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Book Reviews

Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg and Marguerite Rosenthal (Eds.),
Diminishing Welfare: A Cross National Study of Social Provision.
Westport, CT: Auburn House, 2002. \$28.00 paperback.

This book should be read by anyone interested in the changes taking place in social welfare policies and services, particularly in the so-called 'welfare states'. It is also relevant to anyone interested in the political and economic trends influencing those changes, as well as in at least one major perspective concerning the possible future of global social provision. The introductory chapter by Goldberg is itself worth the price of the book.

As is commonly the case with edited books, the entries vary considerably in depth and style, but not in perspective. Those who follow the work of the fine scholars who edited this book will not be surprised to find it relentlessly left-wing and obsessively feminist. Not all readers will find that a shortcoming. However, many may wish that it covered a wider area: it deals exclusively with Euro- American countries, except for Japan. There are chapters on the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Germany and, of course, Sweden. An entry on Hungary represents the former members of the Warsaw Pact (COMECON). It is a curious choice, partly because Hungary is not typical of that particular cohort of nations, and partly because the author of the chapter does not seem to have the same impressive scholarly credentials as do all the other authors.

Very different discussions explain the changes in social provision in each country, but certain conclusions seem to be consistent. Among them: there has been a general erosion of social provision, along with lower expectations, which bodes poorly for any general up-welling of resentment leading to social action; the concept of severity of loss depends on what the benefits had been previously, as well as on the dominant social philosophy; the changes have not been so much abolition of social provisions as re-structuring of them, a change in which old people have often profited and children have lost ground.

In Canada, devolution has taken place under the guise of protecting the programs; only health care is still universal and

it is in peril. The UK seems to have maintained its social provision despite very hostile governments, but inequality has increased. Germany's programs have suffered a long decline, the end of which is not in sight. Italy's social welfare services reflect that nation's historic north-south split, with the south remaining traditional and poor and services remaining particularistic and personal, with a hint of the dead hand of Fascism. In Japan as in Italy, tradition is still a powerful force and has been used adroitly by successive governments to require the family to continue being the major provider of social welfare services, a policy under increasing pressure as the population rapidly ages. Hungarian social provision has declined sharply since that country abandoned socialism for capitalism and people report feeling less secure than formerly, but Hungarians who lived under socialism may have a somewhat less romantic memory of communist 'social equality' than is presented here. Sweden remains the "poster child" of American social welfare writers, but growing policy problems are subtly implied as immigration brings multiculturalism to that formerly homogeneous country. For example, one might wonder if the report of "non-Nordics" living in "increasingly segregated outer-ring suburbs" (p. 107) might not be described elsewhere simply as new ghettos.

In her thoughtful summary chapter, Goldberg notes that poverty generally has increased in these 'welfare states', as has inequality in distribution of benefits, with inequity in taxation. Virtually everywhere, the gap between the bottom quintile and the top has become a chasm and continues to grow. Policy decisions leading on social welfare are taken, according to Backer and Klammer in their discussion on Germany, for fiscal reasons, not to achieve greater social justice. It is seen in other countries, as well. Where savings have resulted from curtailing some programs, the money has not gone to build others. Thus, policy and program changes do not benefit those most in need of them. Moreover, program eligibility is frequently tied to employment. As unemployment increases, funding for social programs is reduced—just when the need for them rises. It is a distressing dilemma which Goldberg avers requires global organizing to limit negative effects of economic globalization. She advocates organizing to press local politicians to act in the interests of the people rather than blaming

the problems of world economies on the cost of social programs. She ends her discussion without holding out much hope for such large-scale international organizing.

This is not a happy book, but it is an important one for anyone involved in or even concerned about the present state of social provision in industrial countries, how it got where it is, the directions in which it seems to be headed, and what might be done.

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Robert J. MacCoun and Peter Reuter, *Drug War Heresies: Learning from Other Vices, Times & Places*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. \$75.00 hardcover, \$25.00 papercover.

In 1970, Troy Duster wrote a groundbreaking book entitled *The Legislation of Morality* in which he argued that “. . . moral beliefs upon which we have based our public policy are themselves founded on myths about both the physical effects of drugs and errors about the total quality of persons addicted (p. 239).” Now, 32 years later, MacCoun and Reuter have taken this argument further by carefully developing a set of frameworks by which specific drug policies can be assessed. They rightly argue that unnecessary and unproductive dichotomies have been presented in the literature that polarize policy options. Total prohibition is one view strongly held by almost all political leaders, law enforcement, and to a large extent, the general public. It argues that illicit drugs are harmful and should continue to be legally prohibited with stronger enforcement and somewhat more severe penalties because they are morally unacceptable. Harm reduction/legalization, the other view, is held primarily by a few academics and researchers who argue that the sheer fiscal costs associated with prohibition in terms of criminality and law enforcement demonstrate that these policies need to be loosened or possibly abandoned. This book makes a creative effort to narrow or bridge the gap between these two views and provide a neutral assessment of different policy in light of a critical assessment of historical and international trends.