

Whom Does the Advocate Planner Serve? (Part Two)

Additional Commentaries

But Which Advocate Planner?

SHERRY R. ARNSTEIN

Frances Piven argues that advocacy planning is a disservice to the poor because it diverts them from street protests. It negates the need for political mobilization of the ghetto, she says, and therefore the poor people's plans can easily be ignored, circumvented or rejected by the powerholders.

I share her jaundiced view of *this model* of advocacy planning, which was conceived and originally promoted by well-meaning, socially oriented city planners and architects. I do not share her view of other, more recent models that have emerged as a result of significant input from ghetto leaders and social planners.

Under the original formulation of advocacy, the planners could indeed be playing into the hands of politicians by "coaxing ghetto leaders off the streets." Under the more recent and multidisciplinary models, political mobilization of the poor is viewed as a *sine qua non* for successful negotiation of the ghetto-developed plan.

With the broader conceptualizations of advocacy, communities are obtaining technical assistance from teams of specialists, including social planners, physical planners, lawyers and com-

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munity organizers, or from one or more generalists with a mix of such technical skills.

These technicians are hired by a community group to work on a three-pronged approach to community development. Simultaneously they help the group (1) to become increasingly more representative and accountable to the neighborhood, (2) to conceptualize what programmatic approaches will benefit the community and to define which trade-offs can be supported at the negotiating stage, and (3) to design the political strategies needed to achieve the group's priorities.

The newer model views the planning process *per se* as only one prong. To teach the have-nots to become physical and/or social planners is not an objective of this process. Rather, the model aims at aiding the poor to reach increased levels of sophistication about what makes the city system (and subsystems) tick, to learn who and where the powerholders are and which levers to press to effect action, and to incorporate such sophistication into concrete programmatic approaches.

In short, the community group develops the capability to design political socioeconomic plans that effectively dent the status quo instead of unwittingly supporting palliative approaches which actually maintain it. In this way the planning process becomes a tactic by which the poor can anticipate the traditional Mickey Mouse games that debase them and prepare a sufficient store of chips to play the game and come out ahead.

Such an advocacy-planning model does not preclude street strategies. On the contrary, it incorporates them into a community group's spectrum of possible actions and reactions to be drawn upon when appropriate. It recognizes that the issue is not whether the poor need sticks or pencils to achieve social equity. The fact is that they need both: sticks to gain and hold the attention of the powerholders, and pencils to articulate their priorities and aspirations.

Advocacy Planning Polarizes the Issues

PAUL AND LINDA DAVIDOFF

Advocacy in planning consists in developing and presenting plans that advance the interests of a particular group or class, rather than that of "the public interest" or the "general good," however defined. We have argued that all planning is advocate planning; whether it recognizes itself as such or not; and we feel that the growing movement for advocacy planning on behalf of the poor is a step forward in broadening the process of planning to include formerly unrepresented groups. To the extent that planning is carried on, it should be carried on in behalf of the poor as well as of the rich.

Writing from the perspective of an ideological advocate planner, Frances Piven contributes the worthwhile warning that participation in the planning process may deflect potentially more important or more effective political activity. Piven's view of political activity for the poor and nonwhite seems, however, to lack a sense of the process by which low-income and nonwhite communities reach decisions about appropriate courses of group action.

Assuming that we agree that it is sound practice for those seeking social change to plan the acts required to produce the desired objectives, then planners are required. The planners may exclude, include, or be limited to professional planners. If the planners for minority groups are middle-class white professionals, like Piven and ourselves, then manipulation of the clients by those professionals and imposition of the professionals' ideas upon the clients will always be a potential danger.

Neither of these outcomes need raise problems if we accept the elitist notion that the professional knows best about what the client should do. If we reject the elitist notion of social change, as we do, then a planning process prior to action calls for participation by the group for whose benefit the action is planned, and poor people and blacks must therefore be "plan-

At the time of this debate, Paul and Linda Davidoff were Director and Research Associate, respectively, of Suburban Action, a nonprofit institute for community research and action, located in White Plains, New York.

ners"; that is, they must have some set of concepts to guide them in making decisions about developing their political power.

In another sense, too, the poor must be planners and must have the assistance of planners. Piven stresses the importance of street demonstrations and "making trouble" as appropriate forms of political expression for the poor. But what are the demonstrations about? A demonstration is an exercise in creating public pressure (power) to implement a series of demands for change in a situation which the demonstrators find intolerable. The formulation and presentation of these demands—as well as the massing of force to support them—are at the heart of mass action for social change. This is where advocacy can be of assistance: to help people draw up their demands on a given part of the power structure. The welfare-rights movement, in which Piven has played a key role, provides many examples of the close relationship between the development of demands (rescind certain welfare-budget cutbacks, drop work requirements, provide a decent guaranteed minimum income) and the creation of mass demonstrations to back up these demands.

Bringing poor people into the process of preparing and presenting demands is not, as Piven unfortunately seems to imply, involving them in something that is beyond their intellectual capacity. It is part of building a movement whose leaders are capable both of seeing what is wrong with their society and of organizing to do something to change it.

The difficulty Piven perceives—the waste of the limited resources of the poor and nonwhite on the nonproductive procedures of plan development—should not really be directed against advocacy. It would be far closer to the mark to attack such programs as Model Cities, which create elaborate procedural requirements for citizen participation in plan preparation, but which have never received enough money in appropriations to permit execution of plans created under these requirements. So long as Congress fails to provide the needed funds, Model Cities' failure to bring about significant social change will not be caused by the action or inaction of advocate planners.

Piven sees the process of creating an Alternate Plan for Cooper Square as a waste of energy. What she fails to consider is that the members of the Cooper Square Committee, as a result of their ten-year battle, gained considerable political maturity and

sophistication in the ways of New York City politics. Piven asserts that protest was successful in halting the original bulldozer plan and, therefore, that the Alternat Plan was unnecessary. This is too glib. It is possible that citizen protest without the benefit of advocate planning could stop the threat of the neighborhood's destruction; but what program of affirmative action for decent housing would have taken its place?

The Thabit Alternat Plan has played an important role in the Cooper Square area and in other areas of the nation. It signifies an approach to city rebuilding based on resource allocation to classes of the population having the greatest economic need, as opposed to perpetuation of traditional renewal policies favoring the rich at the expense of the poor and the nonwhite.

Still another ground for holding Piven's thesis incorrect is that she has narrowly defined advocacy planning as wholly client-oriented. In a number of situations, a clientless advocacy has developed. We are now engaged in such an advocacy-planning program dedicated to changing public policy about urban development so as to take account of the tremendous land and employment opportunities available in the suburbs. In this activity, we have no client but work with the support of foundations.

Frances Piven has herself been an active clientless advocate planner. Along with Richard Cloward, she has presented plans for the way the poor and the nonwhite should act in order to get a fair share of the nation's resources.

Clientless advocacy, ideological advocacy, radical advocacy may work to assist the poor and the black, or they may fail. But the key point is that the professional planner engaged in advocacy tends to polarize issues about urban-development policies. He thus moves planning decisions from nonpolitical into political forums, where power of many varieties may be exercised and where the power of the poor to promote greater equity may operate along lines that Piven herself may find effective.

The Advocate Planner: From "Hired Gun" to Political Partisan

CHESTER W. HARTMAN

Frances Piven has some incisive and valid things to say about social policy, emphasizing the underlying politics of the nascent advocacy-planning movement and the critical test of who gets what. It seems to me, however, that she is describing only one kind of advocacy planning and that her observations ought to be considered not as a put-down of advocacy planners generally but as a corrective, at a time when the movement is still in its formative stage, to what clearly can be reactionary results from their work.

Certainly, if "plans" are the end product of the work of advocacy planners, low-income communities will benefit little and the "planning process" can divert real energies for social change. Seen merely as an attempt to firm up the negotiating position of the poor, advocacy planning may serve only to stabilize the system and emasculate any real movement for change.

Advocacy planning for the poor, if it is to have any real meaning, must be planning for power, planning for political and social change. It must serve to organize the community, help the community perceive and understand the workings of the system by which it is oppressed, and direct political energies toward the realization of long-range, as well as tangible short-range, goals. And these goals must be substantive—a larger share of the pie, different kinds and sizes of pies, the acquisition of real political power. My four years of experience working with Urban Planning Aid (at this point, probably the largest advocacy-planning group in the country) lead me to a somewhat different set of conclusions from that of Piven about the potentials and problems of this kind of work.

At the time of this debate, Chester W. Hartman was an assistant professor of city planning at Harvard University and served on the board of directors of Urban Planning Aid, Inc. In refusing to renew his contract for the year following this debate, Harvard alleged that his "method of teaching conveys a sense of political strategy more than the substance of city planning." His teaching also often led to opposition to the university's policies and expansion in the community.

In the first place, I have seen numerous instances where the presence of advocacy-planning assistance itself served as a critical catalyst to community organization. The Cooper Square area of New York, which contains a fairly high proportion of middle- and lower-middle-class families and is fairly sophisticated politically, is not typical of the areas in which we have done our work. In really low-income areas with a rather low level of political organization, the very existence of one's own "hired guns" can serve as an important catalyst. The fact that someone is taking notice of the community's problems, that the neighborhood has its own professionals to counter the establishment's professionals, frequently dispels the prevailing hopelessness, and the advocate professionals become the node around which local organization begins to build.

The critical point of any advocacy work is the building of political organization: where the local group, once organized, moves around the advocacy effort, or (in the Cooper Square type of situation) what a group does with an organization that is already formed. Here the advocate planner can play a very useful role, but there exists at present considerable ambivalence among advocate planners themselves about what their role should be. The "pure" model stresses the "hired gun" notion: we are here to do the community's bidding, to see that it gets what it wants. Since the communities that need advocates are usually those which the present system most neglects, and since advocate planners tend to be concerned with issues of social justice, a rough "fit" does prevail. Advocate planners have been terribly concerned not to be or appear manipulative, not to impose their values and political goals on the community. Because of the inherent similarity between the goals of advocate planners and advocate plannees, overt conflict rarely occurs. When it does (e.g., the case of a low-income white community which wants to use planning tools to prevent entry of nonwhites), the planners can always withdraw on principled grounds. However, many of us are beginning to reject the "hired gun" model, although it has taken a good deal of experience, similar to that which Piven describes in Cooper Square, to lead us to a new concept of our role.

That new role is one in which politics and organization are primary. Advocate planners should have a clear political analysis

of the way the system works as a whole and the way in which individual elements of the system relevant to their field operate: the housing market, urban renewal, the highway program, etc. If it is accepted that advocate planners can and should have a political analysis that infuses and guides their work, the real question becomes how to make this operational. It is foolish to think that most low-income communities are going to share the same wavelength, and nothing could be more destructive than to apply rigid political tests as a precondition for working in a given community. The process would seem to be one in which the advocacy group deals with the immediate issues that threaten and oppress the community and, in the process of working around these issues, develops an understanding of and organization around a deeper analysis of the nature of the community's problems and the kinds of solutions that are called for.

To give a concrete example. The advocate planner is asked by a tenants' organization to assist in exposing the inadequacies of a much-heralded, large-scale rehabilitation program. Good professional staff work by architects, engineers, lawyers and accountants produces irrefutable documentation of shoddy workmanship, high profits, excessive rents, failure of supervision by FHA and local officials, inadequate relocation assistance and a host of other defects.

Such a report can lead to different conclusions and levels of analysis. It can be used to create a scandal, a horror story of corruption, and can lead to immediate patching up of the poor results of this one project. Or it can be used to educate the community and the public about the workings of the system; that the system of profit-motivated developers, surrounded by government aids but few government controls, without any meaningful participation of the community itself in this rebuilding process, will inevitably lead to the results described. If the advocate planner's understanding of the situation leads him to analyze the system as a whole, it is his responsibility to frame his findings in broader systematic terms and to attempt to persuade the community that this analysis is correct. The action implications are, of course, quite different, depending on the analysis.

That analysis should also lead to a consistent program of

action which can provide guidance as to whether the planning group works with certain communities or not. For example, the highway program and its failure to meet metropolitan transportation needs is working with a community threatened by the program in an effort to stop construction of a new highway. Clearly, it should not work at the same time with a community group which wants assistance in changing to a depressed route to persuade the second community to join the fight against the overall construction program, but both the analysis underlying the work of the planning group and the need to build strong community organization dictate a consistent policy.

With regard to the second critical issue of community political organization, the style of advocacy planning which Piven so rightly criticizes is that of professional-speaking-to-professionals. The community goes through all the standard procedures and attempts to persuade the powers-that-be of the superiority of its plan, using all the accepted tools and terminology. It would seem clear from both our sets of experiences that unless the community develops political muscle which can cover the entire spectrum, from sophisticated conventional organizations to disruption and rebellion, there is no certainty that its plans will be implemented. The process of developing a plan of action must be a process of political organizing. It may be that the rehabilitation report described above could produce some improvements without concomitant political organization among the tenants, because of the outrageous nature of the case and the clear documentation provided by the investigation. But the improvements would be minimal and short-lived in the absence of underlying organization. If that entire system is to be changed into one which is controlled by the community to insure maximum economic benefits from the millions of dollars expended on the project, to produce low rents and a high quality of work and to create a system by which the community controls its own housing stock, such change can come about only through political action.

Above all, the advocate planner should employ his professional skills as a node around which political organizing can take place. His job is to persuade those for whom he works

that the necessary course of political action derives from a radical analysis of the reasons why the system has not produced adequate.

Rejoinder: Disruption Is Still the Decisive Way

FRANCIS FOX PIVEN

If anyone who plans for social change is a "planner," as Paul and Linda Davidoff argue, then, of course, we are all planners, albeit with little effect. And if to be an advocate is simply to be *for* something, then we are all advocate planners, also with little effect. Having named everyone "advocate planner," however, we still have to decide just what we can do specifically that might get something for the poor.

Our role, the Davidoffs say, is to aid the poor in drawing up their demands. The difficulty is that people with very limited power do not name their own terms in political dealings. At times of mass disturbance, such as we witnessed in the cities during the 1960s, the poor may be able to exert pressure, because street protests, riots or erratic voting behavior threaten civic order and political stability. To restore order, government agencies and business leaders may grant concessions. But just what will be conceded is determined by what it takes to quiet the disturbances, and not by any list of demands to be presented and negotiated by the "leaders" (or planners) who come forward at the critical times.

To be sure, the leaders will get something. They will be invited into negotiating sessions, honored with a bit of recognition and patronage—enough to make them eschew future disturbances for fear of losing their new position and payroll. The poverty agencies are populated with former activists whose militancy now seems confined to squabbling over the division of funds.

Can we, as Chester Hartman and Sherry Arnstein say, overcome this historical pattern of disturbance and limited concessions by adopting a model of the advocate as a political tutor of the poor? Such a planner should, Arnstein says, educate the poor, enable them to "learn who and where the powerholders are and which levers to press to effect action, and to incorporate

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such sophistication into concrete programmatic approaches." Hartman adds that the planner should "persuade those for whom he works that the necessary course of political action derives from a radical analysis of the reasons that the system has not produced adequately."

The advocate, in other words, will no longer teach the community how to plan; now he will teach the poor how to use the political process, presumably so they will have influence. But regular political processes do not work for the poor. If they did, the poor would no longer be poor.

Just what political routes will the planner lay out for the poor community? Will he educate them in the use of their vote? Or teach them to lobby? Or to negotiate with bureaucrats? For radicals, if such we are, we make a curious, if tact, assumption: that if only the poor learned how and *tried*, they could exert substantial influence by conventional means—by lobbying, voting, planning, or whatever—as groups elsewhere in the society do. It is only a matter of *educating* them as to the paths of influence. But the poor are a small minority in the voting booth, and in any case most policy decisions are not made in the voting booth; they are scarcely equipped to contend with the powerful interests that regularly lobby in legislative halls and bureaucratic offices; and that is why their plans can be ignored or washed out with delay or absurd tokenism.

Radicals also place great value on organization. If only the poor organized, then they would be able to press those power levers. And advocates can provide the expertise and education to help the organizing process along.

It should be clear by now that educational efforts do not build organizations, among the poor or anyone else. The poor remain unorganized, not for lack of information or exhortation but because there is little to be gained by their joining together. When businessmen or professionals get together, their aggregate resources—economic, social and political—make their organization influential, so it can obtain the governmental concessions which make continued membership worthwhile. The poor have no resources to aggregate, so whatever groups they may form are too weak to produce the payoffs that attract and hold members. Without a poverty program or Model Cities program to provide incentives, stable organizations of the poor do not form

—which is only to say that, like other groups in the society, the poor participate when it is worth their while.

Nor will educational efforts by advocate planners, or black militants, or whoever, keep the small organizations that do come into being on a radical course. Doctrine goes only so far. Organizations, whether of welfare mothers or city planners, have to worry over the payroll and the rent, and, rhetoric aside, whoever meets the payroll calls the tune—and over time fixes the agenda and the priorities.

In a way, such debates as this are idle. Whatever the models we put forward describing what advocate planners should or should not do, there is a more substantial reality than that which we create with our exhortations. Hartman, Arnstein, and the Davidoffs all agree in criticizing the advocate planning done under the federal urban programs, especially Model Cities. They have something very different in mind. But Model Cities, and not what we have in mind, is the reality.

The irony is that the poor get the payroll and the rent money for their organizations, in the first place, not because they have community organizations, but through mass disturbances. Mass disturbances sometimes produce more important concessions as well: a \$10-billion welfare budget, for example. That is not much, perhaps, but it is more than the poor have gotten until now, and it is much more than they are likely to get again soon, especially if they rely on their new community groups and professional advocates, and on the paths of conventional organization and influence.