
BOOK REVIEW

Robert Chernomas and Ian Hudson, ***Social Murder and Other Shortcomings of Conservative Economics.*** Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2007, 224 pages. \$26.95.

Reviewed by **Daniel Preece**, Grant MacEwan College.

Social Murder is an accessible critique of conservative economic theory that demonstrates how the policies driven by this theoretical framework directly enhance corporate power and increase the levels of poverty, exploitation, illness, and economic instability within society. By orienting the book towards the general public, Robert Chernomas and Ian Hudson challenge a number of key assumptions promoted by conservative academics and pundits to illuminate the degree of structural power within the current economic system. Whereas conservative economists advocate for public policy that increases the profitability of business, and maintain that increased profitability will result in widespread societal benefits, the authors unpack this myth and demonstrate how it is supported by neither historical evidence nor contemporary developments.

In the first two thirds of the book, the authors use a series of case studies, both to critique conservative prescriptions regarding economic instability, innovation, income redistribution, and market regulation and to outline how the implementation of these policies have directly harmed the general public. Continuing the examination of how conservative economic policy has generated public harm, the next two chapters outline the broader consequences of these policies, by first detailing the relationship between the economic system and the social determinants of health, and then describing the impact that American foreign policy has had in shaping the global political economy. Finally, the text addresses the contradictory nature of public support for conservative policies. As Chernomas and Hudson note, conservative policies enjoy widespread support from the general public, even though the vast majority of people are harmed by these practices. Moreover, while this contradiction is explicitly addressed in the final chapter, it also serves as one of the key themes throughout the text and frames the challenge posed by the authors for the general public. The critique posed by *Social Murder* seeks both to generate a debate among the voting public over the desirability of these policies and to ferment widespread opposition to the further entrenchment of conservative economics.

However, the orientation of *Social Murder* to a general audience also leads to one of the

Book Review: Social Murder and Other Shortcomings of Conservative Economics

more substantial problems with the book. By writing a text oriented towards popular consumption, Chernomas and Hudson have sacrificed a degree of analytical depth to ensure accessibility. There is a vast literature within political economy that underpins both conservative and critical theory, but these debates are underutilised by the authors. For example, the book discusses the relationship between business and the government, but draws upon neither the research surrounding class formation and class fractions nor the debate over the degree to which the state acts as an instrument of capital or is able to exercise a degree of relative autonomy. Similarly, the discussion surrounding public support for conservative economic policies does not engage with the field of cultural studies or the theory of ideological hegemony proposed by post-Marxist scholars. By failing to engage with these important debates, the conclusions presented in *Social Murder* are strongly asserted, but neither fully developed nor proven.

Nevertheless, as a critique of conservative economics meant to be read by the general public, *Social Murder* fills a valuable and important niche in the debate surrounding socio-economic governance. At a point in history when most popular debate is dominated by conservative economic prescriptions, this book provides a much-needed alternative perspective on the influence of corporate power on democracy. Much like Michael Moore, Chernomas and Hudson have crafted an easily accessible book that directly addresses the key ideas that are explicitly and implicitly promoted by proponents of conservative economic theory. While the book may not be appropriate for a classroom setting, it should be required reading for every citizen.