framed by key values and skills deployed by professionals in encouraging client self-determination and in working for change, not only in individuals but in their circumstances (Stevenson, 1998). Braye and Preston-Shoot argue that competence in practice requires a balance between values and the law, as the basis for practice (see Braye and Preston-Shoot, 1990). Carole Smith argues that social work should be more than simply the operation of instrumental rationality. By this she means that there should be space for more than following procedures, scope to achieve what is morally desirable, through the exercise of values such as sensitivity, concern, reassurance, compassion and warmth (Smith, 2001). This corresponds with Ann Brechin's comment that the critical practitioner may be helped by two guiding principles: respecting other people as equals and adopting an open and 'not-knowing' approach (Brechin, 2000, p. 31). These principles of respect for others and uncertainty about knowledge provide a good vantage point from which to survey all the material in the rest of this book.

Chapter summary

This chapter has identified demographic, political and ideological factors affecting the context of social policy. It has examined the difficulties of defining the major concepts affecting welfare policy and provision, including the terms 'social policy' and 'social work'. It has surveyed the main aspects of social policy change with a bearing on social work.

It has justified the necessity for the critical social worker to maintain an up-to-date, informed view of research and commentary in the different areas of social policy which relate to practice.

Further reading

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Index

A

absolute poverty 43
Adam Smith Institute 30
adopted 10
adoption 112, 120, 123
Adoption of Children Act 1926 116
Adult Training Centres (ATCs) 103
Afro-Caribbean 167
age, crime and substance abuse 143
age-discrimination 160
alcohol use 142–3
anti-discrimination 169–70
anti-psychiatry 19
antisocial behaviour orders 88
Arkansas 10
Ashworth special hospital inquiry (1992) 100
Asian 5, 9, 10
Association of Chief Officers of Police (ACOP) 137
Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 164
Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 164
asylum seeker/s 88, 163–4
Audit Commission 22, 95, 105, 183, 191

B

bailiffs 90
Bains Report (1972) 177
Bangladeshi 57, 81, 158
Barnardo's 29, 115
Beckford, Jasmine 4
Benefits Agency 197
Berlin Wall 30
Beveridge Report (1942) 17, 20, 46, 189
Beveridge, Sir William 17, 62, 66, 173
Black Report (1980) 94, 153
Blair government 20, 52, 136
Blair, Tony 19, 21, 25, 68, 201
Boer War 93
Booth, Charles 41
Borrie Report (1994) 20–1
see also Commission on Social Justice
Bourneville 75
Bowlby, John 122
Bradford riots 215–17
British Nationality Act 1981 165
Brixton riots 213–15
Broadwater Farm Estate 66
Bulger, Jamie 138

C

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) 168
Campaign for Racial Equality (CRE) 170
Campbell, Beatrix 49
Canada 135–6
Care Commissioners 7
Care Programme Approach (CPA) 101, 145
carers 107
Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 93, 201
carers, young 107
Care Standards Act 2000 104, 105, 182–3
Caribbean 9
caring 9
Carlton Approved School 116
case reviews 7
Cathy Come Home 79
central government 15, 21
Chadwick, Edwin 74
charging for services 194–7
Charity Organisation Society (COS) 50
Child Abduction Acts 1984 and 1985 116
child abuse 23, 104, 116–17
see also nonaccidental injury
child benefit 47–8
Child Benefit Act 1975 47
childcare 67, 110–26
Childcare Commission 114
childminding 24, 180
Child Protection Register 120
children 7, 15, 37, 51, 223
Children Act 1908 116
Children Act 1948 8, 18, 116
Children Act 1980 116
Children Act 1989 14, 31, 110, 113, 114, 115, 116, 118, 120, 124, 129, 137
Children and Young Persons Act 1933 110, 116, 137
Children and Young Persons Act 1963 110, 116, 137
Children and Young Persons Act 1969 110, 116, 121, 132, 137, 140, 190
Children First 119
children's rights 116
Children's Rights Commissioner 122
Children's Complaints Officer 122
children's services 22, 23, 32
Children's Society 115
Child Support Act 1991 53, 110, 116

- Child Support Act 1995 52, 53, 110
 Child Support Agency (CSA) 52–3
 Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000 52
 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 92, 102
 citizenship 206
 citizen's rights *see* rights
 civil rights 102
 civil service 19
 class, social 153–4
 Cleveland 117
 Clunis, Christopher 101, 144
 cognitive-behavioural work 135–6
 collective pay bargaining 66
 collectivism 187–8
 Colwell, Maria 24
 Commission on Social Justice 20, 44, 61
 see also Borrie Report
 commissioning 97, 98
 communities 72
 community care 15, 20, 92–109, 188, 191
 Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996 38, 93, 103
 community development 65
 community development projects 42, 45, 65
 community work 65
 complaints 209–10
 compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) 114
 conservatism 20
 Conservative government 30, 52, 62, 66, 68, 77, 80, 84, 132, 133, 139, 140, 165, 175, 178, 179, 182, 193, 201, 213
 Conservative Party 138
 Conservative/s 19, 30, 112
 contract culture 96–8
 council houses/ing 45, 74, 78, 85
 Council of Europe 151
 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 31, 137, 140
 criminal activity 60
 criminal justice 127–48
 Criminal Justice Act 1948 18, 132
 Criminal Justice Act 1972 133
 Criminal Justice Act 1991 138
 Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 133
 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 31, 129, 139
 criminal justice system/s 3
 Criminal Procedure (Insanity and Unfitness to Plead) Act 1991 145
 criminal violence in the home 88
 Crisis (voluntary organisation) 86
 critical practice 33
- D**
 Darwin, Charles 49
 Darwinist 15, 74
 daycare 120
 Daycare Trust 114
 debt management 196
 Debt Redemption Initiative 196
 dementia 105–6
 demographic trends 9–10
 denationalisation 65
 Denmark 181–2
 Department for Education and Employment 47
 Department of Economic Affairs 65
 Department of Health 15, 22, 104, 119, 122, 182, 205
 Department of Health and Social Security 22, 94, 95, 104, 178
 Department of Social Security 47
 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions 82
 Department of Work and Pensions 47
 Dews Report 133
 Direct Service Organisation/s (DSO) 180
 disabilities, people with 102–4
 disability 162–3, 222
 Disability Discrimination Act 1995 93, 102, 161
 disability movement 201
 disabled people 15
 Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 102
 Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1958 92
 Disabled Persons (Service, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 102
 disadvantage 42
 discrimination 6, 158–65
 Disraeli, Benjamin 48
 diversity 69
 divisions 151–60
 divorce 51
 doctor/s 24
 Domestic Proceedings and Magistrates' Courts Act 1978 110
 domiciliary care 99
 Doré, Gustave 73
 drug treatment and testing orders 143
 drug use 129, 142–3

E

- East, the 10
- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) 97
- education 24, 67–9, 167
- Education Act 1870 62
- Education Act 1944 18, 116
- educational priority area (EPA) 42, 45, 65
- Education Reform Act 1988 174
- Ely Hospital 103
- emancipation 159
- employment 17, 24, 55–71, 157
- Employment Action Plan 68
- empowerment 202–7
- Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) 156, 161, 167, 170
- Equal Pay Act 1970 162
- ethical duty and social work 33
- ethnic minorities 83, 167
- Europe 10, 14
 - unemployment in 57
- European Atomic Energy Community 11
- European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) 11
- European Community (EC) 11
- European Convention on Human Rights 151, 170
- European Court of Human Rights 14, 170
- European Economic and Monetary Union 64
- European Parliament 11
- European Union 10, 11–12, 68, 158, 190
- European Working Time Directive 12, 63
- exclusion, racial 60
 - see also* social exclusion

F

- Fabianism 29
- Factory Act 1819 62
- families 8, 9, 42, 51, 72, 80, 223
 - single parent 52
 - work with 110–26
 - see also* lone parent
- family
 - break up 89
 - care 15
 - changing 110–12
 - Income Supplement (FIS) 60
 - policy 21
 - poverty 44
 - social security 38
 - support 6, 67
- Federation of British Industry (FBI) 65

- feminist 19, 29
- financing services 186–99
- First World War 8, 13, 17, 78
- fiscal measures 65
- foster care 120
- foster homes 123
- France 83
- Friedman, Milton 12, 62

G

- garden cities 75
- Gaskell, Elizabeth 48
- gay 112, 156–7
- gender 154–6
- General Strike 66
- George, David Lloyd 76
- General Social Care Council (GSCC) 225
- Germany 83
- globalisation 10, 12–13
- Great Depression 39, 48, 57, 64
- Griffiths Report (1988) 95–6
- Griffiths, Sir Roy 95

H

- Hayek, F. von 62
- health 92–109, 223
- Health Act 1999 224
- Health Action Zones 78, 168
- Health and Community Care Committee (Scotland) 106
- health and social services 7, 12, 20, 98
- health authorities 182
- healthcare 13, 23
- Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 38
- Her Majesty's Inspectors of Probation (HMIP) 137
- Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools 23, 183
- higher education 70
- HIV/AIDS 157–8
- homelessness 85–8
- Home Office 135, 145
- Home Office Probation Unit 137
- homophobic attitudes 157
- household/s 73–4, 81, 89
- House of Commons Public Accounts Committee 84–5
- housing 49, 72–91
 - associations 45, 80–2
 - benefit 70, 84, 90
 - department 6
 - officer 90

Housing Act 1924 76
 Housing Act 1957 80
 Housing Act 1974 80
 Housing Act 1980 80
 Housing Act 1985 86
 Housing Act 1986 72
 Housing Act 1996 81, 84, 88
 Housing and Town Planning Act 1909 76
 Housing and Town Planning Act 1919 76
 Housing Benefit (General) Regulations 1987 38
 Housing Finances Act 1972 80
 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 86, 88
 human rights, *see* rights
 Human Rights Act 1998 102, 151, 170–1
 Hungary 61

I

immigrants 163–4
 Immigration Act 1971 164
 Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 164
 income 43–4, 49, 54
 Income Support 47, 51, 60, 70
 Independent Living Scheme 103
 Industrial Training Act 1964 68
 informal care 106–7
 Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) 19
 intergovernmental organisation (IGO) 13
 intermediate treatment 130
 International Institute for Strategic Studies 163
 International Labour Organisation (ILO) 55, 64
 Invalidity Benefit 63
 investigations 210–11
 Iraq 88
 Irish 9
 Isle of Man 174

J

jeopardy, double and triple 145, 155–6
 Jewish people 10
 Jobseeker's Allowance 70
 justice 137–8

K

Keynes, J M 62, 64
 Keynesian 65
 key performance indicators (KPIs) 137
 Kilshaw, Alan and Judith 10, 117
 Kurdish family example 171–2

L

Labour government 19, 47, 48, 50, 61, 62, 65, 66, 69, 77, 78, 81, 84, 88, 93, 99, 113, 114, 132, 133, 139, 140, 166, 172, 189, 200, 201, 207, 217, 221
 Labour Party 20, 30, 61
laissez-faire 187
 Lawrence, Stephen 138
 learning disability *see* disability
 legalism and social work 32
 lesbian 112, 157
 less eligibility 195
 Lewis, Oscar 42
 liberal 17, 30
 Liberal Democrats 20, 21
 liberalism 29
 local authority/ies 8, 15, 23–6, 77, 80, 86, 187
 Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 3, 28, 178
 local government 177–82
 reorganisation 15, 181
 Local Government Act 1888 174
 Local Government Act 1899 174
 Local Government Act 1929 45
 Local Government Act 1963 174
 Local Government Act 1972 174, 178
 Local Government Act 1985 174
 Local Government Act 1988 129
 Local Government Act 1992 174
 Local Government Act 1999 23, 204
 Local Government Finance Act 1992 194
 Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 179
 local housing companies 84–5
 lone parent/s 50, 51, 81, 113
 see also families, single parent
 long-term care 105
 looked after children 120–3

M

Maastricht Treaty 12, 63
 Macmillan, Harold 65
 Macpherson Report (1999) 139, 159–60
 macroeconomic policy 64
 maintenance 51
 managerialism 176
 Marxist/s 17, 19, 29, 30, 187–8, 207
 Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 72
 Maud Report (1967) 177
 means test 195

- mental health 71, 100–1, 162
 legislation 92
 Mental Health Act 1959 92, 100, 144, 191
 Mental Health Act 1983 31, 92, 100, 101, 145, 191
 Mental Health (Patients in the Community) Act 1995 100
 mentally disordered offenders 143–6
 mentoring 146
 Mexico 61
 Middle East 10, 62, 188
 mid-Victorians 19, 50, 75
 see also Victorians/
 Milton Keynes 75
 MIND 205
 miners' strike (1984–5) 66
 minimum wage 24, 63, 64
 minimum wage councils 66
 Ministerial Group on the Family 21, 113–14
 Ministry of Health 94
 Ministry of Labour 46
 Ministry of Social Security 94
 Ministry of Technology 65
 Modernisation Agency 99
 modernisation programme 200
 Modernising Government initiative 106
 monetarist 19
 Monopolies Commission 66
 Municipal Corporations Act 1835 173
 Murray, Charles 154
- N**
- National Assistance Act 1948 8, 18, 38, 51, 62, 72, 92
 National Association for Youth Justice (NAYJ) 138, 141, 147
 National Association of Probation Officers 134
 National Audit Office 85
 National Care Standards Commission 24, 183
 National Children's Homes (NCH) 29
 National Economic Development Council (NEDC) 65
 National Family and Parenting Institute 124
 National Front 60
 National Health Service (NHS) 94, 194, 224
 National Health Service Act 1946 18
 National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 23, 31, 92–3, 96–7, 104, 105, 180, 186, 192, 210
 National Insurance 47
 National Insurance Act 1911 62
 National Insurance Act 1946 62
 nationalism 65–6
 National Literacy Association 122
 National Minimum Wage Act 1998 162
 National Probation Service 128
 see also probation service
 National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) 29
 Netherlands 130
 New Deal 24, 68
 New Labour 16, 20–2, 168, 188
 New Lanark 75
 New Left 19
 New Right 7, 19, 30, 50, 111, 112, 187, 213
 nonaccidental injury 117
 see also child abuse
 nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) 13
 normalisation 103
 Northern Ireland 9, 10, 11, 22, 28, 76, 151, 166, 167, 174, 177, 181, 183
 north-south divide 48–9
 nurseries 114
- O**
- Office of Fair Trading 66
 older people 104–6
 Old Labour 21
 Ombudsman *see under* Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 61
 organising services 173–85
 Orkney 117
 Orwell, George 48, 49
 Ouseley, Lord Herman 215
 Owen, Robert 75, 204
 owner occupation 78–9
- P**
- Pakistani 57, 81, 158
 Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman) 84
 participation 200–12
 patients 24
 Patients' Association 94
 pauperism 40, 45, 50
 pensions 47–8, 222
 Performance Assessment Framework 119, 183
 performance indicators 23–4
 persistent young offenders 142
 Policy Action Team/s (PAT) of the Social Exclusion Unit 25, 83, 217–21

- Poor Law/s 8, 39, 51, 173
 Elizabethan 86
 Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 45, 60, 62, 195
 poor people 8–9
 population 9–10
 Port Sunlight 75
 Portugal 61
 poverty 6, 19, 25, 37, 39–40, 41–2, 54, 61, 71, 128
 Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 141
 Priority Estates Project 66
 prison 130–1
 private finance initiative (PFI) 84, 99
 private providers 12, 180
 private sector 8, 15
 privatisation 19, 193–4
 probation service 176
see also National Probation Service
 Probation Services Act 1993 3
 providers 15
 Public Assistance Board 51
 public expenditure 19
 Public Health Act 1848 75
 public sector 8, 15
 purchaser 15
- Q**
 quality assurance 22–4, 84, 182–4, 209–11
 Quality Protects 22–3, 119, 141–2
- R**
 Race Relations Act 1965 160
 Race Relations Act 1976 159, 160, 169, 129, 161
 racism 60, 132, 158–60
see also exclusion and social exclusion
 Reagan government 187
 Reagan, Ronald 12, 62
 reasoning and rehabilitation programmes 135–6
 reflexivity 206–7
 Refugee Convention 163
 refugees 10, 163–4
 Regional Development Agencies 77
 Registered Homes Act 1980 92
 Registered Homes Act 1984 24, 92
 rehousing 146
 relative poverty 43
 religious discrimination 163
 Rent Act 1915 76
 repossessions 79–80
 research 7–8
 respite care 105
 Restrictive Trade Practices Court 66
 rights, children's 14, 16
 rights, human 13
 riots 213–17
 risk management 101
 Romania 10
 Rome 151
 Rowntree, Seebohm 41, 221
- S**
 Saltaire 75
 Scandinavia 130
 Scarman, Lord 213
 Scarman Report (1981) 213–15, 217
 school 146
 Scilly Isles 174
 Scotland 9, 10, 11, 22, 28, 49, 76, 106, 130, 151, 161, 166, 167–74, 177, 181–2, 183
 Scottish Executive 49
 Scottish Social Exclusion Network 166
 scroungers 40–1, 54, 61
 Second World War 8, 17, 47, 76, 78, 175
 Seebohm Report (1968) 28, 94, 178, 179
 selective benefits 19
 self-help 19, 50, 67, 159
 service users 24
 severe personality disorders, people with 100
 Sex Discrimination Act 1975 129, 161, 162
 sexism 132
 among working-class men 49
 sexuality 156–8
 Sexual Offences Act 1967 129
 single parent *see under* lone parent
 Single Regeneration Budget 78
 social administration 26–7, 28
 social care 28
 Social Care Group 182
 Social Chapter of the European Union 63
 social democratic 31
 social divisions 51
see also divisions
 social exclusion 25, 45, 201
 definition of 166
 policies in Scotland and Northern Ireland 166
see also exclusion
 Social Exclusion Unit 25, 50, 69, 83, 124, 166–8, 221–3
 social housing 80–2
see also council houses/ing

socialism 20
 socialist 29, 31, 187
 socially excluded people 85
 social policy 26
 social role valorisation 103
 social security 6, 17, 27, 37–54, 221
 Social Security Act 1975 48
 Social Security Act 1986 38, 47
 Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 38
 social services 8, 19, 27–8, 180
 social services department/s 3, 23, 192
 Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) 15, 22, 104, 205, 211
 social work and the law 32–3
 Social Work Service 22
 Spain 61
 Supplementary Benefits Act 1976 72
 Supplementary Benefits Commission 48
 Sure Start 124
 Survivors Speak Out 205
 Sutherland Report (1999) 106

T

taxation 45, 194–5
 taxes 67
 tax subsidies 74
 Thatcher government 18, 19, 21, 65, 81, 112, 168, 187
 Thatcherism 16
 Thatcher, Margaret 12, 62
 Townsend, Peter 41–2
 Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) 63
 travellers 167

U

Uganda 165
 Ugandan Asian people 10
 underclass 49–50, 154
 unemployment 44, 55–72, 222
 unemployment trap 60
 Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) 11, 30
 unitary authority/ies 8, 15
 United Nations (UN) 13–14
 Convention on the Rights of the Child 115
 enactments (on many aspects) 13–14
 High Commissioner for Refugees 163
 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) 13
 universalistic benefits 19

urban aid 42, 45
 Urban Alliance 168
 urban degeneration, theory of 49
 USA 11–12, 14, 68, 117, 187, 190
 utopian communities 75

V

Victorian/s 39, 40, 49, 73, 75
see also mid-Victorians
 Vietnam 10
 violence against women 155
 Visible Women Campaign 161
 voluntary providers 12, 180
 voluntary sector 8, 15

W

Wages Act 1986 68
 Wales 9, 10, 11, 22, 28, 29, 49, 76, 115, 116, 119, 151, 174, 181–2, 183
 Waterhouse Report (2000) 118, 121
 wealth 19, 43, 54, 94
 welfare benefits 67
 welfare pluralism 19
 Welfare Services Act 1947 18
 welfare state 6, 16–18, 19, 27, 51
 critical history of 173, 175
 Welfare to Work 67, 68, 168
 West Indies 165
 whistleblowing 209
 women carers 106–7
 Woodward, Louise 117
 workfare 68
 workhouse 50
 test 195
 Working Families Tax Credit 24, 67
 World Health Organization (WHO) 93

Y

young offender institutions (YOIs) 131, 140, 143
 youth justice 6, 127–8, 223–4
 manifesto for 138, 147
 National Association for Youth Justice (NAYJ) 147
 Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 141
 Youth Justice Board 141
 youth offending team (YOT) 128, 140, 141, 143, 147
 Yugoslavia 10, 88

Z

Zito, Jonathan 101, 144