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2004

Review of *Welfare: A Documentary History of U.S. Policy and Politics*, edited by Gwendolyn Mink and Rickie Solinger

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Schram, Sanford F. Review of *Welfare: A Documentary History of U.S. Policy and Politics*, edited by Gwendolyn Mink and Rickie Solinger. *Social Service Review* 78 (2004): 516-519.

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But the new social movements are only potential modalities of class. For Aronowitz finds that, since the 1970s, new social movements have transformed into rights-centered interest groups. The women's movement, for example, is now more concerned with the occupational mobility of women as professionals and managers than it is with the power divide between men and women, corporate power, or the great number of minimum- and low-wage women workers. Why?

One shortcoming of *How Class Works* is that it does not seem to explicitly apply its own reconceptualization of class and class formation to explain the conditions under which opportunity for class struggle is lost or realized. If, for example, the environmental movement became focused on narrow legislative reforms rather than uniting with labor and women against the power of capital to dominate nature, then how have the previous struggles and class formations that constituted the environmental movement conditioned this reformist path? If we use existing social movement theories to explain this change as part of the nature of the mature phase of the social movement process, or as the problem of resource mobilization, then we resort to the very theories that Aronowitz so convincingly criticizes for reifying the division between class and social movements. His lengthy and by now well-known historical account documents the labor movement's lost opportunity to become a class movement (i.e., its deradicalization). That account seems itself to be a lost opportunity to apply his revised notion of class dynamics.

The major objection to *How Class Works*, however, will likely concern its assertion of the primacy of class, including its need to define new agents and new axes of struggle as modalities of class. Unfortunately, the book offers no rigorous substantiation for this assertion, though opportunities for this exist. For instance, Aronowitz faults social movement theories that replace class with bioidentities or with abstract notions of rights for lacking a moral discourse from which we may decide the issues worth fighting for (p. 159). In contrast, historical materialism, the approach favored by Aronowitz, is not only a theory to explain the objective foundations for struggles and the class formations that ensue, it also explains the emergence of a moral framework from class struggles and can thus provide criteria to judge the worthiness of struggles. Yet, formal analysis and defense of this feature of historical materialism are absent in the book.

Refusing to abandon hope for historical change, *How Class Works* concludes with a cogent critique of the end-of-history ideology. Given the book's emphasis on the unfixed nature of struggle and class formation, it cannot forecast the direction or agents of change. It does, however, anticipate the potential of the global justice and environmental movements to test the limits of liberal democracy and effect historical change. Utopia is on hold, as he titles his last chapter. *How Class Works*, though neither rigorous treatise nor fiery manifesto, inspires us to believe that utopia's revival depends on class.

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Welfare: A Documentary History of U.S. Policy and Politics. Edited by Gwendolyn Mink and Rickie Solinger. New York: New York University Press, 2003. Pp. 864. $80.00 (cloth); $28.00 (paper).

Gwendolyn Mink and Rickie Solinger's new book is a remarkable achievement. It is a compendium of laws, administrative directives, government reports, con-

gressional testimony, and contemporary commentary, tracing the development of welfare policy from state mothers' pensions programs in the early twentieth century to Congress's abolition of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and the implementation of its successor, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), at the end of the century. However, this book is also much more.

As Frances Fox Piven notes in her thoughtful foreword, the selections unmistakably provide the reader with a most informative way to track the cyclical character of public relief in the United States. With Richard Cloward in the path-breaking book, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), Piven provided what remains the definitive theory on social welfare change. Challenging the orthodoxy of the time, they noted that welfare was not becoming progressively more liberal and compassionate in the modern era. Instead, as a secondary institution calibrated to the needs of the primary institutions, the market and the state, welfare alternated in serving political and economic purposes. Sometimes, welfare was more liberal in allowing the poor to gain assistance, so as to recreate the conditions for political quiescence. At other times, welfare was more conservative in enforcing labor market imperatives, requiring the poor to take whatever low-wage jobs were available, even if their families remained mired in poverty. Like no other book before, Mink and Solinger's *Welfare* provides as comprehensive and richly detailed a documentary history of welfare's pendulum movement in response to changing political and economic conditions.

To be sure, there are strategic choices in such an undertaking: no documentary history can include everything. For this reason, some readers may be tempted to fault Mink and Solinger for their choices. But that would be a big mistake. The book reflects a wisdom that transcends the mere act of deciding what to include and exclude. Mink and Solinger very self-consciously embrace the idea that there is no one history of welfare, just as there is no one history, story, or interpretation of any major social practice. Multiple perspectives are inevitable in any human drama, and welfare is no different.

Given that welfare is in no small part a drama about single women who fight for the right to obtain such assistance for themselves and their children, the last thing we would want to pretend is that it can be understood according to one objective his-story. Therefore, most appropriately, Mink and Solinger choose documents that allow them to tell stories of women's struggle for the right to assistance from the state. Excerpts from laws, government reports, witness testimonies, and the like consistently provide a bottom-up view of how women on the margins of the policy process struggle to be understood, to be heard, and to influence the direction of welfare policy making. Further, the documents consistently highlight how the laws changed over time in addressing or imposing hardship endured by women in need. Again and again, issues of race and class join those of gender, as welfare is remade and reformed over time, for better, and often, for worse.

In part, the drama that unfolds in these documents is so compelling because Mink and Solinger make another distinctively self-conscious choice at a second level: they do not limit their documentary history to government documents. Instead, they include commentary, plans for action, and proposals for new policies from the popular press. These help to contextualize how policy developments were being interpreted, challenged, and countered by the advocacy communities concerned about public assistance. This remarkably distinctive feature helps make the sometimes-dry government documents come alive and take on a sense of real urgency. The result is that the drama of policy change, written from the perspective of the women who endure its effects, unfolds in a way that starkly reveals the social consequences of those changes.

None of this is to say that the story told here is univocal. Many of the documents, for instance, detail the conservative preoccupation with limiting assistance in the

name of shoring up the existing gender, race, and class systems within which welfare arose. Even liberal arguments on behalf of progressive reform can be read in this way. For example, in several of the field reports concerning the need for mothers' pensions in the early twentieth century, charity workers and welfare advocates were painfully explicit in their concern that such assistance would protect the role of the mother rather than undermine the traditional family. Then again, excerpts from congressional hearings of the 1950s are more blunt in their concern that welfare is a threat to the moral integrity of the social order. Even the issue of racial discrimination surfaces in documents that highlight the tortuous illogic of how welfare was sometimes used as a way to placate blacks so as to ensure their continued participation in a palpably racist political economy.

This veritable cornucopia of pertinent documents is information of the first order, helping us to understand welfare policy change first and foremost from the perspective of low-income women, often of color, who live with the consequences of these changes. The issue of change is undoubtedly a slippery one, however. As Michael Katz (*The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1989], pp. 4–8) has wisely reminded us, welfare debates throughout U.S. history have moved with a dreary familiarity between two poles: blaming the individual for poverty, on the one hand, and indicting the structure of the political economy for creating poverty, on the other. The former pole, Katz notes, has historically gotten most of the emphasis. The documents included in the Mink and Solinger volume are entirely consistent with this reading of welfare history, as well. they document change, but the tenacity of tradition also comes through. from mothers' pensions to TANF, the debates about welfare continue to revolve around the theme of deservingness that Katz identifies. At times, issues of class, race, and gender achieve their own autonomy in these debates, as when racist southern congressmen are keen to allow black testimony only when it is wrapped in servile obsequiousness to white power. Yet, more often than not in these documents, issues of class, race, and gender are articulated in terms of whether the individual should be blamed for his or her poverty.

The very idea that welfare policy change is cyclical rather than on a linear trajectory of progressive development reaffirms the assertion that welfare policy discourse moves back and forth between two poles. The discourse does, however, seem to gravitate more frequently to the pole that emphasizes blaming the victim. It is noteworthy in this context that Mink and Solinger devote considerable space to documents relating to the recent period, the drive to repeal AFDC, and the implementation of the draconian policies of TANF. In the process, they highlight the reality that the current work-first regime of the new, time-limited welfare reform program reenacts, in new, highly medicalized ways, much of the older punitive approach to welfare that was ascendant before the drive for welfare rights in the 1960s.

In fact, if we step back from the twentieth-century incarnation of welfare policy that Mink and Solinger document and look at welfare policy change from before Thomas Malthus's writing in late eighteenth-century England to after the writings of Charles Murray in the 1980s, the dominant and recurring theme is what Albert Hirschman (*The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* [Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1991]) once called "the perversity thesis": providing welfare only reinforces the poor's personal deficiencies, and these lead to a life of dependency (pp. 27–35). Yet, it is only the less audible counterpoint that looks to structural sources for the persistence of poverty. Still today, even in the medicalized idiom of welfare reform, it seems that Americans more often than not can only debate welfare in the worst possible terms: low-income, black women on welfare are lazy, or they are not. The American discourse on welfare is itself

impoverished. It is not just the failure of public policy to eliminate poverty that is so depressing; American welfare discourse's profound lack of appreciation for complexity is equally troubling.

A great debt of gratitude is owed to Mink and Solinger by all those dedicated to helping make possible a more thoughtfully compassionate welfare discourse. The authors have done the hard work of culling and collating an immense documentary record. The result is a stirringly dramatic narrative of welfare policy history. Through the documents they select, Mink and Solinger bring to life an immensely important human drama, and they do so in a way that paves a path to a higher awareness of the deeply ingrained biases of gender, race, and class that operate in welfare policy. It is now up to us to make use of this important resource. American welfare policy discourse will be the better for it. And, in fact, all of us will be.

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Poor Relief or Poor Deal? The Social Fund, Safety Nets, and Social Security. Edited by Trevor Buck and Roger S. Smith. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003. Pp. 250. $79.95 (cloth).

Edited by two British scholars at the University of Leicester, one from the Faculty of Law and the other from the Faculty of Social Work, this volume is clearly targeted to a British audience. In the United States, it is likely to be of interest to a limited audience with a particular interest in British social policy or with a special interest in identifying the extent to which social assistance satisfies or fails to meet basic economic needs. It may also prove useful to those who study the British and American devices available to fill the gap between assistance benefits and economic needs. The special focus is on a system of targeted, categorical, means-tested cash benefits designed to meet "exceptional needs": those that are not standardized, not regularly present, and not provided through the regular social assistance benefits (p. 5). The policy instrument designed to address these needs in Britain is labeled the Social Fund, a system of discretionary cash benefits (loans and lump sum payments) originally designed to help those poor people most in need of emergency or special assistance, especially children and the disabled.

A collection of papers presented at a special conference on the subject, the volume includes three cross-national chapters that present case studies of relevant programs in Belgium, the Netherlands, and France, respectively. The book is organized in three parts: "The Historical and Political Context," "Meeting Exceptional Needs in Practice," and "The Prospects for Reform." Each part includes one comparative international case study.

The chapters on Britain are reminders of the complexity of the British income-transfer system and the difficulty in understanding it, even for those familiar with the overall picture. The French case study is of interest because it includes material on the French income-transfer system, and such material may be less familiar to most American social policy scholars. Of particular interest is the emphasis that Anne Daguerre and Corinne Nativel place on the role of social solidarity in leading the French to the establishment of a far more universal system than the British or American alternatives. France's growing concern with "social exclusion" (p. 187; see also Alfred J. Kahn and Sheila B. Kamerman, eds., *Beyond Child Poverty:*