

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D.

In the Winter of 2002, *Reflections* published a special issue on Richard A. Cloward, celebrating his life and work. Cloward, along with his intellectual partner and wife, Frances Fox Piven, contributed a theoretical perspective to the social work profession that was unmatched in its intellectual acuity and was based on a deep commitment to social justice. With Cloward, Frances Fox Piven wrote *Regulating the Poor*, in which the authors located welfare as a critical piece of the labor market in industrial capitalism.<sup>1</sup> The authors demonstrated the way in which welfare shadowed the market economy: contracting when low wage jobs were plentiful in order to provide workers willing to work in these jobs, and expanding when low wage jobs were scarce, functioning as a safety valve for discontent among marginalized populations and reducing the chances of unrest. This great insight placed welfare in its proper place as an adjunct of the secondary labor market and gave social work activists and educators a powerful theory to drive their work and their research.

Although a conservative backlash since the publication of *Regulating the Poor* has sought to dismantle the social welfare programs of the New Deal, Piven continues to be hopeful about the contemporary American left and its possibilities for transformative change. In a recent symposium at the City University of New York, she noted the signs of a vibrant social movement challenging capitalist orthodoxy and its political hegemony across the globe. Pointing to the growing anti-war movement in the United States, the immigrant activism which has swelled with the immigration marches last spring, and the several movements for a living wage emerging across the country, Piven anticipated the coalescence of a post New Deal left that has the power to transform the global economy. She argued that ethnic groups and women

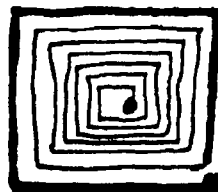
make up a core constituency of these post modern social movements, as opposed to the white unionized working class groups who were instrumental in bringing about the changes of the New Deal. The internationalist potential of this left movement is carried by the internet, combining the power of localism and the global reach of electronic communication.<sup>2</sup>

Piven is at the forefront of intellectual progressive thought today, as much as she and Richard Cloward were in 1971, when *Regulating the Poor* was first published. Her optimism about the viability of the progressive movement and its potential to alter market capitalism toward more socially just outcomes continues to inspire social workers and others concerned with the transformation of the global society for peace and justice. *Reflections* is proud to offer this interview with Frances Fox Piven, who has been a great friend of the journal over the years. We wish to thank Ben Shepard for his work in bringing Frances Fox Piven's voice to our readers.

1. *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*, New York, Vintage, 1971.

2. Frances Fox Piven on the American Left. *Dissent*, 2006.

<http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=739>



Copyright of Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping is the property of Cleveland State University and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.