

## **Social Work: The Rise and Fall of a Profession?**

Steve Rogowski

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This is the second and updated edition of Rogowski's book, the first being published in 2010 amidst the dying days of the New Labour Government and now, ten years later, he adds his analysis of social work under the age of austerity and ten years of Tory government. These significant bookends frame the largely policy and political lens through which he views the struggles of our profession. At a number of points in the book, Rogowski reflects on his 30 plus years in the profession, primarily as a children's and family's social worker and the book, I feel, captures a practitioner's voice as much as an academic one. His analysis rests firmly within a Marxist critique of neoliberalism which perhaps sounds rather earnest, but the author brings an assured and lively hand to his description of the profession's journey over these years. In his introductory chapter he acknowledges that perhaps he may seem 'naïve and idealistic' – but he is at pains to point out that his is not what he describes as a 'true' account – but rather one which questions the dominant narratives that surround social work – and thank goodness for that. There are precious few authors trying to capture such a breadth in approach to understanding our profession's journey (Payne and Parton are perhaps two that come to mind) - and even fewer who wrestle with current orthodoxy. His style is eminently readable, well-paced and he provides summaries, learning points, discussion suggestions and further reading for each chapter.

I especially enjoyed the first chapter where Rogowski lays out his approach and how his personal and professional experience has influenced his views. He posits a view that the 'zenith' of social work occurred in the 1970's where a sense of optimism prevailed and following chapters consider the looming threats of Thatcherism and, indeed, New Labour – whom he basically sees as 'out Toring the Tories' by intensifying the ideological offensive of Thatcherism. Particular ire is reserved in later chapters for managerialism and austerity – taking in reflections on the College of Social Work, Frontline, Social Work England and Brexit - before a concluding chapter examines radical possibilities for the profession to escape its fall into 'un-reflective people processors'.

The final search for optimism for the profession Rogowski so clearly loves is perhaps less convincing than the preceding chapters description of its fall from grace. And in that sense this book can, on one level, be seen as something of a love letter to a type of social work that happened (for some) a long time ago. Rather like Larkin's *Annus Mirabilis*, 1963. Because the analysis is so certain of its approach the reader is, I feel, less likely to be convinced if they don't already at least partly share this view. But here we have a hugely engaging book that was a genuine pleasure to read - and argue along with - through these historical way marks for the profession. It is written with clarity, conviction, passion and a sense of anger that is disappointingly rare nowadays. Suitable for practitioners, students and academics alike - whatever one's politics - for who can really challenge his desire in this book to work towards a, 'more just and equal world'.