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**Michael Oliver**, *The Politics of Disablement*. Critical Texts in Social Work and the Welfare State. London: MacMillan Press Ltd. (McClelland and Stewart, Toronto), 1990.

Reviewed by Joan E. Cummings  
*Maritime School of Social Work*  
*Dalhousie University*

This rather compact but theoretically dense work is presented by a disabled sociologist, critical of the failure of social theorists to take disability seriously. His intent is to counter the currently oppressive dominance of medicine and psychology in the field by producing a social theory which better accords with the experience of disability, and which might inform strategy among disabled people themselves.

The central proposition is that disability is a social construction mounted on personal tragedy theory rather than a "natural" consequence of an impairment; and that the causation of disability resides not in the functional limitations of individuals, but in the conventional modes of social organization which marginalize people who have impairments. Disability as a category, the author argues, is a Capitalist creation, serving as an effective mechanism of control by establishing the boundary between the work-based and the needs-based systems of allocation. Its control function is sustained by the sheer embeddedness of the core ideology of Individualism, and the peripheral ideologies of medicalization and "normality" in the interlocking structures which define experience and mould consciousness from cradle to grave. Despite differences in the way Capitalism has developed in particular societies, there is an underlying logic which creates and perpetuates disability as an individualized and medicalized problem. The greatest leverage for change lies in the potential of the emergent disability movement, as part of the new social movements, to mount counter-hegemonic politics.

The analysis begins with a focus on the importance of socially ascribed meanings in orienting human behaviour. In this context a critical scrutiny

of official definitions of disability is undertaken. The WHO definition, for example, despite intentions to the contrary, has reinforced personal tragedy theory and the medical model. In conserving the notion of impairment as abnormality of function, disability as inability to perform "normal" activities, and handicap as inability to perform normal social roles, the WHO definition ultimately reduces the causation of disability to the individual impairment; and has reified the oppressive concept of "normality".

In explaining the treatment of disability as an individualized and medicalized problem within Capitalism, and particularly the dominance of personal tragedy theory, Oliver draws critically on, and integrates in his analysis, the works of Marx, Comte and Weber. He contends that social policies governing redistribution to the disabled population have always responded to both the needs of the changing mode of production and the changing mode of thought. In this context he traces state intervention into the lives of disabled people, from community care through the rise and then the decline of institutions. This discussion of institutions, and of their repressive and ideological functions, is interesting, and illustrative of his theoretical perspective.

There is an interesting discussion as well of the ideological construction of the "normal" individual under Capitalism as independent, essentially self-interested, rational, and fundamentally concerned with maximizing utility; and of the disabled individual as the antithesis of this "normality". Connections are made between this core ideology of Individualism ("organic ideology" in Gramsci's formulation) and the peripheral (arbitrary) ideologies of medicalization, personal tragedy theory and normalization, as purveyed through the structures of both medical practice and social policy. In the context of this discussion, he draws on and integrates a number of further partial explanations of the ascendancy of the medical profession in society in general, and its complete and continuing domination of the disabled population even in the late twentieth century. Structural ties between Capitalist imperatives and medical practice in general, and rehabilitation in particular, are also elaborated in some detail.

The structuring of disabled identity is similarly explored, and a number of influential factors identified. These include pervasive negative cultural images, pressures from professionals toward physical normality and psychological adjustment (coming to terms with the disability as an individual problem), and race and gender. In relation to the latter, Oliver notes the dearth of available literature, and exposes clear gender bias in some of the work that is available. He makes the point that struggles within the ideological terrain, generated by oppression, do not occur just between the oppressor and the oppressed, but among the oppressed themselves as well.

In addressing the role of social policy in the social construction of disability as a social problem, Oliver contends that social policy definitions themselves are socially constructed. Policy analysis has responded to the core ideology of Individualism, and the peripheral ideologies of medicalization and normality. Because of this, policies have been constructed to do to and for, but not with, disabled people. While recently policy in general has begun to be subjected to more rigorous scrutiny of its ideological underpinnings, this has not yet occurred in the case of disability policy, perhaps because it is only now becoming a discrete policy area, rather than a subset of broader policies.

Recently, with the crisis of the welfare state and its restructuring around dependency reduction along the lines of the political right, policy has moved away from its reliance on personal tragedy theory. The new ideology of dependency reduction embodies the modern version of humanitarianism, the rhetoric asserting that creation or perpetuation of dependency erodes the human spirit. Strategies of privatization espousing this rhetoric are now fully operational in most western countries. Privatized services for disabled people, however, are not new, and they do not reduce, but rather perpetuate, dependency. Service delivery structures similarly create and reinforce dependency, since power inherent in the monopoly of knowledge and expertise continues to reside with the professionals.

The final two chapters of the book, focusing on the politics of disablement, are essentially explorations of possible strategy. The viability of relying on the welfare state to improve the quality of life for disabled people, or on generating effective political action toward positive change through either partisan political participation or traditional pressure group tactics is dismissed. It is concluded that the politics of disablement can only be properly understood in the context of the new social movements that are part of post-capitalist society. These new movements are not grounded in traditional forms of political participation. Rather they are part of the genuine struggle for participatory democracy, social equality and justice. They are engaged in critical evaluation of Capitalist society, and in the creation of alternative models of social organization.

Oliver traces the development of the disability movement, exploring its relationship to the Black Movement and the Women's Movement, and finds hope in the coherence it has developed at national and international levels. Much of this discussion is located in the British experience, but there are parallels in Canada and the United States.

In short, Oliver's strategy for change rests on his conclusion that the disability movement is an important part of the new social movements. While these movements have not succeeded in overturning the status quo, they are nonetheless significant in placing new issues on the political agenda.

It is in the emergence of a strong disability movement as part of the new social movements that Oliver places his hope for the political momentum that can ultimately improve the quality of life for disabled people.

The theoretical analysis of disability which Oliver presents in this book is well constructed, rigorous, comprehensive and coherent. Its distinct departure from mainstream tendencies to psychologize the disability problem, and his application of a framework which asserts social causation, is a major strength. In the opinion of this reviewer (who incidentally also has had to make sense of the experience of disability), the perspective applied is a breath of fresh air. Oliver maintains an unfaltering focus on identifying and challenging the ideological underpinnings of pervasive social practices and beliefs normally taken for granted. In this he demonstrates considerable skill. He is persuasive in his critique of distortive mainstream theory and the incorporation into research design of ideological bias. At one point he exposes the ideological content in a set of questions used in a disability survey by juxtaposing an alternative form of the same questions, his own questions assuming social rather than individual causation. His questions are no less biased than the survey questions, but their juxtaposition serves effectively to demonstrate the use of research design to build and perpetuate ideologically constructed and oppressive theory.

The treatment of a strategy of counter-hegemonic politics is perhaps the least well developed section of the book. Further, while many disabled people might well recognize aspects of their own experience in this work, the theoretical formulation advanced is complex, and the analysis at times pyramids abstractions one upon the other, possibly limiting the potential of this undertaking to meet his goal of informing strategy among disabled people themselves. Nonetheless, this is an important contribution to both social theory and to the field of disability.

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**Valerie Knowles**, *Strangers at Our Gates. Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-1990*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1992, pp. 220. \$19.99 (softcover).

Reviewed by John R. Graham  
*Faculty of Social Work*  
*University of Toronto*

Few things could be more important to Canadian history than the experience of immigration over the past five centuries. The untraceable multitude of local, small-scale exoduses and colonizations, the never-ending creation of new frontiers, the complex intermingling of peoples of diverse cultural,