

# SPECIAL COMMUNICATES

## Welfare State



*Mariusz Baranowski*

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland

### TOWARDS THE WELFARE STATE SOCIOLOGY

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#### ABSTRACT

The undeniable fact is that various social sciences and other disciplines constitute the research perspective which relates to the practice of a multidimensional phenomenon. The welfare state is an excellent example of such notion, which in its nature unifies many theoretical and practical positions. It seems, however, that the economic and political dimensions of the welfare state (as conceptual or pro-social proposals) are disproportionately exposed both on the basis of scientific reflection and pragmatic approaches used by the institutions of the state. This tendency to think in economic and political terms, which incidentally is maintained for several decades, represents: (a) only one side of a complex nature of social welfare, and (b) a significant reductionism, leading to the elimination of sociological, cultural, educational, and psychological consequences of the functioning of the welfare state. This article is designed to reverse the trend of the dominant perception of the construct of the welfare state in economic and political terms, and replace it with the highlight of the mainly sociological dimension of this phenomenon (the welfare state sociology). However, it does not mean abandonment of the economic and political dimensions in general, as they are an integral part of the issue.

#### Key words:

welfare state sociology, social policy, capitalism, economism

## 1. Introduction

A mutual relationship of the social, economic, and political dimensions, which may be expanded with more detailed aspects, does not require any broader comments within widely understood human relationships. Regardless of its definition, the object of an analysis in social sciences is multidimensional because heterogeneous and antinomic factors influence its specificity. Research aims at the identification and conceptualization of these factors (description) in the manner which would enable the hierarchic arrangement of the strength of their influence on a phenomenon in question, using specific tools (explanation). This, in turn, makes it possible to reach, in specific conditions, the most ambitious goal of this analysis, i.e. prediction, which forms grounds for designing directed social changes (social engineering). Welfare state<sup>1</sup> issues are an example of such a multidimensional phenomenon, which lies within the scope of interest of the above-mentioned dimensions as well as in the historical, legal, and cultural perspective. Each of these approaches has developed a characteristic set of notions, the aim of which is to diagnose separate problem areas within the complex mechanism of social security institutions. Naturally, there is a correspondence of various provenances between individual dimensions and perspectives, i.e. one solutions inspire others (also by criticism) or form a starting point for additional explorations and research. Others, still, cooperate within a wider scope in the form of interdisciplinary research projects or implementation formulas.

Being aware of this special complexity of the nature of social life, determined by a range of more or less defined factors, I would like to get down to the issues of the welfare state and to view them from a sociological perspective, because – what I am going to try to demonstrate – the economic and political viewpoints dominate in the discussion on these issues for different reasons (ideological domination of economics as a science and pragmatic reasons of making decisions concerning politics).

## 2. Economic dimension of the welfare state

Starting from the analysis of the notion of *welfare* itself, which may be recognized as “the result of an expanding production care, financial benefits, or other services

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<sup>1</sup> Some researchers differentiate among various meanings of the term welfare state. E. g. Niklas Luhmann is well-known for his distinction between *Wohlfahrtsstaat* i *Sozialstaat*. See: N. Luhmann, *Politische Theorie im Wohlfahrtsstaat*, München 1981, p. 7.

for ensuring the material and cultural conditions for the reproduction of humans as biological beings, as economic producers and members of a work force, and as social beings and citizens (the conditions of integration in society and of social cohesion)<sup>2</sup>, it is difficult not to notice modern associations of this notion with the economic dimension of the organization of society<sup>3</sup>. The beginnings of institutional social reforms in Europe themselves, which are most frequently equated with the Bismarck's social insurance programme (1880) and William Beveridge's report titled *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942), disclose socio-economic problems which had to be faced. In particular, the Beveridge's report, together with the historical context of its development, emphasized a range of (negative) social consequences of the functioning of economic mechanisms. Let us also remember that the author of these reforms was a supporter of the Liberal Party and noticed the deficits of market solutions, which had great consequences for wide social circles. Admittedly, his proposals, unquestionably reveal this liberal feature, which *nota bene* is still present in the British social policy: "Unemployment benefit after a certain period, said Beveridge, should be 'conditional upon attendance at a work or training centre'. Second, let's restore the idea of 'something for something'. Beveridge called his system social insurance. (He didn't like the term welfare state, which had been coined by Archbishop Temple)"<sup>4</sup>

The relationships between the institution of the welfare state with economy are so close that it is difficult to section off the discussed issue from the area of economic activities of society. On the one hand, issues of social inequalities related, in general, to life opportunities, depend deeply on economic conditions themselves. On the other hand, taking any corrective measures related to an attempt of eliminating these significant social and economic differences, i.e. the redistributive function of the state, depends on the economic situation (if we omit intentions of politicians at the moment). The macroeconomic policy of the state also applies to the performance of the stabilization function, where the most important accents are placed on reaching a high rate of economic growth, while keeping the inflation and unemployment rates as low as possible. But the issue of unemployment is directly related to various forms of social programmes of the welfare state (from

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<sup>2</sup> A.M. Guillemand, *Welfare* [in:] *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, N.J. Smelser, P.B. Baltes (eds.), New York 2001, p. 16416.

<sup>3</sup> This aspect is particularly well articulated in: K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times*, Boston 2001.

<sup>4</sup> L. Byrne, *A William Beveridge for this Century's Welfare State*, "The Guardian" 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jan/02/beveridge-welfare-state-labour-revolution> [Access date: 30.07.2013].

securities applied in the situation of loss of a job and programmes helping to find a job to the system of general education); economic growth and inflation influence the quality of life of the whole societies.

The relationship between the economic dimension of the functioning of society and welfare state solutions is undisputable; this, however, does not mean that we should accept, without reflection, economic arguments for or against social welfare institutions as final. The problem of evaluating social solutions, which, according to the author hereof, exists at present, pertains, most of all, to “economic colonization” of the discourse concerning social issues. By this, I would like to underline the domination, in the scientific discourse, as well as in the press, common sense, or administrative areas, of the thinking about any social solutions in the categories of economic efficiency, profitability, usefulness, etc. This particular economism, which shows the features of an accounting balance sheet, should not determine uncompromising frameworks for the possibilities of implementing individual social policy solutions because it is not the only or even the most comprehensive point of view<sup>5</sup>. By focusing on expenses related to social policies, economists (I mean the supporters of the dominating neoliberal concept) see them rather as burdens of the budget which are, admittedly, necessary to maintain social cohesion, but are also economically and disciplinary unreasonable<sup>6</sup>. This may explain the manner of assessing the involvement of the state in the social area using economic measures and indices. The most frequent measure of this involvement is gross domestic product, GDP per capita, or a percentage share of social expenditure in the budget of the country in question. Apart from their undisputable advantage of being convenient, all these measures leave much to be desired in the categories of a socio-economic analysis<sup>7</sup>.

The economic dimension of the welfare state is a dominating element of the discussion on all solutions securing the social part of human existence for many reasons, the leading one being the ideological advantage of capitalist and free market solutions. It is also worth remembering that any counter-proposals to this capitalistic order are often brought to an absurd, most of all based on theoretic and

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<sup>5</sup> See: M. Baranowski, *Working in Social Cooperatives. The Case of Greater Poland Region of Poland*, “*Studia Historiae Oeconomicae*” 2012, Vol. 30, pp. 93–109.

<sup>6</sup> See: M. Husson, *Le capitalisme sans anesthésie. Études sur le capitalisme contemporain, la crise mondiale et la stratégie anticapitaliste*, Paris 2011, especially chapters 2, 5 and 7 (Polish edition: Warszawa 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Thus, new and new research is designed using measurement techniques which are more sensitive to real consequences. Economists often apply the HDI index used by the UN as well, which takes the greater number of socio-demographic variables into account (e.g. Genuine Progress Indicator or The Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare).

practical assumptions generated from the models of the capitalist organization of economy. This uniformization of the discussion on economic issues, which has been “forced” by the supporters of market mechanisms (neoliberals) is an efficient barrier for alternative proposals concerning the welfare state institution. To be more precise, it should be mentioned that a range of solutions securing human welfare is implemented as a part of capitalist logics and on its initiative. Therefore, welfare state institutions are used in free market solutions as well as against their fundamental logics<sup>8</sup>.

### 3. Political dimension of the welfare state

As I have emphasized before, political implications of the functioning of the welfare state are deeply related to the economic sphere as well as to the development of civil rights. Although these rights are related to many dimensions of the functioning of entities, such as civil, politic, and social rights<sup>9</sup>, I am going to define them imprecisely, for the clarity of my reasoning, as a component of the political dimension of the welfare state. When describing the programme of reforms which were implemented, most of all, in Europe and Anglo-Saxon post-colonial countries between 1848 and 1917, Immanuel Wallerstein underlined its three components:

The first was suffrage, which was introduced cautiously but steadily expanded in coverage: sooner or later all adult males (and then women as well) were accorded the right to vote. The second reform was remedial workplace legislation plus redistributive benefits, what we would later call the ‘welfare state’. The third reform, if reform is the right word, was the creation of national identities, largely via compulsory primary education and universal military service (for males)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Let us remember that the capitalist system in its national versions is very varied, what means, in practice, that e.g. the role and scope of the social policy in various countries may be very different; this, in turn, results with greatly diversified socio-economic relations within the capitalist option. See: *Capitalism or Capitalisms?*, J. Tittenbrun (ed.), Szczecin 2009; W.J. Baumol, R.E. Litan, C.J. Schramm, *Good Capitalism, Bad Capitalism, and the Economics of Growth and Prosperity*, New Haven–London 2007; M. Albert, *Capitalism Against Capitalism*, London 1993; Ch. Hampden-Turner, A. Trompenaars, *The Seven Cultures of Capitalism: Value Systems for Creating Wealth in the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Sweden, and the Netherlands*, New York 1993.

<sup>9</sup> T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* [in:] *Inequality and Society. Social Science Perspectives on Social Stratification*, J. Manza, M. Sauder (eds.), New York 2009, pp. 148–154.

<sup>10</sup> I. Wallerstein, *The End of the World as We Know It. Social Science for the Twenty-First Century*, Minneapolis 1999, p. 9.

All those changes led to a completely new reality, which really modified the form of the participation of citizens in political structures, beginning the transformations in other areas: “The three elements together – political participation via the ballot, the intervention of the state to reduce the polarizing consequences of ungoverned market relations, and a transclass unifying national loyalty – comprise the underpinnings, and indeed in actuality the definition, of the liberal state, which by 1914 had become the pan-European norm and partial practice”<sup>11</sup>.

The importance of reforms described by Wallerstein should be considered taking their mutual relationships into account, if only because in many historic analyses the transformation of the political life is described, so to speak, in a void of socio-economic relationships. When focusing on the expansion of the sphere of citizenship, as well as on the development of democratic institutions, and the inclusive character of authority structures, one may not disregard the significance of transformations in material conditions of life of the society. The formal opening of the system for a larger number of participants without appropriate changes in real possibilities of influencing the system means only feigned reforms. As was described vividly by Thomas Marshall: “(...) the right to freedom of speech has little real substance if, from lack of education, you have nothing to say that is worth saying, and no means of making yourself heard if you say it. But these blatant inequalities are not due to defects in civil rights, but to lack of social rights, and social rights in the mid-nineteenth century were in the doldrums”<sup>12</sup>.

The issues of social inequalities (and I am not, by any means, speaking about a trivial, but true, statements that people are not equal by nature) co-developed and conditioned real principles of functioning of authority structures (this concerns political and legal institutions) in the same manner as they do nowadays. In addition, in modern democratic systems, the allocation of budgetary funds is a prerogative of state political institutions of a state. This means that the development of the social policy of a country depends on political intentions of the option in power<sup>13</sup>. And this “political intention” is often determined by many factors, which also include simple (let us call them “ideological”) obligations to donors of funds for political campaigns.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> T.H. Marshall, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>13</sup> This is an obvious simplification because many non-party entities and components, which shape the environment of the state decision-making apparatus (from social consultations, which are an element of the political culture of a country and „systemic” social movements to revolutionary powers, which try to overthrow the existing *status quo*), also have an influence on the shape of such policy as it is.

In his renowned work titled *Contradictions of the Welfare State*, Clause Offe made some very interesting observations, which are worth considering in the context of political discussion on the institution of the welfare state: “Every political theory worth its name has to answer two questions. First, what is the desirable form of the organization of society and state and how can we demonstrate that it is at all ‘workable’, i.e., consistent with our basic normative and factual assumptions about social life? This is the problem of defining a consistent ‘model’ or goal of transformation. Second, how do we get there? This is the problem of identifying the dynamic forces and ‘strategies’ that could bring about the transformation”<sup>14</sup>.

The political consensus concerning the selection of the “desirable form of the organization of society and state” together with the consequences of this decision for social life, which contains an element of specific solutions e.g. concerning the equalization of life opportunities, has significant and permanent consequences, not only for socio-political structures but also for socio-economic ones. Therefore, one should consider possible consequences of specific proposals very thoroughly, because the mechanisms of equalizing opportunities (i.e. the welfare state) may have far broader results than only temporary ones. “This is to say, the welfare state has, in a certain sense, become an irreversible structure, the abolition of which would require nothing less than the abolition of political democracy and the unions, as well as fundamental changes in the party system”<sup>15</sup>.

The fragment above highlights this frequently omitted and underestimated fact, which emphasizes the importance of the nature of welfare state practices which are deeply rooted in the structures of the political system, including its democratic foundations. A standard practice is recognizing social policy as an “addition”, estimated variously by various political options, to the political dimension of the social reality. An addition, which should be limited or, to the contrary, developed. It is, however, extremely rare to identify welfare state solutions as the quoted “irreversible structure”, which is *de facto* a condition of the required stability, how necessary for the democratic order. The history of the development and shaping of the democratic order was full of stormy speeches and fights, most of all by various social movements, which sought the legitimization of their hauls, not only social ones, within the political area. It turns out that welfare state may be recognized as a real, rather than only formal, foundation of a permanent consensus for the democratic system in its various national and cultural variations. Furthermore, even a superficial examination of the political (institutionalized and non-

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<sup>14</sup> C. Offe, *Contradictions of the Welfare State*, London 1984, p. 152.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

institutionalized) activities of citizens indicates that there is nothing that mobilizes people more to become involved in current political disputes than changes (or the lack thereof, in specific conditions) of material conditions of life. Welfare state “acquisitions” are natural examples of this statement.

#### 4. Social dimension of welfare state

Considering the social aspect of the welfare state, one should take economic and political determinants into account, but only in a specific context. In fact, although there is a reversed relation between the social perspective of the assessment of social solutions and their economic and political equivalent, the accents are distributed in a different way<sup>16</sup>. Most of all, the approach discussed here emphasizes the role of social diversity in the framework of the society as a whole, with its numerous outcomes. Such approach to this issue has many serious consequences which enable, on one hand, the determination, within the framework of the social dimension, of e.g. differences in earnings and political or ideological preferences (i.e. ones that, in this case, go beyond the area of politics) and, on the other hand, the interpretation of economic and political objectives based on the dysfunctional character of the society, which may demonstrate itself in the deepening social stratification<sup>17</sup>. Such stratification is usually accompanied<sup>17</sup> by a number of consequences, from typically political ones (e.g. support for extremely populist options) and economical ones (e.g. growing differences in earnings of separate social class-

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<sup>16</sup> The meaning of the social “accent” is explained in the following observation by Max Weber: “It should be emphatically stated that the present discussion is concerned only with a brief summary of the ‘sociological’ aspects of these phenomena, so far as they are relevant to its context. The ‘economic’ aspect is included only insofar as it is expressed in what are formally sociological categories. The presentation would be economic in the ‘substantive’ sense only if the price and market conditions, which so far have been dealt with only on the theoretical level, were brought in. But these substantive aspects of the general problem could be worked into such a summary introduction only in the form of terse theses, which would involve some very dubious distortions. The explanatory methods of ‘pure’ economics are as tempting as they are misleading”. M. Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Berkeley 1978, p. 115.

<sup>17</sup> The historical example of this practice is the following passage from Marx: “Everywhere the working class was outlawed, anathematized, placed under the ‘loi des suspects’. The manufactures no longer needed to restrain themselves. They broke out in open revolt, not only against the Ten Hours’ Act, but against all the legislation since 1833 that had aimed at restricting to some extent the ‘free’ exploitation of labour-power. It was a pro-slavery rebellion in miniature, carried on for over two years with a cynical recklessness and a terroristic energy which were so much the easier to achieve in that the rebel capitalist risked nothing but the skin of his workers”. K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, London 1982, pp. 397–398.



es), to social ones, which, so to speak, reflect the two former ones in the social issue (e.g. growing crime rate, weakened social relationships, deteriorated condition of the public health care and education, and alcoholism). In this approach, the listed social phenomena and pathologies are treated as consequences of the lack of balance between various dimensions within the society, including the axio-prescriptive system.

Let us stay with the issue of social stratification and think about the other side of the coin, i.e. the possibility of generating social differences by welfare state programmes. Gøsta Esping-Andersen, a Danish sociologist, will come to our aid. He stated that:

Social stratification is part and parcel of welfare state. Social policy is supposed to address problems of stratification, but it also produces it. Equality has always been what welfare states were supposed to produce, yet the image of equality has always remained rather vague. In some analyses it is simply taken for granted that social benefits diminish inequalities. In others, the focus is on the eradication of poverty or the overall distribution of income. The really neglected issue is the welfare state as a stratification system in its own right. Does it enhance or diminish existing status or class differences; does it create dualisms, individualism, or broad social solidarity?<sup>18</sup>.

The sociological analysis of the welfare state should also consider, within the scope of its interests, possible and actual negative consequences of the social policy for the society as a whole. After all, the declared purposes together with an honest intention to eliminate social differences (which may not be excluded) do not have to lead, after all, to positive solutions from the viewpoint of cohesion and/or equality of opportunities in the society. Anyway, Esping-Andersen, who was quoted above, speaks clearly about worlds of welfare capitalism, emphasizing that even countries with a well-developed welfare sphere are only examples of the capitalist socio-economic organization with all the consequences of this fact. This does not change, at all, the real examination of social (and not only social) differences present in capitalist countries concerning e.g. economic freedom, unemployment rate, corruption levels, trust in public institutions, etc.

The meshing of the analysed dimensions of human activities resembles a never-ending series of events which condition one another, to the nature of which we may assume a more or less critical approach; however, in fact, each of these ap-

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<sup>18</sup> G. Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 3–4.

proaches has specific, though not universal, reference points. The social *differentia specifica* includes (what also analogically pertains to other dimensions) the emphasis on relationships which do not so much go beyond other areas of the analysis as paraphrase different viewpoints into their own set of relations. As was stated by Richard Morris Titmuss: “We are concerned with the study of a range of social needs and the functioning, in conditions of scarcity, of human organisation, traditionally called social services or social welfare systems, to meet those needs. This complex area of social life lies outside or on the fringes of the so-called free market, the mechanisms of price and tests of profitability”<sup>19</sup>.

This is a very courageous statement, taking my arguments described above into account; however, I used this specific quotation to show, how representatives (in this case, a pioneer of the social policy in its institutional dimension) identify solutions of the social welfare system in the context of other determinants. It is obvious for me that the social dimension corresponds closely with other dimensions; therefore, the area of social life influences economic, political, and cultural structures and is, at the same time, under their the influence. Speaking about the welfare state sociology, I wish to underline the need for a social context of the assessment of described solutions and, in fact, to weaken the domination of the economic and political point of view. To weaken does not mean to eliminate from the scope of interest because, in my opinion “this complex area of social life lies inside of the so-called free market, the mechanisms of price and tests of profitability”, to enumerate if only a few of them.

In addition, the marginalization of the market or democratic influence may result in the lack of “unbiased” assessment of the social welfare system, which, what has already been said, may have unintended negative consequences for the social order itself. “One may even risk a statement”, says Jean-Paul Fitoussi and Pierre Rosanvallon, “that focusing on the exclusion phenomena deforms our understanding of the society. Even if these are the main social phenomena of our times, which should be fought in the first place, they do not exhaust social issues. They do not come down to people with no permanent residence (SDF), nor to ‘golden boys’, nor to the opposition of the excluded to the wealthy”<sup>20</sup>.

In this context, a few matters have to be explained before some mistaken and far-reaching conclusions are drawn. The above fragment from the work by the French researchers does not, in spite of appearances, underestimate the issue of

<sup>19</sup> R.M. Titmuss, *Commitment to Welfare*, London 1976, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> J.-P. Fitoussi, P. Rosanvallon, *Czas nowych nierówności* [The Age of New Inequalities], Kraków 2000, pp. 17–18.

social exclusion. In fact, it even places this issue in the centre of interest of the sociological analysis; however, it also shows a dangerous tendency of focusing on secondary phenomena rather than on their sources. Here, a secondary phenomenon means a clear matter of welfare as opposed to a social issue, i.e. an issue with a wider scope and far more serious consequences. Focusing on a matter of welfare at the expense of social issues will result in the further deepening of social inequalities because temporary aid provided to the most excluded people or groups will not solve fundamental causes of such inequalities. The mechanism observed by the French authors focuses on this tendency, which, while expanding the category of people included in the welfare state aid (people who are socially excluded), omits the causes of social inequalities: "We may not behave as if exclusion was only a consequence of personal misfortunes. It is a result of a certain process rather than being a specific social status. Therefore, it is not possible to prevent it without the analysis of the general destabilization of the situation of hired workers or increase in the number of risks. Speaking about exclusion without considering these transformations as well as attempting to reduce them without changing generally applicable game rules mean that one is under an illusion or that one is lying"<sup>21</sup>.

This interpretation of Fitoussi and Rosanvallon, together with their conceptualization of new inequalities which are intragroup (this means that within specific social categories, the position of individuals may be completely different), reflects the meaning of the social dimension of the welfare state analysis. Considering economic as well as political variables in the evaluation of solutions of the welfare state institution, the mentioned authors focus on the sociological level of modern problems of the French society, what gives rise to a redefinition of the sources of inequalities themselves as well as to the thinking over of their political and economic conditions.

## **5. Conclusions**

Although the issues of welfare state are, what has already been stated, inseparably related to three intertwining dimensions of the functioning of the society, they are also entangled in a number of tensions between those structures, one of which seems to dominate. Franz-Xaver Kaufmann sees it as follows:

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<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 18.

The tension between the economic sciences on the one hand and the legal and social sciences on the other underscores precisely this real tension in modern societies, a tension that became constitutive with functional differentiation. This tension manifests itself in the rise of 'social problems' and cannot be fundamentally dissolved. Thus, the tension between the dynamics of the economic system and the demands of the social welfare system is a constitutive feature of welfare states. It is a permanent challenge for politics to achieve synergies, again and again, among economic and social policies<sup>22</sup>.

Let us also remember about the specific context of considering the welfare state institution where social solutions are a part of the capitalist socio-economic system rather than a determinant of the socialist manner of production, as critics of capitalism would like them to be<sup>23</sup>. The consequences of considering the social security system from the angle of the capitalist organization of economy is of a significant importance for the title issue of the welfare state sociology. In fact, the domination of private ownership of means of production combined with the individualistic ideology creates a possible hazard for social securities, which contain, in their ideological foundations, the aim to eliminate, really or only potentially, social inequalities and, as a result, equalize life opportunities for various categories of entities. Naturally, it may not be excluded that the capitalist reality, as a part of widely understood economic efficiency, intentionally shifts, to welfare state institutions, a part of burdens which should lie on the side of private ownership of means of production. It does not matter whether we speak about the system of general education or the health care system, to give only the two most obvious examples. Some components of the welfare state lie beyond the scope of interest of capitalist entities present in the free market, which seek each opportunity to generate and appropriate an added value.

What also speaks in favour of the thesis supporting the wider perspective of the sociological view of the welfare state is also the nature of a major part of economic concepts which are characterized by a specific orthodoxy of their own solutions. This means, in practice, that a dominating part of economic approaches pays more attention to coherence among the functioning paradigms in economy than to achievements and solutions of other social disciplines. Hence the arising observation that:

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<sup>22</sup> E.-X. Kaufmann, *Towards a Theory of the Welfare State*, "European Review" 2000, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 304.

<sup>23</sup> Interesting observations in this area were made by Michael Walzer, who compared nationalized distribution with the welfare state and nationalized production with the socialist state. See: M. Walzer, *Socializing the Welfare State* [in:] *Democracy and the Welfare State*, A. Gutmann (ed.), New Jersey 1988, pp. 13–26.

The economic approach is, moreover, antisociological. Consider Gary Becker's (1976: 8) claim that the economic approach is applicable to all human beings: 'rich or poor persons, men or women, adults or children, brilliant or stupid persons, patients or therapists, businessmen or politicians, teachers or students.' In advancing this universalist claim, the economic approach elides social differences. Inequality – the backbone of contemporary sociology – does not play a significant role in the economic approach (Lie 1992). In other words, class, race and ethnicity, gender, or any other social attribute remains essentially outside the theoretical purview of the economic approach (...)<sup>24</sup>.

To the existing gap between economy and other disciplines in some areas of scientific inquiries, more interdisciplinary solutions have been finally applied, the achievements of which prove the heuristic productivity of such approaches<sup>25</sup>.

By proposing the shift of a focus in research on the welfare state from, most of all, the economic or political point of view to the sociological viewpoint, I would like to re-emphasize that I do not mean to eliminate those two dimensions of the functioning of societies, because they cannot be overestimated. This idea consists in considering, within a wider scope, the sociological perspective, which is *de facto* a condition of the mentioned dimensions. Then, dialectic complications such as the one below will not be difficult to solve: "The embarrassing secret of the welfare state is that, while its impact upon capitalist accumulation may well become destructive (as the conservative analysis so emphatically demonstrates), its abolition would be plainly disruptive (a fact that is systematically ignored by the conservative critics). The contradiction is that while capitalism cannot coexist 'with,' neither can it exist 'without,' the welfare state"<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> J. Lie, *Sociology of Markets*, "Annual Review of Sociology" 1997, Vol. 23, p. 344.

<sup>25</sup> Public choice theory is a perfect example. See works of: K. Arrow, D. Black, J. Buchanan, G. Tullock, A. Downs, M. Olson etc.

<sup>26</sup> C. Offe, *op.cit.*, p. 153.

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