

How political ideology influences social policy essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



An ideology is quite simply about ideas. It is defined as beliefs, opinions and attitudes which when put together form a set. This set of ideas, attitudes and opinions can influence social policy. The word ideology is commonly used to describe political ideals. Each political party is described as having a particular ideology.

The type of social policy adopted by a society will have a strong influence on that society's structure, the life chances of its citizens and the way in which that society choose to regulate and allocate its resources. Firstly a society must decide what level of state intervention it finds politically, financially and socially acceptable. Secondly it will develop policy that reflects a particular model of welfare provision. Thirdly an eligibility or needs criterion is established for those who will benefit from the policy.

The concept of welfare relates to the way a society ensures the 'well being' of its citizens. A society has to decide who should be responsible for its well-being and in what circumstances. Society has to choose which needs to meet and how it will cope with social problems. Most societies use a mix of the models outlined below:

* The Residual and Selective models of welfare hold that the state should provide welfare if the individual, family or private sector are unable to do so. The state provides a 'safety net' based on a criterion of need. This criterion targets those most disadvantaged. Both Britain and the USA adopt this model but apply it in different ways.

* The Institutional model of welfare holds that welfare provision is an important function of society. The institutional welfare state aims to ensure a decent standard of living for all citizens. It is based on a belief in social equality and the redistribution of resources from those with more to those with less. Similarly the Universal model holds that services should be available to everyone as a right. Sweden and Denmark adopt a form of this model.

* The Individual Achievement model holds that social welfare is part of the economy, that social need should be met on merit and should reward performance, productivity and effort. Mrs Thatcher (Prime Minister 1979-1990) tended to adopt this view.

Compare and contrast the legislative and social policy changes that have taken place over the past fifty years in Britain; identifying differences in political ideology and particular views of the family. State how these ideas have been influential in early years care and education provision and possible consequences for the family.

Hughes and Lewis (1993) note that the post war coalition government and the newly elected Labour government of 1945 based their economic and welfare policies on a social democratic political ideology. The aims of social democracy were to achieve social equality and social improvement through social policies and the state adopting an interventionist role. Social Democracy can be identified as having 3 main ideals: social equality, social justice and equality of opportunity for everyone within society.

The main objectives of Social Democratic ideology was to reduce inequality through introducing social policy and new legalisation and for the first time, the government accepted responsibility for the well being of its citizens. The government would achieve this by adopting an interventionist role by interfering in areas of health, education, work and welfare and introducing new policy. It was no longer accepted that the family should take care of its self, the state acknowledged that society was unequal and that poorer families needed help. It was hoped that this paternalistic attitude adopted by the state would produce a new sense of collective security and promote social cohesion.

Pascall (1986 p 198) cited in Muncie et al (1997) identifies 3 main features of family ideology on which she argues the Beveridge reforms were based:

1. Women are available to do housework and care for dependents without pay.
2. Couples consist of one full time male breadwinner and one housewife whose work outside the home is insignificant being merely for 'pin money'.
3. Women can look to men for financial support.

In 1947 the National Assurance Act was introduced due to the fact that there was a considerable amount of single women who had been widowed throughout the war period. These women could not be dependant on a husband and so required assistance. The benefit was means tested and paid to women without husbands and those without work due to caring

responsibilities, this provided a 'safety net' against destitution but was set at a low rate and as a consequence these women were amongst the poorest in the country.

Muncie and Wetherall (1997) suggest that the ideology of the family promoted by the post war labour government constructed an ideal family type as consisting of heterosexual couple; male breadwinner, dependent wife who stays at home and looks after the dependents and their children. This ideology was strongly influenced by Bowlby's work (1951, 1953) that throughout the war had studied children who had been separated from their mothers. Bowlby argued through his maternal deprivation thesis that children who are detached from maternal care grow up to be emotionally disturbed and affectionless.

Bowlby's work had a huge affect on popular thinking and influenced the government, health, care and education professionals of this period. This theory of maternal deprivation and ideology of the family had a huge impact on early year's provision because as a consequence of such views the public funding of childcare was not seen as important or a responsibility of the state and as such nursery and child care facilities were scarce. The few public places available were allocated to children in 'need'. It was considered that the early years of a child should be spent receiving love and attention at home with mother and this would assist the family in being correctly socialised. This was seen as 'natural' to a child's 'normal' development.

The consequences of such family ideology meant that for those women who could not afford alternative child care or who found it difficult to find other provision were either restricted to low paid part time work or dependency on their husbands. This restricted opportunities for such families and reduced choices, especially for single parent families and families on low income.

The political ideology of the conservatives was market liberal theory also referred to as neo liberalism that was based on the principle of individual rights and freedom of the individual. Neo liberalism was grounded in beliefs that:

1. The individual should be responsible for their own destiny and should be allowed to make free choices.
2. Responsibility for the family rests with the individual and the state should only intervene when the individual and family cannot achieve this through no fault of their own. As such, the state should adopt non interventionist policy and a residual model of welfare.
3. The free market in goods, labour and services should be allowed to operate without state interference and this is necessary if a capitalist market is to function effectively and efficiently. It was argued that undue state interference in the workings of economic market would upset the normal balance and free play of market forces and that the market should be left alone to manage and regulate itself.

The conservative government structured its reforms on a particular ideological view of the family - a belief that the nuclear family consisting of married heterosexual couple comprising of male breadwinner and housewife, who may or may not be involved in part time work and their children were the ideal type. The individual was responsible for the financial and emotional care of the family and this was achieved through hard work and enterprise. The state should interfere only when the individual and family, through no fault of their own could no longer meet the families needs. Such an ideology resulted in the state adopting a residual and selective model of welfare targeting those in most need.

The focus on individual responsibility influenced the passing of 3 acts relating to parental responsibility and the individual rights of the child:

* The Children's Act (1989) that emphasised the importance of promoting the welfare of children and where parental responsibility became of paramount importance. The act stated that parents individually or jointly must maintain, care for and protect children from abuse or neglect and they should control their behaviour. This act influenced all policy relating to children and was perhaps the most influential in early years care.

* The Child Support Act (1991) stated financial responsibility for children was the responsibility of the absent parent. The act conferred wide powers on the newly formed child support agency that had the responsibility for ensuring that fair maintenance was paid for the child or children and their carer. The act stated that absent parents must be named and failure to disclose would

penalise benefit claimants by the imposing of a reduction of 20% for 12 months and 10% for a further 6 months.

In 1996 the government extended this to 40% reduction for 3 years. Claimants could only refuse to name absent fathers if there had been involvement of rape or incest. This policy strategy was introduced to allow the government to recoup some of the welfare expenditure and define financial responsibility for children in terms of absent parents and not the state.

* The Criminal Justice Act (1991) stated that the discipline of children was a responsibility of the parents. The act made the provision of a court order where parents could be forced to pay their children's fine for unsocial behaviour and that parents could be bound over to take proper care and exercise discipline over their children. If parents refused, they too would face criminal proceedings and be fined. The act was based on the view that juvenile delinquency was more a product of bad parenting rather than social or economic factors.

Cutting public expenditure on welfare was one of the main objectives for policy changes and reducing social security benefits was high on the political agenda, Lewis (1998) observes that in 1980's and 1990's policy reforms there was the passing of 3 social security acts in 1986, 1989 and 1990 that all reduced benefit payments and worst affected by these changes were low earners, single parent families and women.

Under the social security act (1986) changes were made to the state earnings related pension schemes (serps), high paid workers were allowed to opt out and pay a lower contribution for the state basic pension and take on private/occupational pension schemes, this was in keeping with the aim to increase individual choice, however, it reduced the redistributory principle where previously those that could afford to pay more did so and subsidised low earners and as a result less money was available for state pensions.

The 1986 social security act also changed the rules for entitlement to unemployment benefit. Those who left their job voluntary or were dismissed had to wait longer to claim. The time extended from 6 weeks to 13 weeks in 1988 and to six months in the 1990 act. The job seekers allowance introduced in 1995 to replace unemployment benefit would now be paid for a maximum of six months and linked to the principle that it would be paid providing the claimant sought paid work.

The government also targeted low income families and single parent families and placed emphasis on more means tested benefits. The government had plans to abolish universal child benefit payments and wanted to means test it and pay it to a selective group of those in most need. However, there was strong opposition and the government were forced to rethink. Instead, child benefit payments were not kept in line with rises in prices and inflation and so the 'real value' fell. Between 1988-90 the government saved $\frac{1}{2}$ 350 million and child benefit was not updated until 1991.

The conservative government welfare reforms had a sharp impact on low income families with young children and single parent families in particular. As a result of means tested benefit and tax reforms that favoured the affluent middle class, there was a widening of the gap between rich and poor. Oppenheim (1993) noted that between 1979 and 1989 12 million people were living on less than 50% average income and welfare benefits had fallen behind prices and average earnings. As a consequence, there was a huge increase in low income families experiencing poverty.

New Labour's political ideology comprised of ideas taken from the social democracy of old Labour which believed in social equality and social justice through social policy and conservative neo liberalism that believed in the free market and individualism.

'Blairism' or new Labour political ideology was based on a language of individual responsibility and opportunity, where a residual and selective model of welfare was retained. New Labour welfare reforms were centred on a political ideology that saw the provision of welfare in terms of a social contract between the State and providers and the recipient of welfare and where a compromise was reached whereby the State would act as an enabler of welfare services and opportunity, in return for an undertaking that the recipient would return to or find unemployment.

The consultation document and green paper 'supporting families' (1998) outlines new Labour's policy aims:

- * Increased support and advice to those actively seeking paid work through the introduction of personal advisors through a 'single gateway' of access to advice and a more coordinated service and investment in education and training schemes.
- * Tax initiatives and increased financial support for families with young children.
- * A commitment to help families balance work and home through more family friendly and employment policy.
- * A commitment to strengthening marriage through increased counselling and support networks.

New Labour's ideology of the family is based on the belief that the married, working, heterosexual couple, together with their children is the ideal type of relationship to achieve stability in the family and society on the whole. This can be seen in the policy commitment to strengthen the institution of marriage. However, there is also recognition that Britain is a multicultural society made up of diversity of family types and that the government has a responsibility to these families, who may need extra support by the provision of opportunity to enable them to keep out of poverty and allowing such families to play a positive role in society. Such a belief has shaped welfare reforms and initiatives of the late 1990's and 21st century which have included: the welfare to work programme incorporating the New Deal, Sure Start, working family tax credit and National Child Care Strategy.

Pugh (2001) observes that in the late 1990's there has been a significant organisational change within local authorities with regards to early years and child care provision with the setting up of Early Years Child Care and Development Partnerships, some have chosen to develop existing structures, while others have placed emphasis on joint planning and unitary structures. The Health Act (1999) enabled local authorities to develop integrated child care services and placed the responsibility for early year's services with the department for education and skills.

Evaluate which legislative and policy decisions you think have been most significant to early year's care/education and families with young children. Draw some justified conclusions based on the evidence you have presented stating which changes you think had the most impact on families with young children.

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Bowlby argued through his maternal deprivation thesis that children who are detached from maternal care grow up to be emotionally disturbed and affectionless. Bowlby's work had a huge affect on popular thinking and influenced the government, health, care and education professionals of this period. This theory of maternal deprivation and ideology of the family had a huge impact on early year's provision because as a consequence of such views the public funding of childcare was not seen as important or a responsibility of the state and as such nursery and child care facilities were scarce.

The few public places available were allocated to children in 'need'. It was considered that the early years of a child should be spent receiving love and attention at home with mother and this would assist the family in being correctly socialised. This was seen as 'natural' to a child's 'normal' development. Without childcare facilities, however, the children could only develop emotionally and would be behind in their development of other areas.

The consequences of such family ideology meant that for those women who could not afford alternative child care or who found it difficult to find other provision were either restricted to low paid part time work or dependency on their husbands. This restricted opportunities for such families and reduced choices, especially for single parent families and families on low income.

Nowadays, this ideology has changed and now women are seen as an equal rather than as someone who spends their days looking after their husband and children. Husbands have become more dependant and even take on more domestic roles in the home. Women are not only more equal in the home but also in the workplace because of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and 1986.

This protects individuals from sex discrimination when applying for a job, at work, renting a home, house sale and purchases, in education and using goods and services. Men and women were both entitled to fair and equal treatment. Also the Equal Pay Act 1972 stated that wages should be the same for a particular job regardless of whether it is a man or a woman

worker. The Equal Opportunities Commission was set up to support the laws effecting sexual discrimination.

The conservative government structured its reforms on a particular ideological view of the family - a belief that the nuclear family consisting of married heterosexual couple comprising of male breadwinner and housewife, who may or may not be involved in part time work and their children were the ideal type. The individual was responsible for the financial and emotional care of the family and this was achieved through hard work and enterprise.

The state should interfere only when the individual and family, through no fault of their own could no longer meet the families needs. Such an ideology resulted in the state adopting a residual and selective model of welfare targeting those in most need. The Conservatives improved the ideology because they believed that the wife may well be occupied with part time work whereas Old Labour assumed women should stay at home and be dependant on their husbands.

The conservative government welfare reforms had a sharp impact on low income families with young children and single parent families in particular. As a result of means tested benefit and tax reforms that favoured the affluent middle class, there was a widening of the gap between rich and poor. Oppenheim (1993) noted that between 1979 and 1989 12 million people were living on less than 50% average income and welfare benefits had fallen behind prices and average earnings. As a consequence, there was a huge increase in low income families experiencing poverty.

New Labour's ideology of the family is based on the belief that the married, working, heterosexual couple, together with their children is the ideal type of relationship to achieve stability in the family and society on the whole. This can be seen in the policy commitment to strengthen the institution of marriage. However, there is also recognition that Britain is a multicultural society made up of diversity of family types and that the government has a responsibility to these families, who may need extra support by the provision of opportunity to enable them to keep out of poverty and allowing such families to play a positive role in society. Such a belief has shaped welfare reforms and initiatives of the late 1990's and 21st century which have included: the welfare to work programme incorporating the New Deal, Sure Start, working family tax credit and National Child Care Strategy. With New Labour believing that there are different family types, this had a positive effect on the families with children as they based their reforms on this idea.

Pugh (2001) observes that in the late 1990's there has been a significant organisational change within local authorities with regards to early years and child care provision with the setting up of Early Years Child Care and Development Partnerships, some have chosen to develop existing structures, while others have placed emphasis on joint planning and unitary structures. The Health Act (1999) enabled local authorities to develop integrated child care services and placed the responsibility for early year's services with the department for education and skills.

All these governments based their ideologies on the same family principle that families should consist of a married heterosexual couple comprising of

male breadwinner and housewife, and their children were the ideal type.

New Labour however realised that Britain is a multicultural society made up of diversity of family types and that the government has a responsibility to these families.