

examines the SRDCs as intergovernmental networks, while chapter 6 analyzes the activities that were undertaken by the councils. Chapter 7 highlights the always changing expectations of the SRDCs and presents an interesting analysis of the outcomes and impacts of the councils. A final chapter examines the “evidence” presented in the book as an example of “new governance.”

Among the many strengths of the book are its anchoring in theory, its deft use of current and classic public management literature, and its emphasis on context and history. The everyday examples of governmental problem solving, public management tensions, boundary spanning, networking, strategic planning, visioning, and collaborative policymaking make this a natural for use in the classroom in a wide variety of courses, especially those in intergovernmental relations, federalism, and rural development. Although the reader is left wanting to learn more—about the subject states, about the case studies, and about the SRDCs in states not studied—the book provides much food for thought. The book is a “must read” for anyone interested in public management and a welcome contribution to the literature.

ROSEMARY O'LEARY is Associate Professor of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University, Bloomington.

Janet A. Weiss

Down from Bureaucracy: The Ambiguity of Privatization and Empowerment, by Joel F. Handler. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996, 269 pp., \$29.95 cloth.

Down from Bureaucracy—this highly ambiguous title gives few hints of what Joel Handler, the Richard C. Maxwell Professor of Law at the University of California at Los Angeles, is up to in this book. At the outset the book asks some very broad questions about decentralization and privatization in a political environment that celebrates the market and distrusts the state. What shapes the allocation of authority in society? Does the reallocation of authority represented by deregulation, decentralization, or privatization increase the freedom of the ordinary person? Handler brings an eclectic assortment of theoretical angles to bear on selected aspects of these questions; only some of them work.

At its best the book addresses the implications of decentralization of authority for the empowerment of citizens, especially what Handler calls subordinate, that is, relatively powerless, citizens. Frequently, Handler treats deregulation, privatization, and devolution as a reallocation of power among stakeholders, and wonders how previously disadvantaged stakeholders fare in the new allocation of power. He is interested in social policy; health care, education, worker safety, and community development constitute the majority of his examples. Thus, the broad argument implied by the title actually boils down to something much more focused, the implications of decentralization of social policy for disadvantaged citizens who are the intended beneficiaries of government intervention.

When Handler sticks to this focus, he has a number of very interesting things to say. By far the best chapter in the book is the discussion of empowerment by invitation. Handler suggests that the reallocation of power from a strong government agency to previously disadvantaged citizens does not necessarily

make things better—unless the previously disempowered parties get sufficient resources to act effectively on their own behalf. Where do these resources come from? Partly they exist or can be developed by the weaker parties, but partly they must come from the stronger parties themselves, “hence the expression empowerment by invitation” (p. 133).

Examples of empowerment by invitation are more common than critics of bureaucracy might think. Handler discusses cases in which government agencies came to understand that their mission could be accomplished more effectively if they had the active participation and involvement of, say, parents of children with disabilities in special education, or nursing home residents and their families in nursing home administration, or tenants in public housing. Once policy officials came to see these subordinate groups (parents, frail elderly residents, public housing tenants, and the like) as part of the solution, rather than merely the problem, they saw that helping the subordinate groups to participate knowledgeably and in a sustainable way was in their own interest. To produce a genuine sharing of power by government agencies, the agency staff have to believe that the clients can help them achieve their own goals *and* there must be some real valued contribution that clients can make. Thus, for example, parents have information about the needs of their disabled children that can be useful to school officials in designing effective educational programs at reasonable cost.

Handler reaches useful conclusions about the conditions that permit previously subordinate groups to play an effective role in policies designed to help them. Dependent people have to see themselves as efficacious; to feel efficacious, they must have at least some experiences in which they succeed in influencing actual results of service delivery. He emphasizes the need for the agency to provide concrete resources to the clients, such as information, money, or authority over some kinds of decisions affecting their own lives. The subordinate group then comes to see the advantages of assuming more power in the relationship. Thus, both agency and clients need to see real benefits in the decentralization of authority to make empowerment successful. Even under advantageous circumstances, empowerment of dependent groups is somewhat unstable. There is a strong tendency to drift back to unequal power arrangements over time.

Handler also explores empowerment of subordinate groups that is imposed on a government agency by law or political pressure, rather than granted by the judgment of agency officials themselves. He calls this empowerment by conflict. His major example is school reform, especially the radical restructuring of the Chicago Public Schools. This discussion illustrates nicely the dilemmas of decentralizing authority among a set of policy stakeholders who see few benefits in working together to accomplish a common purpose. This chapter, however, offers little guidance for policymakers or advocates who hope to achieve public purposes or improve conditions by shifting authority to the local or neighborhood level.

Elsewhere in the book, Handler rambles over a great deal of ground without adding much new. Under the heading of privatization, he reviews literature only about government contracting for social services. His conclusions are familiar, and do not extend beyond Donahue [1989], Smith and Lipsky [1993], or Salamon [1995]. If the discussion of privatization is more narrowly focused than is common in the policy literature, the discussion of decentralization is somewhat broader. Decentralization is Handler’s term for a wide range of

policy initiatives, including welfare reform, devolution, deregulation, and block grants. He is less interested in the differences among these policies than in their common goal of reallocating power to give more voice to stakeholders at local levels of government. Handler's analysis of decentralization draws heavily on the work of others, including Hasenfeld's [1992] explanations of how professional norms channel the delivery of services and Moe's [1989] account of how decentralization can be used for partisan and ideological purposes. With such a broad definition of decentralization, he can only conclude that decentralization is complicated and often used for political reasons to manage conflict. The value of decentralization for accomplishing policy objectives remains elusive.

Throughout the book, a strong political stance is evident. Handler is less interested in policy or bureaucracy than in power for the disadvantaged. Whether down from bureaucracy, up from bureaucracy, down with bureaucracy, or away from bureaucracy altogether, empowerment of the poor, the stigmatized, and the weak seldom succeeds. "Empowerment," he concludes, "rests on a basic contradiction—it envisages a democratic process of equality between participants who are unequal in terms of power and resources" (p. 240).

JANET A. WEISS is Associate Dean and Mary C. Bromage Collegiate Professor of Organizational Behavior and Public Policy at the University of Michigan.

REFERENCES

- Donahue, John (1989), *The Privatization Decision* (New York: Basic Books).
- Hasenfeld, Yeheskel (1992), *Human Services as Complex Organizations* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage).
- Moe, Terry (1989), "The Politics of Bureaucratic Structure," in John Chubb and Paul Peterson (eds.), *Can the Government Govern?* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution).
- Salamon, Lester (1995), *Partners in Public Service: Government–Nonprofit Relations in the Modern Welfare State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).
- Smith, Steven and Michael Lipsky (1993), *Nonprofits for Hire: The Welfare State in the Age of Contracting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

Alasdair S. Roberts

The Privatization Process: A Worldwide Perspective, edited by Terry Anderson and Peter Hill. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996, 274 pp., \$62.50 cloth, \$23.95 paper.

The Privatization Process is an collection of papers, some previously published, presented at a conference on privatization organized by the Political Economy Research Center in 1994. The purpose of the volume is to obtain a richer understanding of how the "privatization revolution" of the last 15 years has occurred. "Economists were well equipped to assert that privatization would improve efficiency," the editors argue, "but were ill-equipped to assist