

## Book Reviews

*An Offer You Can't Refuse: Workforce in International Perspective*, edited by Ivar Lodermeil and Heather Trickey. Bristol: The Policy Press, 357 pp., 2001. ISBN 1 86134 195 4 paperback. £17.99.

Book titles can sometimes be too good for their authors' comfort. In this case, *An Offer You Can't Refuse* suggests realms of social policy philosophy and history the present study could never have hoped – or been intended – to encompass. Nevertheless the editors make the scope and contents of the book quite clear. Workfare, they observe, has heretofore remained 'largely unmapped from a comparative perspective' (p. xiv); meaning a contemporary, quantifiable, data-based perspective. So this publication, the product of a three year European Union-funded socioeconomic research project, is to be welcomed not merely for what the book offers students and practitioners of social and public policy, but for the departures in sponsored research and writing it may herald.

Manifestly, it is a study grounded in government and service-generated data to the extent it is extant and/or readily available in six northern Europe countries and the United States. Inevitably, given differences in policy-making structures (how centralised?), policy implementation arrangements (how localised?), not to mention the definition of prime target groups (how broadly or narrowly conceived?), the ideal type of workfare programme – 'Programmes or schemes that require people to work in return for social assistance benefits.' (p.6) – is nowhere found in its 'pure' form. Everywhere, it would seem, there are majorities of targetted populations doing something (*if anything*) other than 'work' as popularly defined, in return for benefit; and for an impressive variety of reasons, not all to do with individual client choice, let alone client-inspired manipulation. Government arrangements, all too often, fall short just when the call for 'work' appears most urgent.

But this is to offer an oversimplified picture. One heartening feature of this collection is the trouble both editors and individual contributors have taken to disentangle particulars and get behind derogatory European stereotypes of 'workfare' per se to arrive at some more reasonable understanding of workfare-related social assistance as it actually operates. In doing so they have bequeathed fresh sets of concepts and categories to comparative social policy. Pre-existing social assistance systems range from the universal/citizen/rights-based all the way through to the most local and discretionary, in a fashion which scarcely corresponds with the by now conventional wisdoms of the Esping-Anderson-led typologies of Welfare State regimes. No less illuminating – if only for post hoc analytic purposes – is the distinction drawn between workfare-type assistance policies designed primarily to forestall individual dependency by maximising chances of Labour Market Attachment (LMA), by comparison with those designed primarily to address collective structural problems of non-employed/social exclusion by focussing more

generally on Human Resource Development (HRD). Some categorisations may take particular readers by surprise (Britain's New Deal ranks as an HRD rather than LMA strategy for instance); but surprises can be thought-provoking in themselves.

Yet the very thoroughness and meticulousness of this data-based approach may lessen the book's chances of appeal to a wider audience. Descriptive country-by-country chapters consciously presented to accord with a common framework of analysis do not make for a stimulating cover-to-cover read for those simply interested in the topic in general. The careful attention to detail in the penultimate comparative chapter of co-editor Trickey does little to correct this impression – nor, to be fair, is it designed to do so. Only in the final chapter, offered by co-editor Lodermeil, is the general reader offered a stand-back perspective sufficient to include reference to nineteenth century British Poor Law notions of 'less eligibility' and the 'workhouse test' (though not, significantly, to the 'Labour Tests' of mid-nineteenth century). Elsewhere in the book, considerations of 'policy inheritance' as a factor seem to bear only on the declared policy aims and/or strategies of social assistance which obtained in each case immediately before the introduction of the latest workfare-type programmes.

Utilitarianism – allegedly Britain's single original contribution to the development of social philosophy in Europe – does not rate a mention in the depressingly wooden index to this book any more than do the names of Jeremy Bentham and Edwin Chadwick although their great opponent Malthus – abolish Poor Relief altogether – does surprisingly figure. In short, if there be cycles in or of social policy development over time, this is manifestly not the book in which to discover them.

Nevertheless, there are criticisms not so much of this book as of the funded approach to public/social policy investigation it represents. There is much valuable, reasonably up-to-date, material presented here, primarily for the benefit (it is to be presumed) of others variously researching in the field. It is significant that virtually all the contributors with the exception of Alan Walker, Professor of Social Policy at the University of Nottingham, hail from dedicated research institutes and/or relevant research-oriented departments of government. Virtually no one seems possessed of credentials, or interest in the transmission of ideas and evidence direct to relevant students. The image of the University Teacher as mere intermediary for the transmission of latest specialist research findings looms ever larger.

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*Social Policy WorldWide, Oxford*

Sheingate, Adam D. *The Rise of the Agricultural Welfare State: Institutions and Interest Group Power in the United States, France and Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. pp. xii, 279.

Sheingate challenges a long-standing understanding of group politics and public policy in the United States. Scholars such as Grant McConnell and Theodore Lowi often used agricultural policy to argue that the pluralist, decentralized character of American political institutions creates the possibility for the capture of state power by client groups such as farmers. In contrast, Sheingate suggests that these same institutional arrangements have

had varying political effects over time. In the period of the growth of subsidies to protect farm prices and to reinforce farmers' incomes, policies aptly described as the *agricultural welfare state*, there is little evidence of state capture in the sense of producers' peak associations receiving sufficient delegation of state authority to control market developments. Even when political authorities and farm leaders might have been interested in such an arrangement, the absence of the requisite organised interest association system and of centralized bureaucratic authority thwarted such interests. What is more, contrary to the orthodox understanding, these same institutional arrangements left the United States more open to retrenchment of the agricultural welfare state than other states.

This argument is convincingly developed through a comparative historical analysis. Theoretically, the author draws on the US literature on group politics and public policy, broader comparative theories that look at state-producer relations through such concepts as corporatism and policy networks, and on Kent Weaver's and Paul Pierson's contributions to the study of policy retrenchment. Using the relationships between state bureaucracies responsible for agriculture and farmers' peak associations as a set of explanatory variables, the book builds a comparison between the US on the one side, and France and Japan on the other. French and Japanese arrangements have featured centralized bureaucratic authority and comprehensive, vertically integrated peak associations representing farmers' interests. As such, they provide a ready contrast with US institutions.

Respectful of the insights provided by historical institutionalists, Sheingate begins his study in the mid 19th century when the agricultural ministries in each of the three countries were established. He then proceeds to trace their historical development in systematic comparative fashion, looking first at the period from foundation to the Great Depression and then the changes introduced during the Great Depression and the Second World War. This analysis is useful because it shows how institutional arrangements placed more limits on the policy options available to US policy-makers than to their counterparts in France and Japan. In the following two chapters, the book examines the forms of the agricultural welfare state put in place in the three countries and how relationships between government bureaucracies and interest groups evolved. Incorporating a helpful analysis of how partisan politics infuses these relationships, the book goes on to show how farmers had greater control over policy in France and Japan than in the United States. The corporatist structures in the former countries contributed to the kind of clientelist control traditionally said to be present in the United States. In contrast, American results show much less state intervention and rather little ongoing control over policy formation and implementation by farm groups.

Given that the book is seeking to challenge some long established assumptions about American policy-making, it provides slightly more detailed coverage of the United States than of France and Japan. Nonetheless, the author displays an impressive mastery of close to 150 years of policy developments in all three countries. Moreover, its clear and theoretically nuanced dialogue with studies of both group politics and public policy and of welfare state retrenchment makes it a valuable contribution to broader scholarship of comparative public policy. It also engages usefully with the

competing understandings of the role of the state in the New Deal, understandings crucial, in turn, to explanations about the path of development of the American welfare state.

Given its central focus on farmer-state relations, the analysis is most convincing up to the period of retrenchment beginning in the 1980s. At this point, two developments make the argument a little harder to sustain. By 1980, farm politics in France is firmly implanted in a structure of multi-level governance in the European Union. The author argues that consensus decision-making at the EU level and the strong position of the Agriculture Directorate-General of the European Commission make the relationship between the French agricultural ministry and the dominant farmers' peak association still a crucial variable. This argument does not take adequate account of the complexities of agricultural decision-making in the EU, especially the positions of other member-states.

Second, the varying involvement of the three countries in the international agricultural economy becomes more important after 1980. The US is the most heavily involved, followed by France. Japan lacks their capacity to export. These differences make the politics of agricultural trade in GATT and the World Trade Organization relevant in different ways in the three countries, and may affect significantly how the politics of retrenchment unfolds in a given country. To his credit, Sheingate acknowledges these developments, but they will need to be incorporated more systematically, both theoretically and empirically, into explanations of welfare-state retrenchment in future studies. Given the high quality of this book, this challenge is clearly one the author will address well in his future scholarly work.

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*The Politics of Telecommunications: National Institutions, Convergence and Change.* Mark Thatcher. Oxford University Press. 1999. £45.

This book gives a clear and succinct history of the framework for ownership, competition and regulation of the telecommunications industry in both Britain and France over the last 30 years. As such it will be an invaluable reference book for all those interested in the institutional aspects of the regulation of this vital sector. In addition, it will be of great relevance to a much broader group of political scientists.

First, the book represents a test of the central tenets of the 'new institutionalism' as measured by developments in the telecommunications sector. Secondly, it has much to say about lesson learning and the transmission of policy change across borders. The complex tale offers a healthy antidote to any glib generalisations about the relative importance of private or public actors or of international and domestic factors. Thirdly, it offers insights into the mechanisms of 'globalisation' and underlines the two-way relationship between global economic forces and their mediation and stimulation by changes in national policy. The telecommunications sector in both France and the United Kingdom were subject to the same strong external forces of international change but the institutional and policy responses could and did differ.

The central focus of this book is on testing the core propositions of the new

institutionalism and in particular the assertion that the institutional framework will determine policy outcomes, with different institutional arrangements producing different outcomes. Its findings nuance or modify some common assertions. For example, the findings make an important distinction between the choice of policy instruments, which directly reflect institutional arrangements, and economic outcomes which may be similar even if the choice of instrument differs. This distinction is of general relevance to the claims of institutionalists about the link between institutions and the relative economic performance of nations. In addition, in the world of practical policy-making the finding is of direct relevance within the EU as policy makers and regulated industries come to grips with the implications of different national regulatory structures within the Single Market. It suggests there should be less concern with institutional differences and more concentration on the economic effect of policies.

The analysis also sheds light on the process through which institutional arrangements change and the extent to which institutional arrangements can be held to provoke path dependency. It underscores the limits to which institutions can be regarded as exogenous and suggests a more complex relationship between policy and institutions, with periods of institutional stability followed by 'punctuated' reform, in other words a pattern of change which does not fall into the standard accounts of change as either evolutionary or revolutionary.

The sector approach should give pause for thought to all those who attempt to analyse such phenomena as globalisation and path dependency at the level of the so-called nation-state. The case of telecommunications shows a complicated interplay between domestic, international and 'intermestic' (EU) forces and between private and public actors. It suggests that the sector approach can be much more illuminating in identifying dynamics. The sector focus also yields dividends in what it has to say about the processes of lesson learning. In the absence of this case study it would be tempting to conclude that there was an extensive range of common ideas borrowed to bring about similar changes in the telecommunications industry world-wide in the last 20–30 years. However this study suggests a much more transmuted process of change. Thus, the initial spark for change was undertaken entirely for domestic reasons in the United States. This sent a 'wake-up' call to the telecommunications industry in France and the United Kingdom, but changes in the latter were again primarily designed in the light of domestic circumstances. Institutional borrowings in Britain came via the less direct route through comparisons of regulatory approaches with the US and in France through the impact of privatisation in the UK. Both Britain and France drew different lessons to fit their home context better.

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