

Book Review

Gary Teeple, *Globalization and the Decline of Social Reform: Into the Twenty-first Century* (Aurora, ON: Garamond, 2000).

James P. Mulvale, *Reimagining Social Welfare: Beyond the Keynesian Welfare State* (Aurora, ON: Garamond, 2001).

Reviewed by Howard A. Doughty

Prior to any innovation in policy or practice, it is essential to understand the scope and nature of the problem that the innovation is meant to solve. In matters of social policy in general and of policies concerning economic equity in particular, such understanding is premised on the resolution of unavoidably ideological arguments. Put simply, those who support government intervention in the economy will come up with one set of analyses and prescriptions; those who favour an unfettered market will come up with another. During the past few decades it is fair to say that the post-World War II trend toward increasingly broad and generous social programs has been reversed. Instead, reduced benefits to the vulnerable in our society, increased concern about fiscal responsibility and a decline in environmental standards, health and safety regulations, and progressive labour laws have been the norm.

Those who regard this reversal of fortune for what may generally be called “leftist” initiatives with dismay have been losing arguments and losing practical struggles for some time. The dominant perspective on matters as diverse as public housing, education and criminal incarceration has seemingly ordained that the public sector cannot be trusted to provide for the common good and that private developers, private schools and private jails are more efficient and more effective than their public equivalents. Recently, however, there have been displays of concern by citizens who have been left behind by market-driven innovations or who have been unable to take advantage of the narrow benefits of privatization. Inchoate protests have been launched by organizations representing the concerns and interests of any number of people who feel disregarded or dispossessed.

What has been lacking is an up-to-date, careful and incisive analysis of what is going on. The pain felt by the victims of the contemporary agenda is real enough, but a coherent understanding that would make possible a plausible alternative has been sadly lacking. Social democratic political parties, trade unions and community organizations have failed to develop the kind of comprehensive critique that would permit a thoughtful program of imaginative and innovative responses to evident ecological degradation, social disintegration and economic disparity. Moreover, with a few exceptions, academics have been singularly unsuccessful in bringing their complex theoretical investigations down to a level where they would be comprehensible to the uninitiated, much less of pragmatic value to those who either design or are designated as targets of public policy. Meantime, a clear line connects two symbols of the limits of current governmental philosophy. One was Dudley George, an unarmed native protester shot dead at Ipperwash, Ontario in 1995; the other was Kimberly Rogers, a pregnant welfare recipient who probably died of heat stroke (the autopsy results have so far remained sealed) while under house

arrest in Sudbury, Ontario in 2001. Her crime, apparently, was to have been collecting welfare while also receiving a student loan. Those who are disturbed by such events and who have been distressed by the absence of pertinent ideas and practical suggestions for ameliorative action ought not to be without hope. The reason for such cautious optimism can be found in the development of books like the two under review here. Gary Teeple's is the more comprehensive; James P. Mulvale's is the more specific.

Thirty years have flown by since I stood in admiration of Gary Teeple's first major academic publication. We were in our late twenties. He was near the centre and I was at the periphery of a loose network of people who were interested in the restoration of scholarly investigations into Canadian political economy and who were persuaded that such intellectual activity could have a singular effect upon social change. When we spoke of innovation, it meant the development of affordable housing, urban transit, decent schooling and (who knew?) maybe even such then promising notions as a guaranteed annual income. Gary's contribution was an anthology published by the University of Toronto Press entitled *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada*. It dealt critically with nationalism, class structure and creative alternatives to liberal (soon to be neoliberal) ideological hegemony. Others (names like Wallace Clement, Daniel Drache, James Laxer, George Martel, Tom Naylor, and Satu Repo come nostalgically to mind) also took to the field. So did all sorts of people eager to give voice to aboriginal and ethnic concerns. So did feminists. Their work was exemplary; they made huge differences. Against globalization, their time was not at hand.

For the past three decades, corporations (both private and public) have been paying heed to other voices (mainly their own) and have been carrying on innovative activities in such fields as communications technology, organizational mergers and the disassembly of humane health, education and welfare programs. Recently, however, people like Gary Teeple of Simon Fraser University's Department of Sociology and Anthropology, have begun to offer credible challenges to the ideas that have become received wisdom in educational, media and government circles.

Globalization and the Decline of Social Reform is a new and significantly revised version of a book that Teeple first published in 1995. Among the important points that he makes are that unrestrained market forces are incompatible with democratic governance and with an equitable distribution of wealth. The prosperous working and middle classes of the past half century face decomposition as inevitably as the ecosystem as the deindustrialization of the western world is matched with the privatization of social services and the dismantling of social programs. All this and more was well-documented in the original edition. The update, as well as bringing recent information to bear on his theme, was also prompted by the reaction to the 1995 edition. Serious reviewers, Teeple says, rarely called into question his major thesis; on the other hand, there was some complaint that the book promoted despair. In the new book, Teeple includes an edifying section on the question of resistance and the promotion of alternatives. "The fact of the 'new reality' [of globalization] does not imply that there must be compliance or subordination to its demands."

Echoing conservative philosopher George Grant's pleas that moral outrage is too valuable to be wasted on anything but reality, Teeple also adds an excellent description of globalization as the "second bourgeois revolution." The first was accompanied by the industrial revolution and

subsequent democratic political reforms. The second is accompanied by the computer revolution and a subsequent retreat from liberal democracy. “Democracy,” I heard George Grant say in 1965, “is not a concept that is compatible with vast technological empires.” To this observation Teeple adds a meticulous examination of contemporary social, economic and political trends and a trenchant remark that should be taken seriously by anyone interested in innovation. He writes: “The free market and democracy represent in principle two contradictory forms of resource allocation for society. On the one hand, the free market implies a form of social distribution of goods and services via the exchange of private property, which is free of mitigating morality and sometimes captured in the phrase ‘economic justice.’ Democracy, or more broadly politics, on the other hand, implies a certain political determination of economic activities, as implied in the notion of ‘distributive justice.’” Aspirant innovators who regard their activities as essentially pragmatic, merely instrumental and therefore exempt from “politics,” serve (consciously or unconsciously) political interests. Teeple compels us all to face with sober senses the reality of the innovative enterprise.

Given the downsizing of government, the restructuring of social services and the reduction of regulation, the circumscription of civil liberties and trade union powers, Teeple is indulging in no vacuous hyperbole when he speaks of “the coming tyranny” of internationalized capital and supranational administrations. In the hope that such a fate may be stayed, F. J. Pierce of the University of Oklahoma has praised Teeple’s book as being “of great value to those studying social and economic policy” and goes on to say that it “should be required reading for all social workers.” I agree, but I would expand the occupational roster to include all those interested in public sector innovation.

In *Reimagining Social Welfare*, James P. Mulvale of the University of Regina’s School of Human Justice addresses one specific field of social policy. Like Teeple, he takes note of the phenomenon of globalization and the accompanying rightward shift of political opinion that “have de-legitimized and largely dismantled the Keynesian welfare state that developed in the thirty year period after World War II.”

Mulvale’s task is to direct attention to the theoretical underpinnings of current social welfare policies and to connect these ideas to the “real world” by basing much of his book on media reports, documentary evidence and, most importantly, interviews with “key informants,” people in positions of leadership in advocacy groups, churches, educational institutions and trade unions as well as practitioners and representatives of philanthropic organizations. If nothing else (and there is much else), *Reimagining Social Welfare* provides an ample inventory of areas that cry out for policy innovation. In the area of employment, for example, he has some excellent suggestions for innovation in job creation, job training and job entry programs, the development of a fully inclusive and fair labour market, and new initiatives related to improved pay and benefits for part-timers. These and other suggestions, it should be stressed, are not ideas in a vacuum; they are tied to and, indeed, an extension of the “reimagining” project.

A similar approach is taken to the question of income security. Beginning with a consideration of what we ought not to be ashamed to call the “philosophy” of dealing with “economic security in an insecure world,” Mulvale goes on to outline the problems with income maintenance that have come about as a result of the devastation of social assistance and the introduction of workfare “innovations.” Rather, however, than limiting himself to whining about the conditions in which

the disadvantaged are compelled to live, Mulvale says some very interesting things about the kind of practical innovations that could at least arithmetically reduce the suffering of the poor. Concrete suggestions about innovations in the area of nutrition and food supply, adequate and affordable housing, and good health and health care are presented. In offering a new vision of social welfare, inviting people to work toward the democratization of welfare reform, and challenging all concerned to partake of a new quality of citizenship, Mulvale has applied similar lessons to those taught by Teeple to an incredibly important area of public sector activity.

Should Teeple and Mulvale (and so many others) catch the attention of public service practitioners, academic analysts or the general public, the result might be that innovation would be more securely grounded upon a firm basis of understanding. Then, we might allow ourselves to believe that both critical and creative practice (or, dare it be said? - *praxis*) could be enhanced. That way, the words that Karl Marx wrote to open *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* would have a happier ending. "Hegel remarks somewhere that all the events and personalities of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce." Wouldn't it be nice to imagine that we were ready to move beyond tragedy and farce?

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