September 1983

Ideology in Social Welfare Policy Instruction: An Examination of Required Readings

Paul Lyons

Stockton State College

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ABSTRACT

A national survey of required readings in social welfare policy courses indicates that a liberal, pro-welfare state ideology is predominant. Such an ideology rests on the concepts of modernization and industrialization within a structural-functionalist methodology. This predominant model of social welfare policy suggests the inevitability of the welfare state while effectively excluding serious consideration of both conservative and socialist alternatives.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper developed from the author's concerns as a social welfare policy instructor within an undergraduate social work program. In the disarray of the late seventies and early eighties, the mainstream and essentially liberal policy framework has been under attack, mostly from a conservative and neo-conservative electoral surge. This counter-attack ranges from the simple-minded homilies of Reaganomics to the more sophisticated critiques of liberal reform associated with the journal The Public Interest.

My concern, bolstered by experience in the classroom and in conversations with other social welfare policy educators, is that students lack the conceptual tools to comprehend and, therefore, to evaluate the ideological dimensions of the present policy struggles.

Students have minimal exposure to conservative social welfare policy analysis, except as it is reduced to greediness and venality by most liberal-and radical-analysts. In addition, their awareness of socialist social welfare policy approaches is severely distorted and confused by a prevailing conceptual framework that either places socialism along a continuum of liberal policy and practice or rules it out of order as "extreme" and "utopian."

Consequently, many social work students lack the conceptual skills to understand what is happening in the world around them. They receive a close to monolithic view in their policy courses that limits their ability to understand the power and the contradictions
of various policy frameworks. Many of our students were utterly unprepared for the current conservative counter-attack and could respond to it ethically and emotionally, but not analytically.

II. QUESTIONNAIRE

This paper rests on a questionnaire survey of readings in undergraduate and master's level social welfare policy courses. The author sent questionnaires to the nearly three hundred such programs in the United States in late January, 1982. Responses were received from 168 programs, including 195 social welfare policy classes, given in either 1980 or 1981.

TABLE #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Total Classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the questionnaire sought information only about required readings, it would be inappropriate to view the results of the questionnaire as indicating the extent of coverage in social welfare policy courses or programs or as revealing of doctoral instruction. The questionnaire results simply inform us about the central and undoubtedly most emphasized readings in policy courses.

The results of the questionnaire are as follows:

TABLE #2

Required Readings in Social Welfare Policy Courses, Undergraduate and Master's Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Title (Publisher)</th>
<th>Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Undergrad. Masters Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Elizabeth D. Huttman</td>
<td>Introduction to Social Policy (McGraw-Hill)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Andrew W. Dobelstein</td>
<td>Politics, Economics and Public Welfare (Prentice-Hall)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>David G. Gil</td>
<td>Unravelling Social Policy (Schenkman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ralph Dologoff, Donald Feldstein</td>
<td>Understanding Social Welfare (Harper &amp; Row)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Thomas M. Meenaghan, Robert O. Washington</td>
<td>Social Policy and Social Welfare-Structure and Applications (Free Press)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Robert Morris</td>
<td>Social Policy of the American Welfare State- In Introduction to Policy Analysis (Harper &amp; Row)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Alfred J. Kahn</td>
<td>Social Policy and Social Services (Random House)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One must note two social welfare history texts are used extensively in policy courses: Axinn and Levin's Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need (2 undergraduate, 8 master's; 10 total) and Walter I. Trattner's From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America (4 undergraduate, 4 master's; 8 total). It would be useful to know to what extent social welfare policy is integrated with the teaching of the history of social welfare and, one should add, community organization and development. The remaining texts and monographs are listed in descending order: Neil Gilbert and Harry Specht, The Emergence of Social Welfare and Social Work (3 undergraduate, 4 master's; 7 total); Tropman, Dluhy, Lind, New Strategic Perspectives on Social Policy (4, 3; 7 total); Paul E. Weinberger, Perspectives on Social Welfare: An Introductory Anthology (6, 0; 6 total); Charles Lindblom, The Policy-making Process (3, 3; 6 total); Jeffry H. Gaiper, The Politics of Social Services (6, 0; 6 total); Thomas Dye, Understanding Public Policy (5, 1; 6 total); Ronald Frederico, The Social Welfare Institution (5, 0; 5 total); W. Joseph Heffernan, Introduction to Social Welfare Policy (4, 1; 5 total); Harold L. Wilensky and Charles N. Lebeaux, Industrial Society and Social Welfare (1, 3; 4 total); James Leiby, A History of Social Work and Social Welfare (0, 3; 3 total). Within the 168 programs, I received the following: 143 total books mentioned among 404 selections (290 undergraduate and 114 master's level).
III. TEXT ANALYSIS

The most notable qualities among heavily used materials are the pervasiveness of the concepts of modernization and industrialization, the methodological framework of structural-functionalism, the influence of Wilensky and Lebeaux' conceptualizations of the residual and the institutional definitions of social welfare, and the assumption of the inexorability of the welfare state.

Industrialization-Modernization

The conceptual framework of most of the examined texts affirms a particular historical explanation enforced by the continual usage of such words and phrases as "industrial," "industrial society," "pre-industrial," "post-industrial," "industrialization," "modern society," "urbanization." Note Elizabeth Huttman's conventional way of discussing the family in twentieth century life:

The family has to deal with the consequences of the strain of industrialization imposed on family life when it disrupted the pattern of farm living... The family has been equally vulnerable to the related stress of urbanization, which has often separated it from supportive relatives. In our present post-industrial era, the family has had to develop the geographic mobility needed for many corporate jobs...

As future changes come in the large society, the family must again respond and change..."¹

Huttman's technological determinism is characteristic of the literature. There are no human subjects in her reflections on everyday life; only human objects of forces to which they can respond "as future changes come." In addition, part of our ability to respond to such inexorable forces will be, according to Huttman, "through science" and "through technology", through which "we have had" and through which "we have been given" inventions and commodities to ease our adjustment.²

Dolgoff and Feldstein provide us with similar explications of social change:

The coming of industrialization and accelerated movement from rural to urban locations produced great social problems... Along with modernization, specialization developed so that functions which would have been performed traditionally by family members soon became the tasks of specialists.³
Processes "come", and "develop" beyond the capacity of humans to perform as actors on history's stage. Human intervention is tempered by the assumption of its inevitability; it is a task built into the changing social order.

Structural-Functionalism

The motor forces within the above examples of social change assumptions are structures and functions, the transformation of structures from pre-industrial to industrial, pre-modern to modern, agrarian to urban and the consequent re-routing of functions from defunct to emergent institutions. Many of the most popular texts refer to functional analysis or structural-functionalism, or credit particular theorists like Talcott Parsons or Robert Merton for their conceptual framework.

Gilbert and Specht most precisely articulate this approach with their delineation of the institution of social welfare as fulfilling the primary social function of mutual support previously maintained by the family:

The institution of social welfare is that patterning of relationships which develops in society to carry out mutual support functions.

Indeed, Huttman, while admitting that "conflict theory can also help in assessing need," affirms the functionalist paradigm:

...disequilibrium is temporary; the society moves to a new equilibrium or stable state because adjustments occur to take care of tensions caused by change.\(^4\)

Residual-Institutional Definitions

The third component part of the prevailing pattern derives from Wilensky and Lebeaux's influential Industrial Society and Social Welfare, a monograph on virtually all supplementary reading lists and specifically cited and extensively used in the most popular texts. Prigmore and Atherton quote the central thesis:

Two conceptions of social welfare seem to be dominant in the United States today; the residual and the institutional. The first holds that social welfare institutions should come into play only when the normal structures of supply, the family and the market, break
down. The second, in contrast, sees the welfare services as normal, "first line" functions of modern industrial society.\(^5\)

While Prigmore and Atherton criticize the Wilensky-Lebeaux model as insufficiently sensitive to informal institutions, they affirm its historical outlook:

...it can be said that humans ordinarily recognize their interdependence, lose sight of it during the transitional period to an industrial society, and regain it when industrialization has taken hold. Therefore, after a brief (as history goes) hiatus of two hundred or so years, we humans of the Western world seem to be regaining an understanding of the need to reach out to each other and to find ways to be supportive in a very fragile world.\(^6\)

In all cases, with the exception of Gil's more radical framework in *Unravelling Social Policy*, The Wilkensky-Lebeaux model is presented as reflecting the central alternatives available to policy-makers. Indeed, since the residual view is definitionally anachronistic within the model, there is in fact no choice but to embrace the institutional definition. At most one can, like Gilbert and Specht, posit that "residual functions will linger even as social welfare approaches institutional status."\(^7\)

**The Welfare State**

The institutional definition of social welfare presupposes the welfare state as the political embodiment of industrial and modern society. Huttman quotes T. H. Marshall's affirmation of the welfare state:

The social services were not to be regarded as regrettable necessities to be retained only until the capitalist system has been reformed or socialized; they were a permanent and even a glorious part of the social system itself.\(^8\)

And she concludes her discussion by noting that despite problems, the welfare state dominates social policy in most "industrial countries" and its future will be mere additions "on some aspects of older welfare philosophies."\(^9\) As Dolgoff and Feldstein indicate, "Inexorably the creation of the modern world has brought with it the welfare state."\(^15\)
The most popular social welfare policy texts, in reducing conservative, residual definitions to history's dust-bin and in either reshaping socialist visions to the welfare state model or placing them outside the boundaries of legitimacy, effectively limit policy parameters to "the vital center."*

The Vital Center

This vital center of intellectual respectability and ethical normativity rests on a theory of cultural lag, a commitment to liberal pluralism, a consciously pragmatic and anti-utopian stance, and a remarkable avoidance of the role of the corporation in American society.

The Vital Center model of social welfare policy understands the incompletion of the welfare state as a function of cultural lag, which develops, according to Huttman,

...where the nonmaterial culture still holds on to the ways of the past instead of adjusting to the technological changes.10

Dolgoff and Feldstein argue that "in many unconscious and subtle ways" we repeat "patterns that belong to philosophies we have long since rejected."11 Dobelstein speaks of the need for "ideological reform,"12 while Gil speaks of the need for "educational agents" to overcome "false consciousness."13 The structures of industrial society made what Dobelstein calls "liberalist" ideology, which we conventionally label American conservatism, dysfunctional, incapable of charting "social goals" and, in any case, shattered by 1929.14

The Vital Center model celebrates pragmatism and incrementalism. Prigmore and Atherton, while duly noting the attractions of more "radical" guaranteed income and more "conservative" negative income tax proposals, ask, "...must unmet needs continue until the resolution of the ideological differences of right and left?"15 They denigrate left-wing alternatives as requiring "a total restructuring of society" that require us to "pin our hopes on the revolution," and, therefore, reducible to "pure ideology." Their Vital Center advice logically follows:

Unless one has become a true believer in an alternative model (and hence a zealot) there is a certain

*The Vital Center is a metaphor for mainstream liberalism as initially articulated by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. in The Vital Center (1948).
appeal in the notion of a pluralist decision-making process that is open to inputs from various interest groups and coalitions.16

Dobelstein concludes that, granted "half-truths" and limitations, capitalism, liberalism, and positivism...have stood the test of pragmatism."17 Kahn stresses the ways in which both "the Left and Right converged in their distrust of professionals and professionalism." while Morris tends to reduce radical alternatives to Marx's problematic communist stage in arguing that they...

...require for their execution a basic change in social values and attitudes and, therefore, perhaps even several generations to bring about the changes desired. An illustration is the view that income should be distributed according to need and not according to ability or to any contribution to society's productive capacity.18

In brief, the Vital Center model eliminates both conservative and radical critiques.

The historical narrative such accounts present to sustain the Vital Center, the institutional view, the liberal Welfare State, generally limits its critique of capitalism to its early, laissez-faire, robber baron phase, a "transitional" period, as Prigmore and Atherton suggest. Such analyses include both an "order model" and a "conflict" model. Huttman's structural-functionalism posits that all units work together "to fill the functions as a more or less integrated whole," considers that "disequilibrium is temporary." She even goes further, consistent with the dominant historical narrative, in stating:

In the ideas of Marx, the father of conflict theory, the workers would struggle with the bourgeoisie or capitalists. Today these conflict theories have been reshaped by a number of writers to fit the contemporary scene.19

The re-shaping includes other social movements, e.g., blacks, as they engage in conflicts that seek to restore the structural-functionalist equilibrium.

Prigmore and Atherton admit that we have not yet achieved "a mature pluralism", but assert that
It is in the interest of all groups in the society to see that the poor, the disadvantaged, and the powerless gain such access. 

Gilbert and Specht speak of "pluralistic planning", while Dobelstein devotes an entire chapter to the unique role that federalism serves as the American operationalization of conflict theory and pluralistic decision-making processes. 

Present Directions

Whether one focuses on the technological determinism of modernization theory, structural-functionalism, pluralist theory, or "adaptive functions", all roads lead to the welfare state. Whereas all of the popular texts recognize that the welfare state is a modification of capitalism, most are seemingly reluctant to state the obvious, preferring to ignore the "supply-side" of the equation:

What is needed in social policy is less interest in philosophizing about power over production, which is a complicated problem, and more interest in increasing control over consumption, which is a comparatively easy task for competent social engineering. 

In fact, most texts lack the buoyancy, if not the arrogance of Alva Myrdal's approach, and, while still ignoring the productive process, take a more sober, cautious approach to social welfare. Prigmore and Atherton stress the need for greater efficiency in social services, support an increase in private practice, believe in a differential minimum wage for teen-agers, and empathize with suffering employers:

Today the pressures on the employers are redundant, unnecessarily cumbersome, and, worst of all, prone to create gaps and inadequacies in the programs. 

They add,

Employers were widely regarded as the chief architects of unemployment, work injuries, disability, and poverty in old age... Today, in a more sophisticated world, these social problems are seen to relate more to actions and attitudes of government and the public as well as employers. 

Such views, a growing trend in the literature, suggests the tempering of the institutional view by perceived economic and political
realities. Rather than a serious consideration of conservative models, Prigmore and Atherton's approach suggests the influence of what is called both neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideology.

Most of the popular texts reflect the toning down of welfare state optimism in an age of economic stagnation. Few of the authors join Gilbert and Specht in explicating the contradiction between social welfare benefits and economic growth. Even Gilbert and Specht mute their point:

The consideration of stabilization goals means that designs for financing social welfare programs must be analyzed in terms of their effects upon the larger social system, specifically with reference to the functioning of the economic market. While students of social welfare policy tend to emphasize the distributional characteristics of alternative modes of public financing, it is important that they remain aware of these additional considerations relating to stabilization goals of government.25

With the deflation of Great Society hopes coalescing with the economic malaise of the 1970s and 1980s, sobered texts speak critically of the "maximum feasible participation" goals of the War on Poverty, emphasize the excessive and inequitable middle-class tax burden, criticize public employment strategies, accept welfare transfer as adequate, if not high, and join the neo-conservative call for intermediary institutions to limit the power of the welfare state.26 Indeed, there is a new sobriety as the Vital Center liberals fend off both conservative and radical criticism. Kahn, operating within this framework, emphasizes the need for social services to increase their productivity especially when economic growth has become problematic.27 The inexorability of the welfare state, more accurately the welfare capitalist state, must return to questions long dismissed as anachronistic, utopian, extreme, or selfish.

The Corporation

None of the liberal texts focus attention on the centrality of the modern capitalist corporation in all aspects of contemporary society and culture, except, as in the case of Prigmore and Atherton, to express empathy for its strangulation by federal regulators. It may be possible to sustain a pluralist model in the American environment but to do so without a serious and systematic examination of the corporation, national and multi-national, is profoundly inadequate and unsatisfactory. Neither of Gilbert and
IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One can make a good case that most of the popular social welfare policy texts suffer from what Gilbert and Specht shrewdly call the "iron law of specificity," the tendency to reify concepts, to come to belief that they are material phenomena rather than guides to thought and action. Our students, at least in terms of their required readings, tend to be presented a view of the world, a view of social welfare policy, that seriously limits their abilities to understand the contemporary policy issues and dilemmas, insofar as it offers a one-sided and parochial view of the nature of social change and of United States social history.

Our students do learn a great deal in their texts about the process, product and performance of social welfare policy, although the considerations of process are substantially weakened by a neglect of the types of societal forces Gil examines. They learn about problems of fragmentation; they gain a conceptual framework for understanding many of the choices involved in the "who gets what and how" process. Several of the texts, Gilbert and Specht's Dimensions of Social Welfare Policy and Kahn's Social Policy & Social Services in particular, are outstanding liberal presentations of the complexities of policy analysis.

Left and Right

The dilemma is that even such competent and thoughtful texts remain within a framework that effectively eliminates certain alternatives. The single exception among the popular texts is Gil's Unravelling Social Policy which takes a broader approach that integrates social welfare, social and economic policies on the basis of their influences on "the overall quality of life," "the circumstances of living," and "the nature of intra-societal relationships." Gil argues,

The view that man responds primarily to the profit motive is not necessarily a correct indication of mankind's social and cultural potential.

There is, in fact, no meaningful use of conservative social welfare policy texts or monographs, at least as required reading. Whereas the required bibliography includes a scattering of, albeit, little used radical monographs, ranging from Rogers' Poverty Amid Plenty to Terkel's..."
Hard Times, the only decidedly conservative choices, each picked once, were Williams' The Implementation Perspective, Gilder's Wealth & Poverty, and Friedman's Free to Choose.

This survey and evaluation suggests significant limitations in our ability to effectively teach social welfare policy. I would like to list the most salient problem areas, based both on the results of this survey and on several years of teaching policy courses.

1. Is it sufficient to assume the inevitability of the liberally-defined welfare state, particularly when its rarely stated but essential foundation, ongoing economic growth, has become problematic? The liberal, mainstream responses seem to be of two types: one, a call for persistence and continuity, even advance, e.g., national health insurance, guaranteed national income; two, a neo-liberal and neo-conservative toning down of welfare state vision and promises, a return to the skeletal New Deal core and a ruthless shedding of all or much of the Great Society layers. Neither approach questions any of the premises of the industrialization model.

2. Is there a legitimate conservative social welfare policy and can one, as a consequence, be a conservative social worker or policy planner? Most texts answer in the negative through the residual definition and a stream of what is essentially invective, assumptions of venality, callousness, and atavistic thought. Is there a plausible market model of social welfare policy, a la Friedman? More intriguingly, is there an implicitly conservative framework extant but not fully articulated. This academic year, for example, I used Martin Anderson's Welfare to start the term, based on my hunch that our students rarely had been given the opportunity to come to grips with a conservative study (I also used Rodgers, Gilbert and Specht, and Titmuss' The Gift Relationship.)

In the fifties Wilensky and Lebeaux could posit that it seems likely that distinctions between welfare and other types of social institutions will become more and more blurred. Under continuing industrialization all institutions will be oriented toward and evaluated in terms of social welfare aims. The 'welfare state' will become the 'welfare society' and both will be more reality than epithet.

A number of issues, including the problematic of economic growth, the inability of the society to achieve any semblance of social justice and equality, and the issue of the extent to which the "welfare society" subverts our primary institutions -- issues addressed in divergent ways by liberals, conservative, and radicals -- indicate that we have more to consider than the short-term catastrophe that is the Reagan Administration.
3. Is there a legitimate socialist social welfare policy? Most policy texts implicitly deny the possibility in their exclusive focus on the demand-side. Kahn suggests that the Soviet bloc societies are within the same social welfare policy parameters as the capitalist democracies. Others like Gilbert and Specht contribute more confusion than enlightenment by arguing that socialist societies, at least in theory, hold to Marx's communist goal of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." In fact, the only openly socialist policy monograph is Galper's *The Politics of Social Services*, an astute critique of bourgeois ideology in social welfare policy that suffers from a tendency to indiscriminately merge all non-socialist strategies. Morris' challenge to socialist policy analysts remains:

The explicit character of socialist policies has not yet been presented in terms of specific problems, such as programs for an income system, for the mentally or chronically physically ill, or for the delinquent. If such approaches no longer claim that a socialist society eliminates such human difficulties, neither do they present the skeletal outline of how a program and a policy for such would differ from current capitalist approaches.

The difference between the more radical and the 'liberal' alternatives lies in underlying causal analysis: is socialism the essential prerequisite to improvement? If it is, the explicit social welfare content of that alternative, as seen in proposed sectoral policies and programs (not only in attitudes) remains to be launched.

As a socialist policy analyst, I welcome Morris' critique and challenge but add that he and most of the mainstream liberal authors of our basic policy texts need to engage more in such problem-setting endeavors. Martin Rein provides us with the appropriate "value-critical" posture. He emphasizes that

...social policy is, above all, concerned with choice among competing values, and questions of what is morally or culturally desirable can never be excluded from the discussion.

His criticisms of attempts at value-neutrality, e.g., positivism, structural-functionalism, and value-commitment, e.g., Marxism, as incapable of establishing appropriate questions, lead Rein to conclude,
The main safeguard against bias lies in insuring that different perspectives are heard, and that much more systematic attention be given to problem-setting.\textsuperscript{37}

Rein’s suggestion that "there is no reality except that reality which is informed by value screens and ideological frames,"\textsuperscript{38} offers teachers of social welfare policy an appropriate guideline for instruction. We need to question the value screens and ideological frames of all perspectives, such that our students have the capacity to make evaluations with the maximum of information, theory and insight. If our required reading lists are any indication, we are failing at this task.

2. Ibid., p. 40.
6. Ibid., pp. 11-12.
8. *Introduction to Social Policy*, p. 94.
Mao, "Dissent" (March-April 1970) for an incisive Marxist critique of the communist stage as utopian.

Introduction to Social Policy, p. 29, 31.


Alva Myrdal, as quoted in Gilbert and Specht, Dimensions of Social Welfare Policy, p. 83.

Social Welfare Policy, p. 74.

Ibid.


Social Policy and Social Services, p. 25.

Dimensions of Social Welfare Policy, pp. 185-86.


Unravelling Social Policy, pp. 9-15, 24, 23.


Social Policy and Social Services, p. 24.

Dimensions of Social Welfare Policy, p. 42. The line is Marx's and is not directly quoted by Gilbert & Specht.


Ibid., p. 257.