

## BOOK REVIEWS

Gorham, E.B. (1992). *National service, citizenship, and political education*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 282 pp., \$49.50 (hardcover).

Professor Gorham's original and provocative book deserves to be far more widely read than, at U.S. \$49.50, it probably will be. Its relevance has been enhanced by the accession of the Clinton administration in the United States, which campaigned strongly for a program of National Service — while some five years ago the Democratic Leadership Council, the source of Clinton's basic policies, developed the Nunn-McCurdy Citizenship and National Service Bill (SR3-1989), some form of which may well have been passed before this can be printed.

In his introduction, Gorham asserts:

This book is not really about national service. It is about ideology, discourse, and political organization .... In November, 1990, President Bush signed into law the National and Community Service Act of 1990, but it contains only the rudimentary structures and funding of various programs that could affect the lives of thousands of people .... Many criticize the program, but much of this criticism is well-worn: National service violates freedom or rights, it is a costly government program, it presages a draft, it threatens union jobs, etc., etc. While these are powerful critiques of the program, all fail to grasp what I take to be its fundamental nature: An institutional means by which the state uses political discourse and ideology to reproduce a postindustrial capitalist economy in the name of good citizenship. (p. 1)

Indeed, this seems self-evident when you think about it. But it isn't; academics rarely analyze a social process in terms so pejorative to pervasive mainstream values. Gorham provides the evidence needed to advance his

argument. His book comes as an epiphany, releasing a flood of insight and grim memories.

Elderly American readers like myself will recall President Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps and its quasi-military discipline designed to forestall controversy, of which Gorham gives a full account. Canadian readers will be reminded of our hopes for Katimavik and of Senator Jacques H  bert's desperate 1986 fast in his unavailing effort to save one of the few programs of national service to which Gorham's criticism does not apply and which the Federal Government abandoned after nine successful years precisely for that reason.

Gorham deplors the probable erosion of citizenship by the very programs of national service that claim to develop it but deny its members the right and the opportunity to govern themselves, explore how their community actually works, and participate in its controversies. His fundamental concern, however, is more moral than political. He is a professor of political science at Loyola University of New Orleans which perhaps accounts for the rather Jesuitical tone of the work: for example, his elaborate distinction between coercive and compulsory programs (p. 34). Some readers who might prefer to dismiss his analysis as Marxist may well be confounded.

A Marxian analysis, though consistent with Gorham's, would convey less sense of outrage. Gorham's indignation at the dishonest and exploitive character of national service programs that would send young men and women as "volunteers" to do the dirty work in highly profitable nursing homes is both appropriate and refreshing. But it also seems naive or at least inconsistent with his own insights. This inconsistency is especially apparent in the chapter in which he considers existing social institutions, including schools, as possible instruments of citizenship education and finds them wanting. The section (pp. 172-177) on schooling is a superficial fragment that never recognizes that schools, too, are *supposed* to mystify their students about the sources of public policy, just as national service programs are.

The final chapter of *National Service, Citizenship, and Political Education* offers suggestions for some kinds of community service that might actually help those involved to become better informed and more aggressive citizens. The preceding chapter concluded with an extended and rather technical dissuasion of "Casuistic Reasoning" as a useful if treacherous analytical tool. Well it might:

In my more idealistic moments, I might pursue national service as political service, but I doubt that those who reside within and around the northwest quadrant of the District of Columbia would do the same. I doubt that even if they did agree with the following suggestions (much less the entire thesis of the book), they could transform it into a nonbureaucratic participatory reality. I offer the following, then, as food for thought rather than as detailed policy advice and I advise those who share my concerns to fight the very idea of national service as the federal government is devising it. Service to a nation of individualists, instrumental reasoners, corporate interests, and large bureaucracies is not in the best interests of the nation .... Good citizens need to resist this sort of good citizenship. Therefore the following tasks are practical, if currently impracticable, ways in which service workers and participants can become good citizens. (p. 198)

These include establishing an alternative newspaper and television station, providing literacy education à la Freire, and combatting urban decay by lobbying against real estate interests, among other things. As they say in New Orleans, "*Que les bons temps roulent!*" And watch out for Ross Perot.

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