

conclusion ultimately led to her departure from the government of new NDP Premier Lorne Calvert though she has clearly retained her interest in public policy and her wish to comment publicly as a knowledgeable citizen on the issues of the day. It is a wish she wants us all to have.

The book is vital reading for anyone who wants to see what challenges there are for those who would govern from the left in a climate that seems to have moved so far to the right. It makes an interesting counterpoint to the work of another strong woman commenting on the issues of the day. I refer to Linda McQuaig, whose *Shooting the Hippo* reaches almost the opposite conclusion about how we are to live with that troubling dilemma

WELFARE HOT BUTTONS: WOMEN, WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY REFORM

Sylvia Bashevkin
Toronto: University of Toronto
Press, 2002

REVIEWED BY BRENDA M. ELIAS

Here is a riveting look at contemporary social policy change and the real-world politics of three countries; Canada, Great Britain and the United States as presented by their Third Way political leaders—Jean Chrétien, Tony Blair and Bill Clinton.

Loaded with powerful empirical analysis and tracing the shifts in language used to describe social assistance discourse, Dr. Sylvia Bashevkin, Director of the Canadian Studies Program and professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto describes how “lone mothers along with the gov-

ernment programs supporting them and their children became bull’s-eye targets on a deeply perforated social dartboard.” Her argument is that despite seemingly progressive campaign rhetoric, the social policies implemented under each of these three world leaders were in many respects more punitive and restrictive than those of their neo-conservative predecessors in the 1980s.

This scholar has an amazing breadth and depth of understanding regarding this highly charged social theme of welfare reform and how important changes to the climate of ideas about social assistance and “gender-neutral” policies turned out to be highly gendered or, at best, gender-denying. Longstanding ideals of equality and social justice have been under attack in all three countries studied.

Catchy slogans such as “make work pay” and “welfare-to-work” reflect the superficial stance of governments trying to appease tax and fiscal specialists. Those advocating pro-business right-wing deficit-reducing actions have aggressively used labour marketing campaigns and communications methods that target popular opinion through the mainstream media and ultimately undermine the attention placed on the nurturing and unpaid role of low-income mothers with young children.

Dr. Bashevkin’s study tackled 10 basic questions about social assistance issues with over 120 personal interviews conducted in major cities in each of the three countries over a six-year period from 1994-2000. Respondents were selected from among progressive social activists and/or close observers of social policy developments.

Social and economic policy documents published by governments, academics and social policy experts and public speeches were also reviewed with an eye focusing on subtle shifts in the use of language or renaming terms such as poverty, marginalization and the meaning of social rights and entitlements. In this

way, she compares the ways that welfare states are receding and illustrates how an emergent duty state continues to evolve and is replacing the social safety net as we have known it in very subtle, behind the scenes small steps, that go unnoticed by the general public.

Anti-poverty and feminist arguments are well-articulated and woven throughout the chapters of the book. This reviewer has had direct experience managing a large provincial family benefits office and the arguments about abandoning the social support system, particularly, of mothers with young children, resonate very strongly. She also makes an interesting observation about the fact that most Canadian welfare state workers in the education, health care and social service fields are female, and more likely than women in the US to be unionized. Therefore, the erosion of the welfare state presents specific risks for a much larger group of Canadian women than apparent at first glance.

A recent report by Ron Saunders, “Passion and Commitment Under Stress”, published by the Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2004, corroborates this argument that serious human resource issues in the non-profit voluntary sector are affecting its capacity to attract and retain talented workers and strategies must reflect consideration of what is predominantly a female workforce.

Dr. Bashevkin’s assessment of the data obtained in Great Britain ranks this country as having the most tightly woven social safety net with evidence that the power of the social conservatives was far weaker than in Canada or the US. She states that the prospects for humanizing the emergent duty state are the most promising in Great Britain, particularly, because of the geographic proximity to continental Europe that has a stronger hold on child care, enhanced parental leave provisions and sturdier equal pay to name just a few work-related issues.

Recognition of the high level of emotion in a work-obsessed society and the commonplace divisive language now adopted to describe the “new, action-oriented welfare policies” is reflected in this structural analysis of very serious human issues and social citizenship.

Although there is no magic formula, Dr. Bashevkin captures the frustrations expressed by those interviewed calling it a “sickness of heart” among activists and concludes that we are now at a crucial intersection where issues of work and gender meet social policy and that progressive campaigners focused on justice at work may have some hope of altering the harsh face of the new duty states apparent in United States, Britain and Canada.

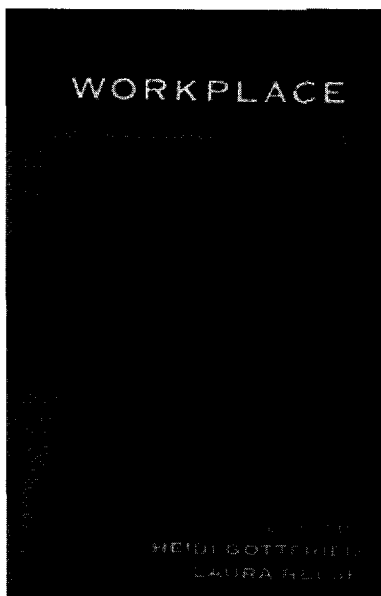
EQUITY IN THE WORKPLACE: GENDERING WORKPLACE POLICY ANALYSIS

Heidi Gottfried and Laura Reese,
Eds.
Lanham, Maryland: Lexington
Books, 2004

REVIEWED BY NOREEN PUPO

Equity in the Workplace is a collection of comparative workplace policy studies of the United States, Germany, Canada, and Japan. The chapters focus on gender and employment practices and policies, including workplace or employment policies, issues of work-life balance, caregiving, parental leave, and sexual harassment. While at first it may appear that this is simply a collection of disparate case studies on policy issues surrounding the workplace, through this volume the editors have

cleverly demonstrated the importance of comparative policy research for understanding the transformations and alternatives possible under a similar set of global economic conditions. In short, readers benefit from the rich, locally grounded studies, each of which contributes to the historical and



critical analysis of the individual nation state, but even more significantly, from the lessons we might carry from place to place in understanding the breadth of policy options and the strategies employed by women to alter workplace practices.

Following an introduction by editors Heidi Gottfried and Laura Reese, the book is divided into four parts: Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Workplace Policy; Implications of Gender in the Workplace; Reconciliation of Work and Family Life: Maternity, Parental and Family Leave; and Specific Applications of Workplace Policies: Gender Equity in the Workplace. In Part One, the authors move away from exposing the oppressive conditions and gender traps of globalization to consider the emergence of feminist transnational networks and the ways in which feminists working through these networks and related organiza-

tions have participated in the policy-making process. While considering the impact of globalization on women's work experience and conditions, authors contextualize the development of women-friendly workplace policies and the ways in which global economic policies, including re-regulation, have contributed to some positive developments in women's workplaces and in facilitating opportunities for transnational organizations to promote feminist policies.

Issues surrounding the quandary of work-family balance, including tensions between wage-earning and care-giving roles, and questions of work time, are the central focus of Parts Two and Three. The authors expose the ways in which seemingly neutral policies are gender-biased by preserving the male breadwinner role and by diminishing the importance of women's paid work. One of the main considerations here is the impact of feminist politics on the policy process and the ways in which women have not only introduced, but promoted feminist discourses and maintained women's issues on their state's policy agendas.

In the final part of the book, the authors examine particular workplace initiatives, such as sexual harassment policies, ultimately designed to eliminate the “chilly” climate in the workplace for women. The authors make evident the importance of understanding how various approaches to workplace and equity policies reflect the particular state structure. Their analyses invite readers to consider the question of adaptability—whether these approaches may or not work within the constraints of historical traditions, cultural processes, and legal systems—and how they may be adapted within a particular socio-political context.

In general, the articles in this volume are clearly written and well researched. The variety of methodologies employed is welcome. As a required reading or teaching resource for upper level courses in women's studies, social policy, or labour stud-