



## **Welfare Lobby Groups responding to Globalisation: A Comparison of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and the UK Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)**

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### **Aims of Project**

The past decade has witnessed a period of intense economic globalisation. The growing significance of international trade, investment, production and financial flows appears to be curtailing the autonomy of individual nation states. In particular, globalisation appears to be encouraging, if not demanding, a decline in social spending and standards.

However, many authors believe that this thesis ignores the continued impact of national political and ideological pressures and lobby groups on policy outcomes. In particular, it has been argued that national welfare consumer and provider groups remain influential defenders of the welfare state. For example, US aged care groups are considered to be particularly effective defenders of social security pensions. According to this argument, governments engaged in welfare retrenchment may experience considerable electoral backlash (Pierson 1996; Mishra 1999). Yet, it is also noted that governments can take action to reduce the impact of such groups by reducing their funding, and their access to policy-making and consultation processes. These actions are then justified on the basis of removing potential obstacles to economic competitiveness (Pierson 1994; Melville 1999).

The aim of this project (January 2004 – December 2004) is to develop a methodological framework for analysing the response of welfare lobby groups to economic globalisation. Initially, the framework is being developed and applied to the peak Australian welfare lobby group, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS). Later, the framework will also be used to compare ACOSS' response to globalisation with that of other national lobby groups such as the British Child Poverty Action Group. Such a comparison will also explore the varied ideological, institutional and political contexts in which different national lobby groups operate.

The framework will endeavour to explore a number of pressing issues:

1. Has globalisation influenced (negatively or otherwise) the power of national welfare lobby groups to influence national social policy agendas and outcomes, and if so in what way?
2. Have national governments sought consciously or otherwise to reduce the influence of welfare lobby groups in order to enhance their capacity to reduce welfare spending? If so, what actions have they taken? Do such actions specifically reflect the impact of globalisation, or are they more likely to be linked to broader ideological agendas such as neo-liberalism?
3. How have national welfare lobby groups responded to the political and ideological challenge

posed by globalisation? Have they attempted to promote alternatives to the currently dominant corporate forms of globalisation? Have they attempted to form alliances with other national and transnational social policy groups and movements?

### **Methodology and Research Plan**

The research is being funded by a small grant from the Monash University Faculty of Medicine

Information about the comparative response of ACOSS and CPAG to globalisation will be sought from three principal sources: a) A literature review of internal ACOSS and CPAG publications b) A review of external publications pertaining to ACOSS and CPAG lobbying activities; c) Interviews with a small number of key ACOSS and CPAG personnel.

The interviews and literature review will be limited to the past five years reflecting both our limited resources, and the fact that globalisation only became an object of popular concern in the late 1990s. A tentative methodological framework will be developed by the applicant for analysing the relationship between ACOSS, CPAG and globalisation according to the three questions discussed above: a) Impact of globalisation on lobby group effectiveness; b) Actions by government to marginalise welfare lobby groups; c) The undertaking of broader forms of advocacy and alliances by ACOSS and CPAG around globalisation.

### **References**

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- Pierson, P.** 1994: *Dismantling the Welfare State?* New York: Cambridge University Press.
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