

preempt the pay equity agenda and limit the ability of the women's movement to resist some of the weakest aspects of the pay equity law? Perhaps this is Kainer's next study!

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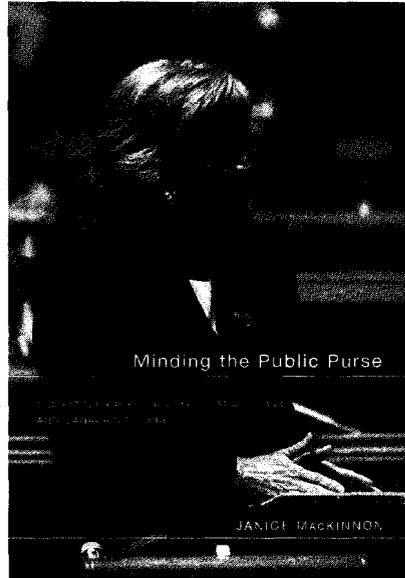
MINDING THE PUBLIC PURSE

Janice MacKinnon
Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003

REVIEWED BY ROBERT DRUMMOND

Janice MacKinnon was the first woman to serve as the finance minister of a government in Canada. She served from 1991 to 2001 (from 1993 to 1997 as finance minister) in the cabinet of Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow, and in this political memoir she addresses the challenges posed by globalization to the scope and scale of state activity in a small, relatively impecunious jurisdiction. As one might imagine, an NDP government was expected by its constituents and members not to be shy about using the power of the state to improve the quality of life of the province's citizens. One might also have imagined the government

would display a posture of resistance to the glorification of private markets that was the mantra of the nineties in so much of North America. However Ms MacKinnon seems not only to have been constrained by the external pressures she faced, but also to have become something of a convert to the budget-reducing strategies of her



federal counterpart—and now Prime Minister—Paul Martin.

Ms MacKinnon refers to the situation she faced in office as a "crisis" created in part by the previous Conservative government of Grant Devine, but fuelled as well in her judgment by the avoidance of "fiscal realities," encouraged by members of her own party. To be sure, she reserves much of her criticism for "megaprojects" in which public dollars were invested—even by governments who trumpeted the virtues of private enterprise—in risky ventures aimed at economic development. However, since her first portfolio in the new cabinet was as minister of social services, she came up against the difficulty of fulfilling traditional NDP promises to enhance social programs, in a climate of straitened fiscal conditions. She was also given responsibility for a government department the Devine government had not treated as a priority, and thus she found herself with a devas-

tated section of the public service, in which several positions were filled not with seasoned experts but political appointees of the previous administration. Forward planning in such an environment was a particular challenge. Her chapters on the early years in office provide a worthwhile addition to the literature on government transition. Caught between the desire to maintain a professional non-partisan civil service and the calls of her party colleagues to "get rid of the Tories" in its ranks, she found herself on the defensive when she wanted to keep people—career civil servants—in place. These were often people who had vital knowledge but who had loyally served the previous government. Distinguishing the Devine partisans from those who were willing now to serve the new government, while fending off attacks from both left and right, was not easy. Moreover there was feeling in some quarters that if the Devine government had been partisan in its choices, the appropriate response was to be equally partisan in the opposite direction.

Probably the most serious challenges MacKinnon reports however were those posed by external forces. Saskatchewan is a vast geographic area with a small, declining population. It is heavily dependent on world markets for agricultural produce and mineral resources, and as a consequence is perhaps more dependent than any Canadian government outside the Atlantic region on the judgments of the bond rating services. Her chapters on the fiscal crisis of the Saskatchewan government and the fiscal federalism of the Martin era of federal finance are fascinating reading, but very disheartening to any who retain a hope that Canada's social programs can be maintained even in the face of global pressures for restructuring.

At the end of the day, MacKinnon is persuaded by the argument that Canada has little choice but to pursue the policies of expenditure reduction and balanced budgets. Her

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.