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## STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL MOBILITY: A POLICY FRAMEWORK

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Since World War II, the discussion of social mobility has moved on three levels: from presentation of the *facts* and patterns of mobility to *explanations* of these patterns to an analysis of *policies* that might induce changes in the profiles of stratification and mobility of a society. Social mobility can no longer be considered a residual or a derivative of immutable structural trends. It is a variable that is affected by public policy, whether through acts of commission or omission.

Social policy is the impetus of the current study of mobility. Although all three levels of discussion—facts, explanations, and policies—are intertwined, policy is now the dominant concern. The facts of social mobility show to what extent policy is effective; success or failure of policy should affect explanation; and, of course, explanation should guide policy. Unfortunately, such smoothness is untypical, for explanations of mobility patterns are not very secure. Policy is a guide to explanation more frequently than the reverse; as we assess and change policy, we begin to understand some of the difficulties or, hopefully, possibilities in the stratification and mobility picture. We can then generate hypotheses to explain the outcomes, which can be tested by new policies.

In the mid-fifties, led principally by Seymour Martin Lipset and his associates (1954, 1959, 1966), there was an emphasis upon structural elements in producing mobility.<sup>1</sup> Given a certain level of technology, certain mobility rates and patterns would emerge. The emphasis was more on the explanation of the apparent facts of con-

temporary mobility rates and patterns than on explicating the variables that could produce change in these rates and patterns. Today, we are beginning to question these structural and normative explanations that do not focus on variables susceptible to policy change. In both low-income nations and high-income nations, planners and politicians have to move to attain higher rates of mobility and are therefore searching for the fulcrums of change rather than for the inevitabilities of structure.

Prior to the work of Lipset on structural analysis was the work of David Glass (1954) who emphasized the impact of education on mobility. Indeed, in many countries schooling and off-the-job manpower-training programs have become the primary ways of attempting to effect social mobility.

In the last few years, we have had dismaying reports about the effectiveness of education as a promoter of social mobility. The Robbins report (United Kingdom Commission on Higher Education, 1963) in Great Britain has shown, to the surprise of many, that the relative proportion of working-class students in universities has not changed over several decades despite the expansion of university places. In the United States, an outpouring of literature has shown that while more education is available to all, the distribution of educational resources is still closely linked to social class factors (Campbell et al., 1966; Hobson, 1970; Sexton, 1961; The Southern Center for Studies in Public Policy and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 1969; Weisbrod and Hansen, 1969). In addition, the report of Coleman et al. (1966) is interpreted to show that school-related factors are less important than family-related factors in educational outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of other variables, see Fox and Miller (1966).

Obviously, to expand educational programs without redistributing or equalizing educational opportunities does not drastically change social mobility rates, particularly for those at the bottom of the social structure. Perhaps there is equally little impact on social mobility rates where educational opportunities are equalized but out-of-school environmental conditions of students are not.

### **Promotion of Social Mobility: New Directions**

Disappointment in educational programs is leading to three levels of further policy work: educational reform, income and education, and stratum mobility.

*Educational Reform.* This first level is in direct continuity with the educational emphasis of the past. It seeks further educational reform in several directions. In the United States, there has been pressure toward more education in very early childhood; the major program of this effort is Operation Head Start. The assumption is that if children with cultural and language limitations are given aid in these areas before they come to school, the school will have less difficulty in working with them. Results have been disappointing. The initial gains of children who have attended Head Start programs erode after they enter schools that do not continue to respond to their needs (Wolff and Stein, 1965a, b). Nevertheless, the programs have important payoffs in that they identify remedial health defects and advance general awareness of the need for preparing children for school. Efforts are being made to improve schools by insisting on accountability in schools' performance with their students and by offering incentives to good performance. Through pressure, public censure, and reward for meritorious work, the hope is to induce schools to perform more adequately than they have before.

Another major educational reform aims at anticredentia- lism and the expansion of continuing or recurrent education (Illich, 1970; Miller, 1968, 1970; Miller and Kroll, 1970; Miller and Reissman, 1969). The first assumption of this perspective is that the educational prerequisites for many, if not most, jobs are inappropriately high (Berg, 1970). A second assumption is that education and training, rather than under-age-thirty experiences, should be regarded as lifetime necessities or interests. The third assumption is that people can be better developed on the job than they now are, and, indeed, that on-the-job training and experience may prove better than formal education for teaching many people. While the primary discussion has been in terms of high-income, high-education countries, the anticredentia- lism/continuing education approach is probably even more applicable to low-income, low-education nations (Illich, 1970).

Three policy lines follow from this perspective. One is to reduce inappropriate educational requirements for jobs so that talented or developable persons with limited formal schooling can obtain good jobs. The second is to develop routes to higher-level jobs for those who have relatively little schooling. The third, connected with the second, is to build and expand a system of recurrent education, connecting formal schooling with the education and development that take place on the job. Many European

countries with long experience in the apprenticeship mode are now looking to this way of developing competence, a way that does not rely exclusively (in form at least) on early or formal schooling. In the United States, man- power programs are moving in this direction, even though it is not fully recognized that these programs are in effect a third-tier, continuing-education system.

Another approach to educational reform is a program that provides cash payments to induce or allow individuals to go further in school. Many countries throughout the world provide stipends (cash subsidies) to university students. To some extent, family allowance programs serve the same function; they make it possible for individuals to stay in school without reducing family income through lost earnings from work or without adding extra expenses. In the United States, the Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC) provides cash to high school students under the guise of helping them to secure training. Since many in-school NYC programs offer little training, in effect they mainly function as a way of augmenting a family's resources so as to make it easier for the children of the family to remain in school.

*Income and Education.* This second new level in policy work is the "cash (income) strategy," most sharply articulated by Lee Rainwater (1970) who argues that it will not be possible to improve the educational out- comes for children from poor families without improving the incomes of their families. In a sense, higher income is a necessary take-off stage for advancement in education. Children whose family's income has increased are more likely to do well in school even though the school has not changed. Thus, educational performance is seen as a function of family income.

There is much that is very attractive in this policy proposal. Its one drawback is that the relationship between education and income is not simple. As shown elsewhere (Miller and Roby, 1970) the education of the parents rather than family income is highly associated with the educational performance of children. Despite this limita- tion, it is important not only to improve schools *but to increase the income of families in order to improve chil- dren's educational prospects.*

There are, of course, political obstacles to overcome in providing cash payments to families instead of spend- ing public funds for education. In many countries, how- ever, expenditures on education are undergoing critical assessment. The result may be that both cash and educa- tional programs lose, rather than that cash strategies benefit. This is an occurrence we would obviously wish to avoid.

*Stratum Mobility or Lessened Inequality.* The third level toward promoting social mobility enlarges on the second one. In doing so, it more sharply connects social policy with social mobility concerns. The emphasis is openly upon stratum, group, or collective mobility rather than upon individual mobility, aiming at promoting a particular type of stratum mobility rather than at in- creasing individual mobility. The type of stratum mo- bility to which we refer is that in which the economic, social, and/or political level of the bottom group in

society is improved relative to groups above it. At the same time no other group—not immigrants from outside the society and not a marginal group from within—is drawn into a new bottommost position. The objective is to redistribute income and other resources to groups at the bottom of the society so that the difference between them and higher-income groups is reduced (Miller, 1968). Furthermore, lessening income differences between groups reduces the (income) significance of individual social mobility.

Unlike the second-level approach, the concern here is not with educational take-off but with drastically changing the conditions of individuals. This may be done largely but not solely by directly increasing the income of families, a strategy that involves a variety of economic policies. The most important, perhaps, is the provision of transfer payments such as social security, family allowances, unemployment insurance, and the like to lower income groups.

Direct cash payments could be accompanied by indirect benefits or services. For example, as Elizabeth Durbin (1969) has pointed out, employers frequently pay white-collar workers when they are ill. This is a form of sickness benefit that is not generally extended to blue-collar workers, who are paid on an hourly basis. Thus a government program of sickness benefits reduces some of the differentials in well-being between white-collar workers and blue-collar workers. As Gorz (1965) and Wedderburn (1970) have shown, there is a wide range of other so-called fringe benefits that accentuates the inequalities of blue-collar workers.

Another tool for lessening inequality or improving stratum mobility is the tax system. A progressive tax system reduces the income of those at the top more than those at the bottom. Through evasion, complicated tax laws, and reliance on indirect taxes, the tax structure in many nations is much less progressive than is frequently believed. For example, despite the steeply rising tax rates for higher incomes, the distribution of incomes after taxes in the United States differs little from the distribution of income before taxes (Bishop, 1967). If statistics on tax avoidance and evasion were taken into consideration, the picture of apparent progressive effects of taxation would look even bleaker. This situation is not unique to the United States (Titmuss, 1962). Our guess is that major reforms in tax systems will be an important item in many countries in the next decade.

Economic policy specifically designed to aid low-income groups is another instrument to be used to promote stratum mobility. In the United States, for example, a policy aimed at continuously high employment would significantly aid low-income groups by drawing them into the labor force and encouraging their upgrading. Wooten (1963) has contended that in post-World War II Great Britain full employment improved the situation of the workers much more than the social welfare state improved it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Wooten (1963) notes, "The origins of this progress [of the British working class since World War II] are not far to seek. Overwhelmingly, the most important factor is the immense reduc-

Selective economic programs rather than aggregative economic programs will be important for groups that are lagging behind the rest of society. This is particularly so for isolated regional groups that do not benefit from general economic expansion. One such selective policy is enactment of a minimum-wage law, which tends to push up the wages of those at the bottom. On the other hand, Marris and Rein (forthcoming) contend on the basis of British experience that the pressure toward equity (fairness) rather than equality means that, over time, wage differentials and wage rates tend to be maintained even though there may be temporary compression or expansion. The conflict they detect between equity and equality deserves close attention.

Many countries are now pursuing—or attempting or contemplating pursuit of—an "incomes policy." Because of the pressures of inflation, such policies aim at restricting wages and prices. One tactic is for income policy boards to decide which occupations will be allowed to receive wage or salary increases. On a large scale, the question is a fundamental one (at least in market-oriented economies), for wages then are no longer regarded as an exclusively market-determined product. Incomes policy can be a way of increasing the stratum mobility of low-level groups without increasing the incomes of other groups. It also can be used to widen differentials between groups and improve the relative position of upper-income groups in society. The economic reform in Hungary, for example, has been criticized by Hegedus and Marcovitch (1969) because it widens differentials in order to increase, presumably, the motivation of managers to work more effectively. In the United States, Bluestone (1970) points out that there has never been explicit recognition of public manipulation of wage differentials, and yet, he notes, neither the federal corporate tax policy nor the government's expenditure policy has been neutral. Both policies have highly favored what are now core, high-wage industries.

The possibility of alternatives to individual occupational mobility as a way of improving one's situation does not mean that individual mobility has no significance. What may happen is that horizontal rather than vertical mobility becomes important. The desirable situation is certainly not zero mobility. Obviously, some jobs are more attractive to different people for various reasons at various points in their lives. Rather than concentrating on a simple upward trajectory of occupations and careers,

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tion in the rate of unemployment." In an analysis of the Michigan Employment Security Commission's 1962 data on 2,114 of Detroit's hard-core unemployed ("hard-core unemployment" was defined as twenty-six weeks or more of joblessness at the time of the survey), Howard Wachtel (1970) found that 40 percent of the hard-core unemployed had been employed in their last job for more than five years. Following his study, Wachtel recommended that "rather than defining hard-core unemployment in terms of an individual's unemployment experiences as of a given point in time, an individual's unemployment experiences over the business cycle should be measured. In this way a more accurate focus on the size and character of hard-core unemployment would be obtained, permitting more meaningful research and policy concerning the problem of hard-core unemployment in the United States" (see also Reubens, 1970; Sinfield, 1970).

we might encourage individuals at different points in their lives to take on various kinds of jobs. This might mean more horizontal than vertical mobility. "Higher" and "lower" positions would be less important than having satisfying work at particular moments. (This is what happens to many women who discontinue working in a factory or office while their children are very young and then return; if their household and child-rearing roles were classified as "work," they would be involved in horizontal mobility.) The diminution of inequalities does not necessarily mean the end of mobility. Rather, occupational mobility may be the means of job satisfaction rather than the route to economic improvement.

### *Mobility as Target*

In the perspective that has been developing over the last decade and longer, social mobility seems affected not only by structural developments but by economic and social policy forces that deliberately change its patterns. In this perspective, a structural pressure is not regarded as having only one possible kind of response. Increased skills may be achievable in ways other than through increased formal schooling; enlarging the supply of workers in a field may not require that income inequalities be expanded. When social mobility is an important objective of public policy, the structural requirements to achieve it may be blunted. Policy may address itself not only to structural goals, such as economic growth, but to the objective of expanding stratum or individual mobility.

An important example is the matter of wage differentials. Generally, increasing the relative gain of a group is seen as stimulating the incentive to work. As Goldthorpe (1969) and Halsey (1970) have stated in important articles on inequality, any argument for increasing inequalities in order to promote motivation must be concretely and carefully scrutinized rather than taken for granted. Goldthorpe then points out that there are social and economic costs in increasing inequalities; he attributes much of worker discontent and work disruption to an anomic response because the norms of society are not acceptable due to the maintenance or aggravation of inequality.<sup>3</sup>

### *Broad Implications*

We conclude by pushing toward some of the wider implications of this paper. If mobility is to be analyzed as a policy question, that is, as a question of what a society wants, the study of it must drive toward the broader issues of economic and social policy and not rest with educational policy alone.

Social mobility and social equality should not be kept as separate discussions. Just as policy, data, and explanations need to be interwoven, social mobility and social equality need to be in part supplementary and interpenetrating perspectives and goals.

<sup>3</sup> As Wooten (1964) argues, moral considerations underlie the claims to higher wages even when these claims are couched in economic terms (see also Goldthorpe, 1969).

Mobility and equality concern more than income. They concern power, dignity, and respect. As we have pointed out, it is misleading to focus solely on the income component of well-being (Miller and Roby, 1970:120-121). One reason is that income does not completely define economic well-being. The second and more important reason is that there are social, psychological, and political characteristics of well-being that are not automatically produced by changes in income. In the United States among blacks, goals have become broader than economic security; they have become focused on political well-being around the slogan "black power." Sometimes, as Frances Piven (1970) contends, national policy fools people by substituting pseudo power for economic gain. But a genuine concern for mobility and equality requires more than a narrow attention to economic events.

Finally, we believe that it is essential for sociologists to turn to (and to be equipped to deal with) questions of economic policy. Until recently, the limited interest of sociologists in economics has focused principally on organizations, structures, and norms. But public economic policies are playing increasingly important roles in determining the operation of the economy and the effects of the economy upon social structure. Economists concentrate on a truncated but powerful theater of action; sociologists are largely unprepared to understand this theater and, therefore, do not understand its larger (social) import. This intellectual void harms both the development of effective and humane policy and the development and utilization of sociology.

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