

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

YANNICK LEMEL and HEINZ-HERBERT NOLL (eds.), *Changing Structures of Inequality: A Comparative Perspective*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003 (paperback edition), 461 p.

There are several strengths in this tenth volume of an ambitious, state-of-the-art effort at comparative charting of social change in selected countries. First, the current volume both more narrowly concentrates on inequality alone and yet has a broader focus in comparing five countries: France, Germany, Canada, Spain, and the United States. Second, this volume shares with all previous ones a strong empirical grounding. Theoretical statements without empirical support are simply not tolerated as anything more than questions here. Third, all of the analyses cover significant periods of time and thus avoid the fallacies of snapshot theory. Finally, the editors have imposed a common set of concepts and issues with some success; the volume has more coherence than most comparable readers. Despite large differences in data sources, conceptual frameworks, and analytical methodologies, the chapters share the same mission. All in all, then, the volume succeeds reasonably well.

The central question of the book is whether traditional analyses of social class and stratification can still capture today's social structures. The Introduction lists "quite a number of general trends of social change ... challenging the traditional view of a structure of social inequality which is mainly ... based on economic relations" (5). These trends include demographic changes, a rise in the general level of living, the expansion of the welfare state and of the service sector, increased access to higher education, increasing female labour force participation, changing gender roles, increasing saliency of race, ethnicity and nationality, and the emergence of cultural consumption and lifestyle as dividers of social strata. All of these trends affect inequality structures, but do they reduce inequality? In the end the editors conclude that not only does inequality persist, but that it persists in certain given structures. The atomization of society has not taken place: "Inequality still seems to be structured by collective or social characteristics" (438).

The first half of the book presents the "research traditions" of the five countries. Each chapter leads to some findings of interest. To give some examples, Lemel's chapter on France shows how technical details such as occupational classification codes tend to delimit the analysis of inequality. Noll's chapter on Germany documents that work-based socioeconomic status has lost some of its former dominance. Langlois' chapter on Quebec

and Canada discusses the complexity of stratification analysis in a two-nation country and how this charter-group division extends to analytical concepts. After Del Campo's chapter on Spain and Kingston's chapter on the United States, Theodore Caplow rounds out the discussion by pointing to the diverse effects of diverse trends: "Whether we consider economic classes or social classes ... no class scheme can now be accurately fitted to ... these national societies" (182).

The "substantial analyses" making up the book's second half contain the "comparative perspective" announced in the title. Income is dealt with by Glatzer and Hauser, who conclude that "the long-term hope for greater income equality is challenged in all countries," but most of all in the United States (214). Chauvel discusses education, while Forsé and Lemel present a chapter on status consistency. The discussions are lucid throughout, but sometimes inconclusive. The authors admit that some results may be in doubt because of measurement problems.

Bahr, Bös, Caldwell, and Maratou-Alipranti's particularly insightful chapter on international migration and inequality is one of the best in the book. Migration is always treated as a system rather than just as individual acts and adaptations. This system "connects international inequalities to inequality within each country, for immigration often produces new inequalities ... or exacerbates existing cultural and economic divisions" (276). While there is now a convergence in immigration policy and, to some extent, in citizenship policy, both immigrant status and citizenship tend to lose their value in defining access to social benefits. Factors other than migration tend to be the key determinants of social inequality. Lemieux and Möhle provide the final "substantial analysis" on gender inequality, i.e. "the unequal access by women relative to men to material resources, status, power and privileges" (333). The choice of these definitional terms already alerts the reader that while the gender focus may be new, the analytical apparatus is not.

Kingston, Langlois, Lemel, and Noll's final chapter on "the structuring effect of social class in four societies" represents the culmination of the book. And what a disappointment it must be for those still clinging to Marxist concepts! Mobility between classes is shown to be so large that common social origins simply cannot be claimed. Social interaction across class lines are the rule rather than the exception. Class voting has declined strongly over the past generation. Overall, then, this comparative analysis of five societies (only four in the final chapter) concludes that: 1) classes are not demographically well-formed groups; 2) individuals do not generally inherit their class position; 3) geographic and occupational mobility undermine traditional class analysis; and 4) political parties are not defined by distinctive class bases. The authors contend not only that the grand narrative of Marxian theory has not been played out in history, but that even on a more modest analytical level, the structuration of modern society by class is hardly prominent or pervasive. Debates about the impact of class are therefore largely moot (416).

Despite the many positive contributions of the volume, one criticism must be noted. Unfortunately, the work suffers from editorial sloppiness, including various awkward translations such as “high class” for upper class (121), a wrong chapter title in the table of contents, confusion of equality and inequality (9), and even a typo on the back cover of the book. Nevertheless, Lemel and Noll’s edited volume is useful, empirically grounded, and theoretically informed.

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