

*Social Policy in
American Society*

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SOCIAL POLICY IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

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PREFACE

The teaching of American social policy has seemed often uneven and disorganized. At present, there is no agreement about whether the major perspective in the teaching of social policy should be historical, descriptive, or analytic. Further, there does not appear to be a commonly accepted base of knowledge and theory considered essential to an understanding of social policy.

In part, this diffuseness exists because social policy is such a new field of study. It was not until 1935 that the federal government sponsored, in any major way, policies to improve the general welfare of people in need. Further, the teaching of social policy has not been important, because American values have not given an important position to social policy. Americans never have been totally comfortable with the idea that all individuals are not completely self-sufficient. Americans never have been totally comfortable with the knowledge that for their physical, economic, and social sustenance and development, some people need help from outside individuals or agencies.

Finally, social policy has not been given scholarly attention appropriate to its importance in society because social policy, perhaps more than any other type of public policy, involves beliefs, opinions, and values. Many people have ideas about how to raise children, what to do with the poor, and how to handle those who break the law. Social policy has been an area where values predominate. The subject is not seen as a field for careful study and analysis. Therefore, although social policy requires a significant investment in terms of money and the time and en-

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ergy of government officials and of the public in general, social policy is not taught consistently in this country.

Social Policy in American Society presents American social policy from descriptive, historical, and analytic perspectives. It is an effort to bring together, in one place, knowledge from various disciplines, including history, sociology, political science, philosophy, economics, urban affairs, and social welfare, which relates to American social policy.

This book is divided into five major parts. Part 1 defines the field and describes the major aspects of the American social welfare system. The second part describes the relationship of social welfare to the social structure, the political structure, the economic structure, and to major American values. Particular attention is given to the functioning of social policy in a democratic and capitalist society. The third part presents selected aspects of the historical development of social policy which have major importance for contemporary social policy. The following four chapters present a model for policy development and policy analysis. The book concludes with a chapter on the important factors which will contribute to social policy in the future in a capitalistic democracy.

I am indebted to a great number of people who helped me with this project. My students, my teachers, and my colleagues all contributed to my interest, understanding, and excitement with social policy. Mary Ann Riggs, Robin Hauser, and Susan Barlow-Stanis were able to make sense of my writing as they typed the various drafts of the manuscript. They were quick, accurate, and always pleasant to work with.

My wife, Peggy, shared with me this big undertaking. She spent untold hours editing the various drafts of each chapter. She was invaluable in her contributions to the overall organization and approach of the book and to the best and clearest way to present the material. In addition, she provided the support and the conditions that enabled me to complete this project.

Social Policy in American Society is broadly conceived. It grew in part out of a frustration developed from teaching social policy courses during the past decade without one main source for important social policy material. It grew also out of a desire to con-

tribute to identifying the major approaches and content in this important area. I have tried to make *Social Policy in American Society* both accessible and stimulating to teachers and to students. It is hoped that this book will provoke reflection and discussion about the form and the content of the field of social policy.

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Part I

AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL POLICY

WHAT IS SOCIAL POLICY?

DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL POLICY

Understanding the nature of social policy begins with forming a clear definition. A social policy is a statement of social goals and means in society's efforts to help meet human needs. Martin Rein writes that "... social policy ... is concerned with social purposes."¹ Social purposes are goals for improving people's lives; goals for the poor, the elderly, the very young, the emotionally ill, the addicted, and other needy members of society. Social purposes can be distinguished from other goals. For example, they are not the goals for the military or the space program.

Social policies are "... principles and courses of action ..."² They tend to be broad statements of purpose and general approaches to accomplish the social purpose. Social policies can be distinguished from social programs. Social programs are more specific. Social programs implement social policy. A typical social policy statement could propose, for example, federal help to communities for the purpose of reducing violence in the family. A social policy might recommend creating safe houses for

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abused spouses and their children. A program proposal to implement this policy would discuss how the safe house was going to be operated, who would be administering and working in the program, and how much specific program components would cost.³

Social policy can be distinguished from personal social services also. Personal social services usually are provided by a social worker and can include various kinds of counseling, advocacy, information and referral, and other basic care functions.⁴

Personal social services are a part of social policy. Social policy includes the broad areas of health, education, and welfare. In addition to social workers, lawyers, businesspeople, accountants, doctors, and others implement social policy. A very small proportion of all social policies include personal social services provided by social workers.

Social policy is one aspect of public policy. Public policy includes all of the policies which come from government at all levels. Social policy is the type of public policy which is devoted to social welfare goals.

It is clear that some policies of government have explicit social purposes. For example, all legislation concerning children, the family, juvenile delinquents, and the elderly has social purposes. However, there are other areas of public policy which do not have explicit social purposes but do have important consequences for social policy and the people it serves. Economic policy has a strong impact on social policy. If policy makers decide to decrease inflation by increasing the number of unemployed persons, there will be serious consequences for clients and for the social welfare system. A government decision to reduce federal social welfare expenditures, based on an economic rationale, is going to have serious consequences for social policy. In fact, there is increasing recognition by politicians and theorists that economic policy and social policy are closely related and cannot be considered separately.⁵

Other types of public policy have consequences for social policy. During the 1950s and 1960s, expressways frequently were built through low income communities. Poor communities suffered this disruption because their members were less likely