

## Introduction

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THIS SPECIAL ISSUE on social welfare was conceived specifically to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the introduction of old age pensions by the Liberal government of New Zealand in 1898. However, it would be inappropriate to write in terms which celebrate this event as marking 100 years of welfare in New Zealand, despite Keith Sinclair's claim that the Liberals were 'among the first to step on a political road . . . towards the Welfare State'.<sup>1</sup> Historians have largely abandoned a celebratory approach to welfare history. This is partly a result of the present crisis in welfare in many Western nations, and also a result of the changing preoccupations of historians themselves.

In December 1990 the newly elected National government's Treasurer, Ruth Richardson, announced her intention to 'redesign' the welfare state.<sup>2</sup> The new Minister of Social Welfare, Jenny Shipley, was also intent on tackling welfare dependency head on. While still in Opposition the previous year she asserted it was 'time New Zealanders stopped treating as "wicked" any MP who want[ed] to take social welfare out of the sacred cow class'.<sup>3</sup> On taking over as Prime Minister in late 1997, she made it clear that welfare and family policy would be 'a defining feature of her leadership'.<sup>4</sup> New Zealand is not alone in reformulating welfare. In the United States the second Clinton administration has promised to 'end welfare as we know it' by the year 2000.<sup>5</sup> In Britain the current Labour government has placed a complete revision of the welfare state on top of its agenda. Governments in Germany, France and Scandinavia have been examining experiments in welfare in countries with a reviving economy such as Chile.<sup>6</sup> These changes have not only inspired but also made timely fresh interpretations

1 Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, rev. ed., Auckland, 1988, p.188.

2 *New Zealand Herald*, 20 December 1990.

3 *ibid.*, 24 February 1989.

4 *Sunday Star-Times*, 21 December 1997.

5 *Observer*, 25 May 1997, cited in Dorothy Porter, 'New Approaches to the History of Health and Welfare: Essay Review', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 72 (1998), p.84.

6 Porter, p.84.

of welfare history. Those supporting and those criticizing the new welfare agendas have appealed to the past, often basing their claims more on assumption than on detailed research.<sup>7</sup>

Traditionally New Zealand's welfare history was seen to have originated with the Liberals, but nineteenth-century historians are arguing for much more continuity with the early nineteenth century, and with the ideology and practice of the British Poor Laws in particular. Old age pensions are no longer seen as a dramatic break with the past and, as David Thomson argues in this volume, the policy shifts of our own times can be positioned within a series of cyclical shifts that have characterized social provision over the centuries in the Western world and Britain in particular.

The contraction of the welfare state in the late twentieth century has led to greater acknowledgement of alternative and complementary channels of welfare delivery and, most especially, the complex interaction between state provision, voluntary philanthropy, mutual aid and the private sector. The notion of a 'mixed economy of welfare' has come to the fore in international welfare historiography.<sup>8</sup> Many of the articles in this volume highlight the changing relationship between state agencies and other service providers, or, like Jenny Carlyon in her article on friendly societies, argue for an awareness of the full spectrum of arrangements made by individuals to assure their own and others' welfare. Derek Dow, in his study of medical services for Maori, and Astrid Baker, in her examination of pharmaceutical benefits, show the intersection of the private medical market and state subsidies over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Taking an even longer-term view, Thomson considers the 'mix of public and private welfare rights and duties' from pre-industrial England to twentieth-century New Zealand, challenging the uniqueness of our own era.

Over the past 20 years re-evaluations of our welfare past have also been inspired by new trends in social history, most especially by its acknowledgement of those at the bottom of the social heap, those likely to be the recipients of welfare in its various forms. The focus has been redirected from policy makers to include consumers, and to address the implementation and impact of welfare — or its absence — on society. Using both case records and oral history, recent studies have attempted to include welfare recipients in their surveys, and to present such individuals not as passive, but as agents whose interactions with

7 D. Green, *From Welfare State to Civil Society. Towards Welfare that Works in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1996; D. Green, 'Charity Starts at Home, Not With Government', *New Zealand Herald*, 20 March 1996.

8 See, for example, Jane Lewis, 'Family Provision of Health and Welfare in the Mixed Economy of Care in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Social History of Medicine*, 8, 1 (1995), p. 1; Anne Digby and John Stewart, 'Welfare in Context', in A. Digby and J. Stewart, eds, *Gender, Health and Welfare*, London, 1996, p. 2.

welfare processes were both complex and active.<sup>9</sup> Articles in this collection are informed by an awareness of those on both sides of the welfare interface, and some explicitly draw upon case materials. Bronwyn Dalley uses Child Welfare files to show the complexities of child welfare officers' interactions with Maori families and communities, suggesting greater flexibility of approach than has recently been appreciated. Like Dow and Thomson, she argues that longer-term studies of welfare, which go well beyond recent decades, are needed to assess current welfare directions.

In much of New Zealand's welfare historiography, with its focus on social legislation, Maori remained absent. As Bill Oliver pointed out in his 1988 historical survey for the Royal Commission on Social Policy, Pakeha welfare in the nineteenth century was in many ways predicated on Maori dispossession of land; on Pakeha land settlement as an *alternative* to welfare.<sup>10</sup> However, until recent times, welfare legislation largely assumed a convergence of Maori and Pakeha interests (though the 1898 Old Age Pensions Act set a precedent in providing a mechanism for the payment of pensions at a lower rate to Maori than to Europeans). Much of the framework of recent analysis of welfare as applied to Maori has been set by works such as Donna Awatere's *Maori Sovereignty* and the historical section of the 1986 report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare, *Puao-te-ata-tu (Day Break)*.<sup>11</sup> Such works have been immensely critical of the interaction of state welfare agencies with Maori, implicating those agencies in larger processes whereby Maori lost autonomy, land and an equitable share in national resources. While considerable research is currently being done on land issues under the aegis of the Waitangi Tribunal and associated agencies, there is still a deficit of research on Maori welfare, more narrowly defined. Articles in this volume by Dow (on Maori health services) and Dalley (child welfare) suggest caution in assessing the intention of government policies towards Maori, in these areas at least. While concluding that policies were more complex than has been represented, they acknowledge that their research is based on government sources and is told from the perspective of policy makers: as Dalley reminds us, Maori sources and perspectives would result in a very different story.

9 A key work in this area is L. Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives. The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston 1880–1960*, London, 1988. For New Zealand see M. Tennant, *Paupers and Providers. Charitable Aid in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1989; A. Else, *A Question of Adoption*, Wellington, 1991; Barbara Brookes, 'Women and Madness: A Case-study of the Seacliff Asylum, 1890–1920', in Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald, Margaret Tennant, eds, *Women in History 2*, Wellington, 1992, pp.129–42.

10 W.H. Oliver, 'Social Policy in New Zealand: An Historical Overview', *New Zealand Today. Report of the Royal Commission on Social Policy*, Vol. One, 1988, pp.4–10.

11 Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty*, Auckland, 1984; Appendix One, 'Historical Perspective', *Puao-te-ata-tu (Day Break)*, Wellington, 1986.

The articles in this issue are indicative of a growing interest in the history of welfare provision and new approaches to it. The historiography of welfare in New Zealand is at a crossroads in 1998, with recent and imminent publication of major new works.<sup>12</sup> These include detailed studies of specific areas of social policy, and broader considerations of the relationship between the state and other welfare providers. All are to be welcomed as adding to debates over the need for welfare, its appropriate targets, constituent elements and future directions.

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12 These include David Thomson, *A World Without Welfare. New Zealand's Colonial Experiment*, Auckland, 1998; Michael Bassett, *The State in New Zealand 1840–1984: Socialism without Doctrines?*, forthcoming; Bronwyn Dalley, *Family Matters: Child Welfare in Twentieth-century New Zealand*, forthcoming; Derek Dow, *Government Policy and Maori Health, 1840–1940*, forthcoming; Margaret McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand, 1898–1998*, forthcoming.