

Letters to the Editor

In response to Cloward and Piven's "The Declining Significance of Class?" *REFLECTIONS*, Vol. 1#1, January 1995.

OTHER TOOLS WHEN TUMULT IS NOT NECESSARY

Reading *REFLECTIONS* brought a sense of comfort. As if sitting with colleagues in my living room around the fire, I listened to their experiences. Sometimes, during a change agent's career, it is important for the long haul to ponder the words of those who have walked the same path and look back in trying to gain a perspective.

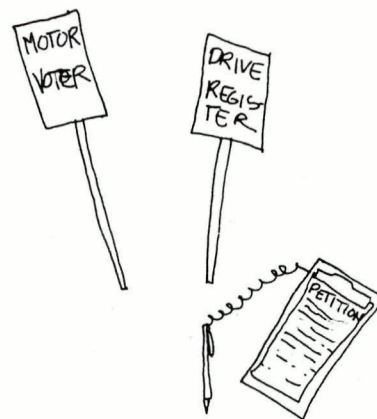
Without question civil disobedience and protest in support of civil rights and welfare rights form the foundation of my professional self. So, with collegial curiosity I turned to Cloward and Piven's "The Declining Significance of Class?" first. I wanted to read their narrative because I have used their works in my classes, I have debated Dick in my student days in Ann Arbor, I have heard both speak to large audiences, and I walked the picket line implementing tactics shaped by their theory on the role of tumult.

My experiences suggest that theories and research on the development of the welfare state

shed light on what I have seen over the last twenty-five years. Indeed, during events leading to the formation and implementation of policy affecting the rights of disabled citizens, welfare families, and people without health insurance, I felt I understood the process as it unfolded. Occasionally, I believe I knew what to say and do because of some of the theories and research on the welfare state. And, armed with the confidence yielded by these experiences, I have tried to pass on what I have learned to students whom I encourage as macro practitioners of the future.

Each policy domain focuses the interests of a particular set of stakeholders on a population a risk within an historical context for resource mobilization, action by the state, and the work of institutional layers between individual citizens and those at the center of government. Many of our states are larger than nation states on the European continent. Although the US may lag behind other nations with respect to universalism, social citizenship rights and services, the work of Weberians postulating variations of *state autonomy/centrism* (Amenta, et al., 1987; Amenta and Carruthers, 1985; Skocpol, 1985; Skocpol and Amenta, 1986) suggests, for

example, that well placed bureaucrats (or professors on sabbatical) may influence the substantive rights and delivery structure. While on sabbatical with the Iowa Department of Human Services, I witnessed *state centric* interventions on behalf of disabled citizens' rights and the service necessary to realize those rights. The results are substantial and tumult or popular protest were not necessary.



Just a few years ago, I participated in a meeting on welfare reform. A relatively small group approximately twenty people representing the two houses of a state legislature, state agency staff appointed by the governor (or hired by appointees of a Republican governor), labor, the private sector, and the universities were discussing the form and shape

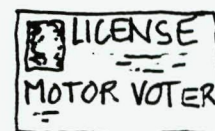
of welfare reform initiatives and the state wavier request. On one hand, agency staff and the private sector reps were proposing policy elements in accord with the asset-based model (Sherraden, 1991). Others, including a member of the house with a Bachelor in Social Work degree argued in favor of economic development and job creation elements because persistent poverty explained why some welfare mothers and families received income assistance for more than the average two years. David Elwood, then a Harvard professor but now an advisor on welfare reform to the President, also participated. He was explaining his proposals on child support when a private sector person espoused positions premised on the culture of poverty, blamed individuals for their own poverty and endorsed the asset-based model, however, Elwood said nothing. Compelled to balance the record with respect to individual versus structural explanations poverty, I asked Elwood to explain the research on temporary and persistent poverty, on the so-called cycle of poverty and the equivocal disparate findings. The resulting legislation has both an asset-based element and job creation and economic development component. This experience conforms to the theory and research on *corporatism* and more advanced welfare state regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Pampel and Adams, 1994; Western, 1991; Wilensky and Turner, 1987).

Finally, I have seen a task force on health care reform

loaded with state agency staff, providers and hospitals, and insurance company representatives and analysts block meaningful reform. In fact this collection blocked even the mention of public sector models like the single-payer plan during the initial negotiations. As a serious observer and participant in the process, I felt certain I was watching *corporate liberalism* (Domhoff, 1986-87) and/or *hegemonic competition* (Quadagno, 1984) in action.

So, for me theories and research on the welfare state do offer counsel. Tumult may not always work but it may not always be necessary. There are institutional layers between the masses and the elites. Depending on the time and place, the context, and the concatenation of stakeholder interests, practitioners are not without explanatory tools. I appreciate the work of Piven and Cloward, but there are other models and intervention strategies that may work. To be sure, we have to commit ourselves to the long haul but I believe we can stem the tide of retrenchment and affect change. □

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