EDITORIAL FOREWORD

During the 1990s European social issues promise to figure very prominently in academic and policy discussion. For this there are two major reasons. First, with the moves towards the political integration of the European Community (EC), stimulated in part by the Single European Act 1986, an increasing range of policy decisions will be taken at Community rather than national level. Second, the dramatic changes in eastern Europe, as well as producing turmoil in the social, economic and political conditions of those countries, pose a substantial challenge to practical policy-making there and in the rest of the Continent, and to academic analysis and theory-building.

These developments are provoking a fundamental rethinking of 'social policy'. The European Commission and the member states of the EC are examining what social dimension the Single Market requires. A social policy orchestrated at Community level is said to be a necessary precondition for social and political cohesion, at a time of accelerated economic restructuring. Opponents of the 'social dimension', however, see it as contradicting the liberal spirit of the Single Market and as undermining the increased economic prosperity which will be required if the Community's citizens are to give their political consent to further European integration.

It is also in relation to social policy that the developments in eastern Europe pose particularly significant questions, both theoretical and practical. The shift from centrally planned to market economies – with major problems of unemployment and hardship, at least in the short term – is threatening to undermine popular support for new and democratically elected governments. Continuing emigration to the countries of the EC seems likely, as a response to the – at best – slow growth in opportunities at home.

Common to both eastern and western Europe, therefore, is the question of the role of social policy – at a national and supranational level – in a period of major economic restructuring, in protecting citizens' living standards, supporting economic efficiency and securing political consent. It is this question that has led us to launch this Journal. The Journal will be centrally concerned with

1. the implications for social welfare of the current economic and political changes in western and eastern Europe
2. the redistribution of social policy decision-making between national and supranational authorities within Europe and the efforts of these supranational authorities to establish common national standards
3. the forces promoting convergence or divergence in welfare strategies across Europe as a whole and the scope for individual countries to maintain distinctive welfare systems
4. methodologies for the study of social policy and social welfare in a cross-national and supranational context.

The Journal will therefore give priority to articles on social policy that deal with comparative developments within Europe and with supranational processes of social, economic and political change. Articles which bring together theoretical and empirical elements and which offer significant developments in methodologies of cross-national research are particularly welcome.

The Journal will be concerned with the experience of social policy from 'below' as well as from 'above'. It is aimed at policymakers and practitioners as well as the academic audience. In the Europe of the 1990s, these decision-makers will need to move beyond narrowly national preoccupations; to an increasing extent the policy-making community will define itself in European rather than merely national terms. It is in recognition of these multiple audiences that the Journal, in addition to academic articles, will also include a European Briefing.
section. This will contain a regular Digest of policy developments at national and supranational levels, as well as news items on particular policy issues and on the social movements and campaigns that are seeking to influence European social policy.

We intend that the Journal should be accessible to authors and to readers in all parts of Europe. We are, in particular, making efforts to develop a network of correspondents within eastern Europe. We hope that the Journal will, among other things, provide a vehicle for exchange and critical scrutiny of ideas and policies between these different parts of the Continent.

Each member of our Board is also involved in activities and studies which go beyond Europe. Europe is not isolated from developments in the wider world and the social policy scenarios which are under debate here are shaped by those wider developments also. But for us, the coming years promise to be sufficiently momentous for the countries of our Continent to justify a Journal devoted to them alone and to the social policy options which face them.