

Elisabeth B. Reynolds (ed.), *Income Security in Canada: Changing Needs, Changing Means*. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1993, pp. 226. \$15.95 (softcover)

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There is an old joke that goes, "If all the economists in the world were placed end to end, they still wouldn't reach a conclusion!" In the spring of 1993, the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) organized a round-table and did, in fact, put more than ten economists and experts into one room to explore Canadian's social welfare policy. Although they did not reach a "conclusion," they were surprisingly harmonious and less controversial than one would expect.

Elisabeth Reynolds did a fine job editing the variety of papers, commentaries and discussion presented at the conference into the book, *Income Security in Canada: Changing Needs, Changing Means*. The contributors are an impressive array of experts on social policy from academia, government and the private sector. The result is a welcomed and timely examination of the issues surrounding social policy reform, just as the Government of Canada has begun the daunting task of reviewing Canada's social welfare system with an eye for reform.

The papers begin with an offering by Jonathan Kesselman of a theoretical overview of the objectives and values underlying employment-related social policies. The following papers by Tom Courchene and Lars Osberg address the integration of social and economic policy. An historical perspective is provided by Claude Castonguay and the role of CAP is explored in Paul Hobson and France St-Hilaire's papers. Descriptions of micro-level approaches in Quebec, Ontario, the USA and Sweden are offered by their respective government experts.

The concluding wrap-up by Andre Reynauld touches on the political realities of welfare reform and summarizes the emerging themes of their discussions. It is evident in his summary that the contributors share a common economic perspective rooted in conservatism. The book calls for a comprehensive and consistent approach to social welfare partially achieved through the integration of separate and competing social programs. However, the

authors imply, but are not so daring to suggest, a guaranteed income. Much more attractive is "targeting" assistance which involves the "correct identification of specific status" (p. 213). The authors acknowledge the limitations of targeting, but are prepared to accept them in order to narrow the focus of social welfare, rejecting universality.

The book also has a macroeconomic orientation. The authors consistently frame their discussions in relation to the global structural changes and international integration and competition. Reynauld credits Courchene with stating that "social policy could not be divorced from economic policy." Unfortunately, they fail to argue that "economic policy could not be divorced from social policy." In fact, economic policy is social policy.

Finally, the authors argue for a conciliation between the provincial and federal governments. Their solution is greater provincial control and decision making, with the federal government providing the funds. This move could lead toward a balkanization of programs resulting in interprovincial inequities, residency requirements and an inability of the federal government to provide effective monitoring and support.

Although the volume gives the impression of a thorough treatment of the entire range of perspectives, the book does suffer from a narrow economic focus permeating the papers and the responses. First, the book's foreword expresses an orientation directed towards individualism rather than the collective. It states that the conference's purpose was "to address the changes in society at the macro level and analyze ways citizens can cope in this unstable environment" (p. 3). Further limiting the discussion is the indicated intent to address principally the working age population. Are not the poverty and employment issues of this age group inextricably bound up with the welfare of children and the aged?

Additionally, there are two assumptions made explicit in the very first paragraph of the foreword that limit the scope of debate. The contributors generalize that the existing social welfare system does not promote self-sufficiency, and that fiscal constraints are forcing governments to reshape social contracts with less cost. It is precisely the acceptance of these assumptions that has resulted in conference participants emerging with congruent understandings and solutions.

The authors acknowledge that much has been achieved in Canada with respect to poverty but "pockets of poverty still persist." These "pockets" include children, lone parents, Aboriginal peoples and the working poor. However, these so-called "pockets" represent sizeable chunks of the Canadian population, and the authors failed to include the disabled. The authors seem cold and dismissive.

Another recurrent theme is that Canadians cannot afford social programs that are genuinely designed to reduce inequities and, therefore, must

reduce public expenditures. Advocates of humanitarian and equity approaches, including many feminists, call this position "debt hysteria." The authors fail to analyze the tax structure, but offer suggestions for its reform. Furthermore, nowhere are feminist analyses given credence. The authors would be wise to examine Eichler's *Families in Canada Today: Recent Changes and their Policy Consequences* and McCormack's *Politics and the Hidden Injuries of Gender*.

Another puzzling omission is any discussion that is related to the positive outcomes of the existing social welfare system. By just about any quantitative or qualitative standard, Canada has been consistently rated as one of the "best" countries in the world to live in. Does it not occur to these authors that our low infant mortality rate, safe streets, clean cities and so on are related to our social security systems? If social assistance were reduced, would one expect to spend more or less money on policing, courts and correctional services?

In spite of the above, and the lack of treatment of the human side of poverty, the book does an interesting and credible job of discussing the problems surrounding work incentives, equity issues and concerns regarding program, albeit from a fiscally conservative orientation. Its economic underpinnings and its occasional use of jargon for the most part do not detract from its essential accessibility to those without a grounding in economics. It should be read by social policy makers of whatever discipline and students of social work, economics, political science and public policy.

Mark Robert Rank, *Living on the Edge: The Realities of Welfare in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 266. \$39.55 (hardcover).

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A major theme of this eight year study of welfare in Wisconsin (not America) is that people on social assistance are like you and me. Like us, they have hopes for their children, a desire to work, the hatred of dependence, and unfortunately negative perceptions of "others" on welfare. For example, Rank found that only 6% of welfare recipients felt *they* were solely responsible for being on welfare. But like the general public, 90% of the recipients felt *others* on welfare were partially or fully to blame (pp. 133, 142).

Most of the findings and interpretations in *Living on the Edge* are not new to serious students of welfare for the poor. Some details, however, may