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History of Contemporary Social Policy: Introduction

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Guest Editor

As the contributions to this special issue of *JSSW* attest, much can be said about the nature of social welfare policies and programs over the past quarter century. Some changes are allegedly beneficial, some not, in regard to the welfare of the nation in general and to economically needy people in particular. The welfare program in the form of cash assistance primarily to low-income mothers and their children as we had understood and implemented it since 1935 ended. Work effort became the *sine qua non* of cash assistance for all low-income families. Further, the very notion of the welfare state in general was subjected to a sustained ideological onslaught. Alternatives such as partially privatizing the welfare state's bedrock program, Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) still commonly referred to as Social Security, were advanced by Democratic and Republican administrations alike. Privatization of Social Security, in part or in whole, may be a non-starter as G. W. Bush enters his last presidential year (Caputo, in press), but as contributions to this special issue suggest, reliance on market forces as the final arbiter of many social problems may have firmly eclipsed that of the Federal Government.

Space and time limited the scope of social welfare policies that found their way into this special issue of *JSSW*. Before introducing the in-depth, thoughtful, and perceptive articles that

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did make it, I would like to address briefly one topic that had no contributors per se, but that has preoccupied my scholarship since pursuing doctoral work in the mid 1980s, namely changes in federal responses to people in need, particularly those in poverty (Caputo, 1991 & 1994).

In several of my earlier preoccupations and studies regarding economic and social policies over the past quarter century, I basically concluded that the nature and extent of change depends on what one examines (Caputo, 2004, 2005). One of the more notable and pronounced changes in social policy over the past quarter century or so is reflected in the amount of Federal and State expenditures on programs for poor individuals and their families. Excluding Social Security payments which lift many low-income persons and their families above poverty thresholds, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was the predominant means through which Federal and State governments distributed income to poor persons and their families from 1976 to 1992. During the 1990s, there was a wholesale shift in the benefits for poor persons to a work incentive system, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), as AFDC and its 1996 replacement program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), decreased in importance.

By 2004 expenditures for the EITC program (approximately \$38 billion in 2000 dollars) eclipsed TANF (approximately \$18 billion), Food Stamps (approximately \$20 billion), and Federal and State Supplemental Security Income (SSI, \$35 billion) (Dowd, 2005). Further, as I have reported in an earlier issue of *JSSW* (Caputo, 2006), the anti-poverty effects of work incentive programs like the EITC, which had been launched in 1975 during the Ford administration but greatly expanded during the Clinton administration in the 1990s, were as equally dramatic. In 2002 for example, the EITC and Federal taxes removed roughly the same percentage of persons from poverty as Social Insurance (10.9% vs. 11.7% respectively) and higher percentages than means-tested non-cash programs (3.5%). These percentages were a striking contrast to the 1979 figures of 15.3 percent for means-tested non-cash programs, 10.9 percent for Social Insurance, 7.7 percent for means-tested cash programs, and -1.6 percent for EITC and Federal taxes (the last due in part to the regressive nature of the Social Security payroll tax which

the EITC did not fully offset in the aggregate until 1993).

While discussing a variety of policy changes over the past quarter century, the contributors to this volume chronicle and analyze the historical, ideological, and structural contexts within which the EITC came to such prominence as an anti-poverty strategy. They do so from a number of different vantage points, precluding any straightforward classification of the individual contributions. Nonetheless, Gilbert and Terrell (2005) identify three analytic perspectives on the study of social welfare policy that offer a fruitful framework to organize the contributions to this issue: process, product, and performance.

The first six contributions focus on processes associated with policy change, the lead concerning faith-based services, three others welfare reform, one Social Security (OASDI), and one Medicare. The seventh and eighth contributions focus on policy as product, the former describing changes in housing policy and the latter examining factors contributing to the likelihood of broadly defined welfare use and exit. Finally, the ninth and tenth contributions respectively focus on policy as performance in regard to how changes in welfare affected individuals with drug- or alcohol-related disabilities and how changes in Medicare affected utilization of the home care benefit, mainly in the fee-for-service program.

In the first process-oriented contribution to this issue, Robert J. Wineburg, Brian Coleman, Stephanie C. Boddie, and Ram A. Cnaan provide the most historically straightforward narrative of changes in the U.S. welfare state. They focus on the emergence of faith-based services. Wineburg et al. demonstrate how the seeds for recruiting faith-based groups were planted before and during the Reagan years, and how two waves of devolution chipped away at the national commitment to welfare. They contend that the first two waves of devolution provided both the ideological and practical means for faith-based social service delivery, which they characterize as the third wave of devolution. Wineburg et al. also review the incorporation of religion in social services as part of the neo-federalist trend of the Reagan legacy.

The second and third process-related contributions of Catherine McDonald and Michael Reisch and of Judie Svihula

and Carroll L. Estes respectively are theoretically driven examinations of different aspects of social welfare state functioning. Both articles approach their subject matter from a broad institutional context of the welfare state, the former using welfare reform as its backdrop or case study and the later examining social security reform. Both articles also provide guidance for social welfare activists who see a viable role for government to tame the vicissitudes of market functioning.

McDonald and Reisch use neo-institutional theory and empirical research to analyze the transition from welfare to workfare state functioning in Australia and the United States. Their comparative analysis of *neo-liberal workfare regimes* leads them to contend that the logic of workfare as an institution has taken on a hegemonic status, that is, workfare now has a degree of cognitive legitimacy as to be taken for granted. McDonald and Reisch show how processes of legitimization have evolved over the past quarter century, how the profession of social work has been affected by it, and how the profession can contribute to processes of institutional change.

Svihula and Estes draw on mobilization or social movement theory to guide their historical and legislative analyses of efforts to "privatize" Social Security. Their study details the ideological shift toward market rationalism within international and national organizations. Their study demonstrates how the propensity for private over public pensions gained ideological ascendancy not only in the United States, but globally, as free market theorists such as Milton Friedman influenced Chilean authorities to fully privatize their public pension scheme. On the basis of their study, Svihula and Estes suggest that our ability to predict the direction of ideological social movements and thereby contribute to fields such as the politics of aging, policy analysis, political sociology and political science would be enhanced by an historical exegesis of the reframing, or "keying," associated with the terminology for reform. This approach could signal ideological alignments and provide a longitudinal network analysis of the actors, their ideologies and resources. Clarity would be gained in regard to how dominant interests in any particular policy domain are able to use their power and relationships to influence policy options.

In the fourth process-related article, Luisa S. Deprez shows

how Congressional and media debates that culminated in passage of the Family Support Act of 1988 (FSA) signified the triumph of individualistic approaches to framing and understanding poverty, the politics of policy-making, and the power of political rhetoric. She relies on the files of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the late Democratic Senator from New York. Deprez contends that the compromise between conservatives and liberals that emerged throughout the 1980s amounted to a tinkering with the welfare system as we then knew it, with no substantive attention paid to the adequacy of paying jobs, day care, and health care benefits and with insufficient attention directed to issues of race, gender and class. As Deprez notes, however, FSA nonetheless laid a structural and ideological basis for the 1996 legislation that cemented FSA's provisions for increasing work incentives, reducing the fiscal burden of states for welfare, and compelling people to work as a condition of eligibility.

In the fifth process-related article, Jennifer L. Christian relies on theories about partisan preferences and on General Social Survey (GSS) data to examine the relationship between public opinion and policy change. Her study sheds additional light on how it came to be that welfare reform was more radical in 1996 with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) than it was in 1988 with FSA. Christian attributes this to the greater degree of partisanship during the Clinton administration about social welfare spending in general and about public cash assistance programs in particular. She contends that welfare reform was an attempt by the Clinton administration to reach out and garner support from Republican and swing voters who had become increasingly less supportive of social welfare spending over the preceding quarter century.

In the sixth process-related article, Svihula relies on political and moral economy to examine the dominant values and actors in the legislative process of the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003. Witnesses from government agencies, Congress, and think tanks had almost equal presence at the hearings. Her content analysis of federal hearings revealed that witnesses who were invited by Congress to testify expressed twice as much support for private interests than for the

general Medicare population or low-income beneficiaries. Few expressed concern for the uninsured population. Witnesses offered almost four times as many expressions of support for market rationalism than social insurance and three times as many than for improving Medicare's solvency/sustainability. With the 2008 presidential candidates split between support for social insurance and support for the private market, Svihula admonishes that Medicare advocates will need to devote extraordinary efforts to significantly counterweigh the strength and influence of market rationalists.

In the first of two policy-as-product contributions to this issue, Sondra J. Fogel, Marc T. Smith, and Anne R. Williamson trace the development of housing policy as a national goal prior to the Reagan administration, then focus more specifically on the Tax Reform Act of 1986 which created the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program. They note that LIHTC shifted the trend of federal low income housing policy from what had been direct (or "demand side") subsidies to tenants (i.e. Section 8 vouchers and certificates) to indirect tax credits to investors (i.e., "supply side" subsidies). The LIHTC program does not meet the needs of the households with the greatest housing needs—those with incomes below 30 percent of area median income. Also examined in this article are the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act passed in 1987 and the 1990 Cranston-Gonzalez Affordable Housing Act. In addition, much attention is given to the pluses and minuses of the Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE IV) program which provided for the revitalization of federally backed public housing in partnership with private and local government entities.

In the second policy-as-product contribution to this issue, Michele Lee Kozimor-King examines characteristics associated with public assistance use and exit, paying particular attention to the role of self-efficacy. Although this study reaffirms that human capital and family background characteristics have the strongest effects on the welfare use and exit within five years, it nonetheless provides some evidence, albeit fragile, that occupational self-efficacy affects the likelihood of exiting public assistance. The combination of work and marriage was found to be the most common route off welfare as compared

to marriage or work alone. Not only was the work/marriage combination the most common route off welfare, but those who were off welfare, working, and married five years after initial exposure were the most likely to have been off welfare the longest during the four year interval. In light of TANF time-limits, findings suggest the difficulty of achieving self-sufficiency through work alone and the need for more research acknowledging the intersections of social institutions such as marriage and family.

In the first of two policy-as-performance contributions to this issue, Sean R Hogan, George J. Unick, Richard Speigman, and Jean C. Norris examine the impact of the 1996 welfare reform legislation on individuals with drug- or alcohol-related (DA&A) disabilities. They note that before January 1, 1997, individuals with drug- or alcohol-related disabilities could qualify for federal public assistance through the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. Welfare reform changed that policy, resulting, as their study shows, in lost income and health care benefits for many low-income substance abusers. Proponents of the policy change had estimated that 75% of former SSI DA&A beneficiaries would still qualify for SSI benefits under another disability category. Only 35% did. Hogan et al. contended that policymakers should have realized that the social welfare of some of our society's most vulnerable members had been compromised, a result antithetical to the goals and objectives of a progressive welfare state and a healthy society.

In the second policy-as-performance contribution to this issue, Joan K. Davitt and Sunha Choi analyze the major policy changes in Medicare and their impact on utilization of the home care benefit, mainly in the fee-for-service program. They summarize policy debates and changes in the 1970s to set the stage for dramatic changes which occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. Davitt and Choi highlight changes in program use measured by actual figures such as costs, users, and visits, as well as growth in use over time. They note that actual use and program growth are related to the assumptions made by analysts at various historical points and that growth rates are appealed to in order to argue for program cuts. Finally, Davitt and Choi offer a critical analysis of the policy incentives, their

impact on agency practice and on benefit use.

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