Social policy and individualised rights

CASR Symposium
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The moralisation of welfare recipients in the 21st century: An examination of welfare post-Howard

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Introduction

- Background
- The significance of the Howard years
- Welfare post-Howard
- Dominant constructions of unemployment as a policy problem
Background context

- Australian system of welfare has always been strongly oriented towards labour market participation
- Widely recognised as liberal (and later neoliberal) alongside US and UK
- Post-1970s – range of factors both nationally and globally that facilitated a fundamental rethinking about Australian welfare provision.
Welfare post-Howard
LEANERS!

LEANERS!

CENTRELINK

LEANERS!

Lifters! Anyone need a hand?

PUBLIC $
NSW Disability Support Pensioners now outnumber Australia’s total war wounded by more than 44,000

SLACKERS & SLOUCH HATS
What’s wrong with this view of welfare?
Capitalism is now accepted as the only viable form of social and economic organisation... In such a climate of belief, social problems are increasingly perceived as the problems of individuals and are explained as such... Individuals and social groupings who experience problems are usually those whose attitudes, abilities and behaviour indicate some form of failure to practice the virtue of capitalist philosophy. By demonstrating the locus of a problem to be in the characteristics of the people experiencing it, the capitalist system is both exonerated and legitimised (Jamrozik & Nocella 1998: 82-3).
Political/Social Sphere
Social problems emerge as ‘negative residue’ from pursuit of dominant values and interests.

Administrative Sphere
Problem converted into technical problem for administrative attention

Operative Sphere
Problem converted into personal problem of affected population

Methods of Intervention
Structural Change
Legislation
Allocation of Resources

Administrative restructuring
Applied research
Use of technical expertise

Personal intervention by helping professions (e.g. counselling, therapy, surveillance)

Source: Jamrozik and Nocella (1998: 50)
Challenging dominant constructions….

• How to retain the problem of unemployment in the political sphere for it be reframed as a different sort of social problem requiring a different form of policy intervention

• Engaging more actively with constructions of ‘choice’ and agency to counter the ‘mischievous’ claims that underpin contemporary welfare arrangements
I felt quite penalised and harassed by the welfare system, and it was a very strong metaphor for me about the no-standing zone which it now appears is the welfare system. You can’t actually stand in the welfare system longer than necessary, and you are penalised for standing in the no-standing zone. And my feeling is a valid use of the welfare system is actually to pull over for a short period of time… until such time as you feel safe to move back into the mainstream world (Kathleen)


150 Low Income Australian’s study 2007-2009, ARC Linkage, led by John Murphy and in partnership with Jobs Australia