

ity production were unlikely to affirm feminist identification, Carbert concludes that "these women may be, unselfconsciously, the real agrarian feminists." (158)

Appearances are always deceptive. There is no incipient revolution brewing in the Ontario countryside, only a greater diversity of viewpoint and lifestyles than authors unfamiliar with this terrain generally admit.

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James Struthers, *The Limits Of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1994)

Social welfare emerged as one of the most controversial and significant issues in Canadian society during the twentieth century; it remains one of the most elusive. For this reason alone James Struthers' follow-up to his 1983 work *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914-1940* (Toronto 1983), was eagerly anticipated by those working in the field. Whereas *No Fault of Their Own* established and defined the concept of social welfare in its formative period, *The Limits of Affluence* examines its evolution, taking into account the many diverse factors which shaped its development.

From the outset, social welfare encompassed more than mere economic considerations; it addressed constitutional issues, Dominion provincial relations, morality, the family, bureaucratic strategies, the status and roles of women, business interests, and the role of the federal government and the extent of its responsibilities to the industrial worker, to name but a few. Add to this heterogeneous mixture rapidly changing economic, social and political circumstances, and the elusive history of social welfare becomes understandable, if not excusable. Herein lies the significance of this

work: in detailing the evolution of welfare in the province of Ontario over a fifty year period, Struthers offers a factually sound basis to begin to understand "our most complex, least understood and most unpopular social program." (261)

In the most general sense, *The Limits of Affluence* is intended "to show the many factors that come into play in attempting to understand an issue as complex and morally charged as the response to poverty in the midst of affluence." (17) According to Struthers, this begins by understanding that underlying the emergence of social welfare was the novel ideal of social justice; in other words, what was once considered a privilege became, if only in theory, a right. The disparities that emerged between the theory and practice of social welfare along with its often contradictory aims and goals, constitute the central theme of the book. Welfare emerged in the opening decades of the twentieth century as a response to the fact that while thousands of Ontarions were living in extreme poverty, the rest of the province was enjoying unprecedented levels of economic prosperity; Ontario would spend the next fifty years testing and defining the limits of this affluence.

In fostering an understanding of social welfare, Struthers borrows from "six distinct interpretations of the origins and development of welfare state policies," using them to place the Ontario experience in the wider context of the making of the Canadian welfare state. The most obvious, and I may add, welcome departure made by Struthers in this book, as compared to his earlier work, is the extent to which gender is addressed. As Struthers argues, "gender analysis ... forces us to re-examine many familiar programs and policies, the division of labour within the welfare state, and the boundaries separating public and private life in completely new ways." (14) Furthermore, given the various ways in which women themselves shaped welfare policy and the highly gendered nature of welfare policy itself, a comprehensive understanding of welfare is simply not possible without the inclusion of women.

In Ontario, women, or more specifically mothers, became "clients" of provincial social assistance. With the inception of moth-

ers' allowances in 1920, mothering [became] a central metaphor for the development of Ontario's welfare state."(48) It was "in the interests of the children" however, that traditional measures of coping with poverty, namely charity at the local level, finally gave way to new ideas which regarded welfare as "entitlement" rather than charity. As Struthers points out however, the initial aims of mothers' allowances, namely that it "not stigmatize, that it foster independence and that it uplift the character of both the women and the children who received it," were not at all reflected once the program was put into practice.(48) Contradictions in regards to eligibility (widows with two or more children were deemed eligible while widows with only one child were not), along with "unresolved contradiction(s) between the needs of women and children, (were) embedded in the program from its inception."(49) Contradictory aims and regulations therefore translated into inconsistent practices and results. Paradox and contradiction thereby became, above all else, the defining characteristics of social welfare in Ontario.

It is the dual themes of contradiction and paradox which also characterize Struthers' analysis of welfare in the province. Old Age Pensions which were at first intended to provide "a new social right or a comfortable, decent old age for the elderly," became "nothing more than state charity ... designed to provide for bare subsistence."(76) Similarly, attempts to establish "a social minimum" in the province, despite endless efforts designed to uncover the needs of the poor as calculated by the "best scientific advice that money could buy," resulted in what was a system designed to provide "as much food as it took to keep a family alive and healthy."(116) The lofty ideal of creating a certain quality of life which all Ontarions could enjoy simply fell to the wayside, replaced instead by the more pragmatic ideal of sustaining physical well-being. Chapters four and five, "Reconstructing Welfare, 1944-50" and "Poverty in Progress: Welfare in Ontario, 1950-58" respectively, further illustrate the contradictory nature of welfare in the province; although

there were no shortages of reform agendas and inquiries into the shortcomings of the system, very little of this was translated into actual changes. When poverty was “rediscovered” in the 1960s, both the so-called War on Poverty and the resulting Canada Assistance Plan, “ultimately failed to alter, in any fundamental way, long-standing approaches to the needs of the poor.”(231) Given the fact that Ontario’s system of social welfare has remained by-and-large intact since its inception seventy-five years ago, contemporary problems surrounding welfare must be addressed within their historical context; it is a history laden with contradictions not the least of which is the fact that welfare has been dictated by affluence rather than the needs of the poor.

James Struthers has produced a lucid and scrupulous analysis of the evolution of social welfare in Ontario. *The Limits of Affluence* is the first book to incorporate the available primary and secondary source materials into a comprehensive discussion of the subject. While the book sheds much light on the factors which shaped the formation of welfare policies, the question of how welfare practices impacted and affected the everyday-lives of recipients remains uncertain. This is not meant to detract in any way from the accomplishments of the book, rather, it is meant to address the shortcomings of the historical record in regards to welfare. If a more complete historical understanding of welfare is to be realized, a bottom-up approach must be assumed. *The Limits of Affluence* has aptly demonstrated the significant disparities that existed between welfare policies and welfare practices; exactly how these disparities were played out remains unknown. That his book raises more questions than it answers, speaks volumes as to what James Struthers and others in the field have been claiming all along: we have yet to scratch the surface in terms of understanding what is one of the most controversial and significant issues in twentieth-century Canadian history.

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