

HE WAS HERE: REMEMBERING CLOWARD'S CONTRIBUTION TO REFLECTIONS

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Sonia Leib Abels was the founding editor of Reflections.

Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven's "Declining Significance of Class," published in the first issue of *Reflections*, gave the journal a great start. As real time social justice activists, their community organizing and publication of numerous articles and books led to critical social change, bringing them national and international acclaim. Their organization, Human SERVE, established motor voter programs in various states that served as precedents for the Federal Motor Voter Registration legislation. In the *Reflections*' article (widely used in social welfare courses as a case record), they modestly describe witnessing the formal approval of the enactment of this Federal Legislation "Both of us got to stand behind President Clinton at the White House signing." (Not much boastfulness here.) The Sophia Smith Collection of Social Change identifies Frances Fox Piven among "Agents of Social Change" (along with Gloria Steinem and others). Their book, *Regulating the Poor*, was listed among the 40 notable books by the American Library Association.

Beyond that, they were the Tchaikovsky of romance, wonderful to watch and listen to; they gave hope to a social work committed to social justice. Together they threw into disarray the contra-dissent stream in the profession, the objectivists who wanted so much to be respected within the university as a "scientific discipline" and the status oriented therapists who hedged on the social work title. Cloward and Piven's stature, struggled accomplishments within the organizing, social, political, and scholarly communities are unquestionable; yet often there were petty, hurtful, and harmful slights. These are reflected by the undeserved

tenure and salary conflicts with some academic institutions. Perhaps their willingness to challenge the status quo in many dimensions led to bureaucratic institutional responses: It may be said of Cloward, as it was of John Maynard Keynes, there was something mythic and fabulous about him (Nassar, 2002).

Different from other scholarly journals, *Reflections* sought to publish personal/professional narratives of practice. It was essential to persuade potential subscribers that the journal was worth reading, and to publish narratives and the work of social work leaders whose ideas and work significantly altered the profession and society and gained recognition beyond social work. Cloward and Piven exemplified some of the authors we hoped would write narratives for the journal. Their book *Regulating the Poor* was read by students in social welfare courses all over the country. It was reviewed by the *New York Times* for its analysis of the history of popular protest movements. They organized Mobilization for Youth. President Clinton gave them the pens he used in signing the voting registration bill. Beyond the notoriety, Cloward and Piven fulfilled the purpose and the meaning of the social work profession.

Their narrative, initially presented at AASWG conference, superbly suited the first issue of this new journal. Alex Gitterman, then president of the organization, asked Cloward and Piven to allow *Reflections* to publish their presentation. (Alex had seen the first announcements we printed.) Their generosity enabled *Reflections* to make a significant and memorable debut.

We were also fortunate and pleased that

Harry Specht wrote a thoughtful and revealing autobiography for the same issue ("How I Didn't Become a Psychotherapist"). Their narrative opened that first issue and Specht's autobiography closed it. Other well-grounded narratives* in that first issue gave *Reflections* a superlative start and led to a word-of-mouth groundswell of subscriptions. We learned a lot about publishing and the generosity of many persons who offered assistance and purchased subscriptions. Readers' responses to Harry's brief autobiography led us to consider another purpose for the journal: to publish the personal/professional histories of the profession's leaders. *Reflections'* readers saw this need and offered their aid in doing oral histories. The first was an oral history of Mitch Ginsberg done by Joshua Miller, who subsequently did an oral history of Ann Hartman.

Fortuitously, I saw Richard at a Council on Social Work Education Meeting a few years ago. A handsome, powerful figure standing alone outside in the hotel's courtyard, he had just finished a presentation at a plenary meeting. After the usual greetings and my words of appreciation, I asked him to consider being interviewed by the journal for an oral history. The day was so sunny, and I was so excited about the possibility. Writing the introduction to this special issue sweeps me back to that time and I weep for our loss. Richard said yes. He was very clear that he wanted the interview to be of both him and Frances, and that the oral historian be a person familiar with their work – both their writings and organizing. We once had a conversation when he said that the profession had not recognized him for his community-organizing knowledge and capabilities. I gladly agreed to his sense-making conditions and bid him farewell. That's the last time I saw him.

Josh Miller agreed to do the history. As chair of the policy sequence at Smith, he certainly knew their work. Cloward was pleased, and agreed to have Josh do the interview. Josh's father (Professor Irving Miller) had taught with Cloward at Columbia for many years. A short time later, Josh called to say he was starting the interview process. Sadly, he told me that Richard was dying from lung cancer. Working in this stress-filled

context, Josh completed the interviews before Cloward died.

The newspapers and the Internet have been rightfully diligent in publishing remembrances of Cloward, and the indebtedness to him of the profession, community organization, and our democracy. As the founding editor of *Reflections*, I feel that this editorial and special issue is one small but heartfelt tribute. As the rest of us know, Richard Cloward's death reaches many different levels of meaning: for our society, the profession, all social workers, and Frances Fox Piven.

¹ Nassar, S. (January 30, 2002) Review of Skidelsky's biography of John Maynard Keynes *New York Times Book Review Section*, p.36.

* See p. 25 this issue

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