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**Review of *The Origins of Active Social Policy: Labour Market and
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Reviewed by James Midgley**

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Book Reviews

Giuliano Bonoli, *The Origins of Active Social Policy: Labour Market and Childcare Policies in a Comparative Perspective*. Oxford University Press (2013). \$ 99.00 (hardcover).

Accounts of the historical evolution of state welfare in the Western countries since the end of the Second World War have relied extensively on quasi-paradigmatic conceptual frameworks that seek to encapsulate the complex social, political, economic, demographic and other changes accompanying welfare state development. Typological representations that classify different countries as well as stadial interpretations that identify key historical phases in social policy evolution have been widely used. These interpretations suggest that the immediate post-war period was a protective stage in which governments prioritized income maintenance and social protection, while the period following the oil shocks of the 1970s and the election of radical right governments is viewed as one of crisis. Recently, a new phase in social policy, one that emphasizes labor market participation and enhanced state intervention in child care, education, skills training and other investments that promote work, has been identified.

Bonoli discusses this new phase and the growing interest in what European social policy scholars have variously called active social policy, social investment, flexicurity, new social risks and the Third Way. Agreeing with other writers, he believes that the emergence of active social policy marks a major shift in social welfare in Western nations and particularly in Europe, where the new approach has been implemented by several governments with the support of the European Union and OECD. The book begins by defining the concept of active social policy with reference to the other terms that have been used to connote more or less the same phenomenon, and this is followed by an operationalized account of the adoption of this approach in different countries, which reveals that most European governments now spend more on active social

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policy than in the 1980s. The author then offers an historical overview of the expansion of active social policy and, in a sophisticated analysis, examines various conceptual interpretations of active social policy, including those that question the idea that European social policy has indeed moved away from social protection towards social productivism. Two chapters compare labor market and child care policies in several European countries in some depth, and in the final chapter, the author grapples with some of the complexities associated with an analysis of the changes that have taken place. In particular, the author discusses several “puzzles” which complicate his analysis. These include: the apparent paradox of increased spending on active social policy versus retrenchment in the face of recent recessionary challenges; the extent to which deterministic explanations capture complex realities; and the problem of differences among European welfare states, some of which have not embraced active social policy with the same enthusiasm.

In addition to offering a readable and engaging account, the author provides useful information on labor market and child care policies in Europe. The two chapters describing these policies and programs will be a useful resource to scholars working in these fields. Similarly, the documentation of recent social policy developments in Europe makes an important contribution to comparative analysis and will be of interest to readers around the world. But it is chiefly with regard to theoretical interpretation that the author’s contribution will excite, largely because he himself recognizes the complexity of the topic. Grappling with several complex issues, including the puzzles mentioned earlier, he examines competing views on recent developments, struggles with exceptions to the trend towards activation, and recognizes the challenges of reducing multifaceted and convoluted historical forces to simple propositions. His account of different analytical interpretations of whether active social policy is essentially a reformulation of market liberalism, a radically new normative approach, or little more than a restatement of older social democratic commitments, is fascinating. Other equally complex but interesting issues are raised throughout the book, which deserves to be widely read. It makes a major contribution to understanding the nuances of social policy in European countries and hopefully it will foster

other accounts that transcend the tendency in social policy to regurgitate simplistic models. Although limited to Europe, its analytical sophistication should be emulated in social policy analysis in other parts of the world as well.

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Sherry Cable, *Sustainable Failures: Environmental Policy and Democracy in a Petro-Dependent World*. Temple University Press (2012). \$29.95 (paperback).

When one examines the ever-deepening state of our global ecological crisis, environmental policies aimed at stemming ecological degradation and growing climate instability have self-evidently failed. Hence, our ability to successfully interrogate why is of critical import if we are to extricate ourselves and heal, in Marx's words, "the metabolic rift" between human society and the biosphere. Sociologist Sherry Cable, in her new book, *Sustainable Failures*, attempts to address this important question of why, despite a host of environmentally-oriented legislation stretching back many decades, neither United States domestic, nor inter-governmental international environmental policy, has been able to move society onto a more environmentally benign pathway.

Domestic and international policy does not conform, as Cable outlines, to leftist ecologist Barry Commoner's *Four Laws of Ecology*, upon which Nature operates in a sustainable manner. Cable seeks to delineate, via extensive exposition of legal examples, why environmental policies focus far more on mitigation of pollution after the fact than on prevention. Her training in sociology propels her to bring to bear an historical, cultural and socio-economic analysis that synthesizes literature from a diverse array of fields, including select case studies, in order to craft an answer.

In a book divided into four sections, Cable begins with a brief and thereby necessarily schematic overview of two million years of human social development, with the emergence of hunter-gather societies, through to today's world of "petro-dependency," which she argues commences in earnest in 1945. Part Two convincingly elucidates the failure