THE TRUTH ABOUT WELFARE REFORM

FRANCES FOX PIVEN AND BARBARA EHRENREICH

For nearly three decades, most Republicans, conservative think tanks, the right-wing media, the Christian right, and even a good many Democrats have been fulminating about a program known in the United States as ‘welfare’. The numbers of people on the program rise and fall, the actual name of the program changes, but the fixation on welfare does not much change. Presumably, overly generous cash assistance to poor women and their children coddles these women, leading to a host of social problems, ranging from idleness to out-of-wedlock births and broken families, crime and truancy, and even poverty itself.

In fact, even at its peak, the program that provided cash assistance to the very poor was quite small, reaching fewer than 5 million families, or 5 per cent of the population, two-thirds of them children. The costs were low, about one per cent of the federal budget, and perhaps three to four per cent of most state budgets. With welfare ‘reform’ in 1996, those already low numbers declined dramatically, to the point where there are only two million families in the program.

Yet the hullabaloo continues. In early 2004, Nexis listed 21 times as many articles in major newspapers on ‘welfare’ as on ‘unemployment insurance’ and 68 times as many hits as a search under ‘Family and Medical Leave Act’ and ‘paid family leave’.1 And the congress continues to try to toughen the already draconian conditions for assistance. Republicans are pushing for more required working hours for mothers on the program, and for reduced block grants to the states so that less money is available to support working mothers with benefits such as childcare. Why has this small program become so focal in American politics?

The answer, we think, is that the organized right made welfare and welfare recipients into a foil to cover their real targets: (1) the larger programs, including medicaid and unemployment insurance which benefit far larger numbers of Americans, and social security which benefits almost all Americans; and (2) the political culture undergirding those programs, with its implicit ideals
of social cohesion and mutual responsibility. There were good reasons for this strategy. The people on welfare were already marginalized, and vulnerable. Paupers have always been a despised caste in western societies. Add to this longstanding distaste the fact that, in the wake of the mass migration of African Americans from the rural south to the urban north and the protests that ensued in the 1960s, welfare had become a disproportionately black and Hispanic program (although the plurality of recipients were non-Hispanic whites.) The presidential campaigns of Barry Goldwater and George Wallace registered this fact and demonstrated the political uses of racism even in the north. ‘Welfare’ became a code-word to evoke and mobilize rising white racial hatreds.

At the same time, changes in sexual mores and family structure were stirring a backlash of popular anxieties, anxieties that were fuelled even more by the rise of the feminist movement. Since most recipients were single mothers in what was judged to be the ‘matriarchal’ subculture of the poor, they were easily deployed as a symbol of all that was wrong with America. Ronald Reagan made the image of the ‘welfare queen’ a staple of American popular culture; and right-wing intellectuals agonized over the presumed promiscuity of welfare recipients. This was the politics of spectacle, a spectacle designed to evoke and intensify popular antipathies against Democrats, against blacks, against liberals, against unruly and ‘licentious’ women, and against government, or at least those parts of government that provided support to poor and working people. In the background and out of the spotlight was the longer term campaign of the organized right to defeat and dismantle the New Deal/Great Society political order.

**THE WINNING OF THE NEW DEAL/GREAT SOCIETY ORDER**

The New Deal/Great Society order was established during the middle decades of the twentieth century, from the 1930s until the 1970s, when the United States developed something approaching a modern European-style welfare state. Two great episodes of protest punctuated the era. It began with the social movements of labour, the aged and the unemployed in the 1930s, and it ended when the protest movements of African Americans, the urban poor, women and environmental activists of the 1960s and early 1970s subsided.

In the 1930s, new programs were inaugurated that provided cash income and ‘in-kind’ supports such as housing for the poor. In 1935, the federal government threw its support behind collective bargaining, and unions grew, especially in the mass production industries. A minimum wage was legislated, along with a maximum hours law that guaranteed many workers higher overtime pay. The transactions of banks and investors were subject to
closer regulation. To be sure, all these programs were flawed. The aged who depended on social security were still poor, many of them subsisting on day-old bakery goods. Little low-income housing was actually built. Workplaces were still not really safe, and in any case, the regulations ignored the physical dangers of new occupations. Innovative schemes for financial manipulation evaded static regulations. And so on. Still, life for most Americans became a little more secure, a little less dangerous.

The resurgence of protest movements in the 1960s led to the resurgence of welfare state initiatives. The protests were spearheaded by the black freedom movement which began in the South as a movement for civil rights, and then spread to the cities of the North where it became a kind of poverty rights movement. A vulnerable Democratic administration responded with the liberalization of the 1930s programs, as well as the creation of new programs that provided nutritional supplements, health care, and subsidized housing for the poor. Moreover, the black freedom movement became a template for other movements, among women, environmentalists, and youth. Industry was required to meet environmental and workplace safety standards, and even hiring practices were regulated to reduce racial and gender discrimination.

When the smoke had cleared, the accomplishments of the movements could be tallied. Between 1930 and the 1970s, income and wealth concentration had plummeted by half. Racial discrimination certainly did not disappear, and African Americans lagged sharply behind whites economically. Their unemployment rates remained twice as high, they were much more likely to be poor, and their net worth was a small fraction of their white counterparts. But however precariously, a good number of blacks were making their way into the middle class, and they had also become voters and acknowledged participants in American political and cultural life.

Even limited and conditional programs contributed to an ongoing transformation in American political culture. The large role that the national government had tried to play in coping with the Great Depression, and especially its initiatives in extending assistance to the poor and working class, changed the way that people thought about government, and therefore changed the basis of their political allegiance. In the nineteenth century, American political parties had perfected the tribalist and clientelist strategies that mobilized high levels of popular electoral participation while insulating voters from the central policy issues of the day. In the New Deal/Great Society order, however, voter support depended less on tribalist and clientelist appeals, and more on assessments of whether the regime was contributing to widespread economic well-being. This was no small achievement. The public held elected officials responsible for their economic well-being, and the initiatives of the 1960s strengthened that strand in popular thought. Political scientists
began to take for granted that election results could be predicted from indicators like unemployment rates, or social security benefit levels, or changes in personal income. The phenomenon was called, somewhat disparagingly, ‘pocket-book politics’. But pocket-book politics, if it meant the pocketbooks of all the people, was a step toward a more democratic society.

There was also a collectivist dimension to the new political culture. The very fact that popular economic well-being was now considered a government responsibility – as opposed to the personal responsibility embedded in the Protestant ethic, and later celebrated in the propaganda of the organized right – implied as much. This idea of mutuality, of collective responsibility, was underlined by programs like social security where the payroll taxes of active workers literally paid the pensions of those workers who had retired. And imagine, the program was wildly popular! A degree of mutuality and collective responsibility was also reflected in the growth of non-governmental insurance schemes like Blue Cross and employment-based pension plans.

THE CAMPAIGN TO DEMOLISH THE NEW DEAL/GREAT SOCIETY ORDER

American business and its allies on the organized right had always opposed these initiatives. But the catastrophe of the Great Depression, the political exposes of business wrongdoing to which it led, and the tumult and threat power of the protest movements of the decade combined to strip business of much of its influence in the 1930s. Subsequently the extraordinary profits that American business enjoyed during and after World War II helped to relax opposition to the New Deal programs. After all, the US was the only major industrial power to emerge from the war relatively unscathed, and for 25 years American corporations dominated world markets. To be sure, in the absence of protest, prosperity did not lead to the expansion or improvement of New Deal initiatives. Income support programs remained meagre, and the legislative protections of unions were rolled back with the Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffith Acts. Harry Truman’s proposal for national health insurance was killed by the American Medical Association, and subsidized housing programs shrank.

Still, this low intensity war notwithstanding, the New Deal order was not dismantled, and in fact those working people who were in the unionized mass production industries did well, which is why the period is often characterized as an era of ‘labour accord’, or the era of the American social compact. Moreover, when riots spread across American cities in the 1960s, business also went along with the expansion of the American welfare state.

On November 8, 1954, Dwight Eisenhower had written to his brother Edgar Newton Eisenhower:
Should any political party attempt to abolish social security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history. There is a tiny splinter group, of course, that believes you can do these things. Among them are H.L. Hunt (you possibly know his background), a few other Texas oil millionaires, and an occasional politician or business man from other areas. Their number is negligible and they are stupid.8

As Eisenhower indicated, business opposition to the New Deal was muted, for a time. But as the movements of the 1960s subsided, longstanding nascent business opposition to the New Deal/Great Society order reemerged.

It was not just that the movements were no longer a threat. American business was in trouble. As Europe and Japan recovered, American corporations faced the unfamiliar prospect of tight competition with goods manufactured elsewhere, and this at a time when they were carrying the costs of the higher wages, more generous social programs, and workplace and environmental regulation which the turbulent 1960s had produced. By the early 1970s, with profit margins narrowing and the memory of the tumultuous sixties fading, the sorts of business leaders that Eisenhower had disparaged as marginal and stupid were leading a conservative counter-assault that, as it gained momentum, threatened to wipe out the reforms of both the New Deal and the Great Society.

The agenda of the campaign is by now familiar: shift the brunt of taxation from business and the affluent to working people, and from capital to wages; dismantle the environmental and workplace regulations that so irritated business and also cost them money; reduce worker power by weakening unions, eviscerating regulatory protections of workers, largely through non-enforcement; and roll back income support programs so as to drive more people into the labor force and the scramble for work, and also keep them anxious and vulnerable about their jobs and their wages.

Wage cuts and social benefit cuts obviously drive more people to seek work, often as part-timers or temps. Immigration policies that leave the borders relatively open, but bar immigrants from social welfare protections, also contribute to an abundance of workers, even though the administration that presides over these policies simultaneously indulges the vigilante Minutemen who recently undertook to patrol the Mexican border. So does the assault on pensions enlarge the numbers looking for work. As the private plans won by unionized workers from their employers after World War II were shifted from defined-benefit pensions to lower cost undefined ones (401Ks), employers saved money but pension benefits shrunk. At the same
time, employer-controlled pension funds became the target of plunder by management. As retirement benefits plummet, inevitably more of the old will continue to work.⁹

Over time, as the campaign gained momentum and scored successes, the agenda became more ambitious, and greedier. Not only were the social programs to be slashed, but what remained of them was targeted as another arena for profitability through publicly subsidized privatization. Families squeezed between stagnant wages and rising costs resorted increasingly to borrowing, and record numbers were driven into bankruptcy. Then, in an effort spearheaded by the banks and credit card companies, even the protections to ordinary families offered by bankruptcy law were rolled back.

The agenda was promoted by a multi-pronged strategy including the buildup of the lobbying capacity of business through the creation of new peak organizations, the revival of sleepy older organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and industry trade groups, and the buildup of a business political war machine on Washington D.C.’s K Street. The campaign also worked hard, and more or less successfully, to fold in a growing populist right based in the fundamentalist churches. The emergence of the Christian right and affiliated movements to outlaw abortion and encourage gun ownership were rooted in anxieties provoked by cultural changes associated with the 1960s. But as a matter of practical politics, those anxieties and the political energies they generated were largely put to work in the campaign to dismantle the New Deal/Great Society order.

The message machine created by the campaign helped to seal this odd alliance. The organized right, it is often said, launched a war of ideas, and the main ideas were a hybrid of market fundamentalism and Christian fundamentalism. Market fundamentalism is of course simply old-fashioned laissez faire, a doctrine in which the individual stands naked and unprotected before market forces and market ‘law’. Christian fundamentalism also strips the individual of communal and political supports, although now the individual stands naked and unprotected before God, and God’s law. Industrial Areas Foundation community organizer Mike Gecan writes:

The religious resonance is reinforced by an economic resonance that is also deep and powerful. The president’s ‘ownership society’ is based on a vision of an individual who is capable of having a direct and personal relationship with the market. An individual should have control over his or her own economic destiny – should be able to own a home rather than renting, work for a private business rather than for the government, save money for retirement rather than expecting the government or an employer to make
the arrangements…. The president is asserting that the individual person or family doesn’t need mediating institutions and programs …. [T]hese institutions and programs have disrupted the development of the hoped-for relationship between the person and the market, just as many believers feel that denomination and religious bureaucracies impede the growth of the personal relationship with God.¹⁰

While confounded liberals often mourn that the right had new ideas, neither of these tenets was actually new at all, of course. What was new was the deliberate and strategic creation of an apparatus to promulgate these ideas. With a handful of small right-wing foundations in the lead, a new infrastructure of think tanks, public intellectuals, periodicals, societies, right-wing media and university outposts was constructed. New media outlets were established, and mainstream media journalists and executives were harassed and intimidated, charged with being ‘liberal’, or more recently, insufficiently patriotic.¹¹ The rhetoric of welfare reform, with its signature slogan of personal responsibility, played a significant role in this campaign. Some of the best known luminaries in the pantheon of right-wing conservative intellectuals made their name through diatribes against welfare, including George Gilder, Charles Murray, and Marvin Olasky.

Together, this alliance of business and the populist right took over the Republican party, pouring new money into the electoral campaigns of hard-right candidates, and pushing older-style conservatives to the margins. But the real measure of its political success was in its influence on the Democratic party that had, for all its internal conflicts, and however reluctantly, championed the New Deal/Great Society order. Franklin Delano Roosevelt had talked of ‘strong central government as a haven of refuge to the individual’.¹² But in the 1990s, the Democrats jettisoned this key tenet of the New Deal/Great Society – largely because of the success of the right-wing campaign against welfare.

That campaign had succeeded in turning welfare into a metaphor for African Americans, sexual license, and liberalism. In 1992, Bill Clinton made his bid for the presidency on the slogan of ‘ending welfare as we know it’, and when the Republicans held his feet to the fire with their proposal for rolling back welfare called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, he followed the advice of his pollsters and consultants and signed the measure. This was in 1996, when Clinton campaigned again for the presidency, following the advice of his consultant Dick Morris to ‘fast-forward the Gingrich agenda’.¹³ ‘Progressives’, argued Clinton pollster Stanley B. Greenberg, ‘needed to transcend welfare politics’.¹⁴ The Demo-
cratic strategy, in a nutshell, was to beat the Republicans by adopting their positions.

The new welfare legislation essentially turned the administration of welfare over to the states, with the proviso that welfare receipt was limited to five years in a lifetime, and that at least half of the women on the rolls were also working. More important, since federal funding was now in the form of a lump-sum block grant, the states had a financial incentive to limit access to welfare assistance. This they did. Under the banner of ‘work first’, access to benefits was made more difficult, and staying on the rolls was also harder since the sanctions of benefit cuts or termination were freely used to punish recipients and their children for one or another sort of transgression of increasingly complex rules, or for failing to meet the terms of individualized ‘contracts’ they were required to sign.

Welfare reform itself was cruel, but its impact was necessarily limited, because few families had been long term welfare recipients in the first place. The message about the degraded, even pathological, character of the people who depended on welfare had a far wider reach, however. For example, the theme of ‘personal responsibility’ resurfaced in early 2005 in the build-up to the passage of a new bankruptcy law which eliminates the possibility of a fresh start for debtors in the poor and middle classes (unsurprisingly, the law leaves loopholes for wealthy debtors).

With its emphasis on ‘personal responsibility’ as opposed to the supposedly degrading forms of ‘dependency’, welfare reform was an attack on the New Deal/Great Society ideas of collective responsibility, and smoothed the way for the agenda of upward income redistribution that was always the goal of the right’s campaign. The harping on welfare helped to discredit other and bigger income support and in-kind programs, including unemployment insurance, old age and disability insurance, nutritional and health supports, and housing subsidies. Simultaneously of course it served to discredit ‘liberalism’ and the Democratic party that had once been its champion.

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF RIGHT WING POLICIES

The results are obvious. Income and wealth inequality are soaring. The top one per cent grabbed 38.4 per cent of the total increase in income between 1979 and 2000. The bottom 20 per cent took home 0.8 per cent. In 2001, the richest one per cent owned 44.8 per cent of all common stock (excluding pensions); the poorest 80 per cent owned 5.8 per cent. Since then, the Bush tax cuts have channelled more money to the very rich. The purchasing power of the minimum wage is worth 25 per cent less than in 1967, and more than one in four workers are earning less than a poverty wage. But CEO pay has soared, and so have profits. The United States is far more class-polarized,
certainly in income terms, than other industrial nations.\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, it is on the low end of international comparisons of social mobility.\textsuperscript{19}

Class polarization, abetted by Republican anti-welfare-state policies, has the effect of further undercutting the old ideals of collective responsibility and mutual assistance. Rather than rub shoulders with the increasing impoverished working class, the upper middle class tend to retreat into their own world of privatized goods and services. They send their children to private schools, to avoid both the crumbling public schools and the impecunious children who crowd them. They avoid public transportation and parks. They even shop in different settings, as the mass market of the postwar years has segmented decisively into discount stores, on the one hand, and luxury purveyors on the other. As the wealthy withdraw from public services and spaces, they come to resent supporting such social goods through their taxes. It’s hard to feel solidarity with people you do not normally encounter, unless as servants, or that you encounter uneasily and even fearfully.

The Republican answer to rising poverty and widening class divisions is to promote what they call the ‘ownership society’, in which risks are not shared but confronted individually. This goal is expressed in their efforts to replace public pensions with private investment accounts, and health insurance with ‘medical savings accounts’, or subsidized rental housing with home ownership. The ownership society is also a justification for the spread of various stock ownership pension schemes. One consequence is obviously to put at risk the benefits that workers and the poor were more or less guaranteed under New Deal/Great Society programs. But there is another perhaps more insidious consequence as workers with pitifully small stock accounts are encouraged to turn away from collective efforts to improve pensions or health care or housing programs in favour of playing in a market in which they are unlikely to survive, much less grow rich.

So the policy direction initiated by welfare reform has set in motion a vicious cycle: cuts in social spending, along with upwardly redistributive tax policies, exacerbate the poverty of the poor and a large portion of the working class, deepening the rift between the classes and further weakening appeals to collective responsibility. Instead of public spending for social welfare, we get ever-rising spending for law enforcement and prisons to house the noncompliant poor. The result is a society increasingly divided between gated communities, on the one hand, and trailer parks and tenements on the other – a society in which traditional notions of the ‘common good’ can only seem quaint.

Growing hardship among the lower classes, combined with the ever-present spectacle of enormous wealth, might be expected to lead to political unrest and even insurgency. The American working class has seen its real
wages decline since the turn of the century; more families are dependent on two wage-earners for survival; and more wage-earners – 90 per cent more since 1973 – must hold more than one job. Welfare reform, combined with cuts in other social services, guarantee that there is no way out for hard-pressed families at the bottom: they must exemplify the Protestant work ethic even more than the upper classes who most vigorously espouse it – and usually at the expense of any kind of family involvement. Multiple jobs, lack of adequate childcare, and long commutes from neighbourhoods containing (barely) affordable housing to distant work sites generate a host of problems from routine sleep deprivation to child neglect.

RELIGION AND THE WELFARE STATE

But economic misery does not necessarily translate into progressive political activism. As organizations like unions and local Democratic Party clubs have declined, hard-pressed Americans have turned to religion, and especially to politically right-leaning evangelical and often fundamentalist Protestant churches. The Bush administration sees the evangelical churches as a central source of political support, and worked strenuously to mobilize their membership for the 2004 election. Through the administration’s ‘faith-based’ social service initiatives, individual churches receive public money to expand their social services and hence their membership. In turn, church leaders urge their parishioners to vote Republican or at least to vote against candidates who favour abortion and gay rights, meaning of course Democrats. So another vicious cycle has been set in motion: declining public services push people toward the churches, which in turn promote a political agenda involving still further decreases in public services. As this process continues, the outcome – which would seem to contradict the outlook of secular advocates of untrammelled free enterprise – is that a increasingly free market economy combines with a compensating form of religiosity that reflects an intellectually, artistically and sexually repressive culture.

It might have been expected that in the aftermath of the 2004 election, centrist Democrats, rather than attribute their defeat to being out-of-touch on ‘faith’ issues, and thus conceding the ‘moral values’ edge to the party that brought us Abu Ghraib, would have re-examined their affinity for candidates too mumble-mouthed and compromised to articulate poverty and war as the urgent moral issues they are. These are issues, after all, on which it is not hard for even secular liberals to claim that Jesus is on their side. Policies of pre-emptive war and the upward redistribution of wealth are inversions of the Judeo-Christian ethic, which is for the most part silent, or mysteriously cryptic, on gays and abortion. With their craven, breast-beating response to Bush’s electoral triumph, leading Democrats only demonstrate how out of
touch they really are with the religious transformation of America. Where secular-type liberals and centrists go wrong is in categorizing religion as a form of ‘irrationality’, akin to spirituality, sports mania and emotion generally. They fail to see that the current ‘Christianization’ wave bears no resemblance to the Great Revival of the early nineteenth century, an ecstatic movement that filled the fields of Virginia with the rolling, shrieking and jerking bodies of the revived. In contrast, today’s right-leaning Christian churches represent a coldly Calvinist tradition in which even speaking in tongues, if it occurs at all, has been increasingly routinized and restricted to the pastor.

What these churches have to offer, in addition to intangibles like eternal salvation, is concrete, material assistance in the form of childcare, after-school programs, support groups for battered women, and help for the unemployed – all permeated with proselytizing messages. Some churches even offer occasional cash handouts to members facing eviction or medical debts. They have become an alternative welfare state, whose support rests not only on ‘faith’ but also on the loyalty of the grateful recipients. For example, just a short drive from Washington D.C., in the Virginia suburbs, is the McLean Bible Church, spiritual home of Senator James Inhofe and other prominent right-wingers. On any given weekday night there, dozens of families and teenagers enjoy a low-priced dinner in the cafeteria; a hundred unemployed people meet for prayer and job tips at the ‘Career Ministry’; divorced and abused women gather in support groups. Among its many services, MBC distributes free clothing to 10,000 poor people a year, has helped start an inner-city ministry for at-risk youth in the District of Columbia, and operates a ‘special needs’ ministry for disabled children. MBC is a mega-church with a parking garage that could serve a medium-sized airport, but many smaller evangelical churches offer a similar array of services – childcare, after-school programs, ESL lessons, help in finding a job, not to mention the occasional cash handout. Nor is the local business elite neglected by the evangelicals. Throughout the Republican ‘red states’ – and increasingly the Democratic ‘blue ones’ too – evangelical churches are vital centers of ‘networking’, where the carwash owner can schmooze with the bank’s loan officer. Some churches offer regular Christian businessmen’s ‘fellowship lunches’, where religious testimonies are given and business cards traded, along with jokes aimed at Democrats and gays.

The lesson is clear. Got a drinking problem, a vicious spouse, a wayward child, a bill due? Find a church. The closest analogy to America’s bureaucratized evangelical movement is Hamas, which draws in poverty-stricken Palestinians through its own miniature welfare state. While Hamas operates in a nonexistent welfare state, the Christian right advances by attacking the existing one. Mainstream, even liberal, churches also provide a range of
services, from soup kitchens to support groups. What makes the typical evangelical church’s social welfare efforts sinister is their implicit – and sometimes not so implicit – linkage to the destruction of public and secular services. In the 2004 election year the connecting code words were ‘abortion’ and ‘gay marriage’: to vote for a candidate who opposed these supposed moral atrocities, as the Christian Coalition and so many churches strongly advised, was to vote against public housing subsidies, childcare and expanded public forms of health insurance. Of course, Bush’s faith-based social welfare strategy only accelerates the downward spiral toward theocracy. Not only do the right-leaning evangelical churches offer their own, shamelessly proselytizing social services; not only do they attack candidates who favour expanded public services – but they stand to gain public money by doing so.

It is this dangerous positive feedback loop, and not any new spiritual or moral dimension of American life, that the Democrats have failed to comprehend: the evangelical church-based welfare system is being fed by the deliberate destruction of the secular welfare state. What the American political system needs, at the very least, is a political alternative that offers a firm commitment to public forms of childcare, healthcare, housing and education – for people of all faiths and no faith at all. At the same time, progressives should perhaps rethink their own disdain for service-based outreach programs. Once it was the left that provided ‘alternative services’ in the form of free clinics, women’s health centers, food co-ops and inner-city multi-service storefronts. Enterprises like these are not substitutes for an adequate public welfare state, but they can become the springboards from which to demand one.

This is especially important now when there are growing signs that the agenda put in motion by welfare reform may be about to unravel. It was one thing to attack the relatively marginalized group of welfare recipients; quite another to take on the fifty-odd million elderly people who depend on public pensions and health insurance. Bush’s drive to privatize or otherwise eliminate Social Security has won no converts, and served only to contribute to his declining approval ratings. At the same time, declining public support for higher education, combined with sky-rocketing college costs, is forcing middle-class families to reflect on the role of government as a provider of social welfare. For all but the wealthy, health insurance is becoming inadequate or out of reach, especially as rates of job turnover increase. In the desolation left by six years of extreme right-wing economic and social policy, values such as collective responsibility and the common good may be beginning to regain their lustre.
NOTES


3 For a discussion, see Herbert J. Gans, ‘Race as Class’, Contexts, November 2005. The median white household earned 62 per cent more income and possessed twelve times the wealth of the median black household. See Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality, New York: Routledge, 1997, pp. 86-90, 96-103.

4 The shift in public opinion is notable. In 1944, only 45 per cent of Americans agreed that African Americans should have as good a chance as white people to get any kind of job. Three decades later, 97 per cent agreed. Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans’ Policy Preferences, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 63; 68-71.

5 Plotke calls this a ‘Democratic political order’, but means essentially the same thing. ‘From the 1930s through the 1960s, it dominated American political life. By political order I mean a durable mode of organizing and exercising political power at the national level, with distinct institutions, policies and discourses’. See David Plotke, Building a Democratic Political Order, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 1.


7 Economic collapse discredited business, at a time of widespread social unrest to which national political leaders had to respond. Moreover, the structural power that business usually wields through the threat of disinvestments in a decentralized system was reduced both by economic
14 This is from Stanley B. Greenberg’s reminiscence, ‘How We Found – and Lost – a Majority’, The American Prospect, 16(6), June 2005. Greenberg’s 1991 article, ‘From Crisis to Working Majority’, The American Prospect, 2(7), September 1991, was considered a key guide for the Clinton 1992 campaign.
18 See Alex Hicks, ‘Back to the Future? A Review Essay in Income Concentration and Conservatism’, Socio-Economic Review, 1, May 2003, pp. 271-88. Hicks reviews data presented by T. Piketty and E. Saez that