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*Are Activation Policies Converging in Europe? The European Employment Strategy for Young People* edited by Amparo SERRANO PASCUAL, Brussels: European Trade Union Institute, 2004, 518 pages, ISBN 2-930352-38-8.

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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depending on the specific context. While this collection as a whole acknowledges that fact, the short, heavily detailed nature of the case studies perhaps does not provide as much enlightenment as one would like. Human Rights Watch and other specialist studies already do a superb job of integrating empirical research data with theoretical overview. Despite its many interesting passages, it remained somewhat unclear what this collection, *qua* collection, was really trying to achieve.

Finally, although the subject of street children is often and inevitably related to that of working children, street children are, in many respects, a separate and extremely challenging population. Amma A. Asante's chapter on "Street Children of Cochabamba," while moving and in one sense self-contained, seemed rather out of place in the collection as a whole. More generally, I considered whether Working Children Around the World isn't a rather enormous a topic to capture in a disparate

set of short essays. G.K. Leiten's own essay on the (often non-obvious) causes of child labour seemed the most innovative of the theoretical pieces. The papers concerned with specific populations of child labourers, while also refreshingly "real," seemed not to be integrated within the framework of the book itself.

I think it is fair to say that readers do approach a book, whether a collection of pieces or a treatise, in an effort to gain a more coherent and theoretically contextualized sense of the topic than they had previous to actually reading it. According to that test, I think this collection leaves something to be desired. If we take each piece on its own, as we might accept conference presentations on their own terms, then there are many fine moments here, especially those based on empirical research carried out in places where children really live and work.

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### ***Are Activation Policies Converging in Europe? The European Employment Strategy for Young People***

edited by Amparo Serrano Pascual, Brussels: European Trade Union Institute, 2004, 518 pages, ISBN 2-930352-38-8.

The countries of the European Union took a significant step when, in 1997, they agreed to coordinate their employment policies. The first fruit of this agreement was the Luxembourg Guidelines, prescribing policy goals for action against long-term unemployment. The general aim of the Guidelines was to shift policy in an "active" direction, in which unemployed people – especially the young – would be led back to jobs with support from programs. This development provides the backdrop for the collection of papers reviewed here, which comes from a seminar organized by the European Trade Union Institute and the Group ESC Toulouse at the end

of 2001, with the aim of characterizing policies of "activation" across Europe. The authors come from eight countries, the majority of the papers are comparative, and the only (pre-accession) EU countries omitted from review are Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg and Portugal. There is also considerable discussion of US developments, and one chapter offers a comparison of Canada with Germany.

The editor's concluding chapter refers to the "semantic confusion" inherent in the concept of "activation," and contrasts its senses of goal, method, principle and ideology. None the less, most contributors are agreed that government

adoption of an “activation” perspective (in whatever sense) is widely observed and that it involves common practical developments. Financial support for unemployed or non-employed groups is reduced, through more limited eligibility and/or through lower entitlements. In parallel, support is sometimes shifted to in-work groups via negative income tax or similar means. Receipt of financial support also becomes, to an increasing extent, conditional on job search, program participation, and flexibility, in the sense of accepting any job opportunity which is available. These tendencies are documented through the descriptions and comparisons of national developments. Particularly impressive in its historical depth and detail is the paper by Lind and Moller on Denmark. Other contributions with new insights include a comparison of recent policy developments in Austria and Germany (Heidemann and Rademacker) and case-studies of innovative programs across four countries (Lafoucrière and Winter-ton). All in all, the descriptive evidence is more than sufficient to establish the significant change that has been taking place in European welfare-to-work systems and policies.

The volume, however, is by no means limited to description. It is as much concerned with offering a critique of “activation,” or rather a series of critiques from the different contributors. Although these critiques differ in many features, some family resemblances can be discerned. Unemployment, or lack of employment, is assumed to arise from conditions of economic demand, exacerbated by monetarist policies and by the advance of globalization. Cuts in financial support for people adversely affected by job loss are argued to be inequitable in such a context, especially when they are used to ease fiscal pressures on the better-off. Further, the growth of coercive control by the public employment services is thought to maintain a reserve army of labour that is obliged to serve

flexible labour markets. This in turn tends to drive down the quality of jobs and the level of wages. Meanwhile the work ethic is promoted as a dominant ideology, individual choice is curtailed, and society is encouraged to blame the victims of malfunctioning national and international economies.

The authors, however, devote little effort to establishing the elements of their critique as well-founded or plausible. They rely on others agreeing with their general assumptions, so that the arguments have somewhat the character of a conversation among the faithful. Yet many of the assumptions are questionable, on the basis of available evidence. For example, many countries have not followed monetarist policies or have abandoned them long since. The assumption that globalization affects aggregate employment has been strongly contested. The evidence about levels of “activation” in relation to levels of flexible (non-standard) employment is complex, and certainly does not support any simple association between the two. Although “activation” policies can in principle foster low-quality employment, this tendency has in a number of countries been deliberately countered through minimum wage policy and increased regulation of employment conditions. In any case, the really flexible labour margin, with exploitative conditions, has in many European countries shifted to the informal economy and illegal immigrant workers, beyond the ambit of welfare-to-work policies.

The weakness of this volume’s critique, in failing to deal with such obvious objections, is all the more regrettable as there is surely much to criticize in “activation” policies. The authors could have analysed the economic mismanagement which has contributed greatly to mass unemployment in several European countries. They could have reviewed the well-documented shortcomings of the employment services, and the common

abuses regarding programs, such as cream-skimming and carousels. They could have examined the economic evaluation evidence for welfare-to-work programs, revealing gains for young participants that range from modest to non-existent. They could have considered the barriers facing unemployed youth – such as credentialist employers, abusive or disintegrating families, lack of affordable housing, or difficult access to therapies – and could have questioned whether the typical “activation” policies are relevant. There is much troubling evidence about the experience of disadvantaged youth, but the authors have preferred to dwell on institutional critique, discourse analysis, and ideology.

A large exception is the chapter by Kieselbach and Traiser, which summarizes a multi-country study of long-term unemployment and social exclusion of young people, focusing

upon the experience of individuals. A model of clarity and balance, this chapter shows how qualitative research, conducted within a well-developed conceptual framework, can produce results that are both humanly revealing and of substantial relevance to policy makers. These authors see “activation” less as something which is imposed on disadvantaged youth and more as something which is withheld from them. Damaged by educational “failure” and by a complex of psychosocial disorders, they need family, social and institutional supports which are often lacking. This chapter’s analysis suggests why the development of European “activation” policy, well described elsewhere in this volume, has so far had little impact on the problems of disadvantaged youth.

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***Les stratégies des ressources humaines, 3<sup>e</sup> édition***

par Bernard Gazier, Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2004, 122 pages, ISBN 2-7071-4389-8.

La troisième édition de l’ouvrage de Bernard Gazier, intitulé *Les stratégies des ressources humaines*, est décidément un incontournable pour qui souhaite approfondir sa compréhension de la GRH. Structuré autour de six chapitres, comptant chacun entre deux et trois sections de moins d’une dizaine de pages, le propos de l’auteur est d’une clarté, d’une concision et d’un souci d’objectivité qui font trop souvent défaut. Loin des rhétoriques normatives, l’exposé de Gazier est savamment critique et sait presque toujours prendre le recul nécessaire pour rendre compte de la réalité d’une façon traduisant la prise en compte simultanée de plusieurs points de vue.

À l’intérieur du premier chapitre, intitulé «Les ressources humaines, de la gestion aux stratégies», le lecteur trouvera deux sections: «Outils et pratiques

de la gestion des ressources humaines» et «La montée en puissance des ressources humaines». Après avoir bien expliqué que l’un des «malheurs» de la GRH est d’être un champ de la gestion comptant parmi les plus éclatés qui soient, Gazier nous explique comment le domaine de la GRH ne peut pas être compris sans la prise en compte de la trilogie inévitable des logiques mettant aux prises les trois acteurs classiques que sont les employeurs, les employés et l’État.

Après quelques pages historiques où Gazier refait l’histoire du développement de la fonction RH, il nous rappelle que depuis la fin des «trente glorieuses» la majorité des organisations sont aux prises avec deux choix fréquents parfois retenus simultanément pour diverses catégories de leur personnel: le rejet des salariés considérés excédentaires associé bien souvent à la précarisation