BLOCK 3 PRIVATE TROUBLES AND PUBLIC ISSUES

UNIT 21 BLOCK 3 REVIEW
Prepared for the course team by John Clarke
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The Open University Press
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA
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writing from the publisher
Designed by the Graphic Design Group of the Open University
Printed in the United Kingdom
by Redwood Books,
Trowbridge, Wiltshire.
ISBN 0 335 12347 3
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Unit 21  BLOCK 3 REVIEW

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UNIT AIMS

The purpose of this unit is to review some of the main themes and issues which have been presented in Block 3, and to provide a reminder of some of the links between these themes and issues and the work of earlier blocks in the course. The block has been a very long one, and has touched on a whole series of topics concerning social work. Obviously, this unit cannot cover everything that has been dealt with, rather it will try to draw out some of the issues which link the different units. So, the main topics for this review will be

1. the nature of social work as a form of social intervention,
2. the arguments about 'problems', 'needs' and rights in social welfare,
3. the relationships between social problems, social inequality and social welfare, and
4. the relationship between historical analysis and the understanding of contemporary social issues

This last topic is obviously rather different from the preceding three. They are primarily concerned with the explicit issues of this block – in terms of studying social work as a form of social intervention. The fourth topic, however, is intended to raise some questions about how, within this course, we have gone about studying social problems and social welfare. You will have found a wide variety of historical examples, comparisons, and evidence as you have worked through the course. In this review unit, we are going to spend a little time exploring why such historical examples have been used, and ask what they contribute to an understanding of contemporary society.

Highlighting these four issues in this review unit should also help you think about how this block has contributed to answering the four questions which were presented in Unit 5 (the review unit for Block 1), and which were returned to in Unit 12 (the review of Block 2).

The four questions were

1. What is social about a social problem?
2. When does a matter of private concern become a social problem?
3. What is the appropriate level of intervention?
4. What are the consequences and outcomes of intervention?

You should try to hold these questions in mind as you work through this unit.

There are no television programmes associated with this unit, but during the course of it you will be asked to read the article by John Ditch in the Course Reader.
Before continuing, I'd like you to write down what you think are the main features about social work as a form of social intervention. What is social work intended to do? How does it go about achieving its aims?

I hope you found these difficult questions to answer, because one of the things you may have discovered from this block is that social work is a very complex form of social intervention. Having said that, let me sketch what I think are some of the key themes about social work as a form of intervention.

In the first place, it is difficult to define the aims of social work as social intervention because these aims are imprecise. Social work deals with a variety of 'client groups' (the elderly, the young, the handicapped, the delinquent and so on), but none of these are distinctive to social work — other agencies are involved with them, too. Nor is it the case that social work deals with all members of these client groups — social work is 'selective' rather than universal.

Similarly, it is difficult to define the aims of social work in terms of precise outcomes (e.g. would the measure of social work success be the number of elderly people cared for in local authority residential institutions? Or would it be the number of people kept out of such institutions?) Social work was established to achieve such objectives as providing care, promoting social welfare, and improving the social functioning of individuals and families. Some of these objectives are embodied in legislation — the statutory duties of social work in relation to particular groups of clients (such as the chronically sick and disabled) or to particular agencies (court duties in the case of delinquents, for example). But important though such statutory duties are, they are not the whole of the 'social work task'.

Equally significant is the problem of whether in defining social work we should pay attention to its formal objectives (the provision of care, the promotion of social welfare etc.) or to its hidden or latent goals (such as the 'containment' of social problems or the exercise of social control). As you have seen in several units in this block, one of the reasons why social work is both a complicated and controversial form of social welfare is that it combines these different functions — providing both care and control. If it is difficult to define social work in terms of its aims and objectives, is it any easier to define it in terms of its methods?

Social work is a distinctive form of social intervention because of its personalized character. This is most obvious in terms of the way social work has viewed problems as individual issues, and has focused on individual clients (and families). But it is equally important to understand that the form of intervention is personalized in a second sense — in that it involves the individual social worker. Unlike other welfare or legal forms of intervention, the person — or personality — of the social worker is a resource, to be used alongside the other benefits and services that might be provided. The establishment of a caring, trusting relationship between the individual social worker and the individual client is a central aim of social work intervention.

It is this personal quality which makes social work stand out from other forms of social intervention — it emphasizes the individual client and the individual social worker in terms of their personal needs and qualities. Although this does not necessarily mean that social work only deals with problems which are seen as personal or individual, it does mean that the structure of social work has a sort of inbuilt bias towards such a personalized view of social problems and social intervention. The emphasis on the personal in social work makes it harder to raise and respond to what Unit 13 called 'social' rather than 'individual' facts.
However, as we have seen during the block, this does not mean that social work is only about the individual social worker and the individual client. We have seen that social workers have to negotiate the needs of the client against the officially recognized categories of need to which the state responds. We have also seen that social workers may work with stereotypes of client groups – as dependent, difficult, demanding, and so on – which may override the characteristics of the individual client. In different ways, social workers may also seek to look at the social causes behind ‘personal’ troubles, and respond in ways (such as group work, community work and through self-help movements) which stress collective or social, rather than individual solutions to problems.

In spite of this, social work remains predominantly an individualistic form of social intervention, characterized by social workers dealing individually with a series of individual cases. Whether clients are self-referred, or are directed to social work by other agencies, they come in the first instance to the social worker as individualized cases. This does not necessarily mean that the problems that they experience are ‘individual problems’, but that social problems are often experienced individually. ‘Public issues’ have personal consequences, and those sections of the population who come into contact with social work – what Unit 14 called the ‘residual and dependent’ working class – are those least likely to have access to collective solutions for their problems. By virtue of being ‘residual and dependent’, they are likely to be relatively marginalized and isolated from the main economic, social, and political relationships of the wider society. Similarly, where we have seen social work involved in residential institutions (for the elderly, children, and mentally ill and handicapped), these ‘institutionalized’ client groups are also likely to be ‘dependent’ and isolated from wider social networks.

In this section, I have mainly concentrated on the difficulties of defining social work intervention. These difficulties arise because state social work was created out of the belief that a single method and approach was appropriate to a whole variety of client groups. The social work ‘task’ does not have a readily defined centre as a consequence of the ‘assemblage’ of different roles, client groups, and duties. This is reflected in the conclusions reached by the Barclay Report on social work which reported in 1982.

Read the following extract from the Barclay Report’s summary of conclusions carefully. Do you think it solves the problem of defining social work?

1. ‘Social work may be classified as direct (including assessment, practical help, surveillance and control, counselling, management, mediation, support of voluntary effort) or indirect (including supervising staff and volunteers, training, planning, management, mediation, community development)

2. ‘Social workers seldom occupy only one of those roles with a client or family or group.

3. ‘If social workers did not undertake the tasks these roles require many of them would be left undone and this would be to the detriment of those affected’ (Barclay Report, 1982, p. 23)
I think it is worth stopping to consider some of the different justifications for social intervention which have appeared in the course so far. In doing so it is worth noting that social intervention usually needs to be justified. It requires a definition of some condition that should be responded to, and the legitimation of some form of social intervention as the appropriate means of responding to that condition. For example, until the early twentieth century, 'unemployment' as a social condition was not seen as requiring any form of state or social intervention. Rather, it was seen as a temporary condition which the workings of the market would remedy. When it did become an issue of political and social concern, there was considerable disagreement about what the most appropriate form of intervention should be, ranging from demands for a legally guaranteed 'right to work' through to enforced emigration of the unemployed. It was only from these conflicts and arguments over how to define and respond to the problem that labour exchanges and unemployment insurance and benefits emerged as the legitimate solution to unemployment as a social problem.

These issues suggest that there are two possible sorts of disagreement about social intervention:

First, over whether the condition is really an issue that ought to be responded to, as opposed to being left alone. For example, in the nineteenth century, some saw poverty as a condition which ought to be left alone, since it was an essential part of the overall working of the economy. Others argued that it constituted a social problem which required some form of social intervention.

Secondly, over what sort of social intervention is an appropriate response to the situation. The same situation can be understood differently – from different theoretical perspectives – and these will suggest different sorts of 'remedies'. So, social interventions directed at poverty might arise from a view of it as an individual problem, a local problem or a national/economic problem – and how the cause is identified will shape what sort of intervention is seen as desirable.

It is important to keep these two areas of argument distinct. It is quite possible to find people arguing against a particular form of social intervention who nevertheless believe that there is a problem which needs some form of response. Their comments are directed at the appropriateness of the intervention rather than whether the problem exists or not. For example, in the unit on the movement for independent living, critics of social work provision were not arguing that the disabled do not experience problems, but that social work has not been the most appropriate form of response. Their definition of the problem produces a view of the need for a different form of response. Equally, critics of residential institutions as a form of social care (for the elderly or mentally ill, for example) were not arguing that social care for such groups should not be provided. Rather, their arguments concerned the form of intervention, claiming that the provision of social care in the community rather than in institutions was the most appropriate form of intervention.

I think that, in the context of this block, we have seen three different forms of justification for social intervention: the existence of a social problem, the responsibility for meeting needs, and the acknowledgement of rights. And one of the difficulties which this block has highlighted is that these different sorts of justifications for social intervention do not sit together very comfortably.

Before we look at each of these in turn, stop and make a note of any forms of social work intervention that can be justified by reference to (a) a social problem, (b) the recognition of need, and (c) the acknowledgement of rights.
**Social Problems**

There are many aspects of social work intervention which have been justified as a response to the perceived existence of a social problem. For example, social work's involvement with juvenile delinquents, in cases of child abuse, with 'problem families' and so on. In each of these cases, the existence of social work, and political perceptions of a 'social problem', have justified the need for social work intervention. And because each of these 'problems' has been defined as having its roots in the 'private sphere' of the home and family (bad upbringing, poor family relationships, incompetent parenting, etc.), social work has been legitimated as an appropriate form of intervention.

But there is an ambiguity in this view of social problems as requiring social intervention. This ambiguity is centred on the question of what is the problem? Is social intervention needed because people have problems — or because people are problems? Think back to Unit 19 on independent living. This issue is an important one in considering how disability is responded to. Part of the impetus for the movement for independent living emerged from the experience of the disabled being treated as if they were the problem, rather than social intervention responding to the problems they experienced. This issue is also well exemplified in the idea of 'problem families' (remember Section 5.2 of Unit 13). The idea of problem families located the 'problems' inside the families rather than seeing families as experiencing problems (some of which were outside, in terms of poverty, poor housing, unhealthy living conditions, etc.) This meant that the focus of intervention was on the internal relationships and processes of the family. The American sociologist, William Ryan, has called this process 'blaming the victim'. Looking at responses to social problems in the USA, he argued that many forms of social intervention define the people with problems as the problem, and that they are held to be the cause of the problems they are experiencing.

This ambiguity in the idea of social problems also helps to explain why social work as a form of social intervention is characterized by the tension between care and control. We might see the idea of 'care' as being a response to people who have problems, while the idea of control is a response to people who are seen as problems. This idea has also appeared in Blocks 1 and 2. For example, Unit 11's discussion of health visiting made a distinction between 'surveillance' (control) and 'monitoring' (care) as different aspects of, and motivations for, social intervention.

**Meeting needs**

Again, there are a variety of aspects of social work intervention which can be justified in terms of meeting needs. For example, social work with the elderly may seek to meet the needs of the elderly for care and accommodation (through placing them in residential care), or it may try to meet their need for independence and autonomy by finding ways of supporting them while they continue to live at home (through such services as home helps, meals on wheels, arranging volunteer visitors, etc.). While much of social work is organized around these tasks of assessing, defining and responding to needs, there are, as we have seen in the course of the block, a number of problems about 'need' in relation to social work.

Make a brief note of any problems you can think of about meeting needs in social work

I think there are two main problems about 'needs' in social work. First, there is the question of what sort of needs social work is intended to meet. As we have seen, the majority of social work clients live in poverty or are dependent on state benefits for economic survival. But social work itself is not intended to meet 'material needs', having few material resources to offer to its clients. At best, social work can try to
help clients in negotiating their needs with other agencies (housing departments, fuel boards, social security departments) Such 'material needs', which may be the most pressing problems for social work clients, cannot be met by social work itself

Secondly, there is the problem of who defines needs. Although the professional culture of social work stresses the importance of meeting the client's needs, this is not a straightforward process. To a large extent, the needs which social work can meet are socially and politically circumscribed. That is, the needs which social work is empowered to meet must first be socially recognized and acknowledged as legitimate. As you saw in Unit 15, the recognition that a child might need to be protected from abuse or maltreatment by its parents is relatively recent (Britain passed laws against cruelty to animals before it passed laws against cruelty to children) And, as Unit 19 made clear, clients and social workers may have very different views of the client's needs. Indeed, social work's professional culture and training has laid great stress on the interpretation and assessment of the client's needs by the social worker. Professional 'insight' is a valued characteristic of the profession. In these circumstances, social work is at the centre of an always potentially conflicting set of definitions of need those which the state and the profession recognize on the one hand, those expressed by the clients on the other. It is this tension that Unit 14 addressed when it talked of social work as a 'mediating profession', negotiating this potential tension between the state and the individual client. In addition, social work encounters changing definitions of needs. Unit 18, for example, illustrated how changing definitions of the needs of client groups played a part in the development of community care policies as an alternative to institutional care.

**Recognizing rights**

Social work intervention can also be justified in terms of the recognition and protection of rights. In cases of Non-Accidental Injury to children, social work has a legal obligation to preserve the right of the child not to be maltreated by its parents. Similarly, social workers may intervene to help clients to obtain their legal right not to be homeless, either by negotiating with housing departments or arranging alternative forms of accommodation, such as hostels or bed and breakfast residences. As in the case of meeting needs, social work is only empowered to intervene where these rights are formally and legally established in the society.

Social work is also involved in intervening where there are potentially conflicting rights — again, for example, in cases of suspected Non-Accidental Injury. Here parents' rights to exercise authority and control over their children may be in conflict with the children's rights to be free from cruelty and mistreatment. Decisions about taking into care may also involve social workers in conflicts over rights, in that they may legally enforce the local authority's right to take a child into care against the parents' wishes, and against the child's wishes. As Unit 15 illustrated, the rights and powers of a local authority over a child in its care have become a controversial issue, since the local authority's rights can involve the denial or diminution of the rights of both the parents and the child.

In each of these areas (and at the points where they overlap), we can see that social work stands at the heart of a set of potential — and often actual — tensions. Although 'problems, needs and rights' may provide the legitimations for social work as a form of social intervention, they also ensure that the practice of social work is highly charged with conflict.
Social work is only one element of the vast array of agencies and institutions in our society which aim to solve social problems and promote social welfare. Its place in this array (which ranges from the police and prisons through the social and economic policies of government) is a relatively limited but significant one. It is limited both in the sense of its overall size and in the sense that there are other 'specialized' agencies which are the primary means which our society has for responding to particular problems or aspects of social welfare. Crime is the 'professional' province of the police, courts, prisons, etc. Housing is the province of local authority housing departments. Poverty is met by the systems of national insurance and supplementary benefit. And so on across the whole range of social problems. Social work is limited by being 'framed' by these other agencies, which, so to speak, set the terms in which social work operates (working with juvenile offenders, social work engages with them on terms set by the police and courts, people with housing problems are met on terms set by housing policies). Part of the peculiarity of social work is this sense of being a 'residual' service, picking up pieces from everywhere.

Nonetheless, social work is distinctive among these agencies by being the service which specializes in the 'individual in general'. Where the other agencies specialize in their particular 'problem', social work has no particular problem of its own. Rather it specializes in the individuals (or families or groups) with problems. It might be described as the 'human face of the welfare state'. As we have seen, this 'individual' focus of social work can be seen as both a strength and a failing. Its defenders have stressed its importance in filling a gap left by the relatively impersonal agencies of state welfare, in which social work can provide a 'humanizing' service to those in need or in distress. Some of its critics, however, have argued that this individual focus has had the effect of turning social problems into individual ones. In that sense, the very presence of social work allows the wider society to leave problems to social work, secure in the belief that social work is an adequate solution.

During the course so far, you have come across arguments that social problems are 'social' in two different senses. On the one hand, social problems may be social in terms of their direct causes—that is, the problems emerge from the way our social arrangements are organized. On the other hand, social problems may be seen as social in the sense that issues are socially defined as problems.

Stop for a moment, and note down problems which you think fall into each of these types of 'social problems'.

Well, possibly you noted such issues as poverty, unemployment, poor housing or environmental conditions in the first type of problem (i.e. those caused by social arrangements), and such topics as the 'youth problem' or 'child abuse' as problems which are socially defined. But in many cases it's not very easy to make this sort of distinction. Think back to the discussion of 'dependency' in old age in Unit 4. Was 'dependency' a problem because of social arrangements (e.g. the enforced removal of people from the labour market at a certain age) or because 'old age' was defined as a problem (the assumption that old age will be marked by a decline in physical and mental competence, and that therefore the elderly need looking after)?

Unit 4 suggested that both of these social processes are at work in producing the dependency of the elderly, each reinforcing the other. The presumed frailty of the elderly legitimates enforced retirement from the labour market. But being out of the labour market also produces economic, social and political marginality, whose personal consequences (feelings of isolation, worthlessness and decline) may justify seeing the elderly as dependent. This combination of processes may also apply to...
those problems which are apparently the most 'individual'. Think back to Unit 19 on independent living. Disablement is apparently a highly individual 'problem' – the product of individual conditions. But as Unit 19 argued, it is the social expectations and assumptions about disability which are disabling, and which produce dependency. By assuming that disability necessarily means dependency, social arrangements and social interventions work to fulfil this prophecy, thus marginalizing the disabled.

I want to suggest that we can see connections between two sorts of social inequality and social problems. On the one hand, some of the problems we have considered are connected to material social inequality: the unequal distribution of resources (income, wealth, housing etc.). On the other, social problems can be seen as connected to inequalities in the power to define social problems, as we have seen, very often those groups who are viewed as 'social problems' (problem families, adolescents, the disabled, the elderly poor, etc.) are those who are relatively powerless – both in economic and social terms. They are economically, socially and politically marginalized, and as such, are vulnerable to others' definitions of them. These other definitions can be found in prevailing social ideologies (for example, about gender, race, age, disability, expected standards of parenting, etc.), in the social policies of the state (about what sort of welfare is provided, to whom and on what conditions), and in the professional views of welfare workers, such as social workers (about the causes and solutions of problems).

In Section 5, I'm going to ask you to read an article from the Course Reader which looks at one such set of definitions (about poverty) and their implications for social policy and for the poor. But before that, I want to summarize some of the implications of what I've said so far about social work.
4 SUMMARY: THE STORY SO FAR

The tensions of social work derive from where it stands at the intersection of social problems, social inequality and social welfare in modern Britain. As the ‘residual’ service of the welfare state, dealing with marginalized groups, it is particularly vulnerable to changes in both the patterns of social inequality, and in the policies of the welfare state (e.g. the development and implementation of ‘community care’). We have seen how it is at the heart of conflicts about problems, needs and rights, and is enmeshed in the tension between care and control. And, as Unit 20 showed, the position of social work also makes it the subject of political controversy about the state and social welfare.

In this sense, social work is itself ‘dependent’. Its practice is affected by changing patterns of social need, and changing definitions of social problems. Its practice is also shaped by the changing social and economic policies of the state. For this reason, the following block moves outwards from the individual and familial focus of social work to examine the broader patterns of social inequality and social welfare within which social work operates. It looks at the changing patterns of inequality and social welfare in postwar Britain. As Unit 20 indicated, the promotion of social welfare has become the subject of increasing political argument since the mid-1970s. Block 4 examines some of the different definitions of the social and economic ills of modern Britain – and the diverse social policies which have been put forward to remedy them.

One central thread which has maintained the connection between social work and the wider structures of social inequality and social welfare is the issue of poverty, and the links between poverty and employment. This issue is the major focus on Block 4, but it has also been a constant theme in this block’s analysis of social work. The next section of this unit looks at one of the ways in which this connection between poverty, social work and social welfare has played a major role in shaping the development of the welfare state in Britain. You may remember that in Unit 13, the origins of social work were caught up in the distinction between the ‘deserving and undeserving poor’. It is that distinction – and its consequences – which is the focus of the next section.
5 DEFINING THE POOR

This section of the unit will be based on the article by John Ditch in the Course Reader entitled 'The undeserving poor unemployed people, then and now'. There are two purposes in looking at the article. One is to examine the arguments which John Ditch is making about the influence of the idea of the 'undeserving poor' on social welfare. The other is to consider the role which historical analysis of the type which Ditch presents can play in the study of contemporary social issues.

At this point, I would like you to read the article by John Ditch. While you are reading it, it would be useful if you would make notes on what you think are the main points of the argument which John Ditch is making. I'd also like you to think about why John Ditch is looking at 'then and now', rather than just at contemporary policy about the unemployed. What difference does the use of historical comparison make to the argument he puts forward? As usual when reading articles like this, you may find it helpful to quickly 'skim read' it first, to get the general sense, and then return to it and read it more thoroughly and make notes.

5.1 The undeserving poor

What follows are my notes on what I thought were the most important points of John Ditch's argument, which include notes on where I thought there were connections between what he was saying and some of the points that have come up during the course.

1. The idea of a distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor is a significant one for social policy, and has been influential since its origins in the practice of the Poor Law in the 1830s through to the present day.

2. The distinction is linked to an economic theory about why people work, which sees them as rational economic calculators. Thus they should not be offered incentives not to work (in the discussions of 'less eligibility' and 'replacement rates').

3. The distinction is also a moral one, in that it sees the undeserving as poor (or unemployed) because of their own failings. (We also saw this in Unit 13 in the work of the Charity Organization Society.)

4. These attitudes and beliefs (even when they are not supported by evidence) have played a major role in influencing policy.

5. Even with changing social policies about unemployment and poverty (with the state taking a greater role), the distinction has continued to play a major role in how the poor are viewed and treated. For example, in the interwar years, there was much concern about 'scroungers', and in the 1980s there is also political and public concern about 'work incentives' and 'availability for work'.

6. They also have an effect on those who are dependent on welfare benefits, in that they 'stigmatize' the poor. Such 'stigma' prevent some people from claiming their entitlement to benefit.

7. Such 'stigma' may also contribute to the social and political marginalization of the unemployed and poor, who do not feel themselves to be full 'citizens' of the society. (We have already talked about the connections between social welfare and marginalized social groups in this unit, and in earlier units, such as Unit 14 and Unit 20.)
That's my summary of what I thought were the most important points of the argument of the article I've obviously left out a lot (and perhaps left out some of the points you thought were important) In particular, I've left out almost all of the detailed examples which the author used to make his argument, keeping in only a few words (like 'less eligibility') to remind me in case I want to make use of the arguments he's made. Hopefully, that will help me go back and find the examples and illustrations that he's used. So from my reading and notetaking on the article, I've been able to sketch the bare bones of the article's argument. But what about the other question that I raised about the role which historical analysis played in the argument?

5.2 'Then and now': the role of historical analysis

Although the main focus of this course has been on social policy and social welfare in contemporary Britain, you will have noticed that many of the units use comparative examples to try to highlight or illuminate particular issues. Some of these comparative examples have been 'cross-cultural', that is drawn from societies whose social organization and culture differs from our own. But others have been historical examples drawn from earlier periods of British society, as in the case of John Ditch's article. In this sense, while D211 is not a 'history' course (in that it does not set out to try to trace the historical development of social problems and social welfare), history has played an important role within it. To some extent, this type of use of history is almost inevitable in the social sciences. There is no date at which 'history' stops, and 'contemporary society' begins (which might match an academic division of labour between the historian and the social scientist). Indeed, by the time you read this, the things that I might be writing about now will already be 'history'.

So, even though social scientists may not be historians (in the sense of doing original historical research and analysis), history can be an important element in the way social scientists go about their analyses. John Ditch's article is a very clear example of this. He has used historical examples (drawn from the research of historians) to illuminate an issue in contemporary social policy, and in doing so highlights some connections which might be missed if one only looked at contemporary policy. This is a fairly common use of history by social scientists, and you may remember that Unit 13 began with a brief discussion of this use of history. It suggested that social scientists often used historical examples to examine the processes of continuity and change.

Think back to John Ditch's article. Can you identify what processes of continuity and change were dealt with in it? Make a note of any you can think of. (It may help to re-read the article again very quickly, if you can't remember any.)

Obviously, the main aspect of continuity which is emphasized by the article is the distinction between the 'deserving and undeserving poor' itself. That is the main focus of the article. But this is linked to other continuities too, for example, the concern about 'work incentives' in the planning of social policy towards the unemployed, and the role played by economic theories about the calculations made by workers which put 'work incentives' in a central place.

But the article also discusses changes most obviously the changes that have taken place in social policy since the Poor Law (from the introduction of unemployment insurance through to the many postwar reorganizations of social security). But within this, the author is concerned to emphasize the continuities within those changes,
rather than the changes themselves. John Ditch also looks at changes in how the
distinction between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ have taken place, for example,
he suggests that, in contemporary Britain, it is such groups as the elderly and
disabled who are seen as ‘deserving’, while the unemployed and single parents are
not. Here again, change and continuity are woven together, for it is the unemployed
who have remained the central focus of the ‘undeserving’ category since the early
nineteenth century.

The article is an excellent example of how the study of contemporary issues can
benefit from the use of historical comparison and analysis. It draws attention to
influences on contemporary social policy which might otherwise be left out of
account. Most importantly, it draws attention to the mix of processes of continuity
and change that have taken place around this topic – rather than suggesting that
we can draw direct parallels between the early nineteenth century and contemporary
Britain.
In this final section of the unit, I want to return briefly to the four questions which were posed in the Introduction (and which were picked up from the other review units you have studied so far). I hope that some of the connections between the topics of this block and those questions are clear to you. You will find it a useful review (and potential revision) exercise if you try to answer those questions again here, drawing on your work on Block 3.

1. What is social about a social problem?
2. When does a matter of private concern become a social problem?
3. What is the appropriate level of intervention?
4. What are the consequences and outcomes of intervention?
REFERENCES
