

**Jane Pulkingham and Gordon Ternowetsky, eds.**, *Remaking Canadian Social Policy: Social Security in the Late 1990s*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1996, 337pp. \$34.95 (softcover).

**Frank Tester, Chris McNiven, and Robert Case, eds.**, *Critical Choices, Turbulent Times: A Companion Reader on Canadian Social Policy Reform*. Vancouver: The School of Social Work, University of British Columbia, 1996, 134pp. \$14.95 (softcover).

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The 1994 Social Security Review (SSR) launched by Lloyd Axworthy is now a distant memory, another in a series of failed social security reviews in the history of Canadian social policy. The issues at stake in the review, however, were, and continue to be, vital to the future of social programs in Canada. These two books represent an important discussion of those issues.

*Remaking Social Policy in Canada* reflects the deliberations at the Seventh Conference on Canadian Social Welfare Policy, that took place from June 25th to 28th, 1995 in Vancouver. The goal of the conference was "to raise corners of the debate that have been either overlooked or inadequately addressed in the social security review" (p. 26). By the time of the conference, the Social Security Review had been eclipsed by the February 1995 budget and the authors' task became one of anticipating the potential impact of the 1995 federal budget and the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST).

This edited book provides a comprehensive and well researched critique of the social security review and the potential impact of the new CHST. With regard to the social security review, it documents the increasing influence of the Department of Finance in shaping social policy; and demonstrates the missing analysis of structural inequalities in the labour market, in taxation policy, and in the impact of changes for women. With regard to the CHST, it warns us that the withdrawal of the federal government from any commitment to preserve national standards will return us to the worthy/unworthy poor distinctions of the past. It forecasts a future for the new "worker-citizen" (p. 258) consisting of lower wages and decreased employment security. And finally, it looks to the future and raises questions about how best to use our energies for social change.

The book is divided into seven sections, with 21 chapters. The first section is an introduction to the book by the editors, Jane Pulkingham and Gordon Ternowetsky, and includes a very helpful chronology of the events of the Social Security Review (Therese Jennissen) and a summary of the government's major reform proposals (Melanie Hess).

The theme of the second section is Canadian social policy at the crossroads. Ken Battle and Sherri Torjman comment on the impact of the CHST and the 1995 federal budget in a number of social policy areas. Susan Silver provides an historical review of the battle for national standards in health care and the "normative shifts" (p. 67) in the 1995 budget affecting the enforceability of the Canada Health Act. Yves Vaillancourt presents a Quebec viewpoint, arguing that the CHST actually lengthens the time the federal government can enforce national standards, and suggests the development of a new progressive social policy paradigm. Richard Shillington provides an overview of the relationship of the tax system to social policy goals, arguing for increased scrutiny of this relationship.

In the third section on labour market restructuring, John Wiseman compares responses to globalization in Australia and Canada, Jim Stanford demonstrates that the real impact of employment program changes will be to lower wages, not to improve the already flexible Canadian labour market, and Grant Schellenberg discusses the increasing financial insecurity for older workers. The discussion of work issues continues in the fourth section on workfare, education and training. Graham Riches draws lessons for Canada from Australia's labour market and social security reform. William Low critiques the effectiveness of work incentives for single parents on social assistance in British Columbia, while Joan McFarland and Robert Mullaly critique the New Brunswick Works program. Jonathan Greene examines the affects of the social security proposals and the 1995 budget on the quality of, and access to post-secondary education.

The impact of the CHST and Employment Insurance changes on women is examined in section five. An analysis of the structural inequalities faced by women was not part of the review and Therese Jennissen documents how the changes to social programs will have a disproportionately negative effect on women. Leah Vosko also shows how women will lose out as training and insurance programs are geared to regular (full-time, full-year) workers. Martha Friendly and Mab Oloman critique the absence of a federal commitment and framework for child care, which has resulted in regional disparity and inequity.

The last two sections of the book look to the future and make suggestions about how to strategically respond to the "normative shift" (Silver) reflected in the 1995 budget. Diana Ralph makes a case for shifting from writing briefs to government to building a people's agenda rooted in a grassroots defense of social programs. In a similar vein, Gloria Geller and Jan Joel suggest countering the new model of individual competitiveness by demonstrating a different

way through women's community economic development and new models of citizenship. And Michael Bach and Marcia Rioux describe a new framework for social well-being that incorporates self-determination, democratization and equality. In their concluding chapter, Pulkingham and Ternowetsky outline several issues for a future agenda, and conclude with a challenge to develop concrete mechanisms that go beyond a reincarnation of Keynesian policies.

I would recommend this book as an informative discussion of a critical turning point in Canadian social welfare policy. In addition, because it engages in structural analysis of social and economic trends, the issues discussed in this book will continue to have relevance for some time to come. It will be helpful for social policy scholars and, because of the comprehensive nature of the issues discussed, it would be useful in an upper level course on Canadian social welfare policy.

There are two challenges for the social policy community that issue from this book. First, a number of authors noted the complete ineffectiveness of public participation in the social security review. If it is time, as Ralph suggests, to stop writing briefs to government, what new strategies for social change are called for? Is the answer to mobilize what Vaillancourt calls the third sector, what Ralph refers to as grassroots organizations and what Geller and Joel call popular sector organizations? Perhaps the first question to ask is do these authors mean the same thing? Who are these groups and do they have a common vision?

This leads us to the second challenge. Bach and Rioux point out that mobilizing and energizing the "community" or "civil society" can only be effective if it takes place within a social and economic policy framework that does not undermine the very survival of these groups, as the current policy framework does. The second challenge is to work on this new framework. The work of the Roehrer Institute in their *Social Well-Being; A Paradigm for Reform* is a good place to start.

A number of the presentations at the Seventh Conference on Canadian Social Welfare Policy were gathered into a second edited book, entitled *Critical Choices, Turbulent Times: A Companion Reader on Canadian Social Policy Reform*. The editors are Chris McNiven, Frank James Tester and Robert Case.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this volume is to serve as a companion reader to a community workbook on social programs with the same title, and to provide multiple perspectives on the current reforms to social policy in Canada. These perspectives include institutional responses, perspectives from labour, business and a number of social movements. Two introductory pieces on the history of social welfare policy (McNiven and Tester) and a concluding chapter on future prospects (Tester) provide the framework for the contributions.

The book is designed to be an accessible text for the general public and for community, church, labour and service organizations.

Although the call for papers for the conference on which both books are based took the standpoint that "the status quo for Canadian social programs was no longer viable" (Pulkingham and Ternowetsky, p. 14), many of the pieces in this companion volume are status quo reflections of the respective sector's position on social policy. This necessarily leads to pieces which challenge and contradict each other. For example, one can contrast Jean Swanson, who claims that "current changes to social policies and programs will contribute to the deaths of more Canadians" (p. 73) and Thomas Courchene, who thinks the CHST "is an ingenious program" (p. 47). Using contrast and comparison can, of course, be a useful tool to learn about approaches to social policy reform. But for the uninitiated, it requires a framework within which to situate and understand the various positions. The two historical pieces at the beginning do not adequately provide such an integrating framework.

The reader begins with an overview by McNiven of the history of social welfare policy from Confederation through the 1960s, primarily through the lens of political forces with somewhat less attention paid to the institutions of federalism. Tester continues the historical overview, tracing the period from 1968 to the Social Security Review (SSR), focussing on the dominance of economic concerns and the eroding presence of the federal government.

The Perspectives Section begins with institutional responses to the SSR by Sherri Torjman of the Caledon Institute and Thomas Courchene of C.D. Howe. While Torjman argues that human well-being should have been part of the framework which shaped the review, Courchene argues that fiscal restraint and globalization are the new framework through which we "filter" our values of fairness and equity. Andrew Jackson, representing labour, argues for a high growth, high employment economy, focussing particularly on the commitment to full employment. Jean Swanson talks about the growing backlash against the poor, especially in the form of restrictive workfare, and offers suggestions for fighting poverty. Sunera Thobani describes how recent changes to Canadian social programs harm women, and how immigration policies are contributing to racism, particularly against women of colour. The struggle of First Nations women to recapture their rights within the Native community is described by Sharon McIver. The perspective of business is given by Catherine Swift who argues that since the social security system was "unsustainable" and "passive", there are some positive elements to be found in the proposed reforms.

This section on Perspectives also includes a piece by Armine Yalnizyan and Tester which provides an insightful discussion of how to frame the questions that face Canadians about the relationship of fiscal and social policy, and the need for social imperatives as well as fiscal imperatives. I found its placement in this section curious, since it reflects not so much a sector

perspective but a framework for dealing with the various perspectives in the book. It would have been a good introductory chapter, and could still be used as an integrating piece.

The last chapter is a prospective contribution by Tester, which I would call the highlight of the book. Tester gives a direct challenge to those on both the left and the right (including some of the authors in this reader) who would argue that future prospects are to be found in high economic growth and development. In so doing, he steps outside a debate that is taking place primarily within liberalism about the role of the state in response to the market,<sup>2</sup> and argues for a discussion about how the market itself is structured. If social democratic theory continues to align itself with the economic growth that lies at the heart of the capitalist enterprise, says Tester, its time has come and gone. Tester outlines an agenda for the future that takes into account *both* the environmental limits to growth and the need for social justice.

As might be surmised from my previous comments, I found the pieces in this reader to be uneven, both in terms of the extent to which they engage in fresh thinking and in terms of their substantive quality. Some chapters read like scholarly pieces, others read more like newspaper editorials. In addition, the lack of references makes it difficult to verify statements about which there is considerable disagreement among policy analysts.

The book does achieve the purpose of representing the multiple perspectives on social policy that are operating in Canada. In that regard perhaps my comments about the lack of fresh thinking should be seen more as a comment on the nature of discourse within various sectors, than as a critique of the book itself. I would suggest that the book is less successful in achieving the purpose of "providing a comprehensive overview of social policy formation in Canada" (p. iv). In that regard, it can best be used as a companion to a source that does provide a comprehensive overview.

## NOTES

1. Note that there is now a second edition of *Critical Choices*. Information can be found at the following website:  
[www.arts.ubc.ca/social/ftester/CriticalChoices/](http://www.arts.ubc.ca/social/ftester/CriticalChoices/).
  2. Gary Teeple makes this argument in *Globalization and Social Reform*, and argues that a discussion around how to fairly redistribute the wealth created by production [the discussion within liberalism] misses the fact that "the distribution of the social product has already occurred in the sphere of production" (p. 42).
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