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Book Reviews

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THE NEW CLASS WAR: REAGAN'S ATTACK ON THE WELFARE STATE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES, by FRANCES FOX PIVEN and RICHARD A. CLOWARD. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982. 160 pp. \$11.50 cloth, \$4.95 paper.

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Piven and Cloward are well-known to readers of this journal as critics of the welfare system and as advocates of mass insurgency as a pressure tactic (rather than as the prelude to a revolutionary transformation from below or to the continuing organization of the poor). Now they turn their attention to current politics.

They trace the history of welfare and labor policies, arguing that when the traditional community was destroyed the propertyless were forced to seek work as wage-labor. The American state was institutionalized as a business-dominated state through the Constitution and through such usages as vote fraud and repression. By putting economic concerns outside of politics, the ideology of laissez faire provided a reasonably stable defense for elite domination of a society in which most voters are decidedly non-elite. This left a local politics of individualism, ethnicity, and neighborhood in which democracy had some reality but in which it would not challenge the real power of the business class.

The Depression of the 1930s caused economic problems to be seen as political, and mass action by the unemployed and by labor partially democratized the use of political power for economic benefit. During and after World War II, government-business ties increased and the political aspect of the economy became more visible. In the 1960s, Black insurgency led to great expansion of social welfare programs and created state agencies linked to democratic publics (parallel to the older linkage of state and business).

In the 1970s, economic difficulties beset American capitalism. Piven and Cloward see this as based in the emergence of strong international competition, rising energy costs, and shrinking Third World opportunities. This seems to me to be inadequate as an explanation of what is a world economic crisis since it leaves only rising energy costs as the cause of the crisis and, indeed, the crisis antedated their rise. I would point to the evidence for a declining rate of profit as a much more basic cause (see Kidron, 1970; Hill, 1979).

Piven and Cloward argue that the crisis led corporations to seek lower tax rates and labor costs. The attacks on labor and on welfare programs that were part of Carter's program, but more visibly the core of Reagan's, aim to drive down the cost of labor by forcing desperate former welfare clients to compete and struggle for jobs and thus to lower wages and working conditions for all workers.

The authors argue that this attack can be defeated. The expansion of the welfare state created a mass of program personnel and a mass of clients. This opens the possibility for a truly broad and deep protest movement. Furthermore, this movement shares an anti-corporate-domination approach with environmentalists; religious, student, civil rights, and civil liberties groups; women; the aged; and labor. The combined power of these groups for disruption and thereafter for voting into office a new politics that will "limit capital's right to invest as it chooses" (p. 149) makes Piven and Cloward optimistic about the outcome.

I have several reservations about their analysis. First, since they view the crisis as a product of corporate competition and high profits, they underestimate the difficulties facing the coalition they call for. As I see it, the crisis is so built into the structure of capitalism (and its Eastern analogues: witness the crisis in Eastern Europe) that the corporate leadership of this country have no choice but to fight for a politics of austerity (whether Reaganomics or Rohatyn's industrial policy). To solve the crisis requires that the poor and, more generally, the entire broadly-defined working class take control of the society and build a new system based on democratic cooperation and initiative rather than elite authoritarian competition. We might learn lessons about how to do this from Polish Solidarity.

My second reservation concerns their analysis (p. 125) that "...the state has finally become the main arena of class conflict. Working people who once looked to the marketplace as the arena for action on their economic grievances and aspirations now look more often to the state." As one who has done much research on the sociology of work and labor (Friedman, 1982), I question this. Although it is true, as they claim, that economic issues now dominate American politics, this reality coexists with a continuing depoliticization of the working class. Thus, massive numbers of workers don't vote--and many of these are extremely alienated from and cynical about all politics, whether centrist, right, or left. Furthermore, most worker activists see

politics as alien to their shop floor, collective bargaining, or union reform struggles; and, indeed, labor bureaucrats often raise "politics," such as U.S. content laws or budget coalitions, to channel discontent away from shop floor and union reform struggles. That is, they set up political apparatuses run from the top as supposed solutions to problems in an attempt to keep workers from mobilizing around their immediate problems at work. Even more telling, the lack of political interest among workers has led many socialists who work in industry to downplay their politics and to treat unionism as unrelated to politics.

In conclusion, my reservations do not detract from my enthusiastically recommending this book. It is a fine blending of serious scholarship and political commitment. Its political recommendations point in the right direction: towards mass activist resistance by welfare state workers and clients and by their potential political allies. Many of the places where the authors and I disagree, furthermore, seem to be based on the lack of relationships among the movements and their associated intellectuals. Labor activists and welfare activists need to work together more and to learn more about each other and about the insights available from the social position of the other movements.

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SOCIAL SERVICE POLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES AND BRITAIN, by WILLARD C. RICHAN. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981. viii, 276 pp. \$22.50 cloth.

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This unpretentious yet ambitious comparison of Britain and the United States asks (1) if social workers are able to influence policy decisions in areas of greatest concern to them and (2) what factors are associated with the ability to influence policy. Though it is well-researched and will

contribute to the political consciousness of the social work community to which it is addressed, the study produces few unexpected or compelling conclusions because of flaws in the research design and a number of conceptual ambiguities.

By focussing on the US and the UK, Richan adopts a most similar systems design. The logic of this procedure is that for relatively similar countries a range of variables are held constant and those differences that emerge with respect to the dependent and independent variables are all the more striking. As the author notes, both countries have tended to adopt a social services strategy to deal with social problems. Actual social service policies in the two countries have nonetheless differed considerably. Responding to different political challenges and opportunities, social worker political strategies in the two countries might be similar or divergent. If the former, then "one can expect to find a similar response in other nations with a comparable political economic structure" (p. 7). If the latter, one ought to be in a position to identify the factors that are related to divergent responses. This reader is unsure whether Richan believes the responses of social workers in the two countries were similar or divergent. Furthermore, though the author stresses governmental centralization as the key structural characteristic distinguishing his two cases, he does not draw systematic conclusions about its effect on social worker responses.

The bulk of the book is devoted to six case studies selected to provide a broad range of data. Two of the three British cases deal with the reorganization of the social services (the Social Work (Scotland) Act of 1968 and the Local Authority Social Services Act of 1970); the other is a series of strikes by social workers in 1978-79. The American cases are the failed attempt to enact the Allied Services bill between 1972 and 1976, the efforts to cap social service spending spawned by the 1967 amendments to the Social Security Act, and the campaign for the licensure of social workers by the states during the seventies. Though the individual analyses are richly documented, the cases do not appear to have been selected either with an eye to their utility to test hypotheses or because of the presence or absence of key variables being explored.

The data allow the author to answer his first question with a weak "yes". Although there was considerable variation, in each instance social work professionals were able to influence policy, though not always decisively and occasionally with consequences not altogether to their liking. Because "influence" is never clearly defined or operationalized, statements about it are largely a matter of the author's subjective evaluation and this is complicated by the necessity of estimating how hard social workers tried to affect policy. The cases are as illuminating for showing how relatively complacent and inactive the social work profession is in the political arena (especially in the US) as they are in demonstrating their clout, as the author realizes.

The answer to question two is both more interesting and problematic. Referring to what he calls the mixed agenda of social work politics, the

author concludes that social workers are likely to be most united and active with respect to issues which seem to involve both public and self-interest. Moreover, lacking money, votes, and positions of formal authority, they "must rely on the quality of their information and their ability to develop strategic personal ties. In effect, they must borrow strength from others; the characteristic way for them to do this is through coalitions with allied interests" (p. 233). The mixed agenda reduces the effectiveness of social work control over information and their efforts to build coalitions. The problem is that they have neither a clear sense of the interests of their clients nor an unabashed commitment to the advancement of their own professional interests. Whether this is simply a growing pain of a profession in evolution or a permanent feature of social work practice is not made clear.

The primary weakness of this study is the failure to delineate carefully the object of analysis. The author moves too easily between an investigation of the political activities of social workers, social work professionals and administrators, social policy analysts and advisors, and professional association lobbyists. His cases involve coalitional politics of the associations, union activities of rank and file workers, and the decisionmaking activities of social policy elites. Neither the cases selected, nor the interest-group framework borrowed from political science, is adequate to deal with such diverse phenomena.

MOTHERS AT WORK: PUBLIC POLICIES IN THE UNITED STATES, SWEDEN AND CHINA, by CAROLYN TEICH ADAMS and KATHRYN TEICH WINSTON. New York: Longman, 1980. 312 pp. \$10.95 paper.

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Women have been entering the labor force in record numbers but there has been little research conducted examining the social policies and programs that affect women who work and their families. In Mothers at Work the authors review the career limitations women face because of their dual roles as wage earners and homemakers. The book details governmental policies, benefits, and services in three countries which intend to improve women's participation and status in the labor market.

The authors begin with an inventory of governmental policies in Sweden, China, and the United States which includes family planning, maternal and child health, maternity leave benefits, child care, housekeeping and welfare assistance to single parents. The survey is comprehensive and well organized and provides an excellent basis for comparative policy analysis as well as data for cross national perspectives on the family. The conclusions drawn from

this analysis are clear - the United States both at the state and federal level does not support or encourage mothers who work. (The notable exception however is the welfare mother who is encouraged by social policy to work outside of the home while relying on the private market to provide such necessities as child care and housekeeping assistance.) The book's intention is to go beyond a simple survey which describes the presence or absence of policies and to explore what may account for the differences observed in the three nations studied.

The central chapters of the book attempt to weigh the influence of interest group politics on policy implementation. Other variables examined are the extent to which social policies for women are merely a part of more general economic and social goals of a government and how differing views of the family and the state's role in the family influence working women's policy development and implementation. These "input variables" frame the comparative analysis among the three nations.

In the discussion of interest group politics and the role of feminist politics in promoting beneficial working mothers policies, the authors contrast "social feminism" with equal rights advocates. They contend that social feminism as found in China and Sweden can be identified by its emphasis on improved living conditions for women (primarily economic issues) even if the policies advocated will treat women "unequally" by providing special forms of support and services for women only. The feminist movement in the United States, however, has focused heavily on equal treatment for women as a gender right and has not coordinated strategies with other coalitions fighting for better economic conditions. While the argument is an interesting one, the authors do not develop it and later suggest that policy outcomes are not dependent on women's political activity or mass organizing. Rather they conclude that in the case of women's issues, the policies which support working mothers were merely a piece of other policy goals such as the full employment policy in China and the pro-natalist/pro-employment policies in Sweden after the Second World War. They see no evidence to suggest that policies designed to assist working mothers in the labor force evidence an attempt at social change or move toward a more egalitarian society. It is somewhat surprising that Adams and Winston, who at the outset define themselves as feminists, never challenge the notion of the "dual role" for women. They seem content searching for policies that support women in "their" housekeeping and child care duties. The authors believe that the only way to achieve equality of opportunity for women in the labor force is to "lower the costs of participation imposed on women by finding ways to reduce the burden of the women's dual role." The discussion to consider the restructuring of family roles and construct a division of labor based on factors other than gender is quickly discounted as impractical. This bias, plus the underestimation of the women's movement successes in the United States, weakens an otherwise very good book.