

Welfare for Whom? Class, Gender, and Race in Social Policy

Alvin Finkel

Volume 49, 2002

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/lt49re01>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Finkel, A. (2002). Welfare for Whom? Class, Gender, and Race in Social Policy. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 49, 247–262.

REVIEW ESSAY / NOTE CRITIQUE

Welfare for Whom? Class, Gender, and Race in Social Policy

Alvin Finkel

Christie, Nancy. *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000)

Hoffman, Beatrix. *The Wages of Sickness: The Politics of Health Insurance in Progressive America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001)

Marshall, Dominique. *Aux origines sociales de l'État-providence: familles québécoises, obligation scolaire et allocations familiales, 1940-1955* (Montréal : Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1998)

O'Connor, Alice. *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)

BEFORE THE 1980s, scholarship on the welfare state, including left-wing scholarship that was mindful of class issues, was almost completely gender-blind. Works on the welfare state by such renowned leftist authors as Ramesh Mishra, John Saville, Ian Gough, Claus Offe, and Pierre Rosanvallon seemed to indicate that there was an international agreement among male scholars of the welfare state that

Alvin Finkel, "Welfare for Whom? Class, Gender, and Race in Social Policy," *Labour/Le Travail*, 49 (Spring 2002), 247-61.

gender did not matter.¹ Mainstream scholarship was no better and no worse, and the classic overviews of the welfare state in the United States, Britain, and Canada in the mid-eighties by respectively Walter Trattner, Derek Fraser, and Dennis Guest had remarkably few references to gender.²

In the 1980s and 1990s, by contrast, feminist scholars rewrote the canon and demonstrated that consideration of gender did not simply complement the existing story, but often, indeed, changed it completely. As in other fields, however, the acceptance of feminist analyses was uneven, and many male scholars and some female in the social welfare field continued blithely to discuss the emergence of various social policies and their implementation as if gender either did not count or could be dealt with in terms of supposedly immutable gender roles. Social histories of welfare that put race at their center often met a similar fate. On the whole, however, there is little doubt that academic writing on the welfare state is far more suffused with the language of gender and race today than ever before.

Almost from the beginning, feminist scholarship on the welfare state seemed to polarize between two camps. On the one hand, there were those like Elizabeth Wilson, writing about Britain; Mimi Abramovitz, writing about the United States; and Jane Ursel, writing about Canada, who regarded the welfare state as the successful effort of a patriarchal state to control women and insure the maintenance of patriarchal norms. On the other were scholars like Jane Lewis in Britain and Linda Gordon in the US who believed that state programs, including welfare programs, were contested terrain and argued that patriarchal aims and program implementation were often turned on their heads by program recipients.³ So, for example, while social assistance was meant to provide only a bare minimum subsistence for a family, its availability to female-headed households allowed women with abusive husbands or boyfriends to break free from their partners without worrying about losing their children or starving. State employees spied on

¹Ramesh Mishra, *Society and Social Policy* (London 1977); John Saville, "The Welfare State: An Historical Approach," *New Reasoner* 3 (1957-58), 5-6, 11, 12-17, 20-4; Ian Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State* (London 1979); Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of work and Politics* (Cambridge, MA 1985); and Pierre Rosanvallon, *La crise de l'État-providence* (Paris 1981).

²Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, 3rd ed. (New York 1984); Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, 2nd ed. (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1984); and Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada*, revised ed. (Vancouver 1985).

³Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State* (London 1977); Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston 1989); Jane Ursel, *Private Lives, Public Policy: 100 Years of State Intervention in the Family* (Toronto 1992); Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900-1939* (London 1980); and Linda Gordon, "The Welfare State: Towards a Socialist-Feminist Perspective," in Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch, eds., *Socialist Register 1990* (London 1990), 169-200.

these women, and the state incomes they received were poverty incomes. Nonetheless, many chose the limited opportunities provided by such programs to become independent of a male "breadwinner." Dependence on a patriarchal state was less oppressive than dependence on an individual abusive male. Individually and collectively, women struggled with the state's representatives to force revisions in programs designed to insure that traditional gender roles did not change.

With gender and race at the forefront of much recent writing on the welfare state, how has the importance of social class fared in this field of inquiry? It was never more than an interest for a minority of the pre-1980 welfare scholars. A survey of recent work suggests that scholars concerned with gender and/or race have rather different views on the importance of class in the shaping of public policy regarding social programs.

Nancy Christie provides an apparent, though ambiguous, rejection of class altogether in studying the evolution of social policies in Canada from the beginning of World War 1 to the end of World War 2. She states flatly: "... the evolution of the Canadian state reflected gender rather than class imperatives; its base was the male breadwinner and its superstructure was the liberal notion of government as both umpire and night watchman." (4) In plainer English, her position is that governments in Canada framed social welfare legislation in ways that would enforce the norm of nuclear families dependent for sustenance on a male breadwinner whose income came almost exclusively from employment earnings. The corollary was that women, who were expected to become wives and mothers, would receive little financial consideration for their economic contribution to the household and for the reproduction, physical and social, of the labour force.

Focusing on mothers' allowances and family allowances, with some attention as well to unemployment insurance, Christie suggests that in the period before the Depression, the welfarist discourse was more progressive with regards to women than it would become in the 1930s. Maternalist approaches to social welfare, which did recognize a woman's right to at least a degree of state support when a man was not available to provide household income, stressed that a mother did indeed contribute to society as a whole when she helped to reproduce the labour force. Providing a useful, if not sufficiently detailed, corrective to the bleak portrait of mothers' allowance as only a social-control mechanism over widows, suggested by James Struthers and more especially Margaret Little,⁴ Christie observes that social norms evolved to make allowances a right for deserted wives and even single mothers. Christie's evidence is national, rather than simply Ontario-based like Struthers' and Little's. What she suggests is that over time, even before the formal rules changed, social pressures forced local officials determining eligibility for mothers' allowances to be more liberal than the original drafters of allowances

⁴James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario 1920-1970* (Toronto 1995); and Margaret Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920-1997* (Toronto 1998).

legislation intended. There was also pressure to increase mothers' allowance payments to a level that would allow mothers to remain home. While legislators responded lugubriously to such suggestions, there was a growing acceptance of the idea that raising a family did represent full-time work, and that mothers in households without male breadwinners deserved a state income large enough to prevent them from having to participate in the paid labour force.

But, and it is a very big but, this liberalism was short-lived. During the Depression, maternalist discourse took a shellacking and, thanks largely to the predominance in government circles of statistics-minded economists' views of poverty, was replaced by a paternalist discourse. The latter represented a hardening of the arteries on the well-established prejudice that a "normal" household was one headed by a male breadwinner, and where such a breadwinner was unavailable, a woman acting in his stead. The view that mothers without husbands should receive state funds that would obviate their need to work became politically marginal, and mothers' allowances sank to the level of relief provided for the unemployed. Only as the economy picked up again in World War II and work for women spread to include married women with children did the patriarchal state's anxiety about gender roles lead to the acceptance of family allowances. But the latter were regarded not so much as payment for mothering as a supplement to male wages so that the elusive "family wage" could be put together, even for large families, from a combination of male wage income and state subsidies. In short, family allowances were meant to remove women from the labour force.

Much of this analysis seems quite sensible, and Christie closely traces debates about what responsibility, if any, the state had in assuring various households of an adequate income. But Christie's desire to avoid issues of social class and indeed of political economy results in a limited universe of political actors and unfortunately to an overall understanding of social policy development that is, as unbalanced in its own way, as the pre-feminist analyses of the mechanics of the welfare state. So, for example, we are assured, at the outset, that the Canadian welfare state, unlike that of other countries, was not a response to the threat posed by organized labour. "Nor was it constructed to forestall the growth of socialism; nor was it fashioned by the imperatives of big business."⁽⁴⁾ Having disposed of any such possibilities, Christie never mentions big business again and largely avoids the issue of elites fighting socialism. More is the pity. The result is a rather naïve account of why certain policies were defeated at a given time and implemented at another.

Take family allowances. In the late 1920s, J.S. Woodsworth, then the Independent Labour MP for Winnipeg North Centre, attempted to win legislative support for family allowances. Christie argues that his lack of success was mainly the result of the rabid opposition to his proposal from Charlotte Whitton, a leading light of Canadian social work who would gradually lose favour as that profession moved leftwards during the Depression. Whitton inventively portrayed family allowances as a policy that would encourage idleness and undermine the male-breadwinner

ideal. "Whitton's attack effectively routed Woodsworth's campaign for a national program of family allowances. Her support of the principle of family independence was even more insidious because it established an argument capable of challenging any proposal for the humanitarian redistribution of the national wealth." (192)

Insidious as Whitton's arguments were, it seems barely credible to blame her for the failure of Woodsworth's proposal. In most respects, Whitton's arguments simply echoed the long-established rationalizations of big business against government spending on the poor. Social work organizations, as Gale Wills has argued, drew their funds from business interests, and it was hardly surprising that someone as conservative as Charlotte Whitton held centre stage among social workers for so long.⁵ Indeed, given the domination of the Canadian state by men, and their limited willingness to listen to women's point of views, it is clear that Whitton got an audience not because of the lucidity and novelty of her arguments, but because she was, however unintentionally, a hack representing ruling-class views. Family allowances would not have been implemented in 1928 if the social work profession had unanimously proclaimed them as necessary for the nation's well-being. The balance of social forces was such that the Canadian state had no need to concede such an expensive program. Not only was big business still opposed to almost all social programs, but the labour movement, which wanted social legislation, was skeptical about family allowances as a scheme to hold down wages.

In 1944, when family allowances were introduced, Charlotte Whitton was as opposed as ever. For Christie, Whitton's arguments this time were drowned out by arguments from other social workers, such as Leonard Marsh and Harry Cassidy, who launched paternalist arguments in favour of family allowances that negated her equally paternalist defence of the status quo. Also, for the government, this program, which would serve well in the larger campaign to remove married women from the post-war labour force, would be a substitute for the larger program of social reforms that socialists were successfully pressing upon Canadians as necessary. None of this is very convincing.

In the first instance, if the debate regarding family allowances simply pitted two views of how to maintain a society without gainful employment for women against one another, it seems inadequate to explain the program's failure at one point and its success at another simply in terms of dueling discourses. And, to her credit, Christie is aware that Keynesian arguments for stimulating consumption were an important factor in influencing politicians to support family allowances in 1944. No doubt she is also right in pointing out, as others have, that family allowances, unlike a national program of free medical care, had predicatable and controllable costs, and therefore served as a cheap way for the King government to proclaim its willingness to embrace social legislation.

⁵Gale Wills, *A Marriage of Convenience: Business and Social Work in Toronto, 1918-1957* (Toronto 1995).

But she overstates her case here. Emphasizing that the Beveridge Report caused Canadians to support a comprehensive social security state, she adds:

Mackenzie King implemented family allowances in 1944 as a means of obviating the further growth of the welfare state, in the belief that such a relatively limited government expenditure would create full employment and thus allow returned soldiers to once again take up their responsibilities as husbands and breadwinners. Thus, when we take a cultural approach to studying the growth of the welfare state, we are able to gauge both the continuities and the disjunctures between society and government. (11)

A "cultural approach?" Mackenzie King was not a Keynesian and was pessimistic about *any* state policy succeeding in preventing a post-war depression. At the time that he introduced family allowances, he believed that he had little choice but to proceed fairly swiftly with comprehensive social security legislation. He campaigned on such legislation in 1945 and, after the election, quickly introduced his "Green Book" of proposals that would have implemented at one fell swoop a sweeping national universal medicare plan, universal old-age pensions, and greater federal responsibility for housing as well as for income security for sections of the unemployed not covered by unemployment insurance. In the end, he was saved by provincial hostility and declining fervour for social reform in the post-war period when a depression did not descend. During the war, a significant section of big business, fearful of the rising militancy of the unions and the growth in CCF electoral support, reluctantly accepted that social security was a means of avoiding Depression-scale unemployment after the war (indeed, many capitalists had come to such conclusions during the Depression when it appeared that the investment climate might never improve on its own). The Canadian Medical Association, its members still burnt by patients' unpaid Depression medical bills, supported medicare. When the post-war depression did not materialize, both businesspeople and physicians returned to their pre-1930s perspective that the state should carefully limit its involvement in the economy. Working people and farmers, who had drifted into the CCF and even Communist camps during the war, were led away by well-orchestrated anti-socialist campaigns, that clearly got quite a boost when the economic sky did not fall at war's end, as the socialists had warned it would.

I would certainly like to see Christie's evidence that family allowances, with their breadwinner ideology, managed to buy off the population or even that King believed in 1944 that the allowances could be anything more than a first instalment of a reform program. Universal medical insurance, a program that would provide benefits to all Canadians regardless of gender, remained almost universally popular among Canadians outside the business and physician groupings; so did universal old-age pensions.

In general, Christie's approach leaves out too many political actors. The Depression and wartime debate about social programs involved big business, the unions, middle-class professionals, farmers, civil servants, and, of course, the

politicians themselves. It was *not* mainly about gender. Unfortunately, that was because, as Christie herself argues rather strenuously, there was almost no one in this period who argued for women's economic emancipation. Whether maternalist or paternalist, those involved in the debate assumed that the male breadwinner-led family was the ideal, and everything else was abnormal, or at least regrettable. Maternalists were more sympathetic to generous treatment of those in other sorts of households, but, they were as unsupportive as the paternalists of anything that might undermine the "ideal" home; they were, however, somewhat less paranoid that any action at all by the state in favour of the underdog automatically achieved such an undermining.

Ultimately Nancy Christie provides no real explanation for why the state opted for various policy options. She simply demonstrates that all the options that they considered could have only baleful consequences for a project of emancipatory feminism, a project that she is adamant — I think too adamant — simply did not exist. By failing to trace shifting balances of social forces that, in turn, were affected by changes in the economy, Christie provides too narrow a tableau for understanding social policy formation. She does, however, in fairness, by examining the rhetoric of a select group of individuals with some involvement in discussions about social policy-making, make as clear as possible the gender assumptions that lay back of various proposals, both successful and unsuccessful.

Neither does Christie completely ignore social class, despite her flat statement that it did not matter in the emergence of policy options. She does attempt to demonstrate that working-class women were important social actors during World War I and in the 1920s. Their insistence that they had a right and an obligation to remain in the home as full-time mothers led to campaigns for higher payments to wives of soldiers who had large families and to early pressures for family allowances after the war.

A recent book dealing with the American welfare state provides a different and I think more promising approach to the set of issues that Nancy Christie tackles. Alice O'Connor's *Poverty Knowledge* traces the development of social welfare research, and emphasizes the influence of class interests in shaping the agenda of researchers in what she calls "the poverty research industry." Though careful not to reduce poverty knowledge to "a playing out of material class interest," (11) O'Connor always insists on a recognition of the political character of poverty research. "It is an exercise of power, in this instance of an educated elite to categorize, stigmatize, but above all to neutralize the poor and disadvantaged through analysis that obscures the political nature of social and economic inequality." (12) Despite an almost desperate effort on the part of poverty researchers to portray themselves as objective and scientific, their research agendas have been influenced by their corporate and state sponsors, and the paradigms they have created have often simply reflected efforts to influence policy development in ways that seem realistic at particular political moments.

O'Connor points out that most of the "poverty knowledge" that has received funding from foundations and state agencies, and that has played a role in policy-making, is characterized by a rejection of structural explanations of poverty. Neither unemployment nor low wages are treated as causes of poverty; instead they are seen as reflections of the dismal cultural attributes of the poor. The notion that there is a "culture of poverty" has, in one form or the other, been a mainstay of poverty knowledge. So, calls for state redistribution of wealth, and for policies of full employment and high minimum wages are regarded not as cures for poverty so much as a caving in to the inadequacies of the poor at the expense of the culturally superior wealthy. As O'Connor carefully explains, the various sophisticated research paradigms that have embodied such pro-capitalist and anti-poor thinking have played into the hands of conservative business interests even when their proponents have been well-meaning liberals who support various state policies meant to change the behaviours of the poor and enable them to overcome their poverty. So, for example, she argues that the influential anti-welfare tract, *Losing Ground*, by Charles Murray, which became a bible on social policy issues for the intellectually lightweight Reagan crowd, borrowed heavily on the arguments that liberal poverty researchers had been making for decades. Murray joined them in blaming the poor themselves for their poverty, indicting them for supposedly lacking foresight, bourgeois values of thrift, hard work, and willingness to forego instant gratification, and the like. But while the liberals had made an industry out of reshaping the values of the poor via myriad government programs, Murray suggested that the continuation of high poverty rates demonstrated the failure of such programs. Indeed, he suggested, to the delight of the Reaganites, that such programs furthered the dependence of those within the culture of poverty on state handouts and direction, and prevented them from learning to survive on their own. The liberals disputed the pessimistic assessment of Murray and other conservatives regarding the impact of their programs on the poor, but they avoided any suggestion that wealth and poverty were linked, and that the oppressors of the poor might be as worthy of their "objective, scientific" gaze as the hapless poor themselves. Ultimately, the liberals were then left with few weapons in their arsenal with which to attack the dismantlement of the few welfare programs that helped some of the poor, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

Why? As O'Connor explains:

Nevertheless, throughout its years of semi-exile, the poverty research establishment had put far more attention and energy into studying, evaluating, and experimenting with welfare than with strategies to reverse the growth in inequality, restore full employment at higher wages to the economy, stop low-end labor market decline-or even strategies to create jobs for all the welfare recipients they expected to move into the labor force. Nor had poverty analysts organized themselves to envision an alternative to the polarized, zero-sum political economy that, as their own research suggested, sustained low wages and high poverty rates. That was at least in part because, following the logic of analytic neutrality, the poverty

research industry had developed a dependency problem of its own: a capacity, that is, to conform and respond to the shifting political agenda of the agencies it relied on for funding, but not to establish and gain support for an independent policy agenda for dealing with poverty at its roots. (291)

Those who suffered from the theorists' construction of poverty as the creation of the shiftless poor were overwhelmingly African Americans and other non-whites; as well as women of all races and their children. The social scientists in the United States, like the social scientists whom Christie studies in Canada, regarded the male-breadwinner family ideal as not only desirable but normal. All women who lived outside such households were therefore abnormal, indeed pathological, and likely to bring poverty onto themselves. So, for example, a long tradition developed — which included some prominent African American social scientists — of labeling the mother-headed African American family as evidence of pathology in the African American community. Rather than hailing the willingness of African American mothers with or without husbands to seek paid work to support themselves and their offspring, the social scientists suggested that these women were both emasculating their men and dooming their families to poverty. Such observations ignored both the deep-seated racism that prevented African American men from finding more than seasonal, low-paying work, as well as the combination of sexism and racism that insured that the African American working mother received a pittance with which to support her family. Instead of blaming systemic racism for the poverty of African Americans, such research blamed the African Americans themselves, most especially the women. While progressive African American researchers, usually without links to the poverty research industry, found that African American working mothers often formed stable communities in which reciprocity with their neighbours created a rich associational life for themselves and their children, the poverty researchers, usually male and usually white, largely ignored such findings.

There have always been challenges to views that blamed the poor for their poverty. Early in the twentieth century, a young W.E.B. DuBois, doing sociological work in Chicago, though partly won over to the cultural explanations that his sociological training had imparted, recognized that such explanations were insufficient and indeed circular. Observing that members of longer-established immigrant groups enjoyed a better status in the work force than more recent arrivals, he lamented that African Americans never moved from the bottom of the heap. Racism, rather than poor education, lack of knowledge of the language, and the like seemed the obvious explanation for why African Americans never got chances in America. In turn, it seemed pointless to blame them for not getting more education when educational advantages were largely denied to them and opened few doors for them in any case. Denouncing them for not having bourgeois values that would allow them to get ahead also made little sense when all the evidence was that even those African Americans who did hold such values ran into Jim Crow everywhere.

Progressive era white researchers, while they generally ignored race issues, also often regarded poverty as structural. Jane Addams and other social settlement workers were less interested in pathologizing the poor than in establishing and assessing programs of community mobilization and action. They hoped to impress upon the wider society the need for state intervention to eliminate poverty, and their focus was on labour issues rather than poverty as such. "Low wages, the sweating system, labor subdivision, and the lack of organization — political as well as social — in working-class neighborhoods" (32) were their focus. But, after World War I, the combination of state-led Red scares and corporate research funding led social researchers away from such issues of class privilege and class oppression towards the cul de sac of a grim focus on the behaviours of the poor. In such research, class, race, and gender prejudices mixed together to create slightly different analyses and slightly different proposals for reform. What held the various research agendas and the advocacy that followed from the research together was the exoneration of the economic system and its leaders from any guilt in creating poverty. The breadwinner ideology that Christie focuses upon was an *a priori* in most of this research. But it was very fungible in supporting class privilege. While it could justify making widows work to support their families, it could equally be used to denounce African American women without husbands (along with those with husbands) for working for pay outside the home, and yet to portray non-white men as irresponsible.

The breadwinner ideal, as both Christie and O'Connor suggest, has been an important ideological tool in arguing against generous state assistance to various types of families with insufficient income for a decent lifestyle reflecting community standards. As Beatrix Hoffman demonstrates in *The Wages of Sickness*, conservative interests indulged fervently in the defence of the bourgeois family as they attacked the maternity benefit clause in New York reformers' proposal for compulsory health insurance in the World War I period. But Hoffman is clear that this was not the conservatives' only line of attack against health insurance, a proposal that would have benefited both men and women, though men to a greater degree. The legislation, like British and German legislation at the time, covered only the work force and included coverage for medical costs as well as sick pay. Opponents said that health insurance was "class legislation" (30) and an attack on real "Americanism," which extolled not only atomistic nuclear families, but also rugged individuals, and a weak state. While Hoffman agrees with earlier scholars that physicians were the most public opponents of state medicine, she focuses equally on the opposition of the insurance industry and manufacturers, the former because it stood to lose business and the latter because they did not wish to have their profits partially skimmed off by the state to fund a health program. Hoffman also nuances the portrait of American organized labour, personified by Samuel Gompers, as an opponent of health insurance and most other state programs. She examines the position of various trade-union players in the New York debates to demonstrate that organized labour in the state largely rejected Gompers' view that

the state, when it provided social insurance, invaded a union prerogative and undermined workers' organization. The New York State Federation of Labor, the Women's Trade Union League, and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) were especially front and center among the campaigners for health insurance in the state.

Gender divisions among social reformers regarding the health insurance proposal reflected class divisions but also ideological divisions. While trade-union women campaigned actively for health insurance, and lauded the inclusion of maternity benefits in the bill, women physicians generally opposed the bill. So did women activists who were married to physicians or manufacturers. Somewhat more surprisingly, Florence Kelley, a leading settlement house activist and advocate of better treatment for working women, staunchly opposed maternity benefits while supporting the principle of health insurance. Kelley charged that such benefits would encourage married women to remain in the work force after giving birth, thus limiting the work options available for single women. Pauline Newman, an ILGWU organizer and committed socialist, who was one of the leading advocates for the health insurance bill, rejected Kelley's arguments. Though single herself, she recognized that married women had a right to work and usually worked out of financial necessity. On the whole, however, women who supported maternity benefits avoided Newman's wholehearted defence of women's right to work, sticking to maternalist arguments that maternity pay would insure that pregnant women took time away from work and gave birth to healthy babies. One group of workers from whom support for the health insurance bill might have been expected were nurses. But, according to Hoffman, though nurses were generally keen on state-legislated universal health insurance, the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL), which initiated the state campaigns for health insurance, ignored them. It failed to consult them about the contents of the bill — there were clauses in the bill that caused reservations among nurses — or to ask for their help in pressing politicians to pass the bill. Largely an organization of academics, the male-dominated AALL seemed able to involve women in its campaigns only when they were part of the male-led organizations, such as trade unions, that the AALL did approach to make common cause with it. Despite its inclusion of maternity benefits in the proposed legislation, the AALL made no specific efforts to involve women in pressing for health insurance.

The AALL was also, at best, blind to race issues, and more likely, racist. Domestic and agricultural workers were specifically excluded from coverage, a provision that would have eliminated almost all African American workers in the state. The AALL made no effort to reach out to African American organizations. Splits along race lines, and within the women's and trade-union movements certainly hurt the AALL's campaign that might nonetheless have been successful if opponents of the bill, especially in the insurance industry, had not made such heavy weather of the "Americanism" argument, likening the proposed health insurance

to its German equivalent. Accused of "Prussianism," the supporters of the bill pointed out that Britain, America's wartime ally, also had a program of health insurance for working people. But this proved of little avail.

If elite resistance to state medicine proved sufficiently powerful to prevent such a program in New York, not to mention everywhere else in the United States to date, elite support for reforms has usually been a guarantor that reform will occur. Of course, as both Alice O'Connor and Nancy Christie suggest in different ways, such "reforms" will likely have a conservative cast. Detailed studies of reforms once they are implemented, however, often suggest that the social dynamics unleashed by a reform can lead in directions that the elite proponents of reform did not especially want. Dominique Marshall's study of the impact of the combination of family allowances and compulsory education in Québec is a case in point. This is an important work in the study of the evolution of liberalism, nationalism, and radicalism in Québec, and an excellent effort to compare and contrast elite and popular attitudes and behaviour in response to social policies of the state.

It is hardly novel by now for historians of Québec to argue that the seeds of the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s were being sown in the post-war period in the form of increasing labour militancy, the growth of liberal currents in the Roman Catholic Church, and the impact of North American and European ideas on an increasingly educated population. But such work tends to take as a given that before the Union Nationale was swept from office in 1960 by the provincial Liberals, the state at all levels in Québec as well as the Church hierarchy acted as a constant brake on reform. Marshall largely explodes this perspective. "*Les engagements du Parti libéral en matière sociale apparaissent comme autant de réponses aux attentes accrues de la population, à laquelle quinze années d'allocations familiales et d'obligation scolaire avaient contribué.*" (286) In short, the experience of the working class, farmers, and small business people of family allowances and compulsory schooling as rights created a sense of entitlement to state provision that led to demands for more and better programs to create social equality.

Marshall is clear that, particularly in the case of legislating "*l'obligation scolaire,*" for which Québec was the laggard within Confederation, popular support was hardly the decisive cause of the reform. Instead, "*la loi de fréquentation scolaire est avant tout le résultat de la renégociation d'une vieille entente entre l'élite politique et l'élite clericale, dans des circonstances où les intérêts de chacune évoluaient rapidement.*" (26) Liberal elements in the Church had largely abandoned as irrelevant the arguments of Church conservatives that too much education simply made the masses religious skeptics. The poor state of education in the province, they believed, in tandem with the political elite, meant that French Canadians could rarely fill important positions in large businesses in the province, too rarely demonstrated entrepreneurship, and too often drifted away from the low-wage economy of the province to better-paying, if unskilled, jobs in the US. The Church could not thrive if its parishioners were impoverished and on the move.

Marshall is hardly alone in arguing that Church moderates did not join with reactionary Union Nationale leader Maurice Duplessis in opposing the introduction of the compulsory-schooling bill introduced by the Liberal government of Adélard Godbout. But she provides the most convincing evidence of the depth of Church support for universal schooling in the province: during the second period in office of Duplessis, which extended from 1944 to 1959, the Church-run school boards throughout the province actively, if furtively, defied Le Chef's edict against cooperating with family allowance authorities in Ottawa to remove families from the family-allowance rolls if their school-age children were not attending school. Duplessis, who supported neither family allowances nor compulsory schooling, denounced the federal government for intruding upon provincial jurisdiction over civil rights by introducing a family allowance program in the first place, and provincial jurisdiction over education by tying the allowance to school attendance. But the Catholic school boards seemed unconcerned about the constitutional niceties that enervated the Union Nationale premier. They wanted all children to receive at least eight or nine grades of schooling, and, in the absence of provincial will to help achieve this objective, were willing to collaborate with Ottawa to enforce a law that would contribute to children remaining in school. For officials whose duty it was to control absences from the schools, the ability to threaten parents with loss of family allowances helped to deal with the threat of recalcitrance. But, as Marshall points out, lowly officials could not implement a policy of cooperation with the family allowance bureaucracy without the active support of the bishops.

Such behaviour on the part of Catholic organizations certainly adds some nuance to the conventional view that the Church, in common with Québec nationalists of this period generally, resisted state intervention altogether and, where faced with the need to accept state intervention, preferred to cooperate with provincial authorities over the "foreign" and "Protestant, English-speaking" federal government.

Local authorities however also unabashedly bought into Duplessis's election patronage network, and, according to Marshall, this discredited them in the eyes of the younger nationalists who would become the governing élite during the Quiet Revolution. Their centralizing, technocratic point of view, she speculates, may partly have resulted from their observation that local authorities were easily corrupted. This seems one of the weaker assertions in a book that generally documents well novel speculations about the dynamics of post-war Québec political life. Québec statist nationalism follows a pattern evident in many European countries, particularly France, where a centralizing élite, often closely associated with national capital, limits the power of local government wherever possible. It seems a bit awkward to argue, in any case, that corruption of local governments by a central government became the argument for strengthening the power of the level of government most responsible for the system of corruption.

The focus on the meaning of family allowances and compulsory schooling to workers, farmers, and the petite bourgeoisie, is the most interesting part of Marshall's work. For the very poor, for example, the family allowance could make the difference between whether they were able to hold on to their children at all. In a period when affordable daycare was unknown, thanks to the familialist ideology general throughout Canada and the especially rabid defence of it by the Catholic Church in Québec, the orphanage remained the destination for many children who had at least one living parent. But family allowances appear to have allowed such poor parents to at least be able to take their children home for Christmas and the summer holidays. According to the regional Family Allowance Board for Québec, only one in twelve children in orphanages spent Christmas and summers at home before 1945. By 1950, it was only one in twelve who remained in the orphanages, almost all of whom were true orphans or abandoned kids.

For working-class families, generally, the message conveyed by family allowances and the compulsory-schooling law raised broader questions of accessibility of education. The trade-union movement campaigned for an end to school fees of all kinds. For many working-class parents, however, particularly women raising children alone, the family allowance combined with the limited wages they could earn and the small provincial mothers' allowance still left the family in poverty. Although the legal school-leaving age was sixteen, parents could remove a child of fourteen or fifteen from school if they applied for a permit that indicated the child was needed by the family as a wage-earner or for domestic work. Of course, as had been the case before schooling was compulsory, statistics demonstrated that the former applied mainly to boys, the latter mainly to girls. A bureaucracy of social workers and other professionals arose to assess the requests for exemptions from school attendance to age sixteen. Marshall suggests that the middle-class people involved in assessing such requests were often radicalized by their encounters with working-class poverty. Many of these individuals would go on to become advocates of reform who had an impact during and after the Quiet Revolution.

Federal government propaganda seeking to inform mothers how they should spend their family allowances was blind to the possibility that recipients were so poor that the allowances were needed to keep them from being on the streets or without food. Government pamphlets encouraged women to see themselves as consumers of the new goods that post war prosperity was making available. But in government-sponsored surveys, Québec mothers indicated that the number one expense they made with family allowances was clothing for the children. This despite the fact that they continued to sew much of their families' clothing at home rather than rush to buy the ready-to-wear clothing that was more abundant and cheap in the stores than ever before. Next came food and then medical expenses. In east end Montréal, about a fifth of the mothers spent part of the allowance on rent, while another fifth spent part of it to repay debts.

All four of these recent works on the evolution of the welfare state in North America demonstrate the continued hold of the breadwinner ideal across class and gender lines, though, in O'Connor's case, with a significant questioning of its utility in practice among African Americans. But it is clear from the two American books that this ideological construct, while it might induce some conservatism across class lines, did not unite either classes or races in their vision of the state's responsibility to its citizens. Nor, despite the hold of the breadwinner ideal among all sections of the population, did it prevent at least a minority of women from defending the rights of all women, married or unmarried, to receive an income either through paid labour or through state allowances that would allow them to support a family. In Québec, suggests Dominique Marshall, the experience with family allowances, a program that was specifically intended to aid the breadwinner ideal by supplementing the incomes of families with children, appears to have encouraged the view that the state owed families a living more than it strengthened the breadwinner ideal per se.

What lessons regarding social welfare analysis, historical and contemporary, might we learn from these four recent books? Alice O'Connor perhaps sets out the most ambitious agenda, as she searches for ways of separating "poverty knowledge" from politicians and corporate foundations, who, like the researchers they employ, rarely know poverty from the inside.

Crucial to this process is a willingness to break down the hierarchical relationship between social scientific ways of knowing and other forms of expertise — to recognize, that is, the legitimacy and importance of knowledge that is grounded in practice, in activism, and in the experience not only of material deprivation but of the everyday workings of the economy. This in turn requires a serious commitment from all sides to the difficult, even tedious, work of building long-term, collaborative relationships for setting as well as carrying out poverty research—a model that takes the production of knowledge out of or at least beyond traditional expert or academic venues and into a variety of communities. (O'Connor, 293-4)

Such an agenda, though perhaps easier to realize in theory than in practice, would certainly get academic activists beyond sterile debates about which of class, race, and gender trumps the other, and force serious efforts to deal with all three in the light of the actual social forces operating within a given political economy.

Libraries & Culture

EDITOR: Donald G. Davis, Jr., University of Texas at Austin



"Feature articles, which are refereed, are well written and usually very interesting. Anyone with an interest in the history and social context of books and libraries will enjoy this publication"

— **Magazines for Libraries 2000**

THE FLEUR COWLES SYMPOSIUM 2000, *The Infinite Library*

**Old Worlds and New: Manuscripts, Archives,
and Special Collections in the 21st Century**

WINTER 2002, VOLUME 37, NUMBER 1

Special Collections Libraries: Looking Ahead by Looking Back

RICHARD WENDORF

**The Future of Libraries and Humanities Research: New Strategic Directions for
the British Library**

LYNNE BRINDLEY

"Only Connect": Institutional Planning and Funding

ELLEN DUNLAP

The Impact of Digitalization on Special Collections in Libraries

PETER HIRTLE

Pushing Paper: Dealers and Institutional Collectors

LISA BROWAR

Excavating the Imagination: Archival Research and the Digital Revolution

RONALD SCHUCHARD

My Infinite Library

WARWICK GOULD

**National Collections, Global Collecting: The Responsibilities of
Librarians as Collectors**

ALICE PROCHASKA

The Bridge Beyond

PROSSER GIFFORD

Single copy rates: Ind. \$15, Inst. \$24,

Canada/Mexico, add \$3.50; other foreign, add \$5.50 (airmail).

Yearly subscription rates: Ind. \$36, Inst. \$70, Student/Retired \$22,

Canada/Mexico, add \$14; other foreign, add \$22 (airmail).

Refunds available only on unshipped quantities of current subscriptions.

University of Texas Press Journals, Box 7819, Austin, Texas 78713-7819

Phone # 512-232-7621, Fax # 512-232-7178, journals@uts.cc.utexas.edu

