Lesson Seven

Welfare and Work

Aims

The aims of this lesson are to enable you to examine:

- the history of the welfare state since 1945

- the nature and role of public, private, voluntary and informal welfare provision

- the changing nature of work

Context

In the previous lesson we considered the issue of poverty and wealth. Here we examine the related issues of welfare provision and work.

Ken Browne: *Sociology for AQA, Vol. 1: AS and 1st-Year A Level*, ch. 7, pp. 483-526;

and also (optionally):

Sociology: Themes and Perspectives, Chapter 4.

Oxford Open Learning

Introduction

A lot of good work has been done in the field of social policy .... but as someone once said, no sociologist has ever been called into court to appear as an expert witness. Psychologists, psychiatrists and lawyers are regarded for their professional expertise, but sociology has never achieved this ..... It has failed to live up to its promise. So stated Professor T.H. Marshall in an interview published in *New Society* in June 1980, in a succinct way which sums up the dilemma faced by a subject without a set of agreed paradigms.
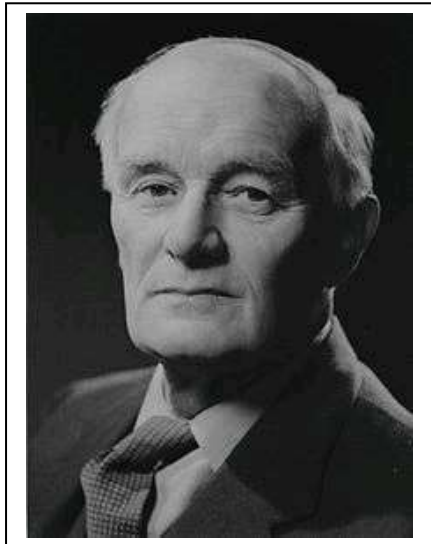
Whether one agrees with Marshall (left) or not, it is evident that much of the Sociology we have looked at in this course so far seems a long way divorced from the *factual* world of the social services, with *real* people suffering *real* problems.

From the Marshall perspective, sociologists have turned inward on themselves, questioning their own ability to ask questions never mind finding answers.

To Marshall there is a factual world out there crying out for the attention of the sociologist whose knowledge and training is comparable to *the diagnostic skill of the physician and the forensic skill of the lawyer.*

But as Martin Rein argues in *Social Science and Public Policy facts* and *values* are integrated, with interpretation being all-important. Far from broadening social consensus by expanding knowledge of *facts*, research findings can sharpen disagreements, making *the issues more uncertain, complex and technical.*

The relationship between sociology and social policy will be discussed in more detail below, but this brief introduction should serve to show the essence of the issue, with contrasting sociological perspectives presenting a different image of the whole nature and aims of sociology as a discipline.

The Development of the Welfare State

The historical details of the development of the Welfare State are available in any book on the social services, and so we will not reproduce them here. Instead, . general points will be raised about the nature of a *welfare state* and about its development in Britain.

Historically the aim of 'welfare'-centred interventions has been to alleviate or prevent poverty and bring in some form of minimum income (now we would call this a minimum wage). For example it was under the 1834 Poor Law (Amendment) Act that workhouses were introduced so that people who were destitute could go and live in these places. However, the conditions were poor and were purposefully kept this way to prevent abuse of the system; for example encouraging people to take state support when they are not strictly eligible for it.

The workhouse system remained in operation until 1928 in various formats. There was no cohesive system of benefits and many poorer people relied on charity for healthcare, or they would take out small insurance policies so that they could afford to call a doctor if they fell ill. You may find these timeframes shocking but the welfare state as we know it today is still in its infancy by historical reform timescales.

The term *welfare state* is commonly used to describe Britain's social services, to express their comprehensive nature, covering education, housing, sanitation, public health, working conditions and so on. It does however, tend to give a false impression of coherent and conscious development, and the successful conquest of the array of social problems to which it has been addressed. In reality the development of the social services has been piece-meal, with each reform being a response to certain social pressures. This is not least compounded by each change of government where loss of cohesive reform is in part due to the different priorities and political agendas as well as changing dynamics of society in general (for example increased social need).

The Labour Government (1945-51) and the Welfare State

It is certainly true that the major reforms of the post-1945 period were not the product of a Socialist or egalitarian ideology, but rather reflected a belief in self-help, aided but not replaced by the state. Indeed the famous Beveridge Report of 1942 envisaged the poor ending their own social problems by enforced payment by them into the national insurance scheme. Beveridge suggested that there were five 'evils' that needed to be eradicated by the introduction of the welfare state. See Figure 1 for details of these.

Figure 1: Beveridge's social evils and welfare state interventions

Poverty	Ignorance	Disease	Poor housing	Unemployment
•Unemployment and sickness benefits introduced	•Free schooling age extended •More schools to be built	•NHS	•Slum clearance •Increased social housing	•Committment to full employment

Thanks to Beveridge's work and a public mood for change, the post-war period saw the introduction of the National Health Service (NHS) in 1948 as well as extended school services, introduction of the social security system, increased social housing provision and an ongoing commitment to full employment.

Reforms since 1951

The 1950s and 1960s have been described politically as the era of *Butskellism* (a name compounded from the surname of the moderate Conservative politician R.A. Butler and the moderate Labour leader, Hugh Gaitskell) with successive Conservative Governments making as many additions to as subtractions from the services established by the Labour Government of 1945-51.

During the course of the 1970s, however, this consensus broke down to a large extent, with Conservative Governments cutting back on certain provisions while Socialist writers such as Frank Field have stressed the need for a wealth tax, action against the private sector of health and educational provision, and measures to prevent companies providing welfare for their higher paid employees at the expense of the tax-payer.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Conservative Government in several ways moved further away from the post-war consensus. In the latter part of the '80s, Child Benefit was frozen so that this universal benefit did not rise with the rate of inflation and the intent was to allow it gradually to wither in significance. Also, the introduction of the 'Social Fund' with its limits to social security provisions in terms of the sums available at benefit offices and the increasing use of loans instead of hardship grants eroded a basic principle of the Beveridge Report. These changes reflected a resurgence of the liberal ideology that the state should have only a limited rôle, and should certainly not interfere with individual initiative.

Since then, the welfare state has changed again, in numerous ways. It is perhaps helpful to imagine that the welfare state has been divided into specific eras, based around the political stances of the government since the 1945 Beveridge report, and these are summarized in Table 1 below:

Era	Approach to welfare	Problems	Was poverty eliminated?
Post-war era – 1945-1979	Focus on eliminating the five "giant" evils. Benefits and services were mainly universal (freely available to all at the point of use	Women were expected to be housewives whilst men went to work Immigrants from the West Indies were often discriminated against, e.g. not eligible for council housing.	No – although it was greatly alleviated. Public expenditure was high and so were taxes but poverty remained.
New Right era – 1979-1997	Focus on individualism (making people responsible for their own welfare). Benefits were mainly targeted and means-tested (based on income levels) to cut govt spending.	Mass unemployment during the 1980s meant people were literally unable to find work	No – instead, it increased massively.
New Labour era – 1997-2010	Focus on welfare pluralism (using a mixture of private, state and charitable services for welfare). Benefits were a mixture of universal and means-tested.	Left-wing politicians felt New Labour didn't do enough for the poor, whereas right-wing commentators said they were spending too much on welfare.	No – poverty, or 'social exclusion' persisted.
Conservative/Lib Dem coalition era and Conservative-led government – 2010-	The approach seems similar to the New Right era. Many benefits have been scrapped and university tuition fees are rising.	Student-led riots in 2010 and youth-led riots in 2011 suggested the country was not happy with the current welfare state and economy.	Not yet!

Table 1: Political stances of governments since 1945

A Marxist View of the Welfare State

Marxist analyses can clearly vary, with some writers seeing elements of the welfare state as hard-won gains made by the proletariat in their struggle with the capitalist system, while others see it as wholly designed in the interests of capitalism and its ruling class.

Whatever the particulars of the analysis, Marxists consider that the effect of a welfare state is to remove many of the obvious excesses of naked capitalism, and by humanising it make its overthrow a delayed or even averted possibility. This is sometimes balanced with an admission that the welfare state has improved some aspects of life for working people and has raised popular expectations, but Marxists refuse to accept that it can abolish poverty or inequality.
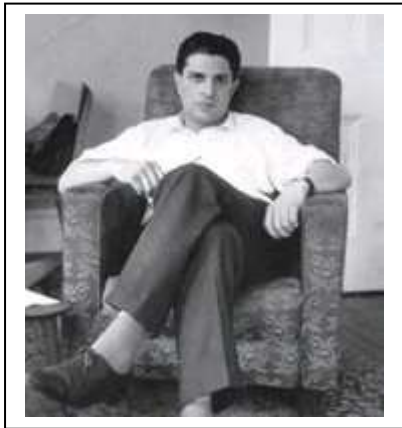
As **Ralph Miliband** (left, the father of David and Ed Miliband) said, *the abolition of poverty will have to wait until the system which breeds it comes on the agenda...*

One interesting contribution to a Marxist analysis of the British welfare state is provided by J.C. Kincaid in *Poverty and Equality in Britain: A Study of Social Security and Taxation.*

Kincaid argues that *widespread poverty is a direct consequence of the limited effectiveness of social security provisions.* He argues that the social security system was never truly egalitarian in its effects, and that what limited impact it had has been reduced by more recent modifications. He points out that pensions and other long-term national insurance benefits are so low that *if a person has no other income ...., he or she is automatically below the poverty line.* Stressing that the problems of poverty can only be removed with a massive redistribution of income and wealth, Kincaid argues that *most of the financial arrangements which under-pin social security have been carefully designed to minimize redistribution of income.*

A 'Social Reform' View of the Welfare State

The development of British Socialist thought can be contrasted with that in other parts of Western Europe in that Marxism has not been central to it. A much more powerful intellectual tradition has been the *gradualism* and *reformism* of the Fabian Society. The stress of Fabian Socialists has been on equality as a means to social unity, efficiency, justice and self-realisation.

R.H. Tawney (left) pointed to the dysfunctional nature of the class system in that it created rivalry and resentment rather than unity and co-operation. Instead of pointing to an inevitability of conflict based on economic forces, the Fabians have seen both the need and possibility for changing attitudes and society itself.

As a result, the Fabians have enthusiastically applauded the welfare state, viewing it as a pragmatic response to the problems and needs of a modern industrial society such as Britain. Attitudes and behaviour can be shaped by it, and Titmuss argued that the way society organizes its health and welfare systems *can encourage or discourage the altruistic in man.* It is this view that has been primarily associated with a belief in *social engineering*; that changed attitudes can be the product of measures initiated by a reformist leadership.

Now read Ken Browne: Sociology for AQA, Vol. 1: AS and 1st-Year A Level, ch. 7, pp. 483-496.

The Social Security Budget

The social security budget in Britain increased markedly between 1979 and 1995. See Table 2 below.

Social Security Spending in Britain (£bn).	
1979	14
1981	27
1983	34
1985	40
1987	48.5
1989	51
1991	68
1993	85
1995	91

Table 2: Social security budget between 1979 and 1995

Adapted from 'The Sunday Times' 21st May 1995

During the New Right era, the Conservative governments introduced a series of welfare reforms to try to tackle what was believed by some to be a 'crisis' in welfare spending.

In 1993, Peter Lilley, then Under Secretary of State for Social Security, echoed the views of many on the political right when he stated: 'The underlying growth in social security has exceeded and will continue to exceed growth in the economy....The underlying growth is above the growth that can be afforded for public expenditure as a whole....There is no escaping the need for structural reform of the social security system to contain spending'.

Quoted in C. Oppenheim: 'The Welfare State: Putting the Record Straight' 1994

Some of the main changes which were introduced by that government included:

1. **Increased selectivity** and means testing, for example, eyesight tests were once free to all but are now means tested.

2. **Loans**. Social security has moved away from giving grants to help claimants with exceptional need. They are now more likely to be given a loan which must be paid back.

3. **Cuts in benefit.** Some benefits have been allowed to fall behind inflation, such as child benefit, while others have kept pace with inflation but not with average earnings, such as old age pensions.

4. **Privatisation**. A number of areas of welfare have been 'contracted out' to the private sector – hospital cleaning services, for example.

5. **Encouragement of welfare pluralism.** The Conservative governments of this period tried to reduce the state's responsibility for welfare provision by inviting the private sector to take on some welfare responsibilities.

6. **Community care.** Many institutions, including old people's homes and mental hospitals were closed and patients cared for in the community, often by family or voluntary organisations.

7. **Competition**. In some sectors, especially in parts of the health service, competition has been introduced.

Activity 1	Now read the following passages.
	It was in December 1992 that Christopher Clunis, a schizophrenic with a long history of mental instability and violence, approached Jonathan Zito, a complete stranger, and stabbed him to death. The murder took place during the hours of daylight in front of horrified bystanders at Finsbury Park tube station. Clunis had been a patient at ten hospitals, including the psychiatric units at four major London hospitals. His records were rarely passed on - there was little or no co-ordination between social workers, doctors and the police. In the words of the official inquiry, 'Clunis's aftercare plan was virtually non-existent. No-one was co-ordinating his psychiatric care and treatment in the community'.
	Adapted from the 'Daily Telegraph' and 'Guardian' 25th April 1994
	Feminists have recently highlighted the true meaning of 'community care' as it applies to handicapped and elderly people. For 'community' read 'family' and for 'family' read 'women'! Feminists are suspicious of attempts to increase 'community' provision, seeing them as part of the political agenda of getting women out of the labour market and back to home, to provide unpaid welfare and health services for members of their own families.
	Adapted from J Finch 'Community Care : Developing Non-Sexist Alternatives' in 'Critical Social Policy' No 9 1984
	Questions
	1. What does the first extract tell us about the co-ordination of welfare services?
	2. How is community care seen in the second passage?

Welfare Pluralism

The 'New Labour' government that was elected in 1997 came with a promise to reform welfare provision. The government advocated using welfare pluralism, also known as the 'mixed economy of welfare'. This was to be a middle ground between the approaches of the first two

eras of welfare. It is helpful to understand the different types of welfare provision, all of which are still being used today.

- **Voluntary providers of welfare**: Charitable or non-profit organizations that provide benefits/help/services to the population. Example: The Salvation Army provides meals to rough sleepers.

- **Informal providers of welfare**: Sources of care that are not official organizations. Examples: family, neighbours.

- **Private Providers of Welfare**: Profit-making companies who charge for welfare. Examples: private schools, private dentists, BUPA.

- **Statutory welfare provision**: Welfare provided by law, usually through the government. Example: the NHS.

Sociologists are undecided as to whether welfare pluralism is preferable to a welfare state purely provided by the state. On one hand, using a range of providers gives people choice. For example, if a patient is unsatisfied with NHS care, then private options are available. Using charities and families also helps keep costs down. On the other hand, there is the argument that the poor do not have the option to 'go private' and by urging the family to provide welfare, the government may be adding to the 'triple burden' of women.

The current status of the Welfare State

You will recall that when 'New' Labour came to power in 1997 under Tony Blair's leadership, welfare reform was a main priority and they undertook to address poverty and inequality as well through legislative policy reform. However, they viewed the welfare state as a significant part of the UK's 'problem' and put forward the so-called 'Third Way' which included reform through decentralization and making more use of the private sector.

This meant that the focus was on a positive welfare based on a contract between the government and citizens who would have rights and responsibilities within a type of partnership. Therefore although the suggestion was that the state would support people who were unemployed, sick or in poverty, the responsibility also lay with individuals to try to change their circumstances rather than rely on state intervention.

In 1997 a minimum hourly wage was also introduced and reform of this continues at regular intervals to try to keep pace with inflation and also to help alleviate poverty by making sure people can afford to meet the most basic of needs.

There was also an aim that by 2010 child poverty would be reduced by 50% but this figure fell short and there was a reduction of around 25%. Despite this shortfall, many of the reform policies were deemed a success and some aims were (and still are) shared ones globally, such as the eradication of child poverty.

The change of government (to a Conservative/Liberal coalition) in 2010 saw continued welfare reform and new policies including the Welfare Reform Act of 2012 which, amongst other things, made changes to housing benefit to prevent under occupancy of social housing (named by the media as the bedroom tax). Other reforms under this Act included the Universal Credit which replaced means tested-benefits and tax credits; phasing out Disability Living Allowance and replacing it with Personal Independent Payments; and introduction of the benefits cap which limits the amount payable to claimants.

These reforms continued the ethos of the previous government which was to make people more responsible for their own circumstances and they also sought to reduce the financial burden of welfare provision, focusing on those who need it most; this is also in response to continually rising fiscal deficits and challenges with meeting the growing welfare budget.

Not surprisingly, welfare reforms always start debates between those who agree and disagree with the reforms themselves and the consequences they have for citizens.

Ever since the introduction of the workhouse system in the 1830 there have been continual attempts by governments to initiate change through welfare reform. Undoubtedly the dynamic nature of society will ensure that reform continues so that the welfare needs of citizens will always remain a priority.

Other sectors providing welfare support

The state (also called the 'public sector') is the main provider of welfare support. Other sectors provide welfare support to varying degrees. The private sector is involved in supporting community welfare projects, mainly through funding, and offering business advice for regeneration initiatives. The private sector also provides a range of insurance schemes that individuals can take up to assist them in maintaining a decent standard of living particularly in older age. Some large organizations in the private sector also provide food, for example supermarkets who distribute food to homeless centres and other charitable establishments towards the end of the food's shelf life.

The charity and voluntary sectors provide a range of welfare support to people in need. For example, one important and growing area of welfare support in this sector is the establishment of food banks, clothing banks and even toy banks. The voluntary sector also provides advocacy for people who require assistance in progressing benefit claims, etc, or who need advice and help accessing specific welfare provisions, housing or employment. The support by these sectors is increasing as cuts are made in government welfare budgets.

You will read more about the charitable and voluntary sector support systems within several subsequent lessons, particularly related to health.

Globalisation, technology and welfare

Globalisation provides a platform where countries can compare welfare systems and evaluate how well these support citizens in their societies. This comparison is a positive step towards a united welfare agenda working towards the eradication of poverty and although ideological, the aim allows debate and analysis on fundamental welfare provisions amongst countries. This is particularly relevant within EU member states where disparities in welfare systems can have an impact on social mobility and the fiscal policies of countries. For example, we see the movement of people to countries where welfare systems are (or are perceived to be) more comprehensive and beneficial than their own. This can result in social inequalities within the receiving society (such as the UK), and also put strain on the infrastructure.

Technology has revolutionized the way we communicate in modern society. Citizens can find information with relative ease via the Internet and media communication allows governments and other welfare support providers to communicate messages to a wide audience.

All government policies are now available to view online and application for welfare benefits can usually be made online as well. This means that benefits can be accessed much more quickly. However, the assumption that all people have access to the Internet and other media devices can cause problems if applications can only be made online. Many in poverty do not have computers or Internet access and have to rely on more traditional forms of communication; this can put many at a disadvantage. Thankfully many charitable and voluntary organizations will help people apply for benefits using communication systems at local libraries or at the offices of the charities providing the support.

Therefore globalization and advancing technology have advantages and disadvantages when discussed in terms of welfare. The advantages include sharing information, comparison of welfare

systems and a shared aim to eradicate poverty. The disadvantages include reinforcement of some social inequalities.

Examination Approaches

The topic of welfare is a growing one as far as examination questions for the AQA are concerned. The problem is that it is such a wide area, and certainly this one lesson cannot hope to cover all the logical possibilities. Remember, too, that welfare is linked with poverty and wealth in the syllabus, so if you are considering answering a question on welfare you need to study poverty and wealth in some detail. You need to consider the relationship between Sociology and Social Policy, and contrasting theories of the Welfare State and its rôle in combating poverty and other forms of social deprivation.

In recent years one major political debate has revolved around the rôle of the voluntary sector in plugging gaps left by the state in welfare provision. Also in an article in *New Society* in February 1981 Bob Holman argued that voluntary agencies would be unable to fill the gap. He pointed to the fact that they were already doing their best to fill existing gaps and, therefore, potentially unable to deal with any new ones that might arise. He also pointed to the dire effects that costs were having on voluntary provision and that their services were already being hit by local council cut-backs of expenditure.

The private sector of health care has been investigated by Ann Shearer who pointed to the growing number of clerical and skilled manual workers who were taking advantage of BUPA etc. In a critical review she suggests that employers have a financial interest but employees are still liable to tax. She further points out that pregnancy is not covered *.... because it's not an illness*, and that the problems of old age and incapacity in the form of geriatric and psychiatric care remain.

Activity 2	Match each key term with the correct definition:

A: Absolute poverty line	1: A store of capital. Obtained via inheritance or accumulation, e.g. via high salaries.
B Relative poverty	2: Referred to by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto 1848 as 'the dangerous class'.
C: Consumption property	3: Having only what is required to meet basic biological needs.
D: Productive property.	4: Property that we have for personal use-clothes, cars, family homes.
E: Income	5: The belief that the state should not be used to bring about any social objectives.
F: Wealth.	6: The flow of resources, either in cash or in kind. Often based on market reward for skills ('earnings').
G: Social Democracy	7: Measured in terms of judgments by members of a particular society of what is considered a reasonable and acceptable standard of living.
H: New Right	8: The provision of welfare from various sources, not just the state.
I: Welfare pluralism.	9: Property that makes money, it is capital and includes factories, farms, stocks and shares.
J: Lumpen proletariat	10: A society with the strong supporting the weak through state intervention via taxation.

Terms and definitions courtesy of www.s-cool.co.uk.

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Work

According to Karl Marx, humans become distinguished from animals as soon as they begin to produce their own means of subsistence, and it is this that forms the basis of human happiness. Marx believed that individuals could express their true natures in the goods they produced and derive immense satisfaction from it.

Work Satisfaction and Technology

The term *work satisfaction* is a very loose one, and can clearly involve value-judgments in its interpretation. For example, it can be equated with work enjoyment and feelings of accomplishment, or it can be limited to a toleration of working conditions resulting from the level of financial rewards accruing.

This makes it extremely difficult to study *work satisfaction*, as an interviewer can easily be misled by the over-simplifications contained in a straightforward answer to a question involving an assessment of attitudes to work. Participant observation probably offers greater opportunities for insight, but it too has dangers with an academic imparting his or her own values and occupational prejudice in interpreting what is *boring* or *rewarding* work.

A number of writers have stressed the negative effects of technology on work-satisfaction. Robert Blauner, for example, in *Alienation and Freedom* (1964) used a questionnaire approach and concluded that technology influences feelings of *alienation* in the work-place in four important ways. In the first place, it determines the degree of control an individual has over his or her work, and at its extreme it can make the individual feel totally powerless. Laurie Taylor and Paul Walton have shown how this can result in industrial sabotage, with deliberate attempts to subvert the power of the conveyor-belt by literally throwing a *spanner in the works*.

Secondly, technology can remove a worker's sense of purpose by separating his or her particular work activity from any meaning or understanding of what the work is all about. This point has been understood by a number of employers who have adopted schemes of work rotation so that it is both less monotonous and the whole process more understandable to the individual worker. Thirdly, technology can lead to isolation and a lack of social integration in work, thereby reducing feelings of companionship. Finally, according to Blauner, *self-estrangement* can result from lack of involvement in work.

Blauner, himself, compared the effects of technology on groups of printers, textile-workers, car-workers, and chemical workers. He concluded that technology was not the only factor at play, with textile-workers not feeling isolated and self-estranged because their industry was situated within particular communities. Nevertheless, it was technology that reduced the need for skill and personal judgment in the car industry that led to feelings of dullness and monotony. At the other extreme the development of automatic processes in the chemical industry restored the situation by creating a need for skilled and responsible repairmen.

Some support for Blauner's findings can be found in other empirical studies of car-workers, such as Studs Terkel in the U.S.A. and Huw Beynon in *Working for Ford's*. Both stressed feelings of tedium and the need for escapism in the form of thinking of financial rewards and leisure interests. Ivan Illich too has attacked the rôle of technology, although in a more fundamental way. While Blauner argues the need for reforms such as work rotation, workers can regain their desired state of personal self-sufficiency by using tools that they themselves can operate.

Criticisms have been made of Blauner's research on the grounds of the limited size of his research. More fundamental, however, are criticisms that he under-emphasizes the rôle of the relations of production and of the cultural setting. To a Marxist such as Harry Braverman, technology is the tool and not the motivating force of capitalist social relations. The nature of work, in this view, is the product of class relations rather than technology, with the greater productivity that could be achieved through worker control being sacrificed for patterns of divide and rule created by job fragmentation. Workers are alienated because the rewards of their labour are appropriated by the capitalist class, and Salaman argues that the absence of the profit-motive and the changed social priorities under the socialist mode of production would change the workers' attitudes.

From a different orientation, Gallie (1978) showed in his comparative study of oil refineries in Britain and France that attitudes to an objectively similar work-situation can be different as a result of reference groups, management and union styles and assumptions, and the whole social and cultural background in which objective working-conditions are situated.

In contrast to the negative approach of Illich and the critical approach of Blauner, many sociologists have stressed the positive aspects of technological development. The society is seen to raise its over-all living standards as wealth is increased. Lenski saw the resulting labour-specialisation as contributing to a narrowing of the gap between the wealthy and the poor, while, in the 1960s, Daniel Bell saw an end to the divisive ideology of *Us v Them.*

Certainly, work is made less exhausting and a more productive leisure time can be opened up. Dangers can still appear, however, with workers being dissatisfied that their training and ability are not fully utilized, and recent developments in micro-technology have shown that technological innovation at a time of economic recession can result in higher levels of unemployment rather than a shorter working week and greater leisure-time.

Finally, there is the danger that some writers ignore the ability of the individual to cope with what may outwardly appear to be a monotonous and boring situation. Baldamus has developed the concept of *traction* as a means by which people do adapt to tedious work. They allow themselves to be pulled along with a sensation of reduced effort, and this gives relative relief from a fundamentally disliked situation. Studs Terkel found one worker - Phil Stallings - let his mind wander to his stamp collection, and it is common for people to reduce tension and frustration by various means.

Perhaps the nearest a teacher finds himself to this situation is the monotony of examination invigilation, and from personal experience this is made more bearable by such means as a mental *bet* as to which students will leave the examination room first or who will require

additional sheets of paper. At the extreme, Taylor and Walton quote the example of workers in a *Blackpool rock* factory who inserted a *filthy* slogan in place of the customary greetings in a half-mile length of it, but more commonly people simply adapt in a way that does not seriously jeopardize production or efficiency.

Contemporary Theories of Technology at Work

Recent theories about technology have attempted to amalgamate the polarities of technological determinism and social determinism, granting technology and socio-cultural forces varying degrees of significance. Winner's argument (1985) that 'technical things have political qualities' is an example of a 'designer technology' approach. It attacks the assumption that technology is neutral and argues that the impact and importance of technology depends on the use we put it to.

Thus Winner relates the example of how New York architect Robert Moses designed bridges so low that buses and therefore the black and poor white sections of New York could not get to Jones Beach. The point is that apparently 'neutral' technological developments actually embody the political concerns of the designer.

One might also argue that it was not just the bridge which stopped the poor reaching the beach, but a whole style of human and non–human obstacles. I might not reach the Queen's Garden Party but it will not be just the gates that stop me. Technology is thus ambiguous and its effects depend on the social relations that surround the way it is used.

Studies on new technology show this very clearly. In theory the expansion of keyboard skills through word processing and computer–based developments might be considered as providing women with an opportunity to liberate themselves from traditionally subordinate positions in offices and factories. But most studies suggest that technological advance tends to buttress or even exacerbate gender–based discrimination (Webster, 1990).

The most recent attempt to articulate a perspective bearing some resemblance to the designer technology approach has been that of Clark et al (1988) and McLoughlin and Clark (1988). Their studies of technological change in the telecommunications industry suggests that one form of exchange equipment facilitates individual working patterns while another lends itself more to team approaches, and that the relative impact of technological and social forces tends to alter, the further away individuals are from the immediate work task. Technology from this perspective therefore is conceptualised as politically impregnated, historically encumbered and as one among many potentially independent variables. But 'once the stages leading

to the choice of a particular system are accomplished, then social choices become frozen in a given technology' (1988).

This approach, it can be argued, underestimates the alloyed nature of technology. In as much as technology embodies social aspects, it is not a stable and determinate object, but an unstable and indeterminate artifact whose precise significance is negotiated but never settled. For example, telephone systems were used originally to broadcast concert music and it was not decided from the outset that the telephone would be first restricted to two–way personal communication and then used to transmit digital communications between computers; these uses were negotiated.

The Deskilling Debate

In the view of Blauner outlined above changing technology was making work more enjoyable in the era of automation. Young and Willmott believed that the middle class was already becoming more work-centred and that the working class would follow with changing technology. In the 1970s and 80s the views of Harry Braverman on technology deskilling the workforce became influential, and so we need to look at these in a little more detail here.

In *Labor and Monopoly Capital,* Braverman argues that while there are more professionals, scientists, engineers and specialist administrators today, such categories include less than one-fifth of the American population. For most people the introducing of modern technology has steadily reduced the need for special skills. He further argues that specialisation and *scientific management* have adapted labour to the needs of capitalism in three ways. In the first place, the traditional knowledge held by the worker of the work process has now been taken over by the manager and reproduced as a set of rules to be followed.

Secondly, the separation of mental from manual labour divorces the workers from the overall logic of what they are doing, thereby preventing them for controlling their environment. Thirdly the management now has the monopoly of knowledge to control each step of the labour process. In Braverman's view the process which has deskilled the manual worker is now being applied to the white collar worker, with the same consequences. In terms of their working conditions and reward levels the vast majority of the labour force now *conforms to the dispossessed condition of a proletariat.*

The basic message of Braverman's work is that the polarisation of the classes predicted by Marx is not taking place with technological innovation eliminating differences of skill and consequent economic rewards within the workforce. Such a view is a useful corrective to the optimism of Lenski, Young and Willmott, etc., but it possibly understates the dialectical relationship between deskilling and reskilling. In recent years we have seen the rise of new specialists in

micro-technology in the same way as the Industrial Revolution created a demand for skilled engineers. It is important, therefore, to examine more closely developments in a whole range of occupations to assess the level of accuracy of Braverman's theory.

The changing nature of work

In general, over the last fifty years, the job market has gradually become more 'flexible'. There are growing numbers of self-employed, homeworkers and teleworkers. Job-sharing has also become more common. A number of firms now employ people on annualised hours (that is, hours of work calculated over a whole year but completed within only part of the year). This means that companies whose sales vary over a year can employ their workers when they are needed, so avoiding costly overtime and paying workers when there is little for them to do.

More extremely, there is the phenomenon of **zero hours contracts**. In this model, the employer promises no work at all, pays by the hour and can dispense with surplus or inconvenient workers at any time. This has many advantages for the employer, but few for the employee. It is often a sign of an imbalance between the numbers in the available workforce and opportunities for work (i.e. in times or regions of high unemployment) as well as typifying a kind of 'free market' capitalism.

Zero hours contracts usually entail great irregularity in a worker's schedule (80 hours one week, none the next) and make it very hard to plan one's life, either in the short-term or the long-term. There is an inevitable sense of insecurity, alienation and a number of other negative psychological consequences for many such 'casual' workers. The pattern of **casualization** may indicate a greater flexibility in working patterns but there is not usually anything 'relaxed' about it. It is almost always more stressful than old fashioned 'regular' employment. The nature of much zero hours work is also problematic – often it involves driving (either taxiing or parcel delivery) to unknown destinations in unpredictable traffic.

Casualization also contributes to a widening gap between what may be called core and periphery workers and to a split between primary and secondary labour markets.

For self-employment to be beneficial for the worker concerned, there needs to be a balance of power, a real opportunity for the worker to say 'yes' or 'no' to certain tasks at certain times, to take control of their schedule and their work-life balance. At best, self-employment can be a form of flexible specialization but only if it is well managed.

As a result of technological developments (e.g. video-conferencing tools like Zoom), social trends and the 2020 pandemic, there has been a big increase in the number of **home-workers**, especially amongst

what used to be called the professional classes. For many, this has led to a better work-life balance (e.g. because no time needs to be spent travelling to work) but there is little evidence that it has contributed to a more equitable distribution of work opportunities across society or made a marked difference to the life chances of those in the more disadvantaged social groups.

Post-Fordism is one name for the dominant system of economic production, consumption, etc, in most industrialized countries since the late 20th century. It is contrasted with Fordism, the system exemplified by Henry Ford's car factories, in which workers worked on a production line, undertaking specialized tasks on a repetitive basis.

Post-Fordism tends to be characterized by some or all of the following phenomena:

- Small-batch production.
- The feminisation of the work force.
- Specialized products and jobs.
- The rise of the white-collar worker and the service economy.
- New information technologies.
- Emphasis on categories of consumer in contrast to the previous stress on social class.

Now read Ken Browne: Sociology for AQA, Vol. 1: AS and 1st-Year A Level, ch. 7, pp. 497-526.

Self-Tuition Quiz

1.   Why did Professor Marshall criticise some contemporary developments in Sociology?

2.   What ideological assumptions lay behind the establishment of the welfare state?

3.   Who wrote *Social Science and Public Policy?*

Summary

The relationship between sociology and the various dimensions of welfare and social policy is a problematic one, with the former having its own ideological concerns and the latter its practical considerations. While sociology has undoubtedly been valuable in highlighting social problems worthy of the attentions of policy-

makers, and many social workers have been *enlightened* by the critical approach of many sociologists, it is inaccurate to view the one as the applied branch of the other. Too many other variables are involved and dangers are implicit in the use of a *pseudo-science* to legitimate policy decisions.

Self-Assessment Test (Lesson Seven)

1.   What is the relationship between Sociology and Social policy?

AQA Subject Content	The lessons in this pack of course materials are linked to the AQA specification. Lessons 6 and 7 relate to Wealth, Poverty and Welfare (sections 3.2.2.4 and 4.2.4 of the AQA specification). If you select this option, you are required to study:
	- the nature, existence and persistence of poverty in contemporary society - the distribution of poverty, wealth and income between different social groups - responses and solutions to poverty by the state and by private, voluntary and informal welfare providers in contemporary society - organisation and control of the labour process, including the division of labour, the role of technology, skill and de-skilling - the significance of work and worklessness for people's lives and life chances, including the effects of globalisation.
	Use the points listed above as headings for a set of notes summarising the key points from the lessons and the textbook. These notes will help you to understand and remember the Information you have read and will be a valuable revision aid. An understanding of wealth and poverty also underlies study of most other areas of sociology, including education and crime.

Answers to Self-Tuition Quiz

1. Professor Marshall regretted the fact that a concern with understanding and alleviating social problems had been replaced by more philosophical questions of the nature of man and society, which he viewed as a dead-end for the subject.

2. Essentially, the ideological assumptions behind the welfare state were liberal-reformist. In other words, there was a recognition of social problems and inequality of opportunity, and its aim was to enable people to provide for their own social needs, but with a 'safety-net' to rescue those who were unable to do so.

3. Martin Rein wrote *Social Science and Public Policy*.

Suggested Answer to Activity One

1. The first passage shows a complete breakdown in communications between people dealing with Clunis. There is no one responsible for co-ordinating his care and little communication between doctors, social workers and police.

2. In the second extract we are shown that if the state pushes responsibility for care onto unpaid carers it is usually women who end up taking responsibility. Some feminists see this as part of a political agenda to return women to the home to provide unpaid support to their families.

Suggested Answer to Activity Two

A: Absolute poverty line	3: Having only what is required to meet basic biological needs.
B Relative poverty	7: Measured in terms of judgments by members of a particular society of what is considered a reasonable and acceptable standard of living.
C: Consumption property	4: Property that we have for personal use – clothes, cars, family homes.
D: Productive property.	9: Property that makes money, it is capital and includes factories, farms, stocks and shares.
E: Income	6: The flow of resources, either in cash or in kind. Often based on market reward for skills ('earnings').
F: Wealth.	1: A store of capital. Obtained via inheritance or accumulation, e.g. via high salaries.
G: Social Democracy	10: A society with the strong supporting the weak through state intervention via taxation.
H: New Right	5: The belief that the state should not be used to bring about any social objectives.
I: Welfare pluralism.	8: The provision of welfare from various sources, not just the state.
J: Lumpen proletariat	2: Referred to by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto 1848 as 'the dangerous class'.