



Volume 43, Issue 2

April 2014 , pp. 435-436

Nina Eliasoph (2013), *The Politics of Volunteering*, Cambridge: Polity Press. £15.99, pp. 190, pbk

STEVEN HOWLETT ^(a1)

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279413000858>

Published online: 15 January 2014

Request permission ([https://s100.copyright.com/AppDispatchServlet?publisherName=CUP&publication=JSP&title=Nina%20Eliasoph%20\(2013\),%20%3Cspan%20class=%22italic%201-15&author=STEVEN%20HOWLETT©right=COPYRIGHT:%20%C2%A9%20Cambridge%20University%20](https://s100.copyright.com/AppDispatchServlet?publisherName=CUP&publication=JSP&title=Nina%20Eliasoph%20(2013),%20%3Cspan%20class=%22italic%201-15&author=STEVEN%20HOWLETT©right=COPYRIGHT:%20%C2%A9%20Cambridge%20University%20))

Abstract

REVIEWS 435

that social workers face in the context of increasing levels of state control linked to privatisation and marketisation. The book recognises the need for social workers to always think critically and to always challenge policies, practices, methods and theories that have the potential to oppress further service users who are already in positions of economic, political and social powerlessness. In doing so, it also points to the ways in which social workers can work towards engaging with service users in a more collective and creative manner.

The book is written in an accessible manner and at the end of each chapter the author summarises 'key points' that have been made, alongside questions for discussion and some contributions from students. Social work practitioners, academics and students will find the book encourages them to critically reflect on the nature of social work in contemporary society,

with a view to developing a more critical and empowering approach to intervention.

LAURA PENKETH
Liverpool Hope University
penketl@hope.ac.uk

Nina Eliasoph (2013), *The Politics of Volunteering*, Cambridge: Polity Press. £15.99,
pp. 190, pbk
doi:10.1017/S0047279413000858

The audience for this book is described as ‘students of sociology, political science, and communications studies’ and it is also stated that the book provides a ‘framework for evaluating the role of civic associations in social and political life, as well as in their own lives as citizens’. The author is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Southern California and so the book inevitably draws on the North American experience. However, I neither think that it makes the book any less relevant for the type of student described who is pursuing their studies outside the US, nor is it a book that should be seen as having its place only on an undergraduate reading list. In fact, I think this is a useful book for students on all sorts of courses and I would love my first year undergraduate business students to read it to help them reflect upon the place of active citizenship in their own lives. But, the book is written in a scholarly, informing and engaging style that would make it also of interest to a wider readership than students. Those interested in civil society, the voluntary sector and volunteering would find this of interest. And I say that because, although volunteering touches many areas, it can become a little isolated. The key thing about this book is that it reminds us that volunteering is political.

In the UK, we have become used to the idea of volunteering being presented in a support role to welfare. That may seem unfair when the ‘Big Society’, in so far as people pin it down, calls for community participation in all sorts of ways; but the fact remains that the general direction of travel is for volunteering to increasingly be seen as ‘paid work without pay’ and its instrumental role as something ‘for your CV’, or as a ‘way back into paid work’. In turn, this leads to research that tends to concentrate on how to recruit, manage and retain volunteers. Don’t get me wrong – that is needed. The oft quoted 1997 National Survey of Volunteering, which showed that 71 per cent of volunteers said that their work could be better organised, can be seen as a root cause of a more considered programme towards improvement in volunteer management (Howlett, 2011). But at the same time, the over emphasis on this leads to a managerial approach that means much of the thinking on volunteering is influenced by organisational psychology and an obsession with motivations and the search for ‘best management practice’. To an extent, we can see a change in this – my own efforts with Colin Rochester and Angela Ellis Paine (Rochester *et al.*, 2012) argued that the work place model impoverishes volunteering, while Rochester’s

Copyright

COPYRIGHT: © Cambridge University Press 2014

References

Hide All

Howlett S. (2011), 'Developing volunteer management as a profession', *Voluntary Sector Review*, 1: 3, 355–61.

[CrossRef \(http://dx.doi.org/10.1332/204080510X538338\)](http://dx.doi.org/10.1332/204080510X538338) |

[Google Scholar \(https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?](https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=Developing+volunteer+management+as+a+profession&publication+year=2011&author=Howlett+S.&journal=V)

[title=Developing+volunteer+management+as+a+profession&publication+year=2011&author=Howlett+S.&journal=V](https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=Developing+volunteer+management+as+a+profession&publication+year=2011&author=Howlett+S.&journal=V)

Rochester C., Ellis Paine A. and Howlett S. (2012), *Volunteering and Society in the 21st Century*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

[Google Scholar \(https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?](https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=Volunteering+and+Society+in+the+21st+Century&publication+year=2012&author=Rochester+C.&author=Ellis+)

[title=Volunteering+and+Society+in+the+21st+Century&publication+year=2012&author=Rochester+C.&author=Ellis+](https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=Volunteering+and+Society+in+the+21st+Century&publication+year=2012&author=Rochester+C.&author=Ellis+)

Rochester C. (2013), *Rediscovering Voluntary Action: The Beat of a Different Drum*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

[CrossRef \(http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781137029461\)](http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781137029461) |

[Google Scholar \(https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?](https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=Rediscovering+Voluntary+Action:+The+Beat+of+a+Different+Drum&publication+year=2013&author=Rocheste)

[title=Rediscovering+Voluntary+Action:+The+Beat+of+a+Different+Drum&publication+year=2013&author=Rocheste](https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=Rediscovering+Voluntary+Action:+The+Beat+of+a+Different+Drum&publication+year=2013&author=Rocheste)