

American Social Welfare Policy: A Pluralist Approach

Chapter 1

Social Policy and the American Welfare State

Definitions of Social Welfare Policy

Social Policy can be defined as:

- “a series of collective interventions that contribute to the general welfare by
 - assigning claims from one set of people who are said to produce or earn the national income
 - to another set of people who may merit compassion and charity.” (Richard Titmuss).

Social Problems and Social Welfare Policy

- Social welfare policy often develops in response to social problems
- An expression of social altruism
- Social welfare policies also relieve the social & economic dislocations caused by:
 - The uneven nature of economic development under capitalism

Social Work and Social Policy

- Social work practice is driven by social policies
 - Dictates how the work is done, with whom, for how much, and toward what ends

Values, Ideology, and Social Welfare Policy

- Social welfare policies are shaped by a set of social and personal values
- Recent U.S. social welfare policy has been largely shaped by values around:
 - Self-sufficiency, work, and the omniscience of the marketplace.

The Political Economy of American Social Welfare

- The interaction of political and economic theories in understanding society
- The political economy of the United States has been labeled democratic capitalism

The U.S. Economic Continuum

- Economics forms the backbone of the political system
- Keynesian Economics
 - Keynesian economics drives liberalism and most welfare state ideologies

The U.S. Economic Continuum

- Periodic and volatile economic situations that cause high unemployment
 - Primarily caused by the instability in investment
- Conservative or Free Market Economics
 - The conservative view of social welfare is guided by free market economics
 - Milton Friedman

The U.S. Economic Continuum

- Supply-side economics
- The Global Financial Crisis (GFC)
 - Alan Greenspan
 - \$168 billion stimulus package giving tax rebates to more to 130 million households

The U.S. Economic Continuum

- Democratic Socialism
 - Based on the belief that radical economic change can occur within a democratic context

The U.S. Political Continuum

- Liberalism and Left-of-Center Movements
 - Liberalism
 - Neoliberalism
 - The Self-Reliance School

The U.S. Political Continuum

- Classical Conservatives and the Far Right
 - Classic Conservatism
 - Neoconservatism
 - Cultural and Social Conservatism
 - Libertarianism

The Welfare Philosophers and the Neoconservative Think Tanks

- Many welfare thinkers envisioned a U.S. welfare state based on a European model
- George Gilder's *Wealth and Poverty*
- “Great Risk Shift”
- The absence of universal health care

Conclusion

- Does the economic policy tend to raise or depress the incomes of most Americans?
- What's the economy for, anyway?