

Transformation of the Welfare State: The Silent Surrender of Public Responsibility.

By Neil Gilbert. Oxford University Press, 2002. 208 pp. \$29.95.

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Neil Gilbert elucidates several mechanisms of convergence toward a market-oriented model of social welfare. He shows that contemporary welfare reforms serve the market by promoting work, privatizing the finance and delivery of welfare services, and restricting eligibility for services to small slices of society. Nuanced, detailed discussions of these reforms outweigh the book's shortcomings and amount to a worthy contribution to welfare state scholarship.

Gilbert sees a qualitative shift in welfare provision among advanced industrialized countries. In this familiar crisis-of-the-welfare-state scenario, aging populations, declining birth rates, economic globalization, immigration, and shifting public opinion force policy reforms that make welfare states look less like a model where state counters market and more like a model where state serves market. Gilbert conceptualizes this new model as the enabling state: enabling states support "private responsibility" through work incentives, welfare disincentives, and privatization of service provision. Gilbert sells the concept on its balance of specificity and multidimensionality, but he confesses that the "enabling" state is just one of many conceptualizations, including "workfare," "hollow," and "postmodern" states. The enabling state also looks strikingly similar to Esping-Andersen's liberal welfare state regime, and it could be that, rather than convergence to a new model of the welfare state, what Gilbert observes is convergence of more generous welfare states toward the liberal model.

Gilbert shows some evidence for a "paradigm shift" in welfare provision, but the case seems weak. Despite the dynamic theory, some evidence is cross-sectional; e.g., we learn that there were 10.6 million non-European Union nationals living in the EU circa 1990, but we are left to assume a significant proportional increase. Likewise, economic globalization and changing public opinion are asserted rather than demonstrated. Gilbert also hedges on the timing of these changes and avoids questions concerning cross-national variation in the lag between cause and effect. In places, the argument takes a tone of inevitability. Finally, forces opposing retrenchment receive too little consideration, as does evidence that economic openness expands welfare effort.

The comparative evidence on policy reforms is much stronger. Gilbert vividly reveals multiple mechanisms of retrenchment. On promoting work, Gilbert focuses on the U.S., detailing federal income maintenance programs from the 1935 Social Security Act to the 1996 reforms, but he also marshals evidence from "workfare" reforms in Western Europe to show how the enabling state promotes work by restricting entrance to and accelerating exit from

unemployment programs, segmenting recipients of income supports by ability, requiring work contracts, and offering incentives. Gilbert also attends to complexities of implementation and some of the consequences for program participants. Gilbert identifies financing and provision of welfare as two paths to privatization, and he describes how states follow these paths via fiscal policy (e.g., incentives for individual retirement accounts), regulations (e.g., requiring employers to provide private pensions), and expenditures (e.g., contracting with private child care providers). On selectivity, Gilbert reviews movement toward means-tested benefits across the OECD, but he goes beyond this and discusses less obvious targeting mechanisms such as progressive taxation of benefits and restriction of eligibility by age, behavioral criteria, and degree of functional impairment.

Less compelling are discussions of the enabling state's social consequences. Gilbert reviews evidence from the International Crime Victims Survey showing little relationship between criminal activity and generosity of the welfare state, and he concludes that social democratic welfare states and neoliberal enabling states are equally likely to strengthen the bonds of civil society, engender trust, and enhance social capital. But the links between the welfare state, social capital, and these victimization measures seem tenuous. Anticipating moral arguments against the enabling state, Gilbert advocates appreciation of the "positive moral implications," "civilizing influence," "and other vigorous virtues" of the "marvelous mechanism" of the market. He urges policymakers to "articulate the policy choices" in a way that "incorporates the self-serving vitality of private enterprise and the humanity of shared public purpose" to "revive the public sphere." But this seems like spin, and it undermines the impartiality Gilbert so carefully cultivates throughout most of the book.

Transformation of the Welfare State deserves commendation for its fascinating, detailed descriptions of welfare retrenchment, but the book is less effective when it turns to explaining this retrenchment and sketching its consequences. Ironically, the empirical material is especially intriguing in light of an alternative explanation that Gilbert fails to consider — political globalization. The international discourse Gilbert cites as evidence for a paradigm shift could be cause rather than effect of welfare state transformation. Presumably, this global policy discourse and these national policy reforms could be examined for evidence that interaction between political elites on the international stage leads neoliberal policy reform. One could also divine the origins of policy models diffused by international organizations. Of course, additional analysis along these lines would lengthen the text and thereby spoil one of this concise, well-written, and important book's best qualities.