

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Miles to Go: A Personal History of Social Policy*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1996. 245 pp; ISBN: 0-674-57440-0, hardcover; \$22.95.

The unusual character of this book, and its strengths and weaknesses, reflect the near unique position Daniel Patrick Moynihan occupies in American political and academic life. Although he is a former director of the Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT and Harvard University and world famous as a social scientist and historian, Moynihan writes *Miles to Go* primarily out of his long career in making social policy, first as a high-level bureaucrat and advisor to presidents from Kennedy to Nixon and then for over twenty years as a Democratic senator from New York. In the Senate he finally rose to chairman of the Finance Committee in 1992, a position he cites a former chairman as saying has jurisdiction over 'just about everything' (5). The Republican majorities in both chambers that resulted from the historic congressional elections of 1994 cut his tenure short and provided impetus for this, the latest of seventeen volumes he has written or edited as America's premier (some would say only) scholar politician.

One strength of *Miles to Go* is implied by the title, an allusion to Frost's poem 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' with its sense of pausing temporarily to reflect before returning to responsibilities as yet unfulfilled for the enlightenment of constituents, colleagues and 'history', Moynihan the career public servant ponders the meaning of his struggles in a 'Personal History of Social Policy' before returning to the fray. His 63-page 'Introduction' invites readers to share his perspective as elder statesman and long-term policymaker. We are privy to a conversation between him and Yeltsin in 1987 about Lenin's library in the Kremlin, which he visits as a representative of the United States as the USSR totters toward collapse. We are invited to share his greater sympathy for the defeat of old friend and government careerist George Bush than for the upstart president-elect from Arkansas, who arrives in the capital as if he had a 'mandate for all manner of governing' (2) with 43 percent of the vote and who brings a staff proposing 'all manner of

'60s enthusiasms' (13) at the end of 1992. He explains for the uninitiated where the 'real' power lies in the federal government, how it accumulated in the position of chairman of the Senate's Committee on Finance, what constitute the essentially different political realities that face members of the House and Senate, and how skillfully presidents master these elementary facts of American government.

Those unfamiliar with such interior views of US politics and government will find the point-of-view and insights here enlightening. The main body of the introduction and later chapters also show this general strength. Moynihan *was* LBJ: in 1961 he warned that building interstate highways would ravage America's cities, and in 1991 he 'decided' it was time to redress the balance in favor of [mass] transit and rail' (4). In 1980 he presciently publicized how the Republican party had become a party of daring political ideas. Before anyone else, LBJ noted how some of its leaders had begun encouraging larger federal budget deficits in the late 1970s to 'starve the beast', that is, to starve the government of funds for domestic programs – just when the New Deal Coalition was ideologically exhausted. He had been there in the 1950s and 60s when the problem had been to spend bothersome budget surpluses that threatened to become a drag on the economy, and he later listened to President Reagan's rhetoric about reducing deficits while his administration did the opposite. Thus in 1993 he understood the crucial partisan and social policy importance of his responsibility as he thwarted this Republican strategy by guiding Clinton's first omnibus budget bill to success, at once proving that the government could raise taxes greatly without stalling economic growth and historically reversing the trend of spiraling public indebtedness. Much of his introductory essay and second chapter, 'Repealing Economics,' recount the signal victory made possible by foresight, the perspective of long experience, and political courage.

Readers feel a touch of the melodramatic as Moynihan permits them to be present while he averts these perils, as well as the foreshortening of a 'very possibly great age of [medical] science' (15), and 'million of infants [being] put to the sword' through welfare reform (41) in the Introduction. Chapters 1 and 4 show him participating in the quantification of economic and sociological research that undergirded the War on Poverty. In chapter 2 he staves off Clinton's gargantuan health reform bill that would have greatly reduced the number of doctors in the US, and successfully opposes Republicans' balanced budget amendment that would have returned the economy to the wild gyrations of the 1800s. In the book's third essay he resists sociologists' redefinition of the seriously deviant in society – high rates of mental illness, crime, drug abuse, and broken families – as normal. He devotes the next chapter to a stout defense of his 1965 report on the black family against accusations of racism and a re-statement of his conviction that decay of the nuclear family – now admittedly in white and Latino as well as black communities – causes the nation's most serious social ills.

Some of Moynihan's heroic efforts are pyrrhic. In chapter 5 he reminds us that he served as assistant to the president on urban affairs 'during the great heroin epidemic of the 1960's' (199) and gives a short history of substance abuse in the US and government attempts to curb it. Then he shows us how he successfully legislated the re-channeling of public expenditure in the war on drugs in 1988 from strict law enforcement to expanded treatment services, only to see that Anti Drug Abuse Act languish for lack of funding in the

face of public and Republican opinion demanding more effective policing and interdiction of drugs at the nation's borders. In his 'Epilogue' to some extent he throws up his hands in despair, asking what is to be done and saying we should expect little of the federal government as we experience continuing family deterioration and the growing disparity of incomes it produces. We can only trust that 'another generation of hard and complex analysis may give us some insights' (229). That is the one hope he holds out in his penultimate sixth chapter, 'The Coming of Age of American Social Policy,' which he claims that economists have given government the tools to manage the economy but sociologists have failed to provide models for understanding and remedying the ills of a post-industrial society.

The great interest in all this is what perhaps only Moynihan can provide: the leading politician's inside view and intimate knowledge of the legislative history of American social programs, combined with sufficient familiarity with the social sciences and writing skill to make expert government studies accessible for the general reader. But the weaknesses of the book also result from these fused roles and abilities. Moynihan is a busy politician. Perhaps that is why *Miles to Go* is not an integrated, documented and well-structured academic study but the recent gleanings of his files of newspaper clippings, speeches, contributions to senatorial debates, and already published op ed and magazine pieces. Bringing these things together does emphasize his policy preoccupations over the last decades and bring them to bear on explaining recent American politics, especially the 1994 Republican 'revolution' and the reactions of a prominent liberal Democrat to it. That has real value but we miss a thoroughly worked out synthesis, especially when throughout the book he emphasizes his ability to predict problems and find solutions when no one else could. He is constantly saying *I told you so* to benighted fellow politicians and social commentators. He is somewhat too busy quoting himself, going on record, taking credit, making the public gesture and planning the hidden strategy to deal with partisan opponents – being the politician – for *Miles to Go* to realize its potential as the work of a social scientist and historian. One wishes Moynihan could have dallied by the woods in thought longer so as to gain a clearer, more objective perspective on the miles he had already traveled.