

## EDITOR'S REMARKS

This issue, which Michael Hanagan and I have coedited, is devoted to the theme of the working class and the welfare state. Read together, the suggestive essays by Cronin and Weiler, Friedman, Steinmetz, and Cohen and Hanagan represent a brief on behalf of the value of configurative case studies and “thick description” comparisons, as well as a rejection of a common trajectory for the development of social policy and class formation in the West.

Within the social sciences, research on these questions has been conducted largely in terms of aggregate data measures of state spending and working-class political capacity (focusing on union strength and the relative successes of social democratic political parties). Discussions in this vein usually seek to validate or inform social democratic models of public policy change against other causal arguments that place their bets on factors other than working-class strength to account for the growth of the domestic tax-and-spending state of the twentieth century. At stake have been two broad questions: Are the various features of labor and capital markets within capitalist economies susceptible to political control; and, have organized working-class political actors been able to exert this control on behalf of the interests of their supporters?

This literature, overall, has demonstrated strong and provocative associations between social democratic political capacity and differential rates of welfare-state growth. When members of the working class have utilized their potential as citizens for organization and political mobilization, the growth of the welfare state has been faster and its redistributive character more pronounced than when coherent social democratic movements have been weak or absent. Comparative quantitative studies thus have been rather clear in demonstrating that the most ambitious uses of the state for the purposes of cushioning markets and reshaping their patterns of reward have been found in countries with working classes that have been strong in organizational and political terms.

However correct as a broad generalization, this assertion—in part scientific, in part ideological—begs a great many questions and is susceptible to challenge from two very different perspectives: claims of similarity and difference. In the first instance, it is clear that irrespective of the organizational features of working-class life or the precise attributes of national conflicts over distribution, welfare states can be found in all the first-world capitalist countries that utilize very large fractions of national wealth, cushion against exclusion from labor markets by reasons of age, illness, accident and unemployment, and protect the least well-off from privation. Certainly since World War II, all the capitalist democracies have possessed such significant welfare states (a term coined in Britain only in the 1940s), in spite of wide variations in patterns of class formation in individual countries. Thus the first dimension of questioning about the relationship between

class and social policy concerns the relative importance of variation in the face of powerful similarities across instances.

The second direction of criticism is concerned more with differences than with similarities. Too certain an association between welfare-state growth through social democratic politics and union mobilization rides roughshod over uncomfortable problems of genesis and cause. There have been multiple paths to welfare-state development, only some of which have entailed the involvement of organized working-class forces on behalf of state action; the stubborn truth is that not all social democratic unions and movements have favored a more vigorous role for the state in civil society. Other factors, such as the relative strength of the political right, the role of social knowledge and middle-class reform, the organization of the state and the preferences of its officials, the impact of large-scale war, the existence of corporatist forms of interest intermediation, the qualities of relations between men and women, and the place of a country within the international political economy may be more significant in accounting for differences in welfare-state outcomes. Furthermore, the contrasting characteristics that divide instances are accentuated if the scope of what we mean by the welfare state is broadened to include education, on the one side, and a wide array of measures to plan, regulate, and organize the operation of capitalist markets, on the other.

The articles in this issue remind us of just how important it is that nuanced historical and comparative case studies, unafraid of accentuating anomalies, be full partners in research on the welfare state. Not until World War II, Cronin and Weiler show us, did the British working class prefer a strong and assertive domestic state. Rather, the labor movement's central tendency was a kind of civil-society socialism, grounded in collective bargaining with employers free from state supervision and in self-help associations such as friendly societies in working-class neighborhoods. British working-class leaders feared the state was indelibly a capitalist state and sought to distance themselves from it unless it could be reorganized to serve social purposes. Liberal reforms at the beginning of the 1910s and the uneven costs exacted by World War I exacerbated this sense of a mobilization of class bias in the public realm. Only with the incorporation of Labour during World War II and with the election of the Attlee government did the British working class come to fit the role assigned to it in the social democratic model of welfare-state growth. And, as the authors remind us, Labour's embrace of the welfare state came about within the essentially liberal framework of Keynesianism.

The skepticism of British workers toward the state was in part the product of their long path to full citizenship. Yet, as Friedman demonstrates, even in the United States, where universal franchise for white males came early, labor activists shared in a deep disbelief about the ability of the state to be fair in matters of class conflict. In part, this was a matter of supposition, in part of exposure. Even those labor leaders who welcomed state-level efforts in New York and Massachusetts to settle strikes on the assumption that working people provided the majority of

voters in a democracy soon were disappointed as governments in action proved to have a decisive tilt toward capital. Within the deeply embittered, at times bloody, industrial relations of the late nineteenth century, the experience by American labor of attempts at the level of the various states to create mediation and arbitration procedures impelled a fundamental reorientation toward defensive restraint of a hostile state rather than democratic assertion in a sympathetic one. Not only the AFL's voluntarism but also its resistance to an expanded social-welfare role for the national state can be understood in these terms. Only the catastrophe of the Great Depression and the encounter with total war produced a more friendly positioning by labor toward the state.

Friedman's emphasis on how the exposure of the working class to state policies helped shape patterns of class formation is taken up even more fully in Steinmetz's treatment of Imperial Germany. There, an extensive network of welfare-state institutions was created in the interest of securing legitimacy and stability for an authoritarian regime largely without working-class support. Steinmetz shows how the German welfare state, once established, left workers and their organizations no choice but to participate as players, and how, as such, they had some effect on the new policies and their administration. Reciprocally, he demonstrates, the welfare state powerfully affected German working-class formation. In making this case against essentialist treatments of the working class, Steinmetz sensitively distinguishes between different dimensions of the manner in which public policy and working-class participation in the institutions of the welfare state affected German workers: assigning material resources to organizations and clients; directing *ressentiment* into established public channels; securing particular classifications of workers and their identities; and regulating private lives. This multidimensional approach, with its reversal of the usual causal paths of the social democratic model, opens up a host of fascinating questions for further consideration.

Last, Cohen and Hanagan's deceptively modest paper presses us in a number of fertile directions. By extending the scope of what we mean by the welfare state to include education, it highlights the comparatively early and enthusiastic American commitment to mass schooling, thus presenting us with a puzzle with which simple social democratic models are ill-equipped to deal. Further, Cohen and Hanagan implicitly reject work that is limited to national-level comparisons. By focusing on Birmingham and Pittsburgh—cities comparable in many dimensions, but which diverged sharply in their schooling experiences only after the 1920s—they show how the imbrication of the local and the national can decisively affect policy results. Such local-level factors as qualities of employment, the dispositions of reformers, and political organization impel outcomes that not only differ from those in other countries but from other cities in the same country.

I.K.

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