I am delighted to have been appointed editor of Policy and Politics. I have been on its Board since it came to the University of Bristol in 1979 and was its Abstracts Editor between 1980 and 1983. First of all, I would like to thank my predecessor as editor, Paul Burton, for making the succession a painless process. Throughout his period in post, he was thorough, imaginative and forward looking. Hence it is not until this July 1996 issue that I have had to make the hard choices between excellent submissions and, even more daunting, to sit before a blank screen in order to compose this editorial.

Referring to the issue of succession leads to reflection on whether submissions in the near future to Policy and Politics might address constitutional matters in the UK. Proposals for referenda abound: abolition of the monarchy following the abdication or death of the Queen, continued membership of the European Union, the single currency. Other agenda include reform of the House of Lords, proposals for regional chambers in England and some form of quasi-independence for Scotland and perhaps Wales, the stuttering peace process in Northern Ireland. The (dis) United Kingdom is going through a major bout of introspection.

I share with my editorial predecessors the view that debate of this kind should not be confined to domestic commentators but should be illuminated by experience elsewhere. It was in 1990 that Robin Means, Paul Burton's predecessor as editor of Policy and Politics, reflected on international perspectives in public policy and established the journal's International Advisory Board. The international dimension for the journal is important both intellectually and financially. In response to this, one of my early initiatives has been to introduce the annual Policy and Politics lecture. The first was held in April 1996 and was given by The Hon Neal Blewett, the Australian High Commissioner in London. His theme was Australia, Europe and the Pacific Century. Despite strong challenges in the literature to the notion of the Pacific Century from, for example, Gerald Segal of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Dr Blewett convinced his audience that the influence of the Pacific titans of the 21st century, China, Japan and the United States, was of greater importance to the future polity of Europe (and the UK within Europe) than were our current domestic squabbles.

This issue of Policy and Politics includes two explicitly comparative articles which help to put the UK in context. The first, by Castles and Pierson, examines the thesis of welfare state convergence and concludes that, whilst international economic forces affect Australia, New Zealand and the UK alike, there is enough diversity in the policy response to raise questions about the convergence thesis. The second article, by Toft, argues for the development of a theory of governance of welfare provision to supplement economic theory of the welfare state and for its empirical dimension it draws on comparison between social security systems in Britain, Denmark and Germany. This argument could well be developed further and responses to Toft's paper would be most welcome.

Other articles in this issue, whilst not explicitly global, transnational or comparative, have broad implications. Barrow's advocacy of principal-agent theory in illuminating the organisation of and changes in public services provision has the potential for wide application, as have the reflections by Palfrey and Thomas on ethical issues in policy evaluation, "relatively uncharted territory", as they put it. Towell's argument for revaluing and renewing the UK National Health Service is based on an empowerment thesis refreshingly embedded as much in personal experience as in the analytical literature. I am very pleased to publish this cogent but unconventionally constructed piece. The pathbreaking empirical work by Owen and Farmer addresses one of most complex issues in British social policy. How can children be adequately protected whilst recognising both their rights and those of their family members, and the responsibilities of the planners and providers of care? And how much more problematic is this in a multi-racial context?

The first issue of Policy and Politics under my editorship has been constructed. I trust it will offer the readers of the journal, both in Europe and further afield, good value for money. Planning for the next issue in October 1996 is well under way and thought is being given to 1997, the 25th anniversary of the journal and, of course, how Policy and Politics should reflect the millennium.

Randall Smith