

BOOK REVIEWS

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<i>In Care of the State</i>	Abram de Swaan	Pat Thane
<i>Work and Wages</i>	Michael Sonenscher	Christopher H. Johnson
<i>Working-Class Mobilization and Political Control</i>	Charles L. Davis	Mark Thompson
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SWAAN, ABRAM DE. *In Care of the State. Health Care, Education and Welfare in Europe and the USA in the Modern Era.* Polity Press, Cambridge 1988. ix, 339 pp. £ 32.50.

De Swaan set himself no modest task. He deals with the collectivizing process in health care, education and welfare, but from an uncommon perspective and with an unusual scope. The perspective is that of comparative historical sociology and the theory of collective action; the discussion ranges from the dawn of modernity to the present, covering developments in Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the US. Evidently the product of formidable scholarship. However, De Swaan was not too hard on himself, for “the guiding role has been never to investigate primary sources, to avoid monographs, to rely mostly on studies that reviewed at least one institutional field in one country over an extended period of time”.

He has used this material to answer one central question: “How and why did people come to develop collective, nation-wide and compulsory arrangements to cope with deficiencies and adversities that appeared to affect them separately and to call for individual remedies”; and how did the social policies which resulted contribute to the formation of modern states.

The role of social policies in modern state formation has indeed been underestimated by political sociologists. De Swaan’s analysis is worked out within a framework constructed from two intellectual traditions: the concept of external effects as used in welfare economics. This refers to the indirect consequences of one

person's deficiency or adversity for those not themselves immediately afflicted. It is linked with a combination of the notion drawn from Norbert Elias of increasing human interdependency as the "civilizing process" draws us all into greater consciousness of the effects of our actions upon others, with the theory of collective action, employed to explain the transformation of this consciousness into action. For De Swaan this offers a more subtle and flexible framework for working out the long developing emergence of institutions of collective social responsibility than either Parsonian functionalism or Marxism. Though in the latter case he sets up an extremely vulgar straw man for criticism (social policy as a simple expression of business imperatives) and he must be the last intellectual in the world to find the similarity of the functionalism of these two sets of theories "surprising". He also rejects "social control" approaches in favour of a more interactive relationship between dominant and subordinate social groups.

His proposed alternative is certainly more flexible than the alternatives he describes – especially as he describes them. The question is whether, as he approaches it, it is too flexible at essential points to provide a usefully rigorous framework of explanation.

De Swaan applies this approach to history by taking a series of key episodes in the growth of collectivization of care and of state formation. As the early modern European economy expanded the vagrant poor became not only a problem but a threat to public order. The fact of their vagrancy forced individual communities to reach agreement as to their treatment, to ensure that the burden was not unequally spread – hence the growth of Poor Laws. As, in response to these and other stimuli, states grew alongside markets, education, in the medium of a single national language, became a means whereby elites sought to unify and culturally influence the populations of states, drawing the illiterate, dialect speaking masses into communication with the state and the market; building, not without conflict, new institutional channels for such communication and strengthening their own authority.

The growing economies drew even more people into the appalling squalour of industrial towns. Though the first instinct of the rich was to flee to more wholesome districts, it became clear that they could not escape the external effects of urbanization. Most dramatically, cholera forced them to recognize the interdependency of their lives with those of the slumdweller among whom the disease appeared to fester, and to seek new forms of collective action for their common protection. Hence the great sanitation works of the nineteenth century and the policing bureaucracy (established in parallel with the crime protection police) developed to ensure their use further strengthened the apparatus of state and its involvement in the intimate lives of the people.

The state advanced further into private lives as wage labour became the common experience. Wages proved inadequate to provide for periods of enforced non-work due to sickness, unemployment, old age etc. and the resulting poverty constituted another potential menace to social order. This was combatted by social insurance legislation. This differed from the conditional hand-outs of poor relief in notionally treating participants as full and equal citizens who by paying contributions bought a right to a benefit subsidized by others, whilst, since the contribution was compulsory, being (theoretically) unobtrusively socialized into habits of regular saving. By

this means all wage-earners were permanently attached to the state apparatus (though not their, generally female, “dependents”). De Swaan is wholly silent on the gender dimension of his story, despite the age-old predominance of females among the poorest). This “constituted the most incisive spurt within the collectivizing process in the past century and a new phase in the process of state formation”. He believes that it generally extended after World War Two due to fears of working class risings following the spread of Soviet power. Curiously he ignores World War One – that massive and unprecedented war which demanded unprecedented levels of action, which greatly extended, or broke, the power of states. He is also surprisingly silent on a key feature of post-Second-World-War welfare which was its “universalization” in most European countries to include, generally for the first time, all or most of the middle classes and all or most females. The next wave of expansion he describes in the 1960s, until the oil crisis of 1973. This he believes to have been impelled by the popular agitations of the period, despite the fact that the great expansions of public social expenditure began before the manifestations of ‘68 and after. Welfare states, he concludes, have through this long process grown to a point at which, despite attempts to cut them, the underlying basis of support for them remains strong, though he rightly comments that there is no consensus about the future. He concludes with some rather vague but pessimistic comments about whether the civilizing process will come to bind together the first and the third worlds.

The motor of this long process of change, as he describes it, is the struggle for control among competing elites, in which, over time, the state itself becomes an increasingly crucial actor, although its autonomy is always constrained by its need to act as broker among major power groupings. Indeed, although at one point, De Swaan refers slightly to “middle classes who are always rising”, it is rising bourgeoisies throughout this story who carry forward the growing institutions of state in the teeth of opposition from established churches and landowners who are always reactionary. Until, at some point in the nineteenth century, landed society disappears from the scene as the main enemy (rather suddenly and completely in view of the efforts of Anderson, Nairn, Arno Mayer and others to insist upon the long-continued hegemony of landed values in modern European states, an important and relevant debate oddly overlooked here) and are replaced by the forces of the petty bourgeoisie. Thereafter their determination to hold on to a privatized world of individual accumulation and minimal state action became the main force slowing the process of collectivization. It has diminished in the twentieth century not because the strength of the petty bourgeoisie has been outmatched by that of others, such as the working class, but because they have been transformed. They have given up their small farms, shops and businesses reluctantly, but, making the best of it, they and/or their children have taken advantage of what the growing state has had to offer and it has been their turn to “rise”. They have entered education, the professions, politics and the state bureaucracy, expanding their own opportunities, whilst profoundly influencing the shape of the welfare state which they sought initially to oppose.

We should not forget that Mrs Thatcher is the daughter of a shopkeeper and De Swaan’s theme is thought-provoking, but it lacks the empirical backing which might make it convincing. It should perhaps have been preceded by some contact with

monographs or even with primary sources, since De Swaan comments on how little is actually known historically about petty bourgeoisies (though there is more than he seems aware of). However, it is even odder in the context of this argument that he says so little about the fact that the middle classes have been such extensive beneficiaries of state welfare in Europe since World War Two; and that recent cuts have come at the point at which many more of them than before believe that they can make independent provision for their needs.

De Swaan's interesting, but not firmly grounded or clearly or rigorously thought-out speculations about the role of the petty bourgeoisie are characteristic of the book as a whole. That it contains a lot of historical inaccuracies is unavoidable, probably, in a book with so wide a sweep. There is no point in commenting upon these in detail (though his belief that the post-1906 Liberal governments planned to finance welfare with tariffs will surprise British historians), but it is not simply the banal fact-retaining obsessions of the historian that induces worry about generalizations grounded so often in insecure empirical foundations. Another problem with his method is that he so often generalizes to all of his countries from one or two instances in one or two of them, with no comment upon the problems of such generalization or of comparison among different states and societies. The grand sweep of long-run historical sociology is desirable but if it is ever to ride above the level of not quite convincing speculation and constitute something more significant than sociologists seeking to impress one another, such sociologists are going to have to read historical work, and even historical sources when the secondary work fails them, as it often will, more widely, deeply and critically than they often do.

Pat Thane

SONENSCHER, MICHAEL. *Work and Wages. Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, New Rochelle 1989. xi, 427 pp. Maps. £ 37.50.

This book is destined to be the standard against which future studies of artisans and their organizations under the Old Regime will be measured. Using largely untapped judicial records along with the usual array of sources concerning the *corporations*, Sonenscher has produced a sweeping reinterpretation of the economic and political world of handicraft manufacturing before the permanent abolition of the guilds. Although he tends, like William Sewell and many other writers, to assume (quite erroneously) that he has accounted for the vast majority of industrial workers in the eighteenth century by examining those crafts subject to corporative law, Sonenscher has nevertheless succeeded in creating a picture of the life of the trades before and during the Revolution that should prove enduring. Whether he has adequately explained the causes of the shape that this life took by the later eighteenth century is another matter.

The key to the book's insights is the author's brilliant analysis of conflict in the trades between masters and journeymen as well as among those on the same side of the wage bargain, conflict that was played out largely in courts of law all the way up