Neo-Conservative Policy in British Columbia, 1986–1991"), Muszynski ("Defending the Welfare State and Labour Market Policy"), Shields and Russell ("Part-Time Workers, the Welfare State, and Labour Market Relations"), and Haddow ("Canadian Organized Labour and the Guaranteed Annual Income").

2. Delineated in the chapters by Lord ("Social Assistance and 'Employability' for Single Mothers in Nova Scotia"), Clark, ("Mothers and Children: Ensuring Acceptable Standards of Living"), and Shields and Russell ("Part-Time Workers . . . ").

John O'Neill, *The Missing Child in Liberal Theory: Towards a Covenant Theory of Family, Community, Welfare and the Civic State.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994, 136pp. $40.00 (hardcover), $14.95 (paperback).

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The Missing Child in Liberal Theory could have been an important book. O'Neill challenges readers to rededicate "the Canadian commons to the well-being of the civic person" which he confidently claims will provide "a model of survival and governance among the nations of the twenty-first century" (p. 120). At a time when politically and fiscally neo-liberal forces are joining with the economic forces gathered in the global market to threaten the very existence of the welfare state, a call for a "second-generation welfare state" (the present generation of children being supported by the first generation) could provide the kind of ammunition needed to fight the diminishing life chances of children today growing up in poor and modest income families.

O'Neill's intentions for distributional justice for children are admirable. But his arguments to build his case, as to who besides their parents should support children, take him into a strange direction. O'Neill turns his argument into a battle of absolutes—contractarian justice versus "civic covenant," the politics of liberal individualism against the "norm of reciprocity within and between generations"—ignoring that there are clear limits to what can be settled by philosophical argument. His plea is for a moral exchange of quid pro quo—"to extend ourselves in a community of civic obligations towards others whose recognition simultaneously affords us our own moral worth" (p. 86), which he claims can only be achieved through "a shift from liberal contract paradigm to a covenant paradigm with maximum recognition of the social endowment." This "cannot be inherited," he contends, "except as an obligation to serve it as stewards of

this generation's indebtedness to past and future generations through whom social institutions derive their life" (p. 15). The problem with this is that he forgets that the present social endowment of the civic commons we received consists of an inegalitarian social order whose institutions and social practices are better changed than served.

O'Neill dismisses John Rawls' contractarian liberalism as political fiction because it assumes that atomistic "disembodied individuals" spring from nowhere into adulthood only to return, eventually, to the void. It is a contract among rational individuals in a hypothetical state of nature, who had no way of knowing what place they would occupy in the social order and therefore would make sure that the position of the most humble and poorest members would be acceptable and tolerable, because they themselves might find themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Rawls' social contract like Kant's is built on the moral precept that individuals will treat others as they would like to be treated themselves were they in their place. By contrast, O'Neill grounds his civic covenant in "the continuity of life that extends from the present to the past and from the present to the future of the human family" (p. 53). He correctly recognizes that accounting for the procreation and nurturing of children is part of the general problem in contractarian theory and declares his covenant principle of care between parents and children as the most sacred principle in the founding of human institutions (p. 56). The fundamental material reality that humans must reproduce as well as produce in order to sustain human life (a natural condition) makes "the covenant of care" for him an inescapable function of social life.

The question is whether basing his civic covenant on the natural condition of generative powers does not amount to a form of biologism. Biologistic arguments generally tend to subsume complex socially and historically constructed phenomena like families under the simple category of biological essentialism. For O'Neill's families and civic society are homologous and held together through the procreative power of both parents. His civic covenant flows naturally from the "progenitors," who, "so far from being 'owners' of ovum, sperm and womb should rather be considered trustees of Life . . . " (p. 65). The solidarity of the trustees of Life then becomes the foundation of the "civic commons to endow the family economy" (p. 112) and the social bond between citizens as progenitors. O'Neill attributes even more social power to his biological transcendentism. It allows him to avoid the sexually undifferentiated individual of social contract theory and to insist that "from the cultural perspective of family covenants *both* parents have children, while recognizing that one or the other — or both where day-care is involved — may not have the major role in their care" (p. 66). What are we to make of this? Ignoring the causal role procreative biology has played

historically in the ability of male progenitors to walk away from responsibilities towards their children, O'Neill wants to use his notion of "family covenants" to support the sex-rights of fathers. Thus he claims that we are currently running the risk of allowing women "to reject maternity by themselves and confer paternity by their same will in as much as they choose insemination" (p. 65). Here one wonders who he means by we? — Is he referring to himself or his readers, some of them female who may not share his view of the decision of some women to parent on their own as "sexist limitations vis-à-vis fathers . . . and ageist exclusion of grandparents" (p. 66)?

Besides the possessive individualism of bourgeois feminists, O'Neill points to empirical evidence that the "duty-free society" is failing children. Mobile, rootless corporations unwilling to tolerate tax levels that would pay for social programs and lack of political will are blamed for their failure to protect children and their families against "swings in economic forces" (p. 110). Because he wants us to believe that rich and poor are both hurt by the "duty-free society," he has nothing to say about how the beneficiaries, the well-to-do and powerful, should abandon the advantages this "duty-free society" gives them. His insistence on the power of intergenerational reciprocal norms prevents him from considering the possibility that their personal economic gain might be much more significant to them than their mythical bond with economically disadvantaged "trustees of Life."

O'Neill says nothing about the way economic stagnation has made government expenditure unpopular. Social program spending enjoyed considerably more acceptance in the prosperous sixties and seventies when the economic pie was increasing and rich and poor benefited, although inequitably, from economic growth. The moral force of O'Neill's civic covenant is to turn around the present Canadian political agenda. A force that he sees as springing from the bond between citizens and that the demands of the reproduction of life impose on them. O'Neill's indentification of biological reality with a moral imperative is far from persuasive. In the modern world, the generative powers of fathers do not give them political power and families and political society are seen as two different forms of association. In a society structured by unequal class, gender and race relations, public responsibility for the reproduction of life is a divisive issue, as public resistance to state provision for mothers parenting on their own clearly indicates. This reality makes the relationship between *The Missing Child in Liberal Theory* and public provisions like blowing the horn in the car when stuck in an impenetrable traffic jam. It draws attention to your frustration but does nothing to get the traffic moving.

The combination of stagnating standards of living preventing many young people from starting or enlarging a family, the persistence of high unemployment preventing those out of work from earning a living, students

unable to find employment appropriate to their qualifications and the division of the labour market into well-paying secure jobs and low-paying, time-limited jobs without benefits, are factors generating explosive social forces. Alongside the political revival of neo-liberalism and the power of global forces there is also working beneath them both a renewed stirring of discontent and dissatisfaction with the present state of class relations. These forces of discontent as the empirical evidence of the thirties and forties showed, may prove in the long run stronger and more powerful than O'Neill's continuity of Life covenant. If an argument cannot be settled philosophically, it seems more useful to let evidence speak instead of engaging in misplaced biological transcendentism. It would have been convincing.

Pamela Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma: The Gender Politics of Auto Workers in Canada, 1937–1979*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994, 293pp. $50.00 (hardcover), $19.95 (paperback).

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The topic of *Labour Dilemma; The Gender Politics of Auto Workers in Canada, 1937–1979* is an in-depth analysis of the process by which unequal value of women's work and status is accepted and reinforced in the workplace and the union. It analyses the ways society's values were incorporated into hiring and firing systems, including the most basic of union systems—that of seniority.

The author, Pamela Sugiman, started the book as part of a doctoral dissertation seven years before its publication. She started the project with a question "Why has the auto manufacturing industry remained sex-segregated for a period spanning more than seventy years?" Her book succeeds in answering this question.

In Canada, the United Auto Worker's Union (UAW) started in the late 1930s. Ms. Sugiman described the history of this union as one of the most socially active, democratic and progressive of the large industrial unions in North America. Yet sex segregation in the auto plants did not begin to break down until 1970. She describes the contradiction of being an agent for social and economic change and, at the same time, a supporter and reenforcer of the status quo as labour's dilemma.

Central to labour's dilemma was the issue of seniority, fought for by men and women on the basis that seniority offered a system of fairness in