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Transformation of the Welfare State: The Silent Surrender of Public Responsibility

Neil Gilbert

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Since the early 1970s, debate has raged over the "crisis of the welfare state." As the United States successfully exported its bootstrap brand of capitalism and an ever-broadening range of public activity came to be viewed through the prism of profit and loss, social welfare policies were closely scrutinized worldwide. Welfare was no longer seen as a means to remedy the inherent flaws of capitalism, but rather was recast as part of the very problem it was designed to solve. At the same time, the glaring systemic deficiencies of extant welfare systems-and the psychological toll of welfare dependency--became increasingly apparent, even to welfare's supporters.

How much has really changed in the world of welfare? A great deal, according to Neil Gilbert, one of our most deeply engaged and thoughtful analysts of social welfare policy. In this panoramic inquiry, Gilbert spans the globe to assess, in provocative yet dispassionate fashion, what welfare looks like in a free market world. From Sweden to the U.S., Gilbert finds a fundamental transformation in the welfare state--a turn away from broad-based entitlements and automatic benefits to a new, "enabling" approach defined by policies designed to promote privatization and labor force participation. He provides tangible evidence of how these new systems promote work and responsibility over protection and how they thicken the glue of civil society by diluting the pervasive role of government.

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