

Lorraine Green and Karen Clarke (2016), *Social Policy for Social Work*, Cambridge: Policy Press, £17.99, pp. 240, pbk.
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This is a highly accessible, well-written and challenging book that aims to provide social work and social policy students with: 'a critical understanding of social work in the UK and the issues it faces' (Green and Clarke, 2016: 1). In order to achieve this, the authors have sought to locate social work within a context of social values, the wider social policy agenda and a recognition of the power of political ideologies, impacting at the individual, family, market and the state levels. Whilst the book is primarily targeted at the UK market it is not purely inward looking and includes writers and data from outside the UK and a consideration of globalisation. Each chapter of the book finishes with both a set of challenging discussion questions and further reading which will be of particular interest to social work and social policy academics.

The book is well-structured, beginning with the roots of the welfare state and the genesis of today's social policy and social work up to the Coalition Government in 2015. This is then followed by a critical discussion identifying the main tenets and critiques of various ideological positions. The authors also explain how politics and ideologies have influenced social work highlighting the pervasive effects of neoliberalism throughout the book and how it has shaped and is shaping current social policy and social work practice.

There is then a chapter focused on social problems, their nature and how the labelling of something as a social problem can be seen as promoting the interests of different parts of society whilst at the same time preventing other issues from being seen as problematic. The authors identify and critique the usual suspects: child abuse, domestic violence and adult protection but interestingly position wealth as a social problem. I would have been interested in seeing this argument being developed further. It was, however in keeping with their previous discussion on the link between unequal societies, crime, ill health, poor mental health and child abuse (p.42).

In seeking to understand social policy and social work there is a chapter based on the organisation of social work from Seebomh to the present day. Included within this there are critiques of new public management, partnerships and interprofessional working. The pernicious effects of performance management are identified along with the financial crisis and local government cuts resulting in the acceptance of austerity measures on social work funding and those with whom it seeks to work.

Of particular interest to me was Green and Clarke's perspective on social work education. Whilst starting from the days of CCETSW 1971 they quickly jump to the current position at the point of their writing of the book which includes 'Step Up' and 'Frontline' as fast track, often critiqued as elitist child care masters level social work qualifying programmes. The book was written before 'Think Ahead', a similar fast track master's level programme for qualifying mental health social workers, was introduced, the current uncertainty over bursaries for social work training and the continued disputes between the DfE and DoH.

The effectiveness of 'Frontline', which has been heavily championed by the DoE, is still unresolved even with the publication of its independent evaluation (Maxwell *et al.*, 2016). I did think it would have been good to have said more about the Narey (2014) DfE and Croisdale –Appleby (2014) DoH reports on the future of social work education and the visions they expounded, Narey with his instrumental technical expertise and Croisdale –Appleby with his call for a social worker to be a practitioner, professional, and social scientist.

Before discussing the next chapter, it is worthwhile reminding ourselves of the global definition of social work:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of

people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. (IFSW and IAASW, 2014)

It is thus very beneficial that this textbook focuses on key social work concepts such as: social justice, citizenship, equality, difference and risk, endeavouring to clarify the complexities and contested nature of these concepts. The application of these concepts is also highlighted through a series of case examples. Other key social work terms are also usefully problematized including conceptions of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice, empowerment and experts by experience.

Given the UK's decision to 'Brexit' it is fitting there is also a chapter on globalisation and the impact of global economic policy on migration, the position of 'illegal migrants', refugees and asylum seekers. A senior social work academic who was not born in the UK although they have lived here for most of their life informed me that the day after Brexit she was approached by a lady in the street and asked, 'when was she going home?' This made her feel very uncomfortable, and is likely to be a shared experience of many who are non-white Anglo-Saxon and will provide a significant challenge to social workers in the near future.

The authors provide an excellent overview of the contribution of social policy to social work. If there is a weakness it is in the guidance for social workers of how to use social policy in their practice. The authors challenge the current orthodoxy of viewing service users as being personally responsible for their poverty and problems without acknowledging social injustice or structural inequalities. The book provides an excellent introduction for social work and social policy students whilst reminding social workers of the need to uphold their professional values in negotiating the personal and the political. As Green and Clarke (2016: 174) conclude:

'The years ahead look likely to be challenging times for social work, requiring a good critical understanding of the profession within the broader welfare state, as a basis for standing up for its professional principles'.

As matters currently stand this is probably an understatement!

References

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