Review of *The Politics of Care: Human Services at the Local Level.* Alan J. Hahn. Reviewed by Ram A. Cnaan, University of Pennsylvania.

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Alan J. Hahn, *The Politics of Care: Human Services at the Local Level.*
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papercover, 256 pp.

Our era is the first to witness national and state leaders who
do not come to power with a vision and then attempt to persuade
and influence their constituencies and colleagues to follow this
vision. Current leaders are those who research public opinion and
employ market analysts to identify what the majority expects in
an attempt to increase their popularity and to be re-elected. This is
known as the "theory of electoral accountability." The generation
of politicians who had the public follow them or were comfortable
at making unpopular, though important, political decisions is
vanishing. This old generation is termed by Hahn as the "unitary
model." When "policy makers somehow rise above the fray of
politics to make decisions that reflect the good of the community
or society as a whole" (p. 240). One area that is suffering from the
consequences of the rising "electoral accountability" is welfare
and human services as politicians happily cut budgets to satisfy
electoral sentiments. The paradox is that we may currently have
a greater number of democratically elected officials who more
readily respond to public opinion, but we lack brave politicians
who dare to do what is right. We no longer have leaders who will
support human services; thus, the political support and advocacy
for these services should come from within. The ruling by major-
ity interest and opinion and its impact on human services is the
context for Alan J. Hahn's *The Politics of care: Human Services at the
Local Level.*

In the introduction to this book, Alan J. Hahn states that "the
purpose of the book is to help people interested in human services
develop a better understanding of the local political arena and
increase their capacity to work effectively within that arena (p. 4).
Hahn's assumption is that "service providers have impressive
resources" (p. 44) which, in a political context, can be applied to
obtain power. However, "the autonomy of service providers pro-
duces a tendency for them to have a narrow view of their political
environment" (p. 51). That is they apply an isolationist approach
and "are in touch with only a limited range of other participants in
public decision making" (p. 52). "In short, it appears to me that at

all three levels in human service agencies—policy, management, and service—human service workers should be thinking more than they do about the political environment" (p. 57).

In order to accomplish his purpose, Hahn first discusses how certain issues are raised, debated, and decided upon in the local political arena. Then, in chapter two, he reviews various roles for human service workers in making and influencing decisions. This section (in my view the most interesting chapter) is followed by five chapters which are more specifically devoted to the key players in local politics. Chapter 3 discusses local governments, and it emphasizes the impact of business people on local political decision-making. The remaining chapters address the following: social movement organizations, federal and state governments, courts, and the news media. "Finally, chapter 8 offers suggestions on how human service workers can become more intelligent about influencing public decisions . . ." (p. 5).

In order for the reader to be able to absorb the various issues, the author provides many examples in the text as well as many boxes (side bars) with short summaries of studies that support his statements; this practice is very helpful, especially as the text is geared toward the novice. However, I was disappointed that there were no index of authors and no organized bibliographical list at the end of the book.

In many parts of the book, it appears as if the role of human service workers is to influence local politicians. Although the author acknowledges nonprofit and proprietary services, the focus is on the struggle between human services and public sources. This perspective is emphasized in the final chapter when the author stresses: *"The primary objective is to obtain approval from the authorities for an outcome favorable to one's interests"* (p. 226, italicized in original). I tend to consider this view as reductionist, especially in the United States, a country in which many human services balance their budgets through client fees, donors, endowments, grants, and foundation support. When the state relinquished its obligation to human services, other players, such as religious auspices, assumed responsibility for some of these services. Furthermore, a large segment of human services is and was provided under non-governmental auspices. While the government is still the key player in the human services arena, focusing

almost entirely on local officials is a European tradition artificially applied to the United States.

Alan J. Hahn is a professor of human service studies at Cornell University. As I noted above, most of the analysis of the book comes from a political science perspective and not from social work or human services literature. Throughout the book I was under the impression that the author has very little familiarity with social service workers or their working conditions, abilities, and experiences. The book gives the impression of being written from an ivory tower perspective for those human service workers who are not intelligent enough to be political. I counted over 30 times that the phrase "human service workers need to . . ." (or its equivalent) appear in the text. The author applied an interesting and helpful political science framework to human service politics, but in the process it appears condescending to those who are expected to implement these suggestions; this is most regretful. What was even more disturbing is that, on the one hand, Hahn reprimanded social workers for being politically naive; however, on the other hand, his proposed solution was both naive and unattainable. Hahn advocates a politics of care in which all parties come with good intentions, attentively listen to each other, and jointly come to a constructive compromise that takes into account the needs of the weak members of society. To accept this as anything but utopia is unrealistic, and to assume that human service workers will believe that they can bring this utopian approach into reality is insulting.

The book as a whole reads like a text on local politics 101, which, with varying degrees of success, is adapted to meet the interests of human service professionals. Chapters 3 to 7 move from local governments to the news media and span pp. 61–220; they also do not deal with the book's purpose. It is my assumption that they were (and clearly could have been) written regardless of the book's purpose as a primary text of local politics and power. Only the two introductory chapters and the final chapter were seriously transformed to meet the author's declared purpose. These five chapters are a good review of the local political scene from a political science perspective. The final chapter comes too late and includes too little that can be of practical help to practitioners. The author could search the rich community organization literature

and find suitable examples where human service professionals indeed were highly effective in influencing local politics. An incorporation of human services material in these five chapters and a less condescending approach would have made this book an important addition into macro practice literature. Still, the ones who can benefit from this book are community-practice students in introductory courses.

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Björn Hvinden, *Divided Against Itself: A Study of Integration in A Welfare Bureaucracy*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1994 # 45 hardcover (Distributed in the United States by Oxford University Press, 200 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016).

In European social research, the "Matthew effect" is a notion associated with the Flemish researcher Herman Deleeck, a continental equivalent of Richard Titmuss and T. H. Marshall. Whether the young Norwegian sociologist Björn Hvinden will invent a "Mark effect" remains to be seen, but he is absolutely on his way towards recognition and academic respect. Like Deleeck, Hvinden has modelled the title of his book on a quotation from the New Testament: "And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (St Mark III:25). However, Deleeck is focussing on distribution, Hvinden on organization and implementation.

Divided Against Itself is a pioneering study of frontline social administrators inspired by Michael Lipsky's streetlevel bureaucrat approach. In focus are two of the most important social policy agencies in Norway: local offices of the National Social Insurance Administration, and local government social service departments; and ambitions to coordinate their efforts to serve the local community and develop human resources.

Hvinden undertakes an in-depth study through "indirect participatory observation" of eight paired offices of the two branches of government. He looks into what the employees and local managers actually are doing behind their desks and computers, and traces their way of problem-solving and problem-avoidance. The