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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Paul Adams - Editor

The Cost of Human Neglect: America's Welfare Failure, by HARRELL R. RODGERS JR. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1982. 192 pp. \$20.00 cloth, \$12.00 paper.

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"America has the most illogical welfare system of any modern nation on earth," Harrell Rodgers declares in the introduction to his timely new book. "It is a huge, complex, inefficient, ineffective failure--and a dreadfully expensive failure to boot." Rodgers asks "How could America spend so much and accomplish so little?" and devotes over 200 tightly argued and detailed pages to answering that query and proposing alternatives to our welfare failure.

Despite the Regan-like language of this declaration and challenge, Rodgers's book is most not definitely not a paen to the economic and welfare policies of the New Right. In fact, Rodgers effectively and repeatedly punctures the myths, miscalculations and misstatements of those currently dismantling the ne'er completed structure of the U.S. welfare state. His most telling arguments are those which refute persistent stereotypes propagated by conservatives and new-liberals alike as to

the nature and size of the poverty population (much larger in Rodgers's view, and more diverse) and the relationship between the economic and welfare systems in the United States (much more interdependent, Rodgers asserts, than generally believed).

Rodgers's own answers, however are only partially satisfying. He concludes "that the American welfare system does about what it is meant to do," that is, provide insufficient benefits to a carefully selected population of "legitimate" poor, "to treat only the symptoms of the continuing crisis caused by society's neglect of millions of citizens," not "to end or to prevent poverty." By his own admission, this is not a controversial view. The flawed nature of U.S. welfare programs has become an article of faith among Republicans, Democrats, radicals and even many social workers.

Nor is Rodgers's second major argument particularly novel. He stresses throughout the book that the success of the U.S. welfare system is predicated upon a healthy U.S. economy, one which competes effectively in the world market, keeps inflation at modest levels and provides "all willing adults with decent employment opportunities while it serves public needs." This view, too, in various forms has been standard U.S. national policy since Kennedy, and, arguably, since the New Deal. Both the Reagan Administration and its critics agree that these should be our country's economic and social goals. No major party or faction thereof, however, has developed a means to achieve these far-reaching goals without compounding the current misery of millions of Americans and writing off the futures of millions of others.

Rodgers's proposals to revamp our welfare system without such economic and social shockwaves also offer little that is new, but present an effective and occasionally persuasive synthesis of the of the corporatist/social democratic position in the United States as articulated by Felix Rohatyn and Lester Thurow. Rodgers calls for a dismantling of our present reactive system and its replacement with a preventive system consisting of four major components: (1) a viable and broadly defined family policy; (2) an income policy--funded via general tax revenues and an employer/employee tax--which would provide adequate benefits to those who cannot work and those whose incomes fall below a decent financial level; (3) a national health insurance system; and (4) a national housing policy blending public initiatives and subsidies for the private sector.

The success of these proposals rests upon sustained economic growth with improvements in the distributive mechanisms of the U.S. economy, a goal which Rodgers believes can be accomplished by rebuilding the economy along the lines of a Swedish-Japanese hybrid. While he acknowledges that "it would not be easy to adapt such approaches to the American system," he argues that the "serious and systematic" economic problems of the U.S. "cannot be solved easily or without some fundamental alterations in economic policies, business management and government-business relationships." Planning, public enterprise and social contracts, he maintains, "represent realistic alternatives because they would deal with the actual causes of the nation's economic problems."

Rodgers's solutions certainly deserve serious consideration and discussion. They are far more humane than those proposed by

the Reagan Administration, more creative and far-reaching than the rehashed views of the Democratic party center and more consistent with the principles of the social work profession than either. Yet his search for complementary industrial and welfare policies which deal with "actual causes" ignores certain crucial elements. Briefly, these are (1) the role of militarism--the welfare/warfare state--in creating both the problems of the U.S. economy and precluding many possible solutions is given scant attention. No long-range answers to the multiple problems of the U.S. economy and society can be formulated which do not address this fundamental issue head on; (2) the relationship of sexism and racism to the U.S. economy is presented as if the emergence and persistence of gender and racial oppression were somehow disconnected from the broader political economy. Many studies have shown that nothing could be further from the truth. The problems of racism and sexism go far beyond discrimination and the absence of opportunity. They are directly related to the fundamental processes of U.S. capitalism and are, in fact, two of the "actual causes" Rodgers purports to address; (3) the presentation of alternatives to current welfare and economic policies ignores any ideas of a truly radical nature. Rodgers's conception of a leftist analysis and leftist solutions goes little beyond a moderate social democratic view, suggested by left-liberal politicians and academicians and already practiced in various forms in Sweden, the Netherlands, and France. The perspectives of Marxist economists or analysts of social welfare are not included, nor is there any mention of the attempts by socialist countries to resolve the dilemmas of poverty, illness, and inequality. Until we are able to allow the introduction of such ideas into the

public forum, welfare and economic policies will continue to be debated within a narrow framework which accepts too much as given and ventures too little in the exploration of new ideas with which to tackle our intransigent social and economic problems.

Women in the Workplace: Proposals for Research and Policy Concerning the Conditions of Women in Industrial and Service Jobs, by PAMELA ROBY. Cambridge, Ma: Schenkman, 1981.

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This short volume (102 pages of text) does just what its subtitle suggests: it proposes a research agenda to address working class women's issues. In doing so Pamela Roby provides a succinct review of the literature in the field, a useful bibliography and an overview of the problems facing blue collar women. The language is clear and the subject is nicely focussed. Books like this are a delight for graduate students, teachers looking for syllabus references and would-be researchers.

Roby has been thorough, given her self imposed limits. Indeed, the major arguments one could have with such a volume arise from the topics not included. She decides to limit herself to blue collar women, while acknowledging that omitting white collar workers (especially clericals) is a problem--necessitated by the need to "keep the effort within manageable limits." Similarly, she does not highlight the special problems of women of color or of

other women who are multiply discriminated against. She does not seriously discuss or critique differing research methods, so we are not sure what she thinks is the most effective way to actually tackle the wide ranging research problems she reviews. Finally, she omits a full treatment of the research on welfare programs--thereby suggesting that welfare and work are more separate than they are.

But such omissions seem reasonable, if regrettable, assuming the limited focus of the book. The one missing ingredient which does seem significant, however, is any thorough discussion of the spectrum of ideological issues embodied in past research or underlying future research agendas. Here Roby is simply too descriptive, leaving the reader to her own political inferences regarding the underlying values reflected in the different studies. She could easily have supplied such an analysis without being intrusive; it would have been a great help to her readers. Instead, we are left to sift through the topics raised without enough explicit guidance regarding political priorities among topics for research.

Roby has, nevertheless, performed a useful service for anyone concerned with women's condition. Her book is not pretentious and does not claim more than it delivers. Its topic is relevant and its style, accessible. While it breaks no new ground, it is an informative addition to any collection of books on women and work.

Social Welfare or Social Control? Some Historical Reflections on REGULATING THE POOR, edited by WALTER I. TRATTNER. University of Tennessee Press, 1983. 161 pp.

\$14.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper.

Values in Social Policy: Nine Contradictions by JEAN HARDY. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. x+132 pp. \$15.00 paper.

An Immodest Agenda: Rebuilding America Before the 21st Century, by AMITAI ETZIONI. McGraw-Hill, 1983. \$26.95 cloth.

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The American welfare state is in deep trouble; of that there can be little doubt. And, until recently social policy professionals seemed not to understand the nature of the crisis. The three books under review here are part of an encouraging wave of new work that seeks to refocus social policy by taking a fresh look at some first principles. To discuss them it is first necessary to establish a context.

The problems of the welfare state go far beyond the current conservative onslaught. Consider the tiresome arguments over the impact of the Great Society. It is simply preposterous to assert, as apologists for the Reagan administration have done, that poverty has been eliminated in the U.S. or that recent cutbacks have not hurt the poor. The newly (July, 1983) released Census Bureau report of annual estimates of those living in poverty puts the lie to that position. When all benefits are taken into account, the proportion of the population living in poverty had declined steadily until 1979; since then it has been on the increase. Considering only cash income (from all

sources), the number of people living in poverty rose by about thirteen percent between 1980 and 1982, from about thirty million to about 34.5 million people. The change is even more dramatic when in-kind benefits such as food stamps and Medicaid are factored in. Taking into account all benefits, 6.1 percent of the population were living in poverty in 1979; by 1982, 8.8 percent were. This represents an increase of more than six million people.

It is thus clear that the Great Society programs reduced poverty and that the policies of the Reagan administration have reversed the trend. This information has been widely circulated by the news media. However, it is not the central concern regarding social policy of the general populace--those whose support is essential to the success of any public policy in a democratic society. They are worried that welfare state programs have been designed in ways that undermine such important social institutions as the family and community, and that they run counter to fundamental societal values of mutual aid, personal autonomy, hard work, and the like. For example, it is argued that by subsuming more and more helping functions under formally organized auspices the welfare state has undermined the natural coping mechanisms of families and communities. As a result, these social institutions have been weakened and those the welfare state was meant to assist have been socialized into a condition of helplessness.

Here the numbers are not supportive of the Great Society. To cite only a couple of examples, in 1960, 21 percent of black families were headed by a single parent; by 1981, the figure had increased to 47 percent. As a second example, the black male population increased by 92 percent between

1960 and 1982, but employment among this group grew by only 42 percent; moreover, the proportion of black men "not in the labor force," not working or looking for work, grew from 17 to 28 percent during that period.

Contrary to the belief of reactionaries, the welfare state did not cause those figures, but there is a serious and legitimate concern imbedded in them that social policy professionals have tended to ignore: The conditions these figures describe exist despite the efforts of the welfare state. The black family is deteriorating even more rapidly than its counterpart in the general population. Black males are being excluded at an accelerating rate from work, an activity that in this society provides not only income but self-esteem, autonomy, and a sense of personal efficacy.

In trying to demonstrate that they have not created these conditions, too many defenders of the welfare state have argued that the underlying values and institutions are not important--for example that the nuclear family is an anachronism or that to value work is to fall victim to bourgeois false consciousness. As a result, reactionaries have been able to reduce social policy to a yes-no question: should the American people and their government continue to support the welfare state, considering that its defenders are indifferent to society's basic values and institutions?

The books being considered show a maturing of thought about social policy. They acknowledge the importance of supporting basic values and institutions, not only for political reasons but because the health of society requires it. Social

policy must be sensitive to the intrinsic tensions in society--competition vs. cooperation, the individual vs. the community, equity vs. equality--that sustain these values and institutions.

One of the pioneer efforts in this vein was Piven and Cloward's Regulating the Poor (1971). They argued that social policy is shaped by the self-interest of those involved and that most of the time those involved are the privileged and powerful. As a result, social policy is weighted in favor of the powerful and against the common person. They argued that the real purpose (or at least the most conspicuous outcome) of social policy has been social control of common people.

The social control thesis has been a source of controversy and a stimulus to the new wave in social policy. The most recent contribution to the dialogue is Social Welfare or Social Control?, the outgrowth of a session by that title organized by Walter I. Trattner for the 1980 meetings of the Organization of American Historians. Trattner's book consists of his Introduction, five essays by social historians examining the social control thesis, and a response by Piven and Cloward. In his Introduction, Trattner describes the social and historiographic background of the social control thesis and outlines the purpose of the book, which is "to test the central thesis of [Regulating the Poor] . . ." (p. 9).

None of the essays supports the social control thesis. John K. Alexander (whose essay is the only one--except for the Piven and Cloward response--not to have been presented at the OAH session), Raymond A. Mohl, and Muriel and Ralph Pumphrey all look at periods not considered by Piven and

Cloward--Alexander at late eighteenth century Philadelphia, Mohl at the abolition of outdoor relief in the late nineteenth century, and the Pumphreys at the widows' pension movement of the early decades of this century. None of them feel that their data support the social control thesis. W. Andrew Achenbaum confronts Piven and Cloward head on. He analyzes the early years of the Social Security Act, a time period covered in Regulating the Poor, and concludes that they simply got it wrong.

In an extremely thoughtful essay that is an expansion of his informal remarks as discussant at the OAH session, James Leiby puts his finger on the central issue. He notes that social control does not always have sinister connotations. In addition to its coercive implications, social control describes the processes that support a level of social cohesion necessary for the survival of society. Thus, social control spans the tension between the individual and the community. On one hand it is coercive of individuals; on the other it is necessary for the existence of the community. From a social policy perspective the question is one of balance, of maintaining the tension.

Piven and Cloward add little to the debate in their response. Except for specific responses to the other authors' essays, they have made most of their points elsewhere before. Their position is that social policy responds to the needs of the common person only when civil disorder threatens the status quo. Their critics argue that social policy is a humanitarian response to the needs of the least well-off members of the community. Readers can judge the evidence on each side for themselves. The value of Social Welfare or Social control? is that it brings the evi-

dence together in a way that focuses on the intrinsic tensions in society.

Values in Social Policy: Nine Contradictions examines these Tensions directly. Jean Hardy is an English social worker and sociologist. Through she writes in a British context, the issues she raises have great salience for the U.S. as well. The nine contradictions of her title are actually value conflicts. Her purpose is not to choose sides but to explicate the necessary tensions in social policy. She deals with her "contradictions" one per chapter: authority vs. liberation; representative vs. participatory theories of government; needs and resources; the family as a basis of society or as the root of society's problems; bureaucracy vs. professionalism; rationality vs. negotiation in decision-making; the individual vs. the community; equality vs. freedom; and the personal vs. the political.

Hardy notes that there are moral, philosophical, political, and social questions underlying the welfare state and that "most legislation, and most administrative practice springing from legislation, is a compromise between conflicting values" (p. vii). She analyzes these conflicting values through what amounts to an extended review of the relevant literature in social theory and philosophy. The result is a major contribution to the social policy literature. Recognizing that the welfare state is not simply a matter of technique, but that it requires us to take seriously the values and institutions of society, Hardy moves us from the ultimately trivial question of "how?" to the central discussion of "why?"

In An Immodest Agenda, Amitai Etzioni brings the question of "why" down from a

theoretical to a practical level. One of our most eminent social scientists, he argues that the failure of the welfare state is not only economic, but that our notions of family, school, and community have also deteriorated. His concern is with social control, but of the sort that Leiby pointed to--the social cohesion necessary for the survival of society.

Etzioni feels that the community is the only viable force capable of holding society together, because only it can adequately describe and direct the shared concerns of its constituent members. He laments the rise of big government through the welfare state, as well as the "Me Generation" reaction to it, ego-centered individualism. Both cut people off from one another and from having viable and effective selves. He argues the need for mutuality--a commitment to others and to shared concerns; and for civility--taking action in the service of shared concerns. Practically, he offers a program for social reconstruction based on these concepts. It might be said that he offers a suggested new direction for social policy, for the American welfare state, sensitive to basic values and institutions.

One might disagree with Etzioni's analysis or with the specifics of his program, but he does respond seriously and cogently to the crisis in social policy. He argues in terms of basic values and institutions rather than techniques.

The common denominator of these books is a recognition that social policy is at least as much an intellectual as it is an economic or political phenomenon. Although they will not resolve the crisis, it is encouraging to know that the discussion is moving in the right direction.