



# Book Reviews

## *Children and the Future of Work* by Louise Crossley

Child Poverty Review 3

BSL, Melbourne, 1990. 49pp. \$8.00

Unemployment is on the rise again and it seems like every taxi driver in Melbourne has a story to tell about their brother laid off from Nissan or their wife without a job as another clothing factory closes. It is therefore not surprising that books about unemployment have once again become a growth industry, as they were when unemployment peaked at over ten per cent in the early 1980s. In this context Louise Crossley's book *Children and the Future of Work*, provides a brief, accessible and timely survey of key debates about the impact of unemployment and the future of work.

Crossley's starting point is the abundant evidence of the nexus between child poverty, poor education and long term unemployment. This nexus works in two ways. Firstly children of unemployed parents are most likely to face long periods of poverty. Secondly these same children are likely to leave school early and face poor employment prospects themselves. The conclusion is that:

the major determinant of the life chances ... of children raised in poverty is the extent to which they will be able to acquire the skills needed to take advantage of the job opportunities available and to develop a secure and rewarding career (p.30).

So what job opportunities are likely to be available in the foreseeable future? On the one hand there are the optimists who predict that technological change will create as least as many jobs as it destroys – and they will be better jobs. On the other hand the pessimists argue that new technologies are replacing both mental and manual labour in an unprecedented manner. This will lead to high unemployment combined with the deskilling of many of the jobs which do exist. Crossley tends to side with the pessimists and backs her conclusion with a convinc-

ing array of arguments and evidence.

The remainder of the book focuses on the consideration of four scenarios about the future of work. Scenario 1 is the utopian dream of the leisure society in which technological advances permit the abolition of both paid work and poverty. This might sound like fun for children – and everyone else. But I can only agree with the author that this fantasy world is a distant prospect given current Australian conditions and values.

Scenario 2 is the future of the dual society with an elite of well paid skilled employees in secure jobs and an underclass of adults and their children condemned to long periods of unemployment or, at best, unskilled, casual jobs on the margins of the workforce. Again I agree with the author that this is a recipe for the entrenchment of child poverty, alienation and bitterness. My concern is that this prospect may be closer to reality than is suggested here.

The third option is a return to full employment through a combination of government economic intervention, targeted labour market programs and an expansion of job creation, particularly in the community services area. The prospects for children in poverty will clearly depend on the success of such interventions and the degree to which they maximise the educational and employment opportunities of disadvantaged groups.

Scenario 4 provides "work for all" by breaking the link between work and income. This would involve sharing out the tasks that need to be done with expanded opportunities for unpaid "ownwork" such as caring or creative labour. This would need to be backed up by some form of Guaranteed Income scheme and an expansion of universally available community services. Such a future provides part-

icularly attractive possibilities for those who wish to see greater time spent by both men and women in the care and education of children.

Crossley concludes by providing a useful summary of the policies required to achieve some combination of the third and fourth options which she favours.

A fifty page booklet of this kind cannot provide a comprehensive discussion of all the complex issues raised under the heading of the future of work. Nonetheless this is a useful starting point for the general reader or student interested in the relation between employment and poverty. Crossley presents her arguments and evidence with style and clarity although there are moments where she does assume some familiarity with economic terms and debates. I doubt, for example, whether many readers of this journal are comfortable with the concept of 'Kondratiev long waves' and perhaps a little more attention could have been paid to clarifying this kind of language. On the other hand this may also suggest that there is a need for people working in the community services and social policy field to educate themselves about economic terms and debates.

For better or for worse debates about child poverty, educational opportunities and employment are increasingly going to be conducted in the context of debates about economic threats and opportunities. The challenge facing those who wish to see social justice priorities remain on the agenda is to ensure that economic debate is driven by explicit ethical commitments to redistribution rather than the current total obsession with technological solutions and the "invisible hand" of the free market. This will not be an easy task given the very real economic problems facing Australia. There are times when Crossley too seems to

miss this point. It may be true that "as society becomes more productive distribution rather than production is the key economic issue" (p.39), but the problems of distribution, jobs and poverty do need to be linked to the problems of investment and trade, otherwise the two debates will continue in isolation from each other and the narrowest version of economic policy is a likely winner. The outcome of that will be a divided dual

society of the kind implied by Scenario 2.

If all Australian children are to escape the misery of poverty and unemployment, we do need to open up a radically different set of options about the future of work and the purposes of economic policy. "*Children and the Future of Work*" is a most helpful contribution to this task.

*Reviewer: John Wiseman, Lecturer  
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## *Love, Sweat and Tears* by Barbara Szwarc

The Victorian Children's Aid Society, 1990. 135pp. \$12.50

**H**ope, fear, despair, joy and above all, great love – all these are present in Barbara Szwarc's book. *Love, Sweat and Tears* is the personal story of Barbara and her family during a turbulent six years of their lives. The family's hitherto quiet existence was thrown into disarray following the birth, first of Daniel and two years later, of little Joshua. Both these boys were born with a rare and incurable genetic condition called Canavin's Disease, which caused physical and intellectual degeneration, ultimately leading to the death of both children within a few short years.

The book tells of the family's great courage and strength as they struggle to provide the best care possible for Daniel and Joshua while at the same time, maintain some semblance of an ordinary life. It follows events from the heartbreaking revelations that all was not well, through the gradual acceptance by the family and adjustment to a different way of living.

The author simply and frankly reveals the vast array of emotions she, her husband Martin and eldest son Simon, all experienced. She relates how two very special children brought joy and agony into their lives, teaching them all lessons which under usual circumstances may never be learned in a lifetime.

The demands placed on families who care for children with disabilities is

clearly portrayed. Life is a constant round of meeting physical, medical and emotional needs without outside assistance all day and every day, every week of each year. There is no time out, no let up from the physical tasks and emotional demands.

The Szwarc's life is dotted with contrasting episodes ranging from pleasure to sheer exhaustion. The children were delightful, with charming personalities and senses of humour. They were loved by all who knew them and shared with them their fight to find their place in life. The author's struggles to find the best resources for the boys, led her into contact with some marvellous and caring people and organisations who somehow appeared to provide both respite for the family and residential care of foster care just when most needed.

However, Szwarc also recounts times when she had to advocate or plead for much needed assistance. Although the services she used provided excellent and caring help, there were few available and access to them was limited. The family had little choice and were sometimes forced by circumstances to 'grab what they could.' Although not the central message, the book highlights how crucial the availability of appropriate and high quality services are, for children like Daniel and Joshua and those who care for them. Their right to such services is indisputable. However, so often in our

community these rights are reduced to mere rhetoric, leaving the primary caring role to the families concerned with little or no assistance. We just expect them to cope.

One of the most important sources of comfort which the family found came through the friendship of another family who also had two children with Canavin's disease. The importance of families being linked to others in similar circumstances cannot be underestimated for the sharing of experiences, support and help they can offer each other.

*Love, Sweat and Tears*, although demonstrating the difficulties confronting families with disabled children, also brings with it a message of hope and encouragement to families in similar circumstances. For those working with children with disabilities and their families, it offers a rare insight into the lives of service users. For all of us, it is a tribute to the human spirit and a reminder of our responsibility as a society to provide for all our members in all their difference.

In the prelude, Szwarc dreams of a place for her boys where they can be participants not just observers. Surely our society can be such a place, if only we can 'get it right'.

*Reviewer: Jill Volard, Lecturer  
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