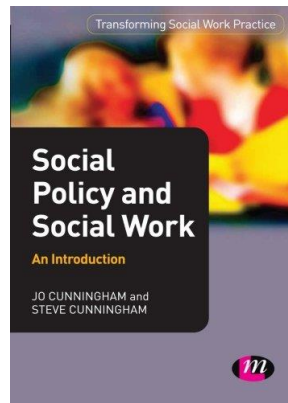


BOOK REVIEW

Ranjan Kumar Sahoo*:
**Social Policy and Social Work – An Introduction Edited by Jo
Cunningham & Steve Cunningham**



Social Policy and Social Work – An Introduction Edited by Jo Cunningham & Steve Cunningham (2017)

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An understanding of social policy is critical for social workers as it underlies and determines the legislative framework within which they work. From safeguarding service users and empowering them to improve their lives to protecting society's most vulnerable, social policy plays an important part in social work education. Therefore, it is crucial for students to engage critically with social policy. *Social Policy and Social Work: An Introduction* by Jo Cunningham and Steve Cunningham is an important contribution in this respect which explains the policy and demonstrates how it has developed and evolved over time, how it reflects societal changes, and how it is applied to daily practice. Understanding social policy and its relationship with, and impact upon, social work has never been more important. In recent years have been a plethora of social policy initiatives introduced, each designed to improve the lives of social work service users at different stages in their life course. The book is written not only as an introduction to these various social policy initiatives but also as a guide to how they relate to day-to-day social work practices. Throughout the book, consideration is also given to how the social work theory base has shaped and developed social policy, including the role of Marxism and Feminism, Neo-liberalism, and Anti-racist theory. The author uses practical examples throughout, including case studies, reflection points, and research summaries, to aid learning and develop students' understanding of this often-complex aspect of the social work degree.

The book is divided into two major parts. The first part deals with “The Historical and Theoretical Context” which comprises five chapters and the second part deals with “Social Policy, Social Work and Service Users” which comprises of another five chapters. So, the total book consists of two parts with ten chapters. At the outset of the book in chapter one, Jo & Steve introduces the discipline of social policy as well as examine the historical development of the subject in higher education. It discusses its transition in two parts: before 1945 and after it. Then it discusses the links between the academic subject of social policy and social work education. The chapter also explains how and why social policy can make an important contribution to our professional studies. It suggests, *“we do so by assessing how recent public expenditure cuts have impacted upon service users and the ability of social workers to meet the needs of vulnerable people”* (p. 10). Chapter two takes the readers more inside the historical approach and looks at the development of social policy and social work in the nineteenth century. It discusses some of the key developments and debates that took place during that time and then some continuities in the twenty-first-century policy and debates about administering welfare. It is often found that social policy and social work developments have historically been motivated primarily by humanitarian sentiment. However, such interpretations are partial and fail to acknowledge the complex range of factors, concerns, and forces that have shaped and continue to shape policy and practice. The focus shifted on Chapter three, as Jo & Steve concentrate on the “Ideology, Social Policy and Social Work” Here they make a discussion of their ideologies: social democracy, neo-liberalism, and Marxism, which they are covering in all the forthcoming chapters of the book. In connection to it, they state that *“an ideology is a set of opinions or beliefs of a group or an individual. Very often ideology refers to a set of political beliefs or a set of ideas that characterize a particular culture”* (p. 36). The next two chapters examine the historical development of the post-war welfare state. The advantage of this approach is to illustrate how different ideological perspectives have exercised different levels of influence on social policy and social work developments at different times in British history. Hence, its timeline is a chart of the influence of different political ideologies, examining the extent to which each has influenced policy and practice. Chapter four focuses on the ideology of social democracy and the development of social policy and social work after 1945. It begins by discussing the emerging influence of more interventionist, collectivist, progressive ideals on social policy at the end of the nineteenth century, and then it goes on to examine the growing influence of social democratic principles, and in particular, the way they shaped the development of the welfare state after the Second World War. In connection with the ideology of social democracy, it advocates, *“social democracy is a political, social and economic ideology that supports economic and social interventions*

to promote social justice within the framework of a capitalist economy, as well as a policy regime involving a commitment to representative and participatory democracy, measures for income redistribution and regulation of the economy in the general interest and welfare state provisions” (p. 45). Then it looks over “The Beveridge Report” which talks about how to improve Britain’s uncoordinated system of social service provision. But there come so many critiques on it from the political and feminist ground. Then it discusses social work during the social democratic era and suggested Govt. has to reaffirm its commitment to a genuinely social democratic project and redouble its efforts to address the nation’s economic and social skills. Chapter five deals with the ideology of “Neo-liberalism” and focuses on the challenges posed by neoliberal critiques of welfare. It first discusses conservative governments, labour governments, coalition governments, and also the vision of big society but in every case, they found some major critiques. Thus, the end of the chapter, also suggests some of the key features that might characterize an ideal type of neo-liberal public welfare. *“It should be based upon needs and not rights. The assistance given should be temporary and conditional and it should be delivered by voluntary or private organizations rather than state agencies”* (p. 65). Next in the second part of the book Jo & Steve shifted to their next ideology in the last chapter of the first part which examines the influence of Marxist perspectives on social policy and social work. Here they start with the evolution of Marxist interpretation with the previous two ideologies and there found in Marxists are in some cases agreed with the aims of social democrats and neo-liberalist, but they reject the strategies which they are adopted for achieving these aims. It suggests that there needs a radical change in every functionary sector like in legitimation, accumulation etc. for the welfare state. New policies are also introduced not only to make the promotion of the status quo rather for progressive economic and social change. The next three chapters deals with the policy areas related to day-to-day social work practice and how social policies impact citizens at different stages in their life course: children, young, adult, and older adults. First, in Chapter seven, Jo & Steve focus on children and examine how children have been at the forefront of social policy and social work practice developments over the past decade. At the beginning of the chapter, it discussed that children are convicted of the issues relating to child abuse and they were neglected in media and political commentaries. Thus, it further talks about child protection and emphasizes education and training which helps us to encompass an analysis of other factors that affect children’s welfare. Within the social work, the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié and more recently the Baby Peter Connelly case have placed a very public spotlight on social workers’ attempts to safeguard children. However, the major concern of this chapter shows how an over-concentration on the issue of neglect and child protection can serve to divert attention

away from the pressing need to address other factors that can affect the life chances of vulnerable children such as poverty, poor educational opportunities, and health inequalities. Chapter eight includes young people. As we know young people have always been the subject of social policy and social work interventions, so this chapter gives emphasis on how policy initiatives contribute to and are in turn influenced by wider moral ‘panics’ about young people. Thus, it first examines the growing evidence of youth exclusion in Britain today and questions the effectiveness of recent policies. The chapter also provides a broad assessment of the overall trajectory of policy, critically analyzing the assumptions and concerns that have shaped it. Chapter nine provides a critical analysis of the potential of such initiatives which were discussed in the previous one. It suggested that working with and providing services to older people can constitute a significant part of a social worker’s role. It also discusses the case with working-age adult services, that how the focus of some recent initiatives has been geared towards empowering service users, by providing them with the means to make decisions about their own lives as well as examining these policies and coined it as the term ‘*the personalization agenda.*’ It describes “*personalization is universally portrayed as the new panacea, or the ‘holy grail’ of adult social care and its arrival on the social policy agenda will make radical solution to the problems that have previously beset adult social care*” (p. 138). The last chapter of the book also considers a range of other social policy developments that can contribute to or impinge upon the economic and social well-being of older people. In short, it accesses the relative ease with which older people can access the citizenship rights that other section of the population takes for granted such as decent income, appropriate housing, and social care services. Finally, the book ended by briefly reiterating once more the importance of embracing a social policy dimension to the studies.

Overall, it is found that the sequence of the chapters in the book is well thought out and logically relevant. The book began with the origin and definition of social policy and social work and gradually it covers different ideologies in forthcoming chapters to make some complete theoretical perspectives in the first part and then in the second part it gradually deals with the policy areas related to day to day social work practice and how social policies impact upon citizens at different stages in their life course: children, young, adult and older adults, which provide a base for all-round development and comprehensive understanding of students, teachers, and all the readers. Then it concludes by briefly reiterating once more the importance of embracing a social policy dimension to the studies. The use of vivid examples from all sectors, and the incorporation of appropriate information or data sets at the right places aided in compression. Stating researched-based facts and the present context of

the content may immensely help to shape our understanding of these issues. Each content area of the book has been dealt with in a well-versed manner, but it requires some modification in some chapters. In chapter seven, “children, social policy, and social work”, there is a lack of clear-cut instruction on the exact suggestive framework for it. It only includes the child’s well-being in the UK, and it only covers the social democracy and neoliberal ideology perspectives whereas, in other chapters out of these two, the Marxism ideology perspectives are also given due importance. However, Jo & Steve elaborated on all the themes of social policy and social work very clearly. This book is easily understandable by the learner as well as the teachers. Each section of the book contains a summary, objectives, and sources for better understanding and enhancing the learning of students. The author also gives a conclusion at the end of the book for a detailed understanding and significance of the book briefly.

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