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THE IMPACT OF POLICY ON SOCIAL INEQUALITY
A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BELGIAN SITUATION

INTRODUCTION

In order to introduce the topic of this article I'd like to start with the conclusion J. Le Grand – a British economist/sociologist – formulates in his book: *The strategy of equality. Redistribution and the social services*. After having analyzed in detail public policy on health care, education, housing and transport in Great-Britain he states the following: „Overall it is difficult to avoid the implication that the strategy of promoting equality through public expenditure on the social services has failed. It has failed to achieve full equality of whatever kind for most of the services reviewed. In those areas where data are available it has failed to achieve greater equality over time, and, in some cases, it is likely that there would be greater equality if there was no public expenditure on the services concerned” (Le Grand, J., 1982:132).

With this article it is my intention to analyze the relationship between social inequality and social policy in Belgium. Can the conclusions of J. Le Grand concerning the British situation also be applied to the Belgian situation? Can his conclusion be generalized for other social services like the social security and personal social services? In short, I'll try to examine if and to what extent the Belgian state, through a large amount of public expenditure on the social services, has succeeded in eliminating or in reducing the primary social inequalities between individuals and/or households and their consequences on the different spheres of life. In the first part an overview will be given of the most important research findings. The second part will be devoted to a sociological reflection on these findings.

I. SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL POLICY. THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Before answering the just stated problem, it is necessary to be a bit more accurate about two questions: „equality of what?” and „equality between whom?”. Looking at the literature on equality there seem to be different kinds of equality that appear in one context or another as suitable objectives for social policy. In this paper I’ll try to gather the research material concerning the Belgian situation around four of the five types of equality J. Le Grand (1982) distinguishes: equality of cost, equality of use, equality of outcome, equality of final income. The fifth type of equality he talks about, equality of public expenditure, will not be treated. With regard to the second question the focus will be on the social inequalities between individuals and/or groups defined in terms of their social and economic status using indicators such as income (income categories) and occupation (socio-professional categories).

A. SOCIAL POLICY AND EQUALITY OF COST

A first measure to assess whether social policy has achieved (greater) equality is equality of cost. Here the thesis is that public expenditure should be allocated in such a way that all relevant individuals face the same private cost – defined in relation to their income – per „unit” of the service used. The cost could be taken to mean the expenditure of money and/or time; or it could be interpreted more broadly as the welfare or satisfaction foregone through that expenditure.

How is the situation in Belgium with regard to this equality of cost? To what extent is it so that need rather than individual or structural factors determine the access to the social services? A lot of measures taken in the field of health care, education, social welfare, housing and so on have been set up with this purpose. Nevertheless, on all these domains there are numerous indications of the contrary.

Studies concerning the health care system (Van Langendonck, J., 1985:7) are very illustrative in this respect. Given the fact that not all kinds of medical care are repaid by the sickness and invalidity scheme, some of them (e.g. some dental prothesis) are inaccessible for those lower down the social scale. Secondly the so-called moderating ticket (people have to pay a part of their health expenditure themselves) has proven to be of influence on these kinds of health care that from a strictly medical point of view are defined as less necessary, e.g. prothesis, kinesitherapy, nursing help, some technical acts.

Inequality of cost also plays an important role in the owner occupied public housing sector. Research (Deleeck, H., e.a., 1983: 358) has shown that people

who want to buy a collectively build house or who try to obtain a house with the help of some public housing allowances belong, relatively seen, more to the higher and even to the highest income categories. The explanation for this phenomenon is that people wanting to acquire a house with the help of the public housing policy mechanisms need to have already quite a lot of money (money for the land, for contracting a loan, for all kind of fiscal duties...). In comparison with these costs the allowances themselves are relatively low. Instead of being a help for the lower-income categories to become a house owner, these allowances are rather an additional advantage for people who anyway would become owners.

B. SOCIAL POLICY AND EQUALITY OF USE

Social equality as an objective of social policy can secondly be interpreted as equality of the use (equality of participation or consumption) people make of the social services. The thesis here is that public expenditure on a social service should be allocated so that the amounts of the service used by all relevant individuals are the same (Le Grand, J., 1982: 14).

There is a lot of research material about the extent to which Belgian social policy succeeds in achieving this objective. In what follows an overview will be given of the main research findings concerning the areas of education and health care.

Making abstraction of the primary education, where there is no question of a social selection in the use made of this service, the studies on educational participation show the following results.

At the level of the secondary education a good deal of research (Billiet, J., 1977; Verbrugghe, B., & Dulaing, L., 1977) points at the relationship between social background and choice of study type. The higher the socio-professional category of the father the more one chooses for general education and within this for the so-called classic (Latin, Greek) direction. The lower the category of the father, the more children go into the technical and vocational types of education. Even if we take the results of the children in the last year of the primary school into consideration we see the same trend.

As far as the higher non-university education is concerned, research done by the Center for Social Policy (1981) shows that participation increases in function of family income, socio-professional category and level of education of the father. Nearly half of the students of this level of education belong to the three highest income-deciles and there is a clear under-representation of youngsters coming from the categories of „workers” and „small self-employed”.

Research with respect to the university education shows that in the matter of equality of use great progress has been made in favor of students coming from the middle classes and of female students. On the other hand, there is a very outspoken under-representation of students coming from the working class. The analysis of their participation at the Catholic University of Leuven shows an evolution from 17,9% in 1964, over 21,8% (highest level) in 1974 to 17,7% in 1984. (De Lanoo, I., 1982: 35). Working with participation-indexes, and as such taking into account the evolution of the part the different socio-economic categories represent in the total population, shows similar results. At this same university the category „students from the working class” is very strongly under-represented (participation-index: 29 in 1964, 36 in the period 1970-'77, 32 in 1984 for male students) (Lammertyn, F., 1987:160). Above that there is a very significant relationship between social class and study direction. The Faculties of Law, Medicine and Applied Sciences are characterized by a significant under-representation of students from the lower socio-professional level. An over-representation of this level is found in the Faculties for Social Sciences, Psychology and Pedagogy, Religion and Sciences. The Faculty of Economy and the Faculty of Arts are both faculties which have the same power of attraction for students coming from the higher and the lower socio-professional level.

Research concerning the consumption of health care services first teaches that there is a systematic increase of family expenditures for health care in the higher income groups. Furthermore it seems (Quaethoven, P., a. o., 1980: 30) that:

- half of the general-practitioner clientele consists of people who are not employed (housewives, invalids, unemployed, and retirees);
- in comparison with the general practitioner, the practice of the specialist for primary care (gynecologist and pediatrician) shows a shift to white-collar workers, government officials, teachers and the self-employed;
- higher social classes in the population go more often directly to pharmacists;
- dentists see more students and less retired people than the general practitioner; dental patients come more often from higher occupational categories;
- higher level occupations are, compared with the general practitioner care, over-represented in specialist care.

As far as hospital care consumption is concerned the same study gives the following observations:

- there is a strikingly large number of admissions in the „primary education” category (correlated with age, this appears to be mostly elderly people);
- the second highest frequency is found in the category „technical school”;

– the shortest duration of hospitalization: university education.

The general picture that arises from all this is that the higher socio-economic categories, the persons with higher incomes and a higher level of education and occupational status, on the average not only consume more health care services, but especially make use of the qualitatively better services.

C. SOCIAL POLICY AND EQUALITY OF OUTCOME

Equality as an objective for social policy can thirdly be interpreted as equality of outcome. In this context the thesis is that public expenditure should be allocated so as to promote equality in the „outcome” associated with the use of a particular service. What is meant by outcome or result will vary from service to service. For health care it could be an individual’s state of health; for education the bundle of skills with which an individual emerges from the education system, the extra income which he can earn as a result of his education; for housing, the conditions of individuals’ dwelling and so on. This objective has been particularly important in the case of education where the belief that education could be used as a means of obtaining a more equal society (in terms of income and social mobility) has been of crucial influence on social policy in this area.

Let’s have a look at the empirical findings with regard to this objective in relation to education. As noted, there are different criteria to assess the extent to which this kind of objective has been achieved in this area. In what follows, I’ll deal with two of them: school attainments and social mobility.

Concerning school attainments there is ample proof that already at the level of primary education and especially in the first years, working class children more frequently double a year and on the average have lower school results than children originating from the higher socio-professional categories. At the secondary level there appear important differences in the school career in that sense that children belonging to the higher categories can better maintain themselves. Working class children on the contrary have a greater drop-out or change more frequently to types of education with lower status. In contradiction to the often formulated statement that the social class bias in university entrance is not matched by a corresponding bias in university performance, a recently published study (Lammertyn, F., 1986: 42-44), based on the results of 22.681 students who in the period 1979-’80 up to 1983-’84 registered for the first time at the Catholic University of Leuven, shows that the chance of passing their first year examinations increases as the socio-professional level of their father gets higher. There is even a significant relationship between the grades they get and their social background.

A second way to determine whether education furthers equality of outcome consists of examining if educational provision increases the chances of working-class youth, relative to those of other young people, to reach positions at the top of the occupational ladder. In other words has it affected favorably their relative chances of upward social mobility? Research concerning this question (Vandekerckhove, L., & Huyse, L., 1976) tells us that working-class students leaving university run in what might be called an „outside track”. Ninety percent of working class university graduates are in paid employment; for students coming from the highest socio-economic level this percentage rises merely up to 30%. The self-employed occupation is apparently something that working-class students dislike; those originating from the top level on the contrary eschew work in paid employment. These figures tell at the same time that working-class university graduates don't penetrate in the most prestigious and best paid occupational positions, more specifically in the „professions”. Remarkable is also that one in four of the working-class university graduates becomes a teacher at the secondary level of education; in the group of students with a top level social background this is the case for 2 a 3%. A further difference between these two groups is the way they perceive their university diploma. Those who belong to the highest stratum see it as a starting point, as something that has to be supplemented with a second or third certificate. Most working-class students see their diploma as something that has to be immediately remunerative, first for their parents and later for themselves. The fact that this study is based on a very small group of respondents does not invalidate the results. In the meantime other studies have been done on much larger groups and their conclusions do not contradict the above mentioned results.

A second area in which the „equality of outcome” – question is applicable is the area of health care. Does the use of the health care services by the different socio-professional and income groups leads to an equal outcome in terms of health and is there a change over the years? Both questions, because of the difficulties related to the operationalization of the concept of health and because of the poor data concerning the relationship between health and socio-professional category, can only be answered in a tentative way. Research related to the first question teaches us that notwithstanding the existence of a whole range of health care services there still exists a lot of social inequality in relation to illness and death. Have these inequalities changed over the years? I must say that we don't have the appropriate material for the Belgian situation to answer this question. Concerning mortality for instance things are presumably not very different from what they are in France, the Netherlands, Great-Britain, namely that there has been a substantial reduction in mortality rates for all socio-economic groups but that this reduction has been more substantial for

the upper socio-economic groups, with the result that socio-economic inequalities have widened over the years (Desplanques, G., 1984; Brotherton, J., 1976; Report of the Committee on Child Health Services, 1976).

D. SOCIAL POLICY AND EQUALITY OF FINAL INCOME

A fourth type of equality that can be used to determine whether social policy achieves (more) equality is equality of final income. In this case the thesis is that public expenditure on the social services should be allocated in such a way as to favor the poor, so that their „final incomes” (roughly, private money income plus the value of any public subsidy received in cash or in kind) are brought more into line with those of the rich. It is this theme we find in questions about the degree to which direct taxes, social security contributions and benefits etc. have a redistributive effect on primary incomes. In what follows I want to confine myself to the redistributive effects of the social security system. The research material (Deleeck, H., 1983: 31-48) we have about this form of social policy shows two phenomena:

- first, the social security replacement of income benefits lead to a horizontal – from people who are active to the non-actives, and to a vertical redistribution – from high to low, but this last redistribution is very limited.

- secondly, this material learns us that those who for their income depend exclusively on social security benefits are in a socially very precarious position. Indeed, studies about the effectiveness of the social security system (Deleeck, H., a. o., 1980; Deleeck, H., a. o., 1983) have indicated that:

- nearly half of the Flemish families (49% in 1976, 51% in 1982) have already a financial security without the social security payments;

- nearly one fourth (27% in 1976, 27,2% in 1982) of the families acquire financial security because of these payments;

- approximately one fifth (24% in 1976, 21,7% in 1982) of the Flemish families have no financial security even after the intervention of the social security system.

Even if the minimum standard of living, by which this security is measured, is narrowed to three-fourths of its originally calculated value, 8% (1976) and 6,1% (1982) of the households are still financially insecure. So, partially because of the social security system, the vast majority of the population enjoys financial security. However, there is a minority that remains insecure. This minority is concentrated among those who are not or who are no longer employed, have no primary income and who are therefore exclusively dependent on the social security system. This leads to the paradoxical conclusion that

those who depend entirely on the social security system have a much higher chance of being financially insecure.

II. SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL POLICY A SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATION

The least one can say after the just given overview of the empirical findings is that the promotion of (more) equality through public expenditure on the social services is a very difficult enterprise. The question that arises immediately is: why? In the second part of this paper I'll try to give a sociological answer to that question, or more accurately formulated, I shall give a sketch, an outline of the elements one has to take into account to explain these findings. The fact that I am talking about a sketch/outline has nothing to do with some kind of modesty of mine but with the enormous diversity of the material that was introduced in the first part. Different kinds of social services were examined with in fact quite different questions. This outline has two parts. The first one deals with the relationship between social inequality and social policy by referring to the societal context in which social policy has emerged and later on has developed. The second part contains an exposition of the inequality stimulating factors that can be situated at the level of the relationship between the social services and their target groups.

A. THE SOCIETAL PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL POLICY

The extent to which social policy succeeds in achieving (more) equality can first be seen as being caused by the relation of social policy to its societal context. The problem with such an expression is that at the same time everything and nothing is said. Indeed, what is meant by the notion „societal context” and what is the real meaning of the term „relation”? Both questions bring us in the middle of the discussion about the theoretical pluralism in sociology; in the middle of the discussion between sociologists about what are the most fundamental driving social factors that, in this case, determine social policy; they bring us also in the middle of the discussion about the nature of the factors sociologists call upon in their explanation (determinism vs. voluntarism). Depending on the way both notions are conceptualized we are confronted with functionalism, neo-Weberian sociology, neo-Marxist sociology or one or another variant of this theories. For the purpose of this article I'd like to work with a combination of insights given by a factor and an actor-oriented conflict sociology, with a combination of elements coming from a structural and a pluralist

theory. From this perspective social policy, in its development as well as in its functioning, on the one hand is seen as the result of conflicts between the interests of the different social classes and on the other hand as the result of conflicts, agreements, compromises between interests that cut across class boundaries.

1. Insights from the structural approach

Explaining the development of social policy, the functioning of the services established in this area, the impact they have on social inequality from a structural perspective means that one has to look at the way in which social policy measures are structured (limited, determined) by the impact they have on the economy of a particular society and the associated political and ideological systems. A lot of studies on social policy (George, V., Wilding, P., 1984; Gough, I., 1979; Taylor-Gooby, P., Dale, J., 1981) have pointed at its multi-functional character. Social policy can, so they say, on the one hand be seen as a social gain, realized through a difficult and long lasting struggle by the labor movement; on the other hand they say that this whole range of services constituting social policy only could be realized because they secured and promoted the interests of private and collective capital. In this sense the authors point at the contribution social policy can make to the improvement of the quality of labor, to the promotion of labor mobility, to the encouragement of consumption and production, and so on. With respect to the political and ideological systems these and other studies point at the contribution of social policy to the easing of potentially disruptive problems, to the adoption of definitions of social problems which do not challenge the economic and social order. They also show how social policy encourages or rewards certain values and forms of behavior and punishes others. Furthermore they refer to the way in which the social services support authority and hierarchy in society and to the way they help to transform class conflict into a less threatening group conflict.

What insights can now be derived from such an approach concerning the relationship between social inequality and social policy? To deal with this question I want to make a distinction between the two stages that can be found in every policy making process: the phase of problem-formulation and the phase of problem-solving.

a) *The phase of problem-formulation*

In the stage of problem-formulation the economic, political and ideological systems mentioned above, first find their expression in the struggle to define

social inequalities as fair or as unfair phenomena. Social inequality in fact stops being a societal problem (and therefore an unfair phenomenon) once one can show that individual and not social conditions (working conditions, social background, economic tendencies) are responsible; once one can show it has been caused by a lack of dedication or responsibility of the individual, by his moral qualities and ultimately by his genetic structure. Related to this phenomenon of „desocializing social problems” (Stoesz, D., 1981) or „victim blaming” (Ryan, W., 1976) is the use, or should I say the misuse, that nowadays is being made by certain interest groups of sociobiology (cfr.: Rose, H., Rose, S., 1982; Fitzgerald, T., 1983). A second way to de-problemize social inequalities consists of arguing that they are functional to (certain parts of) society or inversely that the already realized social equality and certainly a further increase of it will be dysfunctional.

Directly related to this process of desocializing social inequalities is that not all forms of social inequality become defined as problematic or that they only get defined as such during certain historical periods. In a study on social inequality and university education in Belgium, L. Vandekerckhove en L. Huyse (1976) elaborate the thesis that policy with regard to the equality of opportunity has failed because it was inspired too much by economic efficiency considerations and all too little by considerations of social justice. When nevertheless during a certain period measures were taken to stimulate the democratization of this kind of education, they were caused by the happy coincidence that the economic motive (e. g. the provision of qualified labor the economy needed in its technological competition between the industrialized countries) and considerations of social justice went hand in hand.

That not all types of inequality get defined as problematic is something we also can notice in the stressing of equality of opportunity as an objective of social policy. This equality of opportunity or equality at the start is somehow the compromise between the „laissez-faire” principle and equality at the finish.

b) *The phase of problem solving*

The broader societal context of social policy secondly puts its stamp on the content and the form of the policy measures taken as an answer to the problem of social inequality. In this phase of the policy-making process, decisions (or non-decisions) are taken with regard to questions like (Gilbert, N., Specht, H., 1974: 28):

- who is entitled to a social benefit or social service (*who* gets *what*?)
- what are the types of social provision to be allocated? (*who* gets *what* ?)

– what are the strategies for the delivery of these provisions (*how* are the services provided?)

With regard to the first question quite a lot of Belgian sociologists have dealt with the theme of universality and selectivity. They have shown how decisions about the universal or selective character of social services are closely related to economic, political and ideological considerations. For instance they have shown how the values promoted by capitalism such as individualism and the work ethic find their expression in restricting as much as possible the group that is entitled to certain benefits or services. In the same sense a study on public housing policy in Belgium shows how this policy in its development has not only been structured in function of the existing housing problems but also in function of quite a few other objectives. The preservation of the social order, the increase of production and productivity, the levelling of the economic conjuncture and the decrease of unemployment were, diachronically seen, the latent but real aims of this policy. These were also the real criteria for determining who was entitled to certain allowances. The author of this study (Goossens, L., 1982) quite correctly speaks of an improper use of public housing policy, an improper use that is responsible for the fact that this policy did little to improve the bad housing situation of the poorest sections of the population.

Also with regard to the second question one can notice the impact of the socio-economic context on social policy. This context pressures social policy to restrict financial benefits so that those who are eligible can't live a life that equals the life style of those who still participate in the production process. This goes together with the fear that higher benefits would undermine the individual responsibility. After all, so is advanced nowadays by a lot of politicians, the provision of benefits above the minimum level is not a task of society but of the individual and his family. Research (Buyse, B., 1979) in which a comparison was made between the different social security income replacement benefits, the benefits for handicapped people and the subsistence income benefit has shown how in all these benefits there is a kind of hierarchy. The closer the reason for not being able to work is esteemed to be near the production process, the higher the replacement benefits. In this way the distribution of primary incomes is reflected in social policy. This reminds me of what R. Mishra wrote in his: *Society and social policy. Theoretical perspectives on welfare* (1980: 144) namely: „... this absence of redistribution may be the precondition for the development of the social services in capitalist society. The basic immunity of income distribution from the effects of the reallocation of resources may be the price exacted by the upper and middle classes for accepting a substantial socialization of distribution”.

The impact of the socio-economic context on the way social inequality is tackled by social policy can thirdly be found in the structure of the services that have been set up. In this respect it was noted by several sociologists (Schuyt, C., 1978: 77) that a lot of measures in the welfare state were socialist in their formulation, but remained liberal in their implementation. The emphasis remained on own initiative, on own gathering of information by those who wanted help, on passive instead of active service delivery. The implementation of social policy is characterized by passivity, whereas the group of people who are most in need for social services are characterized by a passive mentality so that we get a cumulation of meekness and the aims are not reached.

2. Insights from the pluralist approach

The thus far sketched structural approach of the relationship between social inequality and social policy is, how useful it may be, nevertheless a limited approach. It only points at the boundaries within which social policy can be an answer to the problem of social inequality and not all aspects of this relationship can be explained from this perspective. Complementary to this approach I think we need an approach in terms of an actor-oriented conflict sociology. Characteristic for this perspective is that, in this case social policy, is seen as the unstable resultant of conflicts, negotiations and compromises between a plurality of interest groups, interest groups that unlike the structural perspective are seen as autonomous actors on the political field. Such an analysis of the development of social policy or of one or another theme in this context, consists of – on the one hand – identifying the different actors who have played a role in the decision-making process and, on the other hand, it consists of reconstructing their strategies of negotiation in relation to their interests and the resources (power position, expertise, reputation, personal relations) they have.

An illustration of such an analysis is the study done by a research team of the University of Antwerp (Deleeck, H. e. a. 1980) on the effectiveness of social security policy. The range of measures constituting social security is, according to the authors, to be seen as the result of the struggle between organized and institutionalized social groups, a struggle carried on in view of the production of collective services that are in line with their interests, values and way of life. This struggle, so they say, is enacted in the institutional frame of corporatism with its double monopoly of the so-called social partners (organizations of employers and employees) and parliamentary democracy with government, parliament and political parties backed by their voters. This whole constellation is responsible for the fact that the interests of respectively the modal employee and the middle class voter come first. In this way they show how

social security policy has mainly been determined by the social partners and has been developed in the context of the industrial relations. The policy that emerged out of this was based on concrete revendications, rather than on a global long term vision. Characteristic for this policy was further that it was related to the concept of work: benefits and organizational structures were mainly in tune with the situation of those who were employed, so that the position of those who were (and are) out of work or at the margin of it got little attention. This whole frame, thirdly was responsible for the fact that the problem of finding financial means was more important than the question of the effective use of this means.

B. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SOCIAL SERVICES AND THEIR TARGET GROUPS

In the thus far outlined analysis I've tried to show that the extent to which social policy is a real answer to the problem of social inequality is determined in large part by the societal context in which this policy is produced. The empirical findings formulated in the first part of this article and especially those related to equality of cost, equality of use and equality of outcome ask however for a second kind of explanation, an explanation that is situated at the level of the relationship between social services and their target groups. On both sides of this relationship there are factors that hinder the realization of (more) social equality.

1. Determinants on the demand side

On the demand side these factors are located in the different social position of the (potential) users of the social services. It is from this position and the related volume and structure of the economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, P., 1983) that people go through the process of transformation from needs to felt needs and from felt needs to articulated interests, demands and claims.

In medical sociology for instance there is a lot of material referring to this phenomenon, material showing how knowledge and perception of health and health care services is related to the social position. Similar material we find in that part of the sociology of education dealing with differential educational attainment. Theories developed in this context point at the primary (subcultural, sociolinguistic theories) and at the secondary effects of social stratification (positional theory, theory of status incongruence). Research on the area of the social welfare services has proven that the „objective” reality of the welfare

state is „subjectively” meaningless for many users. R. Pinker (1971: 142): „... the concept of social rights may be on the lips of the tender-minded intellectuals and administrators, it is seldom in the minds of the potential users”. The consequence is that certain services are not used and that need and social inequality continue to exist.

2. Determinants on the supply side

Not only on the demand side but also at the supply side there are quite a few factors hindering the realization of (more) social equality by social policy. More specifically one can refer to the structural properties of service organizations and the characteristics of their personnel such as (Hegner, F., 1980: 143-161):

- variables of organization structure - for example, characteristics of technology, domain adjustment, selection and distribution of personnel, bureaucratization of communication and control processes, evaluation criteria for performance and so forth;

- variables of organization culture – for example, links between general value conceptions and operative goals or norms, informal group and group climate, incentive systems, conflicts of interest, dominance of bureaucratic or professional orientations and so forth;

- variables of personnel – for example, characteristics of individual perceptions, motivations, values and norms resulting from personality structure as well as from vocational formation and so forth;

- variables of space, time and material resources – for example, spatial location and geographical distribution of offices, hours of opening, furniture, appointments, quantity and quality of application forms, and so forth.

Themes like these we find illustrated in Belgian sociological research concerning the health care services, education and social welfare services. With respect to the first services there has been pointed (Deleeck, J., 1983: 291) at the values of the health care personnel, who by their social background and their group characteristics belong to the middle and upper classes; they speak another language and use another value system which can lead to difficulties in their contacts with patients coming from the lower income categories. In the same way the institutional organization of the health care system contains a lot of inequality stimulating elements. Hospitals and mutualities are large organizations with a way of operating that is manageable by people with a higher level of education and professional status, but difficult to handle by people from the lower categories. Similar factors can be found in the schooling system and in the social service organizations. It is remarkable how in the literature on these

three kinds of services – health care, education and welfare services – one finds the notions of respectively the „good patient”, the „good student” and the „good client”. This reminds me of a book written by M. Rein (1970: 54-55) in which he says: „... there is something in the nature of professional technology that exerts pressure for disengagement ...” Agencies neglect to service those in greatest need because there is a pressure for them to accept „good clients” who will deliver all the rewards that professionals and agencies are accustomed to or need. A good client is one who is cooperative, motivated to use the service offered, able to change and eventually able to express gratitude rather than resentment for the services that are made available to him. In short, professionals understandably prefer cases with good prognosis rather than the so-called hopeless case. Certain cases, including certainly many who are extremely disadvantaged, are characterized as „multi-problemmed”, „chronic” and are considered virtually as „unreachable”. Such labels reflect better the operation of agencies than the characteristics of the clients.

CONCLUSION

A lot of sociologists who have done research on social policy and social inequality conclude their study with saying that social policy certainly is not superfluous. The distribution of social goods like education, housing, welfare services, health care etc. would be a lot more unequal if they were distributed on a market base. I think one can hardly doubt this thesis. Another thesis one finds in these studies - a thesis one equally can not call in question - is that social policy has to a large extent underestimated the resistance the class structure can offer to attempts to change it. Confronted with this conclusion some plead for more selectivity, for a clearer definition of priorities, for measures of positive discrimination and so on. Partly the same authors, partly others say that social inequality should not be tackled by a „back-door policy” but by a „front-door policy”, a policy directed at the economic inequalities and the factors that are responsible for them. In this matter they refer to the income, employment and labor market policy.

I think it will be clear that certainly nowadays such a strategy of promoting social equality, even more than the strategy working through the social services, will be resisted very strongly. Think of phenomena, well-known in Belgium and other West-European countries, like deregulation, flexibility, the growing precariousness of the labor contracts, the increasing segmentation of the labor market and the all this accompanying „ideology of inequality”. By way of conclusion I would like to elaborate two aspects of this ideology.

A first aspect is based on the thesis that the actual structure of social inequality is unfair but that moves towards greater economic equality are undesirable because there is already a substantial degree of equality (perhaps even too much) and because attempts to reduce inequality yet further would have disastrous consequences for the other objectives which a society may have, such as diversity, economic growth and freedom. A further levelling of incomes - so is said - would temper the will to take initiative and risks, would discourage the dynamic and creative forces in society would stimulate fiscal and para-fiscal fraud, would encourage capital- and braindrain, would cause unemployment and undermine the responsibility of the citizen.

The second aspect of the „ideology of inequality” rests on the belief that the present structure of inequalities is basically fair and that people deserve the income they receive, and that, by and large, the rich are deserving and the poor undeserving. Again and again this belief is transmitted to the public, among others, by spokesmen of the employers. One example; some time ago the former chairman of the Flemish Economical Board said the following: „Above Marxist ideology stating that social inequality is founded on the social background of those concerned, I prefer the inspirational New Testamental vision of the parable of the talents. The servants who had received five and two talents and who made respectively five and two talents more, were praised by their Lord. When asked what he who received one talent had done with it, the third servant said he hid in the earth. The Lord said to him: „you should have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine with usure”. There are plenty messages like this. The intended effect is clear: those who have made it did so thanks to their work, talent, study and all those sociological theories pointing at the social origins of social inequality are ideological constructions leading to a „cult of weakness”.

Times are difficult for sociologists who study social inequality. More than ever it becomes clear that as well the questions they ask about it as the sociological explanations they formulate make them part of the societal discussion concerning the definition of social inequality as a fair or an unfair phenomenon.

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WPLYW POLITYKI SPOŁECZNEJ NA NIERÓWNOŚĆ SPOŁECZNĄ
SOCJOLOGICZNA ANALIZA SYTUACJI BELGIJSKIEJ

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Autor analizuje związek między nierównością społeczną a polityką społeczną w Belgii. Przedstawia wyniki badań nad skutecznością polityki społecznej w osiąganiu celów: równości kosztów usług, równości użytkowania usług, równości rezultatów użycia usług, równości ostatecznych dochodów (zarobki oraz subsydia). Promocja równości poprzez wydatki publiczne na ubezpieczenie społeczne wciąż nie jest dostateczna. Przyczyn należy upatrywać w społecznym kontekście powstawania i rozwoju polityki społecznej, formułowania problemu i rozwiązywania problemu nierówności. Czynniki wywołujące nierówność usytuowane są także na poziomie usług społecznych i grup, ku którym są skierowane – uwarunkowania strony zaopatrującej i uwarunkowania strony żądającej. Istotnym czynnikiem pozostaje upowszechniana w społeczeństwie ideologia nierówności. Socjologiczne wyjaśnienia są częścią społecznej dyskusji nad definicją nierówności społecznej jako zjawiska słusznego lub niesłusznego.