

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

**JAMES P. MULVALE, *Reimagining Social Welfare: Beyond the Keynesian Welfare State*. Aurora, ON: Garamond. 2001, x + 239 p., Index, \$21.95 paper.**

Whither the provision of social welfare in the 21st century? This is a question much at the forefront of policy debates in recent years resulting from (as has been oft recounted) the replacement of the Fordist compromise by neo-liberal dictates. James Mulvale's book attempts to provide some answers.

The author states his intent is to "focus on current efforts to rethink and refashion the concept of social welfare in Canada: specifically, the questions of it, how, and to what extent social movements and progressive organizations based in civil society and committed to greater economic and political equality have undertaken the tasks of rethinking 'social welfare' in a broad, 'philosophical' sense" (11-12). The rest of the chapter consists of the following: 1) a brief review of the rise and fall of the Keynesian welfare state; 2) an equally brief account of six "progressive" theories of social welfare, one of which – social democratic theory – Mulvale immediately discards as "theoretically exhausted and practically immobilized" (29), leaving the remaining five (Marxism and neo-Marxism, feminism, anti-racism critiques, the green critique, and an emancipatory needs-articulation approach) to provide theoretical answers to refashioning social welfare; 3) an examination of four key issues to be addressed (29-32); a listing of five constituencies necessary to the reformulation of solutions; and 5) a brief discussion of methodology used in writing the book (formerly, Mulvale's doctoral thesis at McMaster University).

Chapters two to five deal in sequence with the four key issues identified in chapter one. Chapter two looks at "how to broaden our understanding of socially necessary and useful work" and discusses commodified labour and unpaid labour, along with important issues of inclusiveness and equity, quality of life, and Jeremy Rifkin's controversial "end of work" thesis. Chapter two ends with a number of suggestions for dealing with these issues (p. 80). Chapter three examines "how to ensure an adequate economic livelihood and material standard of living for all" and covers a broad range of issues, from pensions, to food and nutrition, to housing, to health care. Chapter four examines "how to extend our understanding of social equality beyond access to economic resources, in order to incorporate the rich diversity of human capabilities and needs, and the variegated nature of human and collective identities." It examines

specifically several factors underlying social stratification and inequality, such as gender, race and ethnicity, and physical and other disabilities. It also raises questions over how to bridge formal equality with the specific needs and circumstances of individuals and groups. Chapter five looks at "how to extend and reshape our understanding of citizenship" and discusses social rights, the democratization of social policy, and ecological sustainability. This chapter examines how the notion of civil rights has been extended since T. H. Marshall's original formulation, but also how "rugged individualism" and "market ideology" have resulted in recent years in its retraction. The same chapter looks briefly at the impact of international agreements (and globalization broadly) upon social welfare. There is also a very important discussion of "the greening of public policy" re: issues of sustainability and how to break with modern capitalism's production/consumption cycle. Finally, chapter six returns to the notion of creating a new vision of social welfare.

This is an earnest book on an important topic. On the whole, however, I found the book somewhat unsatisfying. It bares many of the hallmarks of its origins as a thesis, notably redundancy at many points. The methodological approach—especially the use of interviews and media reports - also creates a problem. At times, the book reads not so much as providing a brave, new vision of social welfare as a summary— maybe a wish list?— f things from various progressive groups (who may or may not get agree). The book's review of these ideas is useful, but I get no solid sense of the author's own practical solutions.

The book contains a certain irony. As previously noted, the author early on "writes off" the utility of the social democratic approach. Yet many of his sources (as even the author admits) remain wedded to the social-democratic path. The author's implied radicalism at the outset is thus undercut throughout much of the text.

These criticisms aside, the author does ask a number of important questions—ones which perhaps the author or others can more forcefully answer in a future text.

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