

Welfare and Work

Frances Fox Piven

THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT THE BEARING OF THE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND WORK Opportunity Act (PRWOA) of 1996 on labor markets, and especially on the low-wage labor market. The nationwide debate that climaxed with the rollback of federal welfare responsibilities ignored this aspect of welfare policy. Instead, arguments fastened on questions of personal morality. A lax and too-generous welfare system was said to lead women to shun work in favor of habitual idleness and dependency. Welfare was also said to undermine sexual and family morality. Together these charges spurred something like a grand national revival movement to restore moral compulsion to the lives of the poor. Yet, throughout the long history of relief or welfare, charges that relief encouraged immorality always accompanied measures that worsened the terms of work for broad swaths of the population, as I have been at pains to argue elsewhere in work with Richard Cloward.¹ Here I will show that this episode of reform is no different.

To make my points about labor markets, I first discuss the grounds for the charge that the availability of welfare distorts the individual's choice to work or not to work. Then I turn to the larger question of the systemic effects of welfare policy on labor markets, particularly in the context of the specific conditions that characterize the American labor market in the 1990s. Finally, albeit necessarily briefly, I try to unravel some of the tangled connections between labor markets and family stability, the other electrified pole in the campaign against welfare. I will argue that, ironically, when labor market effects are taken into account, "welfare reform" is far more likely to weaken the actual families that exist in America than to restore them.



The public argument about welfare and work focuses on the impact of the dole on the choices of poor women, as well as on the debilitating psychological and subcultural consequences of those choices. Welfare use or "dependency" is thus cast as a problem of personal morality. Liberals, for their part, defend a more generous policy by arguing in the same vein, claiming that welfare use is justified because most recipients rely on welfare only for relatively short periods and do not in fact become welfare dependent (a claim that rests, however, on just how the

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count is made).² The defenders also argue that there are not enough jobs for the relatively unskilled women on welfare, especially in the inner cities where these women, many of whom are minorities, are concentrated. Some defenders also point to circumstances beyond the control of poor women that prevent them from working, such as the violence of abusive men who are alarmed at the prospect that their female partners will become independent.³ This, in sum, is an effort to legitimate the decisions of the poor women who turn to welfare.

The arguments made by the defenders have a good deal of truth. Yet they also skirt the central charge, that there is a tradeoff between welfare and work, and a more liberal welfare policy tilts individual choices toward welfare, while a restrictive policy tilts the other way. The skittishness is understandable, because acknowledging the tradeoff raises the question of whether it is morally right for a mother to choose welfare over work, a question on which the American public seems to have made up its mind by large majorities, at least for the time being.

The underlying idea of the tradeoff is clear, and it does make sense (Edin and Lein, 1997). It is the logic of incentives and disincentives. The economic rewards of work must be greater than the benefits available from unemployment insurance or social assistance or old age pensions. This is the ancient principle of “less eligibility,” a principle that asserts that even the lowest paid worker must fare better than the pauper. It is not the whole story, of course, since surviving on the dole can be demeaning, and people may want to work for other reasons than their wages. Nevertheless, if people can survive without working, and survive in a manner judged reasonable by the standards of their community, a good many will, at least if the work available to them offers only dreary toil, low wages, and little reason for pride. It follows also that if there is no way of surviving except through low-wage drudgery, most people will work. The logic of the new welfare policies from this point of view is simply to eliminate the possibility of a welfare-to-work tradeoff for many women, and to worsen the terms of the welfare option for many others.

Thus, the new lifetime limits of five years mean that many women will have no recourse but to search for whatever work they can get. Moreover, unless a state opts out of this requirement, cash assistance is limited to two months, and in any case to no more than two years. This means that many women will be required to work in exchange for whatever benefits they get. Besides the time limit on cash assistance, the federal law also establishes “quotas” backed up by fiscal penalties. Twenty-five percent of the recipients in a state must be working at least 20 hours a week by the end of 1997, rising to 50% and 30 hours by the year 2002. The states can meet these requirements either by cutting people off, or by assigning them to some kind of “workfare” activity, for enough hours to equal the amount of their welfare and food stamp benefits (sometimes but not always calculated at the minimum wage).

Finally, federal funding now takes the form of a block grant to the states, leaving them free to set even more restrictive policies. Many states are legislating

tighter time limits, along with benefit cuts encouraged by the increasingly hostile climate toward welfare and new sanctions that mean reduced or terminated benefits for one or another kind of presumably undesirable behavior. The states are also freer to use administrative procedures that increase the rate of erroneous bureaucratic denials. A recent study by the Citizens Budget Commission of New York City, for example, found that the city's increasingly vigorous procedures to root out welfare fraud had resulted in the cutoff of aid to thousands of eligible people.⁴ Indeed, even before the new legislation had passed, many states had initiated more restrictive policies under "waivers" approved by the Clinton administration. Wisconsin, for example, had embarked on a program to simply eliminate most cash assistance in favor of "the principle of immediate, universal work — no exemptions, exceptions, or delays."⁵

I think it obvious that these policies will succeed in pushing or cajoling or humiliating women who are now on welfare to search for work, and a good many of them will find it, especially if unemployment levels remain relatively low. I should note that many current welfare recipients already do work, although most do not report their earnings.⁶ They rely on income from part-time or irregular work to supplement low and declining benefits. The new requirements will necessarily disrupt these informal arrangements and lead to lower family incomes.

A recently published study by Katherine Edin and Laura Lein (1997) makes clear how necessary these irregular sources of income are for these families. It also illuminates the calculus underlying welfare or work choices among poor women raising children. Edin and Lein conducted a careful study of the household economies of two groups of poor mothers, one on welfare, another in low-wage jobs. Both groups lived precariously, managing to stay afloat only through elaborate stratagems, including some income from work and contributions from family and friends. The women and their children endured periods of serious hardship nevertheless. For the most part, those on welfare did not match the caricature of people who have become "dependent" on welfare. Most of them had job experience — on average 4.2 years — and they expected to leave welfare for the labor force again. However, they had concluded that they could not afford to quit welfare for a low-wage job, and many were trying to acquire the education or skills that would make work a more practical alternative. As for the working mothers who do not use welfare, the Edin and Lein data show that they actually had a harder time than the women on welfare. Their income was a little higher, but their expenses were also higher and they worried more about the supervision of their children. These women worked nevertheless because it made them feel better about themselves.

When welfare is no longer an option, however, or when the terms worsen because benefits fall or harassment increases, or when stigma intensifies, more women will inevitably work. The press has searched out the stories of such women and reported delighted accounts of women pushed into the workforce by the new

policies. The stories are told as morality tales that exemplify individual moral rejuvenation through work. We read of an Opal or a Shari prodded by the new policies to pull herself together and get a job, and of how her life and those of her children improved.⁷ There are, of course, other stories, of women who don't manage to find work or hold their families together, and as time goes on, there are likely to be more of these, especially if the economy weakens. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that when the welfare-work tradeoff worsens, or is eliminated altogether, more poor women will work. Moreover, there will even be a payoff. Edin and Lein show that welfare makes sense for poor women raising children. Yet it also exacts a toll in stigma and lost pride, and the din of publicity about the presumed moral deficits of recipients along with new sanctions necessarily raises that toll.

This helps explain the sharp decline in caseloads, by 25% from January 1993 to summer 1997, allowing the president and the press to proclaim that the new policies are a success.⁸ To be sure, almost the entire drop occurred well before the implementation of the PRWOA, and the most important reasons are probably improvements in the job market and demographic shifts.⁹ Nevertheless, welfare restrictiveness is a factor as well. Many states have been operating for several years under waiver plans that freed them to employ sanctions that could result in the termination of aid for one or another kind of disapproved behavior. We should not discount the impact of these increasingly restrictive welfare practices, or the threat of more restrictions in the future. As the tradeoff worsens and the level of insult rises, many poor mothers shrink from applying for welfare and exert themselves to find other ways of making do.



Although the impact of the tradeoff on individual decisions must be confronted, it is not my main point. Political talk notwithstanding, welfare is not mainly an institution to regulate individual morality. It is also, and more importantly, a labor market institution.¹⁰ The impact of welfare cutbacks should be evaluated not simply — and perhaps not mainly — in terms of the morality of the individual choices it encourages poor women to make as they struggle to survive. Rather, we have to consider the *systemic* consequences of the new policies. These are new institutional arrangements that will affect large aggregates of people, and these cumulative effects will alter the terms of the labor market, especially its lower tiers, where poor and unskilled women compete for work. There are moral issues here, too, but they are issues that pertain to the social justice of our institutions, to the fairness of the choices that people face, rather than to the morality of the choices they make when confronted with narrowly limited alternatives.

In other words, the welfare-work tradeoff needs to be writ large to appreciate its full significance. Public programs that provide people with income, at least if the income is not conditional on participation in the labor market, create a floor

under wages. Hence, the persuasive comparative evidence that shows more generous social programs are correlated with higher wages, especially at the bottom end of the wage scale where social benefit levels can approach wage levels. Haveman points out that in countries with narrow and narrowing income protections (such as unemployment insurance or social assistance for poor families), including the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Japan, the relative wages of low-skilled workers fell during the 1980s, by 10 to 25%. Yet in continental European countries with more generous benefits, the relative wages of the unskilled remained stable, and despite rising unemployment, measures of income inequality remained substantially lower than in the U.S. (Haveman, 1997; OECD, 1994). Briefly, the higher the benefits, the higher the wages, and the lower the benefits, the lower the wages.

More recently, Elaine McCrate has shown the close link between state-to-state variations in welfare benefit levels and variations in the earnings of young women with a high school degree or less. McCrate (1996) combined the benefits available from AFDC, food stamps, and Medicaid and showed that wages fell by three percent with each state-to-state drop of \$100 in the benefit package. Michael Hout (1997) develops McCrate's data to show that cuts in the real value of AFDC benefits during the 1980s combined with the erosion of the minimum wage to drag down the wages of less-educated women by 14%.

In a nutshell, the new welfare policies will lower the floor that welfare has constructed under wages. As time limits go into effect, fewer women will be able to choose welfare, and the combination of benefit cuts, administrative obstacles, and rising public stigma will also make welfare a less and less tolerable alternative so that only the most desperate will turn to it. This means that a steady stream of hundreds of thousands of poor women will flow into the low-wage end of the labor market, competing with those who are already there. That segment of the labor market is still glutted, despite a tighter labor market overall. Jared Bernstein (1997) of the Economic Policy Institute reports that the unemployment rate among women with a high school degree or less is 13.6%, and the underemployment rate (which includes people who have given up the search for work) is 24.3%. The rates for minorities are substantially higher. In other words, women barred from welfare aid will compete in a segment of the labor market that is already saturated with job seekers, with the result that low wages will be driven lower, particularly in states like California and New York with large welfare populations. Mishel and Schmitt (1995) estimate that wages for the bottom 30% of workers will fall by 11.9%; in California, the drop will be 17.8% and in New York, 17.1%.

Another way that welfare affects the labor market is through policies that make benefits conditional on mandatory work. There is a long history of such programs, called "relief in aid of wages" in the 19th-century English Speenhamland plan. Karl Polanyi's seminal work on Speenhamland castigated the plan, and 19th-century English poor relief generally, for driving agricultural wages down, and

thus deepening rural poverty and demoralization. Polanyi's analysis confused relief with work relief, however. He looked at the effects of the Speenhamland system of work relief on wages and morale, and attributed those effects to relief generally. However, relief unconditioned by forced work would almost surely have raised wages, for then local farmers would have had to offer more to attract workers. Speenhamland, by contrast, gave the poor no choice but to offer themselves to local farmers for whatever they could get, with the parish relief system supplementing that amount according to a formula that presumably guaranteed the "right to live." It was this arrangement that drove wages and morale down more generally for the rural population, for those not on relief had to compete with the minimal earnings of the parish poor.¹¹

Consider the parallels. The new mandatory work requirements are leading states and localities to institute "workfare" programs that replicate key features of the Speenhamland plan. Recipients are assigned to some kind of work activity in exchange for their grants. We have had welfare work programs before, but the new requirements affect many more people and the terms are now harsher. The education and training activities that once often counted for work no longer do; fewer exemptions are allowed; work rules have been stiffened; and recipients are being assigned not only to public and nonprofit agencies, but also to private employers (who receive substantial tax credits and often subsidies paid for by welfare "grant diversions"). Meanwhile, hotly contested disputes are being waged on both the state and federal levels over the question of whether these people are in fact "workers" and therefore entitled to the protections of 20th-century labor laws. Much hinges on how these questions will be resolved, including, for example, whether welfare recipients assigned to work are entitled to the minimum wage,¹² to unemployment insurance, or to OSHA protections, as well as the applicability of a host of state labor laws.

When the Department of Labor ruled that welfare workers were indeed covered by some federal labor laws, and particularly by the minimum wage provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act, Republicans in Congress tried to reverse the ruling during negotiations over the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (see Greenberg, 1997). They failed, but Speaker Newt Gingrich vowed to make the issue his central legislative effort this fall.¹³ Needless to say, in the absence of these protections, workfare means the creation of a virtually indentured labor force of welfare recipients. This is, of course, hard on recipients. More to our point here, welfare recipients assigned to workfare no longer enjoy the privilege of calculating the welfare-work tradeoff. If they refuse to work, they will not receive welfare. Thus, they constitute a reservoir of exceedingly vulnerable labor for employers. Since the welfare budget pays all or part of such wages as they receive, and tax credits to employers may cancel out the rest, they are also exceedingly cheap. The threat of competition with vulnerable and cheap welfare workers may well have pervasive labor market effects.

The early reports are worrisome. New York City is a workfare pioneer, because it began its program before the federal welfare law was passed, with recipients who were on state and city-administered general assistance. Only recently have former AFDC recipients also been channeled into workfare. Some 40,000 job slots are now filled by people who wear the orange vests that are the workfare uniform, and the numbers are expected to rise to 65,000 job slots in 1998. Welfare recipients clean the parks, streets, and subways, or do routine clerical work in exchange for welfare and food stamp benefits, often without the regulation equipment issued to other workers, or the job-related protections, and sometimes even without elementary decencies like bathrooms and lockers. Some recipients who were in school are being forced to drop out in order to take workfare assignments. Eight thousand have already been pushed out of the City University where, like the women in the Edin and Lein sample, they were trying to equip themselves to get a step ahead of the dead-end jobs that characterize the low-wage end of the job market (see Mogulescu, 1997). Such evidence as we have suggests that workfare does nothing to help people get ahead. Only miniscule numbers in New York City have moved into regular jobs in the agencies where they were assigned as workfare recipients.¹⁴

Though workfare doesn't lead to jobs for recipients, it is likely to worsen conditions for people who do have jobs, by depressing wages and displacing workers. Some 20,000 municipal jobs were lost in New York City during the last few years. For example, to do the work that unionized workers once did, 6,300 workfare recipients were assigned to the Parks Department by early 1996 and 4,300 to Sanitation. James Butler, president of the Municipal Hospital Workers Union Local 420, tells how workfare recipients were used in one municipal agency:

At the Health and Hospital Corporation, a total of 472 [workfare] workers...as of March 4, 1996, filled positions that had previously been occupied by 896 HHC employees who accepted the severance packages offered by the Giuliani Administration.... [T]hey were paid much more than the \$4.25 per hour that the workfare workers replacing them are receiving. Not only is the city getting the same services for much less money, but because these workers are filling these jobs under the threat of the loss of their welfare benefits, they are, in effect, indentured servants.¹⁵

Other cities are now following in New York City's footsteps, although in cities without New York's large public sector, the emphasis is likely to be on placements in private business. So far, we have only scattered reports, but these suggest that thousands of companies are signing up for tens of thousands of welfare workers. In Salt Lake City, the manager of a temporary agency told *The New York Times* that "without the welfare people...we would have had to raise the wage...maybe 5 percent" (see Uchitelle, 1997: A1). In Baltimore, nine schools did not renew

contracts with firms that supplied janitors at \$6 an hour and instead brought in workfare workers who cost them \$1.50 an hour because the welfare grant is diverted to the employer (see Hall, 1997). No wonder the unions are in a panic over the threat that existing workers will be displaced, especially relatively better-paid union workers (see Piven, 1997).



So far I have fastened on the labor market consequences of welfare considered mainly as a set of material incentives. Yet material practices are also cultural practices, in the simple sense that they help to shape the way people think about themselves and their world. Conversely, so are cultural or symbolic practices also material, in the sense that by helping to shape the way people think about themselves and their world, they help to account for their responses to material conditions.

In key ways, poor relief has not changed very much since it emerged some five centuries ago in Europe during the waning days of feudalism. From the beginning, relief or welfare practices firmly and often brutally singled out and punished those of the poor who were not workers. This was accomplished in part simply by the pitiful sustenance they were allowed, and in that sense, material practices had cultural consequences. It was also accomplished through public rituals of degradation, by the brand and the stocks, by the surveillance to which paupers had to submit, and by the penal regimen of the workhouse. These practices were not intended simply to punish and chasten the pauper. They were also designed to teach a broader lesson to all who observed the rituals, a lesson about the moral imperative of work and the fate that would befall those who shirked.

Family and sexual morality has always figured largely in this process of ritual degradation. The magistrates who supervised the administration of relief in Lyon in the early 16th century monitored the intimate behavior of the paupers who turned to them, as well as their work behavior. The English social critics who called for the elimination of relief to the poor in their own houses in the 19th century named licentious behavior prominently among their complaints. As the Poor Law Commission of 1834 said, outdoor relief had generated a “train of evils,” including the loss of responsibility, prudence, and temperance. In a similar vein, the state and county officials of the American South made “unsuitable homes” — meaning the presence of a child born out of wedlock — grounds for cutting thousands of black women from the relief rolls (see Piven and Cloward, 1988).

The contemporary campaign strikes similar notes by reiterating charges that welfare encourages sexual license and family irresponsibility among the poor. These public complaints are part of the larger ritual of degradation. So are the new procedures for monitoring and sanctioning recipient families for one or another kind of disapproved behavior.¹⁶ Then there are the investigative procedures that are proliferating among the states, presumably to root out fraud, including multiple investigations to certify eligibility, “finger imaging” (or finger printing) applicants, and requiring them to submit to drug tests.

Workfare is not the workhouse. People are not incarcerated, nor are family members separated and then made to break stones on diets so meager that only the strong survive. Still, the New York City women in orange vests, carrying huge trash baskets to which their lunches in plastic bags are tied, are participants in a ritual oriented to a wide public. Mickey Kaus (1986) explains it well:

[W]hat's most important is not whether sweeping streets or cleaning buildings helps Betsy Smith, single teenage parent and high school dropout, learn skills that will help her find a private sector job. It is whether the prospect of sweeping streets and cleaning buildings for a welfare grant will deter Betsy Smith from having the illegitimate child that drops her out of school and onto welfare in the first place — or, failing that, whether the *sight* of Betsy Smith sweeping streets after having her illegitimate child will discourage her younger sisters and neighbors from doing as she did.

In other words, the public display of the humiliated recipient will terrify her sisters and neighbors with the threat of what awaits them, and thus drive them to take any job at any wage.



These policies take on added significance when we consider them in relation to broader shifts in the labor market. A much-commented anomaly of this period is that, while official unemployment is at a historic low, wages are not rising. A large part of the reason is the growing insecurity of much work. The key word is restructuring, and it means the increasing reliance of employers (or the threatened reliance) on outsourcing, or on new forms of less-than-secure employment, such as the temporary or involuntary part-time employment that became the symbolic rallying point of the United Parcel Service strike, or on “independent contractors,” who do the work that regular employees once did, but without benefits or job security, or the right to unionize.¹⁷

Pervasive job insecurity has altered the power balance between workers and employers. Workers worried about their jobs don't bid for higher wages, or they don't join unions that will fight for higher wages. As a consequence, the business share of the American economic pie is growing, and the worker share is shrinking. Corporate profit shares have risen to a 30-year high, largely as a result of the successful restraint of wages.¹⁸ Meanwhile, executive salaries have spun upward to new heights of excess, while the real earnings of manufacturing workers declined throughout the 1980s, and the lowest-wage workers fell further and further behind (see Kuttner, 1997).

The striking redistribution of the American economic product from wages to profits argues a broad shift in class power. So does the fact that public policies have played an important role in the process, partly by increasing worker insecurity.

Some of those policies, including the lagging level of the legislated minimum wage and eroding federal protections for labor unions, have been much discussed elsewhere. Here I wish to make the point that welfare cutbacks are only the most publicized of a range of cutbacks in social policies, the consequence of which will be to systematically increase the insecurity of workers.

Take, for example, the Social Security program. When the program was initiated in the mid-1930s, it was with the goal of *removing* older people from a labor market where they competed with other workers for scarce jobs. Now, however, the direction of policy development has been reversed. The age at which people become eligible for pensions is already being gradually raised, from 65 to 67, with talk of eligibility at age 70 in the future. The rationale is that the old are healthier than they once were. The consequence, though, will be to ensure that millions of older people continue to work or search for work. Meanwhile, those already receiving Social Security are encouraged to remain in the workforce by new regulations that reduce the penalties on earnings. So far, these changes have not attracted much attention because they are being implemented gradually. There is the looming prospect, however, as talk of the “crisis” in Social Security financing becomes more strident, of additional major rollbacks, including downward revisions in benefit levels and upward revisions in the age of eligibility.¹⁹ Together these changes would result in a flood of many millions of pensioners and erstwhile pensioners bidding for jobs, especially low-wage jobs.

Then there are the new policies toward immigrants, some of which were also incorporated in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. Many legal immigrants will no longer be entitled to Medicaid, Food Stamps, or cash assistance. Much of the public seems to go along with these exclusions, presumably because they don’t think immigrants should enter the country unless they can support themselves. Yet no informed observer believes that denying these benefits will actually be a significant deterrent to immigration. Indeed, the conservative think tanks and business lobbyists that backed the benefit cutoffs, and the congressional bloc that pushed them through, also opposed new restrictions on immigration. The objective, apparently, is not to keep immigrants out, but to bring them in, and keep them vulnerable to low-wage employers. Denying benefits ensures that once here, they will be without any protections to tide them over in periods of adversity or to supplement low wages.²⁰

Consider the cutbacks in Food Stamp benefits, by almost 20%, reducing the average benefit per meal from 80 cents to 66 cents.²¹ These cuts will affect not only welfare recipients and the elderly, but also the working poor. Indeed, an especially harsh provision limits unemployed adults without children to three months of food stamps during any three-year stint of unemployment. Again, the likely effects seem clear. Public benefits were intended in part to help the unemployed weather joblessness without being forced to accept sharply lower wages and working conditions. The withdrawal of those benefits inevitably will have the reverse effect.

These policy changes all work to squeeze wages and raise business profits, contributing to the seismic shift of the last decades in the power balance between employers and employees. Not surprisingly, the business community mobilized to promote the policies that weakened workers, first by funding the think tanks and the policy intellectuals who developed the arguments against government social spending, and then by orchestrating the media campaigns that made the arguments popular.²²

This public campaign helps to explain an otherwise inexplicable aspect of the welfare debacle. Despite the effects of the new policies in increasing worker insecurity widely, popular unease has been channeled into an upsurge of indignation at the poor, especially poor women, and most especially minority poor women. The intensification of the rituals of degradation to which women on welfare are exposed also contributes to this indignation. I said these rituals increased the anxiety of insecure low-wage workers. But they also give them a perverse reason for pride, even for a sense of martyrdom, just because they have through their efforts, sometimes extraordinary efforts, managed to keep themselves and their families above the mudslinging of welfare.

Another part of the reason for popular indignation has to do with the intense emotions provoked by the charge that welfare encourages sexual and family immorality, which in fact became the dominant argument for welfare cutbacks as the congressional debate proceeded. Presumably, young women who knew they could turn to welfare engaged in irresponsible sex, and young men turned their backs on the babies they had fathered because they would be supported by welfare. In truth, the sex and family argument had little support in research data, if only because family forms do not change easily, and when they do, large-scale social changes are almost surely the cause, not welfare benefits.²³ Nevertheless, repeated invocation of sexual and family transgressions also help explain why a wider public, including many of the low-wage workers who were likely to be harmed by the effects of the new policies, nevertheless enthusiastically supported the need to “end welfare as we know it.”²⁴

If welfare is an unlikely cause of changes in family structure, the labor market developments to which I have pointed, and to which welfare cutbacks are contributing, may indeed affect family forms. To compensate for declining or stagnant incomes, more people are working and they are also working substantially longer hours.²⁵ Needing extra money, more workers hold two or more jobs. Indeed, Bluestone and Rose (1997: 66), after carefully reviewing the data, conclude that “in the span of just two decades, working husband-wife couples increased their annual market work input by a cycle-adjusted 684 hours of four months of full-time work.” Moreover, most of the new work time is the result of rising levels of market work by women.

Inevitably, this means time and effort taken away from family work, from caring for children and preparing family meals and keeping track of family

members needs and activities, or what Wendy Mink (1995) calls mother work. Whether this is something to celebrate or not can be debated. Clearly, for some women it means expanded life alternatives, a chance for self-realization, for status, and for a good salary. For others, it means the intensification of work and stress. For many, it probably means some of both. Yet my point here is a different one. Family stability requires, if not mother work, then someone to do family work, to track the children, organize the family occasions, maintain the domestic space, and create a sense of nurturing. When no one does that because no one is there, families as we knew them do indeed weaken.

This brings me to the final irony of the campaign against welfare. Cutbacks that were justified by invoking traditional family norms will almost surely contribute to the continued erosion of family life in the United States, not only among the families headed by poor women, but also among the many Americans already faltering under the burdens of family and work.

NOTES

1. See Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward (1993, 1987a, 1987b).
2. If we count as welfare users the total population that moves on and off welfare over a period of years, the argument is correct. Most people who turn to welfare do not remain on the rolls very long. However, some do, and if we use as the base the population on the rolls at any one time, about half are in fact long-term users of welfare.
3. See Raphael (1997).
4. See *The New York Times* (August 12, 1997).
5. See DeParle (1997: 37). DeParle describes Jason Turner, the architect of the program, as someone so jolted at the idea that women existed on government charity that, in junior high, while other students scribbled football plays, he designed plans to put women on welfare to work. DeParle appears to be approving of this odd childhood.
6. See Harris (1993) and Spalter-Roth, Burr, Shaw, and Hartman (1994).
7. Shari Pharr was featured in McCormick and Thomas (1997); Opal Caples was featured in DeParle (1997).
8. See "CLASP Update" (May 21, 1997, Center for Law and Social Policy, Washington, D.C.). See also editorial, *New York Times* (August 20, 1997).
9. This conclusion was reached in a report by the Council of Economic Advisors, "Explaining the Decline in Welfare Receipt, 1993–96." The report is discussed in "CLASP Update" (Center for Law and Social Policy, Washington, D.C., May 21, 1997).
10. On this point, see Freeman (1994).
11. See Polanyi (1957). See also the discussion in Piven and Cloward (1987a).
12. The observation is that the minimum wage typically means that work hours are adjusted so that welfare and food stamp benefits are equivalent to the minimum wage. The fairness of this is disputed, since other of the working poor are often eligible for food stamps. In any case, the principle of making a range of benefits subject to the calculation of a minimum wage cash equivalent could quickly make the minimum wage requirement meaningless.
13. See *New York Times* (August 23, 1997).
14. The city does not keep records of what happens to the recipients who move through workfare. However, even the claims of city officials amount to an absurdly low placement rate of less than one percent. See Krueger, Accles, and Wernick (1997).

15. *Ibid.* (p. 10).
16. The much talked about “learnfare” program, which sanctions families by cutting benefits if adolescent children are truant from school, is an example. The program was pioneered by the State of Wisconsin, which expanded the program even after research by the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee demonstrated it did not improve school attendance. See Pawasarat et al. (1992).
17. See *The New York Times* (July 20, 1997) and Bluestone and Rose (1997).
18. See the “Week in Review,” *The New York Times* (August 10, 1997). See also Mishel (1997) and Krugman (1996).
19. See, for example, Peterson (1996). Since social security recipients are numerous and well organized, benefits cuts run the risk of serious opposition. The stratagem being floated now is a statistical sleight of hand where benefits would be lowered by reducing the official rate of inflation, which is the basis for calculating annual cost-of-living adjustments. One estimate is that, in high-cost areas of the country, a one percent reduction in the cost of living formula over 10 years would reduce real benefits by 10%. See Nelson (1995).
20. American employers have always lobbied for a policy of open borders for immigrants, and closed borders for goods. On business opposition to restrictions on immigration in the current period, see Schmitt (1996).
21. The estimate is from Henwood (1996).
22. A number of studies have begun to document the role of business in the campaign against government programs. See, for example, Covington (1997). On the role of business in the campaign against welfare specifically, see Post (1996). See also Williams (1996).
23. There is by now a large volume of research on this question. See, for example, Hoynes (1995), Lichter, McLaughlin, and Ribar (1997), McLanahan and Casper (1995), and Moffitt (1995).
24. An Associated Press poll in the summer of 1996 found large majorities favoring time limits, although they also thought government should provide training and jobs. See “CLASP Update” (July 2, 1996, Center on Law and Social Policy, Washington, D.C.).
25. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, between 1976 and 1993, the average employed man added 100 hours per year, while the average employed woman increased her work year by 233 hours (reported in the *Left Business Observer*, No. 77, May 14, 1997: 8). Freeman reports that labor-force participation in the United States has risen from 65 to 71% of the population since 1974, while comparable figures for OECD countries show a decline from 65 to 60%. See Freeman (1997). This trend is usually reported as an American success, but its meaning is ambiguous, as when women who are already unpaid domestic workers, or students, are forced into the labor market solely by the stagnant or declining earnings of primary earners.

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