

Winter 12-1-1992

The Making of Social Policy in Britain 1830-1990

L. Margaret Barnett

University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://aquila.usm.edu/fac_pubs



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Barnett, L. M. (1992). The Making of Social Policy in Britain 1830-1990. *Albion*, 24(4), 687-688.

Available at: https://aquila.usm.edu/fac_pubs/6921

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.

woman reformer is called Emilia, Dilke, and Lady Dilke, and two of the early inspectors are alternately called Lucy and Deane, Adelaide and Anderson.

Despite my substantial criticisms, I do not wish to end on a negative note. McFeely has demonstrated her abilities and diligence by producing a very interesting work of considerable value. I simply regret that it is not so important a contribution to women's history as it could have been.

University of South Carolina, Spartanburg

LEE HOLCOMBE

Kathleen Jones. *The Making of Social Policy in Britain 1830–1990*. London: The Athlone Press; distributed by Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, N.J. 1991. Pp. xii, 268. \$50.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

The breaking of the national consensus on welfare by the Conservatives in the 1980s provides the rationale for Kathleen Jones' rather lackluster survey of British social policy over the past 160 years. In her introduction, the author paints a bleak picture of today's attitudes to welfare, which remind her of an earlier age. The Thatcher government's imposition of stiff curbs on spending and its forcing of the public sector to adopt such businesslike qualities as competitiveness, independence, and financial accountability have been accompanied, Jones writes, by the revival of nineteenth-century arguments about the nature of poverty and the role of the state in its alleviation. Britain has witnessed, she says, the reappearance of problems once thought banished by civilized society, notably the stigmatization of poverty and the reliance on charity organizations to fill the gaps in state programs. Jones feels that the lessons of the past are in danger of being forgotten—hence the need for this book.

Until the last few chapters, readers will find themselves on familiar ground—the growth of state and local governments' responsibility for social services up through the creation of the Welfare State. In the author's own words, this “material has been well worked over by social historians” (p. xi) and so, apparently, it has deserved a minimum of analysis and footnotes. Marring the earlier chapters to some extent is an apparent assumption that early-nineteenth century political groups have essentially the same aims and attitudes as later parties bearing similar names. The early Liberals, for instance, are identified only with the Whigs.

Of much greater interest is the latter portion of the book, which tackles the specific changes wrought by the Conservatives over the last decade and the attempts by preceding Labour governments to come to grips with the problems of consumer dissatisfaction, runaway costs, and stifling bureaucracy without actually altering the basic framework of the social services system. The last chapter, on the 1980s, will particularly be welcome to those bewildered by the pace and complexity of the ongoing upheaval. Jones provides a lucid summary of developments in a number of key areas—employment, local government, the National Health Service, community care and the social services, social security, housing, and education.

Much more space could have been devoted to some of these topics, particularly to the pillar of the Welfare State, the National Health Service. Indeed, the author could have developed this whole section to advantage, providing greater insight into the reasons for the radical shift in social policy and into the degree of controversy in individual spheres of action. There is a final section on the impact of change, which returns the reader to the author's

opening arguments, but this is unsatisfactory from a number of points of view. Although the author disclaims a political orientation, her assessment of the Conservatives' record is uniformly negative. Among her criticisms are that the public objects to cuts in health services and education in return for lower taxes, that there has been a widening gap between rich and poor, that homelessness is on the rise, and that the government is creating a smokescreen by making it increasingly difficult to obtain the statistical information necessary for informed objection. Such areas of concern certainly should not be overlooked or downplayed, but do they represent the whole picture? Have there been no benefits at all except for cost cutting? Do only the Conservatives feel that the old system is not worth preserving? Has the British voter not voiced some approval by renewing the mandate for change three times since 1979? Have welfare services yet been dismantled to the point where the author can state with such conviction that "the gap between those who think that poverty is society's responsibility and those who think that it is the individual's responsibility does not seem to have narrowed" since the 1830s? (p. 208). Despite the book's value as a guide to recent events, one is left with the impression that there is much more to be said on this important topic.

University of Southern Mississippi

L. MARGARET BARNETT

Vincent Newey and Ann Thompson, editors. *Literature and Nationalism*. Savage, Md.: Barnes & Noble Books. 1991. Pp. xiii, 286. \$49.50.

This is a collection of eighteen essays and one poem to mark the retirement of Philip Edwards from his professorship at Liverpool University, which he had held since 1974. His high reputation as a Renaissance scholar was secured through critical and editorial work on a range of writers: Thomas Kyd, Philip Massinger, Sir Walter Raleigh and, of course, William Shakespeare. His former colleagues and friends have nevertheless rightly identified *Threshold of a Nation: A Study in English and Irish Drama*, first published in 1979, as being his most influential work.

This means that their celebration of his career is roughly structured along the same lines as this particular study: essays on Renaissance writers followed by ones on Irish writings of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Edwards suggested, in a bold move, that it was productive to study these two historical periods in conjunction. He demonstrated not only the ways in which the later writings drew upon the earlier ones but also, more generally, how both historical moments were conditioned by the Protestant Reformation.

Although this volume reproduces the structure of *Threshold of a Nation*, there are perhaps inevitably some of Edwards's themes which are not developed. His secure sense of theatre history, difficult to recapture in short essays, is missing. More surprisingly, given the double-focus of these essays, there is no attempt to follow up his interesting but relatively brief comments on Renaissance representations of Ireland.

It is nevertheless a tribute to him that this volume finds some of its own directions. There are, for instance, three essays that concentrate on the poetry of the late eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries. Vincent Newey uses his meticulous knowledge of the politics of the period to suggest that even William Cowper's seemingly more detached poetry requires to be set in this context. R. A. Foakes writes well about Samuel Taylor Coleridge's love-hate relationship with Napoleon. Bernard Beattie offers an intricate, cleverly written account of the way in which Lord Byron, the alienated international tourist, is often at odds with Lord