

Arthur Gould: *Conflict and Control in Welfare Policy. The Swedish Experience*. London: Longman, 1988, 193 pp.

'Why do the British – or the British media at any rate – detest Sweden so much? I'm always hearing people pronouncing on Nordic impassivity, gloom and suicide, based on a sample that on inspection, appears to consist only of Ingmar Bergman and Bjorn Borg. Behind this attitude, I suspect, is a long-running sense that Sweden has got away with things that we haven't.'

These words were written last summer in the '*New Statesman & Society*' by columnist Sean French (4 August 1989). In a similar mood, Arthur Gould, a lecturer in social administration at Loughborough University in the English midlands, has written '*Conflict and Control in Welfare Policy*'. His starting point was the widespread accusation, in the international press (including the British), in the early 1980s, at Sweden for being a totalitarian hell for society's youngest ones, a 'Children's Gulag'. According to reports in newspapers like *The Observer* and *The Times*, and the BBC, Sweden held a sensationally high world-record for the percentage of children taken into custody by state force. These reports were put under Gould's eyes by one of his social policy students, who argued that statements like these contradict the very idea of Sweden as a model welfare state. This conclusion fits into Sean French's view of the British attitude, although Gould's sample turns out to be larger than Bergman and Borg. Actually, Gould in his investigation into this case ends up concluding that although the 'Children's Gulag affair' was exaggerated to the extreme by the news media, the rate of children in custody is quite high and the duration of care is rather long for an advanced welfare state, and he continues: 'it is plausible to advance the hypothesis that the debate in Sweden about the controlling aspects of welfare policy might be as much a conflict between authoritarians and libertarians as between the (political) left and the right' (p. 76).

Thus, Gould has widened his scope of inquiry and expanded his early curiousness into a broader study of social welfare in theory and practice. To summarize, Gould's book operates on three levels: (1) theoretically, the ambition is to investigate the limits and possibilities of the notion of 'social control' as a tool in social policy analysis; (2) comparatively, it provides a study of social welfare practice in Sweden and the UK, with an emphasis on the former country; and (3) empirically, it focuses on the implementation of the new Swedish social welfare laws of 1982 – SoL and the accompanying, more repressive, LVM and LVU – and the conflicts that aroused in their wake.

Structurally, the book can be briefly described according to three sections. In the first section, in three chapters, Gould dwells upon the concept of control and its relevance for a study of social welfare (ch. 1), giving an overview of the development of the Swedish welfare state in terms of money, resources, and personnel (ch. 2). In chapter three, he outlines the historical background to the ideological conflicts behind the social welfare reforms in Sweden in the early 1980s. In section two, Gould reaches his main objective of examining recent social welfare practices in Sweden by including four different chapters and case studies on: (1) the above-mentioned 'Children's Gulag-affair'; (2) compulsory and voluntary measures in Swedish social case-work among families with 'problems' after the introduction of the new social welfare laws but before the 1985 introduction of the new law on 'intermediate force' LTU (*mellantvång*); (3) the 'Alby-affair' and the interpretation of the right to social assistance under the new social welfare law; and finally (4) treatment of alcoholics, drug addicts and AIDS sufferers according to the new

Arthur Gould: *Conflict and Control in Welfare Policy. The Swedish Experience*. London: Longman, 1988, 193 pp.

'Why do the British – or the British media at any rate – detest Sweden so much? I'm always hearing people pronouncing on Nordic impassivity, gloom and suicide, based on a sample that on inspection, appears to consist only of Ingmar Bergman and Bjorn Borg. Behind this attitude, I suspect, is a long-running sense that Sweden has got away with things that we haven't.'

These words were written last summer in the '*New Statesman & Society*' by columnist Sean French (4 August 1989). In a similar mood, Arthur Gould, a lecturer in social administration at Loughborough University in the English midlands, has written '*Conflict and Control in Welfare Policy*'. His starting point was the widespread accusation, in the international press (including the British), in the early 1980s, at Sweden for being a totalitarian hell for society's youngest ones, a 'Children's Gulag'. According to reports in newspapers like *The Observer* and *The Times*, and the BBC, Sweden held a sensationally high world-record for the percentage of children taken into custody by state force. These reports were put under Gould's eyes by one of his social policy students, who argued that statements like these contradict the very idea of Sweden as a model welfare state. This conclusion fits into Sean French's view of the British attitude, although Gould's sample turns out to be larger than Bergman and Borg. Actually, Gould in his investigation into this case ends up concluding that although the 'Children's Gulag affair' was exaggerated to the extreme by the news media, the rate of children in custody is quite high and the duration of care is rather long for an advanced welfare state, and he continues: 'it is plausible to advance the hypothesis that the debate in Sweden about the controlling aspects of welfare policy might be as much a conflict between authoritarians and libertarians as between the (political) left and the right' (p. 76).

Thus, Gould has widened his scope of inquiry and expanded his early curiousness into a broader study of social welfare in theory and practice. To summarize, Gould's book operates on three levels: (1) theoretically, the ambition is to investigate the limits and possibilities of the notion of 'social control' as a tool in social policy analysis; (2) comparatively, it provides a study of social welfare practice in Sweden and the UK, with an emphasis on the former country; and (3) empirically, it focuses on the implementation of the new Swedish social welfare laws of 1982 – SoL and the accompanying, more repressive, LVM and LVU – and the conflicts that aroused in their wake.

Structurally, the book can be briefly described according to three sections. In the first section, in three chapters, Gould dwells upon the concept of control and its relevance for a study of social welfare (ch. 1), giving an overview of the development of the Swedish welfare state in terms of money, resources, and personnel (ch. 2). In chapter three, he outlines the historical background to the ideological conflicts behind the social welfare reforms in Sweden in the early 1980s. In section two, Gould reaches his main objective of examining recent social welfare practices in Sweden by including four different chapters and case studies on: (1) the above-mentioned 'Children's Gulag-affair'; (2) compulsory and voluntary measures in Swedish social case-work among families with 'problems' after the introduction of the new social welfare laws but before the 1985 introduction of the new law on 'intermediate force' LTU (*mellantvång*); (3) the 'Alby-affair' and the interpretation of the right to social assistance under the new social welfare law; and finally (4) treatment of alcoholics, drug addicts and AIDS sufferers according to the new

Swedish welfare laws. Finally, in the third section, again in three chapters, Gould makes an attempt to draw together his findings from these case studies into a generalized pattern of conflict between welfare and control in Sweden and elsewhere.

Methodologically, Gould relies on official statistics regarding welfare developments in Sweden, however, in chapter two they are a little outdated. He has also interviewed people who have been involved in the case studies under consideration and leading representatives of public authorities and interest organizations in the field, about the pros and cons of compulsion in Swedish social welfare services. In one of the case studies, he also had the opportunity to make his own small study of a group of single-parent families with 'problems' in two sub-districts of the Swedish towns Karlskoga and Örebro. Here, he carried out interviews on his own with people under – according to the new book – voluntary surveillance of the welfare authorities. Of course, he also interviewed relevant social service officials in the two Bergslagen metropolises. Thus, Gould's analysis has a much firmer basis than most foreign travel books.

The author is neither a political scientist nor a sociologist or an economist. He belongs to the peculiar British tradition of social policy or 'social administration' research and teaching, in the post-war epoch, closely associated with the late Richard Titmuss, for many years the Chair of Social Administration at the London School of Economics and Political Science. For a few decades, this rather outspoken anti-theoretical – i.e. anti-traditional, neo-classical, economic theory – research tradition produced some of the most remarkable and penetrating empirical analysis of poverty and social conditions in the UK. In the last twenty years, this field of research was severely criticized, not only for its view on concepts and theories, but also for its 'national focus', its Britishness. Thus, to Adrian Webb, Professor of Social Administration at the Loughborough University, and a well-known 'Titmussian' who has written a short foreword to this book, Gould's analysis is a welcome and internationalist response to the challenges from outside which have embattled this research tradition.

Given this background, it is rather natural that Gould attempts to link social welfare ideologies to political party viewpoints as indicated by the hypothesis put forward above by the author. Now and then this is done too crudely for the domestic reader, but in general, Gould manages to make his argument. In this regard, it is the dilemma of individual rights versus state power – in Sweden in general, and in Swedish social welfare practice in particular – that gives *'Conflict and Control in Welfare Policy'* its special edge. Throughout these studies it is the conflicts between hardliners and wets (although the author nowhere uses this 'Thatcherite' notion) that is in the foreground of his analysis. On the other hand, Gould finds no clear-cut, left-right divisions on issues such as child custody, treatment of alcoholics or drug addicts, the right to social assistance and so forth. Instead, the obviously existing left-right cleavage is bisected by another, authoritarian-libertarian, split.

This may sound self-evident to a Swede, but the way Gould anchors the latter cleavage in our temperance past of the last hundred years is both fresh and partly convincing. And the fact that Gould's analysis does not resolve with a 'balanced split' but a cross-cutting of the political spectrum more to the left than to the right, makes it even more convincing. Sweden is a country, in sociopolitical terms, heavily dominated by its long ruling Social Democracy, and in particular, on matters regarding welfare policies, it has managed to make a unique imprint on 'the way things work'. However, from the beginning of the working-class movement, teetotallers constituted a disproportionate number among party activists and organ-

izers, and thus have had a say in both policy formulation and implementation. Historically, this tendency within the labour movement has been more important in the shapening of a civilized version of 'workfare' than right-wing defenders of the old poor laws.

On the conservative side, there exists of course a similar split between authoritarians and libertarians, in particular after the arrival of modern neo-liberalism, but it is the conflicts within the 'socialist camp' that make current social affairs intriguing, as Gould's analysis illustrates. For example, on the issue of children taken into custody, the right libertarian Family Campaign in the early 1980s joined forces with the left libertarian Family Rights Association against the 'defenders of the system', i.e. the authorities acting according to the present laws. A few years later in Alby, a southern suburb of Stockholm, left authoritarian social workers managed to obtain the unanimous support of the local Social Democratic majority against the liberal-minded Social Democratic National Board of Health and Social Affairs (*Socialstyrelsen*) in a test of the rights of individuals to direct economic aid (social assistance) and the possibility that social workers could make these rights conditional. In the Alby-affair, it was also noteworthy that the Minister of Social Affairs, Gertrud Sigurdson (misspelled throughout Gould's book), sided with the authoritarian left against the wishes of the Social Democratic libertarian reformers from the early 1980s, those who backed the new social laws. Thus, in his case studies of social welfare practice, as well as in his deconstruction of the ideological positions in recent social policy debate in Sweden, Gould succeeds in highlighting the deep divisions in Swedish culture and politics over how welfare services ought to handle human beings.

The disciplination of the behaviour of individuals through the network of state social service agencies is a hot issue in most societies with such a set of organizations. For example, comparatively speaking, and from a Swedish perspective, in the UK the tolerance towards persons who destroy themselves with drugs is much wider than would most likely ever be possible in Sweden. In the absence of a strong, popular anti-drug social movement, liberty prevails and drugs flow in abundance. It is not in his rather superficial elaborations of the concept of social control in Durkheim's and Marx' writings, that Gould makes a contribution to social policy analysis. But his insistence on the limitations of this concept in the Anglo-Saxon social sciences makes the Swedish case in general look less authoritarian than often believed by outsiders. The author comes from a fairly liberal or libertarian position, and is in no sense an uncritical interlocutor of the 'Swedish road'. Nevertheless, he ends up defending, not in a crude or vulgar way, a peculiar kind of organized working-class authoritarianism.

In toto, Gould has written a book not only of interest to students of social policy, or admirers or detractors of the most advanced welfare state on the globe – Swedniks – but to a general social science audience as well. Not least of whom, those engaged in the basically philosophical battle over the universal social rights of mankind will, in the richness of detail, find a goldmine in '*Conflict and Control in Welfare Policy*'.

*Sven E. Olsson, Swedish Institute for Social Research, Stockholm*