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Changing Politics of Canadian Social Policy. James R. Rice and Michael J. Prince.

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Book Notes

James R. Rice and Michael J. Prince, *Changing Politics of Canadian Social Policy*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2000. \$60.00 hardcover, \$22.95 papercover.

Over the last twenty years, the social policies of the Western industrial nations have been faced with enormous fiscal, political and other challenges. Changing demographic realities, new attitudes, globalization and ideological opposition to government intervention in social welfare have all created pressures which have undermined established patterns of social welfare provision.

Canada has long been viewed as an advanced welfare state, and its extensive social services have often been contrasted favorably with the less generous social programs of the United States. However, the nation's social welfare system has also been negatively affected by the forces of change. As Rice and Prince reveal, Canadian social welfare is now under great pressure from the global economy, ideological opposition and greater cultural pluralism. Traditional social policy approaches will need to take account of these changes.

The authors believe that the established welfare system cannot be preserved without some form of adaptation. They do not, however, lament the need for change. Unlike much normative writing on welfare states today, Rice and Prince recognize that established approaches were lacking. For example, drawing on the critical work of feminist social policy writers, they stress the gender biases in traditional social policy. They also emphasize the role of cultural pluralization in shaping new social policies. Indeed, they suggest that diversity is as important as globalization in creating new pressures on social welfare. However, these pressures are to be welcomed because they create opportunities for community based social movements to transcend the traditional male-dominated class politics that shaped the welfare state.

Although this book contains some descriptive content and can, therefore, be viewed as a 'country case study' of Canadian social policy, it offers a sophisticated analysis of the changes facing social policy in Canada and, indeed, other industrial countries

today. It makes extensive use of theory, and offers interesting normative directions for future development. The book not only informs readers about trends in Canada but offers interesting insights into the dilemmas of social welfare in many other countries facing similar challenges.

Jeanine Braithwaite, Christiaan Grootaert and Branko Milanovic, *Poverty and Social Assistance in Transition Countries*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. \$45.00 hardcover.

The dramatic political changes which took place in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s have been accompanied by equally dramatic economic changes. Although the collapse of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was a direct result of the refusal of ordinary people to accept totalitarianism, economic stagnation and the failures of centralized planning also fueled popular discontent. However, as is widely recognized, the advent of so-called free market economic reforms have not brought prosperity. Indeed, poverty in the region is higher than before and income inequality has become far more marked. Also, as the authors reveal, attempts to deal with the problem through social assistance have not been very successful.

This book is the result of a major study of poverty and social assistance programs in three former communist Eastern European nations and three former Soviet Republics undertaken by World Bank staff. In addition to assessing the incidence of poverty in the region, the study sought to examine the role of social assistance in addressing the problem. Noting that the World Bank has become increasingly interested in 'targeting' income benefits, the authors sought to determine whether targeting is an effective anti-poverty strategy.

The authors report that poverty rates increased dramatically in the Eastern European and former Soviet regions in the early 1990s. Poverty had already begun to rise as a result of economic difficulties but after the closure of state owned enterprises, increased administrative disorganization and the advent of rapid inflation, poverty rates accelerated. In the Eastern European countries, poverty was primarily a function of unemployment resulting from the closure of public enterprises, but in the former Soviet Union, and particularly in Russia, it was more widespread.