

## Book Review

## A history of the Personal Social Services in England. Feast, Famine and the Future

Jones R. (2020). *A history of the Personal Social Services in England. Feast, Famine and the Future*. (2020). London: Palgrave Macmillan. Paperback, ISBN 978-3-030-46123-2. £24.99. Aus \$45.02 plus postage. 494 pages.

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The author of this book is, Ray Jones, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, Kingston University. Jones was formerly the Director of Social Services for Wiltshire, Chief Executive of the Social Care Institute for Excellence, Deputy Chair of the British Association of Social Workers, and in 2018 he was awarded Social Worker of the year for his outstanding contribution to social work.

In this book, Jones displays an encyclopaedic knowledge of the local authority personal social services (PSS) and the unified profession of social work, prior to and after, the passing of the *Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Service Act (1970)* that created these services in the UK. Also on display, is a profound knowledge of the political and legislative processes that have shaped these services across the last 50 years. Jones maps the changing government structures, including the abolition of some organisational forms and the creation of new forms, some of which had a short life. Alongside these observations, he interweaves commentary about the legislation that has impacted on the work of Social Service departments, such as the *Mental Capacity Act (2005)* and the *Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (1970)*.

Given Jones's remarkable service management and educational career, this book is both a personal history, a history of the evolution of the PSS and an organisational and political history of considerable merit. It is also a book so full of detail that all this review can give the reader is snippets of information in the hope that they will go further and read the book in full.

The book is made up of 5 sections and 13 chapters. Part 1 is Creating the Personal Social Services. Part 2 is the Personal Social Services in Action. Part 3 is New Laws and New Horizons. Part 4 is the Recent Reforms and Unravelling. And finally, Part 5 is Reflecting and Re-routing.

The process by which each chapter was established involved not only the researching key documents that recorded the debates in committee meetings but also interviews with 33 well-known people who were prominent in these debates. The interviews are extensively reported throughout the book.

The four chapters that make up section 1 are Seizing the Moment: The Seebohm Committee, Scripting the Future:

The Seebohm Committee and Preparing the Platform: The Local Authority Social Services Bill and Act. This section explores the events that led up to the establishment of the Seebohm Committee as well as the committee's activities and the debate following publication in 1968 of their report. On display is the argument for the Probation Service staying outside the proposed Local Authority Social Service Department structure. Also, on display are the arguments put forward by the existing Local Authority Departments of Health who argued that social work and welfare services as envisaged by the Seebohm committee should be subsumed under these departments and not be located in a new Department of Social Services. The Probation Service remained a separate service primarily as a service to the Courts and the legal system, although there were some later changes. The push by local authority medical personnel for responsibility for Seebohm services did not gain favour, and the *Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Service Bill* was presented to Parliament and became law in 1970. This is Jones's era of "feast".

A startling suggestion in chapter 3 of this book is that "The Seebohm report can be seen as the missing chapter of the 1942 Beveridge report" (p. 46). If true, the Seebohm report may be the final fling at addressing the five "wants" (health, housing, education, employment and income) that were the focus of the Beveridge report. When published, the Beveridge report represented a consensus that supported and inspired the Beveridge legislation, a consensus that has since fallen away. This may also be why in 2020 the PSS are, as we shall see later, unravelling.

Part 2, the PSS in Action consists of four chapters – Creating the Empire: Promise and Potential (1970–1976); The Seismic Shifts in the mid-1970s; Norming and Storming: Social Work Debates and Developments in the 1970s and Thatcher and Threat (1979–1989). The first of the chapters provides a detailed account of how in one year, 174 new Directors of Social Service were recruited. On 1 April 1971, of the 136 Directors appointed, only 53 were qualified social workers. It is worth commenting at this point, on how the Seebohm Report called for the establishment of Departments of Social Services not Departments of Social Work, even though local authorities had disciplinary based Departments of, for example, Education or Borough engineers for whom a university disciplinary degree was a required qualification. The implications for Social Work of the Seebohm Social Service PSS nomenclature will be explored later.

The next chapter, the "Seismic Shifts in the mid-1970s", deals with the impact of the Maria Colwell Inquiry into children's services that moved from the Home Office and became part of the unified local authority PSS. This inquiry changed the children's services focus on working with disadvantaged children and families, to one of "rescue" and removal of children from parental care. This is a focus that remains today and one which is well articulated by Leigh (2017) in relation to the culture of present-day child protection services and by Burns et al. (2017) in relation to child removal by the state. This is a change which echoed loudly in Australia. Another influence that took the children's service sector in this direction was Kempe et al's. (1962) "Battered child"

syndrome and the Goldstein et al.'s "Best interests of the Child" series (1973, 1979, 1986, 1996).

Chapter 7, the "Norming and Storming: Social Work Debates and Developments in the 1970s", looks at a series of theoretical influences on social work such as deviancy theory, the anti-psychiatry movement and radical social work and the debate about whether social work is about social change or social control. This led to consideration of social work as an integrated profession and to the foundation of the British Association of Social Workers and the Association of Directors of Social Services in 1970. From there the book moves to a consideration of social work education and the role of Central Council for the Education and Training of Social Workers (CCETSW) as a government regulatory body that accredited social work courses in the university and college sector. The main qualification was the Certificate in Social Work (CQSW) that was later followed by the non-graduate Certificate in Social Services (CSS). The lower level CSS was developed as way of addressing the shortage of workforce for the Department of Social Services. At that time, it was not a professional social work qualification although later the CQSW and CSS were merged to become the Diploma in Social Work.

A further discussion in this chapter is about the unitary or integrated models of social work practice (Bartlett, 1971; Goldstein, 1973; Pincus & Minahan, 1973) that were imported from the USA. These models seemed to fit the integrated practice structure that was reflected in the PSS construct, that the Seebohm Report had envisaged, and that was now in place. Incidentally, these practice models had less impact on social work education in the USA in comparison to England and Australia.

The final chapter in this section of the book is "Thatcher and Threat (1979–1989)". Much has been written about the Thatcher era and how the benefits of the welfare state eroded. This involved the promotion by the Thatcher government of a market for services, the privatisation of the PSS and the introduction of a contract culture with corresponding changes in the role of children's NGO's. This is an issue that Jones has already written about in his book *In whose interest? The privatisation of child protection and social work*, that was reviewed in *Children Australia* in 2019. Suffice to say, that book sets out issues related to the Thatcher and beyond era in absorbing detail.

The next section of the book is entitled New Laws and New Horizons. It consists of two chapters. A Drama in Two Parts. Part 1, the 1989 Children's Act and Children's Social Services. And Part 2, the 1990 National Health Services and Community Care Act and the Adult Social Services and Social Work. These chapters point to a gradual unravelling of the commitment to an integrated model of PSS, as per Seebohm.

The next section called "Recent Reforms and Unravelling" with chapters titled New Labour: New agenda (1997–2010) and the Coalition and the Conservative party austerity and hostility, towards social work (2010–2020). Even with a change of government, this unravelling trajectory continued under Blair's Labour, although possibly more vigorously under the Conservative party once they regained power. This is what Jones calls the "famine".

The final chapter of the book called "Reflecting and Re-routing", "The PSS today and tomorrow" is Jones' view of the "future".

These final three sections of the book could in themselves make a separate history volume as they detail more recent events and may therefore be of more interest to younger readers. This is where lessons may be learned that could benefit Australian services as the trends in privatisation and contracting for services are well

underway in Australia. This is very clearly visible in the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Service (NDIS).

Overall, I consider this a remarkable book that contains 829 references; and is likely to stand as the definitive history of the English PSS for many years to come.

### Comment

A important difference between the UK and Australia is that while social work education in both countries quickly embraced the integrated or unitary model of practice, as developed in the USA by Goldstein (1973) and Pincus and Minahan (1973), the forerunner of which was Bartlett's "Common Base of Social Work Practice" (1971), the Australian service organisations remained population focussed, that is, Department of Disability and Aged Care Services or Department of Families and Community. They did not emulate the Seebohm PSS construct, largely because social services legislation in Australia is at a state and territory level. Australian social services legislation, unlike in England, is not nationally based, although the introduction of the NDIS in 2013 changed that. Importantly, while in England there has been an overarching Department of Social Services since 2004, there has been some return to specialisation with divisional structures that separate services for children from adult social care services.

Towards the end of this book there is a section titled "The political control of Social Work and Social Workers" (Chapter 12). The question I have is: to what extent is political control of the PSS an inevitable outcome of the way in which the Seebohm Report (1968) conceived of all embracing PSS system, especially given the resource implications for central and local government of this service developments?

It can be argued that the UK government at the time of Seebohm wanted a social care workforce for the PSS and not a professional social work workforce. It just so happened that university and college departments had small student enrolments and were committed to remaining small. This allegedly was to ensure a quality social work education, although the link between limited enrolment and quality education was not clear. The CCETSW, a semi-autonomous government funded body, did not deal with this issue. Instead, the Council developed the non-graduate CSS in response to local and central government pressure to deal with the staff qualification issue. It might be said that that was the beginning of the end of the Seebohm PSS system. The action of the CCETSW prevented, possibly unwittingly, the PSS departments ever becoming the preserve of professional social workers. From then on you see government seeking more and more to control social work services and social work education in England. If that analysis is correct, then the political control of the training and education of the PSS workforce was an inevitable outcome.

Interestingly, in Australia, social work education degree level courses are accredited by the Australian Association of Social Work Educators (AASWE), a non-government organisation, and social work is not a registered occupation in all Australian states and territories. The net result is that governments in Australia have less power to regulate social work education or the social work profession which, despite all the negatives in this book, is now a registered profession in England.

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