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States, Social Knowledge, and the Origins of Modern Social Policies

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Edited by Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol

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Preface

THE INTELLECTUAL conversations that led to this book started years ago under the auspices of the Committee on States and Social Structures at the Social Science Research Council. The Committee had already commissioned conferences that culminated in the volumes *Bringing the State Back In,* edited by the two of us along with Peter B. Evans, and *The Political Power of Economic Ideas: Keynesianism Across Nations,* edited by Peter A. Hall. A focus on social knowledge and the origins of modern social policies seemed a good way to further explore the sorts of questions that had been taken up in these earlier projects, and especially in the one coordinated by Peter Hall. With funding from the Spencer Foundation, meetings of social scientists and historians were convened and papers were drafted and revised. After some years interrupted by other demands on academic schedules, this collection came together. By the time it was ready for publication, the SSRC Committee had moved to the Russell Sage Foundation, to become the Working Group on States and Social Structures.

Over the course of work on this book, we have accumulated many debts. All of our colleagues on the original Committee on States and Social Structures had a hand in planning this project, and for that we thank Peter Evans, Albert Hirschman, Ira Katznelson, Peter Katzenstein, Stephen Krasner, and Charles Tilly. We also appreciate the work done by SSRC staffers Martha Gephart and Yasmine Ergas. And we are very grateful for the support given to the workshop meetings and preparation of the book by the Spencer Foundation. Martin Bulmer, Stephan Liebfried, and Giovanna Procacci made valuable contributions to meetings on this project, contributions which have intellectually enriched the book as well as the group discussions. For help with publication, we are grateful to Lisa Nachtigall at the Russell Sage Foundation, Malcolm DeBevoise at Princeton University Press, and the anonymous scholarly reviewers who made valuable suggestions in response to the first version of the manuscript. We would also like to acknowledge Margie Towery for the meticulously prepared index. Finally, we wish to thank our spouses, Marilyn Rueschemeyer and Bill Skocpol, for the help and encouragement they have offered in many ways.

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Introduction

THEDA SKOCPOL
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THE MODERN social sciences took shape in close interaction with early attempts by national states to deal with the social consequences of capitalist industrialization. From roughly the 1850s to the 1920s, such social policies as regulations of the industrial labor process, pensions for the elderly, unemployment insurance, and measures to educate and ensure the welfare of children were enacted into law in many industrializing capitalist nations. This was also the period in which the modern social sciences emerged, taking on intellectual and institutional characteristics still recognizable today. The emerging social sciences can be examined as social groups and as modes of knowing about the social world. In both senses they influenced, and were influenced by, the making of early modern social policies.

This book uses a focus on the origins of modern social policies to explore the interrelations of states and social knowledge. The chapters examine how the social dilemmas of industrialization changed the ways in which knowledge about social and economic life was created—and how, in turn, new knowledge and newly constituted knowledge groups influenced the substance and direction of governmental policies. Looking at the emerging social sciences in relation to governmental policymaking enhances our general understanding of the cultural accompaniments and intellectual bases of state action.

We can examine in a fresh and informative way matters which, heretofore, have been de-emphasized in scholarly debates about the development of national states and their social policies. Previous scholarly debates about the origins of modern social policies have focused almost exclusively on class and political conflicts, de-emphasizing the equally important contributions of ideas, of knowledge-bearing groups, and of knowledge-generating institutions. Most previous research has likewise not explored as fully as possible the impact of varying national government institutions and social policies on the outlooks, institutional arrangements, and civic impact of the emerging social sciences.

Although this book looks at its own distinct time period and set of substantive questions, its comparative-historical and institutionalist approach resembles the theoretical and methodological approaches used in

Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism by Robert Wuthnow, and in *The Political Power of Economic Ideas: Keynesianism Across Nations,* edited by Peter A. Hall.[1] Both of these works, and this collection as well, investigate intellectual transformations in the modern world—asking about the social locations of the proponents of new ideas, and about the institutional conditions that have influenced the spread, transformation, and policy successes or failures of the ideas and their carriers. This book, like the other two, concludes that historically changing and cross-nationally varying institutional configurations—interrelations among states and social structures—have much to do with the development and deployment of systems of ideas, including scientific ideas as well as political or moral ideologies.

In the remainder of this brief introduction, we do two things. We first note the broad epochal transformations that form the backdrop for all of the chapters in this volume, pointing to the special relevance of partially autonomous elites and groups making claims to new kinds of knowledge about the social world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Then we introduce the three major parts of the book, discussing how the chapters included in each part address a particular subset of issues about states, social knowledge, and the origins of modern social policies.

Social Knowledge and Modern Social Policies

Leaders of states in the modern world have concerned themselves with social order and with at least the external conditions for the smooth functioning of markets and production processes. Modern social policies of the more specific types we are considering in this volume were developed by or through the national states of industrializing capitalist countries in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These state interventions aimed at giving working people and their dependents, or members of the "respectable poor," minimal protection against the economic hazards of injury, illness, family breakup, old age, and unemployment. In time, the earliest social policies established by industrializing nations were expanded and knit together into what have been labeled, since World War II, "modern welfare states." Governments became involved in social life in unforeseen and unprecedented ways.

Creators of modern social policies responded to a number of master trends set in motion by the rise and success of capitalism. Class interests, both new and old, became more openly antagonistic, and they expressed themselves with an unheard-of starkness in collective organization and collective action. At the same time, there occurred what Karl Mannheim called the "fundamental democratization" of society—the empowerment

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of subordinate groups and classes formerly excluded from political influence and participation. Together these two developments raised the specter of nations irreparably divided: politically and economically disruptive class conflict loomed as a realistic possibility. And a third development gave a special urgency to these threats to social order and economic efficiency. As English dominance of the international economy gradually gave way to an increasingly harsh competition among nationally organized political economies, authorities within each nation had geopolitical as well as domestic reasons for attending to the problems raised during the course of capitalist economic development.

Who, then, defined such transformations as political challenges, and then devised ideas about how to respond to them? The obvious answer may seem to be: the political representatives of dominant class interests facing challenges from the subordinate classes. Yet this answer does not take account of major transformations at the apex of the industrializing capitalist political economies.

It does not take into account, in the first place, the rise in many places of bureaucratic states whose power was structurally separated from the economic power of landlords and of capitalist entrepreneurs. Power grounded in the ownership of land no longer, in and of itself, conferred governmental authority; and neither did power grounded in the ownership of other capital assets. Increasingly effective in their internal workings, bureaucratizing state apparatuses became—at different times and in varying degrees in different countries—more important as sites for official actors who were potentially autonomous from dominant economic groups. And so did political parties devoted to mobilizing groups for (more or less democratic) elections. Thus, even in the United States, where bureaucratized agencies of government emerged only slowly and in piecemeal fashion, powerful political organizations—in this case, patronage-oriented political parties, along with state and federal courts—exercised some relatively autonomous authority in relation to social classes and class conflict.[2]

Also obscured by a simple class analysis are the new uses of knowledge and the new roles of knowledge-generative institutions and knowledge-bearing elites. Throughout Western Europe and North America, schools, academies, universities, and scholarly societies were reconstructed or newly created on a large scale. The rise of capitalism and of modern national states created many new practical uses for social knowledge. Set off to some extent from religious leaders as well as from economic owners and established political authorities, knowledge-bearing groups and intellectual elites acquired a new authority based on their claims to effective secular knowledge. While the new knowledge-bearing elites probably never had (nor ever will have) the dominant impact on society that was ascribed to them by the eighteenth-century French philosophers—not to mention by such present-

day theorists of "post-industrial society" as Alvin Gouldner and Daniel Bell—they did gain considerable social and policymaking influence.[3] Just as the state cannot be collapsed into capitalism or class conflict, neither can knowledge-generating institutions or knowledge-bearing groups and their ideas be analytically collapsed into capitalism or the state.

This said, of course, the role of experts and intellectual elites was markedly greater when and where they served the knowledge needs of other powerful actors—above all interests understood and acted upon by agencies of modern national states. In historical actuality, the rise of bureaucratically organized government and the new role of secular knowledge were not unrelated. Not unjustifiably did the seminal social theorist and comparative-historical analyst Max Weber view bureaucratization and the increased governmental use of social knowledge as twin aspects of a more comprehensive process of "rationalization" associated with capitalism from its earliest beginnings.

The major actors in the initiation of modern social policies were not, in fact, simply class-based groups. The bourgeoisie and the industrial working class were without doubt of great importance; their relations shaped much of the context within which knowledge-bearers and policymakers operated. Yet, in any immediate sense, neither bourgeois capital owners nor industrial workers played the leading roles in social reform. In fact, both business and working-class organizations took either oppositional or reserved and ambiguous positions in the debates about such policies as social insurance for workingmen and their dependents.[4] Working-class organizations, such as unions and early social-democratic political parties, often constituted an apparent threat to the established order; and without this threat the formulation of proposals for the first modern social policies is hardly conceivable. Yet challenges from below had an effect on social reform primarily through the perceptions and interpretation of elite actors powerfully situated in or around the state.

In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the primary forces behind policy innovations were often what one might call "third" parties (presuming that capital and labor are considered as the two main parties to many underlying conflicts). The "third party" role could be played by such central political figures as Britain's Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, and Germany's Chancellor Bismarck. As well, civil servants often had a critical part in the design and in the political realization of social reform measures. Similarly, intellectual elites reshaped educated opinion and advised governments on social problems and social policy.

The historical record and the chapters of this volume show that various sorts of ideas and different sorts of knowledge-bearing elites have played distinct parts in various countries, and in relation to specific kinds of policy issues. But amidst the variation, there is one constant: intellectual expertise

and authority invariably left their imprint on the formation of early modern social policies. We need to understand more deeply both the ideas and the socio-institutional locations of the bearers of new knowledge about society who figured so importantly in the origins of early modern social policies.

Looking Ahead

All of the authors in this volume engage themselves in historical comparison, undertaking the difficult task of exploring policy changes and the generation and use of knowledge across national borders. Inevitably then —and we think, valuably—the chapters cut at different points into complex webs of interrelationships, all parts of which need to be explored if we are to better understand states, social knowledge, and the origins of modern social policies. We have chosen to cluster the essays not by country or by time but according to how each set cuts into the empirical interrelationships at issue here. In this way, the findings and arguments of these chapters can be seen to resonate with, and build upon, one another, leading toward more sophisticated and grounded generalizations than one could achieve by theoretical deduction alone.

The nature of modern social knowledge as it took historical shape in industrializing Europe is the concern of the chapters collected into Part I, "The Emergence of Modern Social Knowledge." As Ira Katznelson points out, scholars often move too quickly to asking about the instrumental purposes of intellectuals—"knowledge for what"—before adequately exploring "knowledge about what." In Katznelson's view, there emerged in modernizing Europe a quest for knowledge about the relationships of postfeudal political authorities to citizens of more and more participatory nation-states. A "new liberal" intelligentsia, Katznelson argues, focused thought and research on the changing linkages among states, markets, and citizens. These intellectuals had faith that empirical and rational analysis would lead toward scientific solutions of ethical and policy problems. The bulk of Katznelson's chapter discusses in detail the ideas of certain English "new liberals," chiefly John Stuart Mill, Alfred Marshall, and H. L. Beales. Variants of the same ideas, and reactions against them, have in Katznelson's view "shaped and limited" Western social science from the nineteenth century to the present.

Anson Rabinbach also writes about the substance of social knowledge in modernizing Europe, about the emergence of the general belief that society develops in lawlike ways and that behavior and public policies can rationally be made to conform to social laws. Specifically, Rabinbach examines ideas embodied in late nineteenth-century French and German discus-

sions about industrial accidents. Two "novel ideas" gained currency and prestige at the end of the nineteenth century, he tells us. Society came to be seen as having an obligation to reduce risks and inequities for individuals. And the notion developed that "social responsibility can be grounded scientifically and demonstrated by statistical laws." Because of the emergence of such ways of thinking, issues about industrial accidents that were once centered directly in immediate employer-employee relationships were "displaced" into realms of jurisprudence and statistical and medical expertise. Industrial "work" became subject to social-scientific investigation, as did other aspects of economic and social life. This did not, however, end class conflict. Rather, it led to the "politicization" of knowledge, as conflicts based in class and other interests came to be carried out in the guise of disputes among scientific experts, situated within new institutional locales, and using new forms of discourse.

Neither Katznelson nor Rabinbach pay great attention to the causes of cross-national variations in ideas or public policymaking. To be sure, Katznelson notes the limits of his focus on English intellectuals; and Rabinbach discusses in considerable detail the contrasting sorts of industrial accident policies and political coalitions that held center stage in France versus Germany at the end of the 1800s. But both Katznelson and Rabinbach are chiefly interested in similar trends in the contents of modern social knowledge as it emerged in nineteenth-century Europe. In contrast, the third chapter in Part I, by Björn Wittrock and Peter Wagner, stresses the need for, and analytical advantages of, comparative studies of variations across the nations of industrializing Europe.

Wittrock and Wagner have written a synthetic "think piece" that reflects on findings in all of the chapters in this book. The origins of modern social policies in Western nations coincided, these authors point out, with the emergence of modern universities and professions as the institutional settings for the production and deployment of new kinds of social knowledge. Yet no single master evolutionary path of change was followed, and scholars cannot understand these intertwined changes either in terms of socioeconomic reductionism or simply the internal logic of ideas as such. They must, instead, explore and seek to explain cross-national variations, with a focus on the diverse institutional configurations that tied together political institutions and knowledge-producing institutions.

Wittrock and Wagner argue that key differences are to be found between "statist" European nations that had bureaucratic-absolutist political systems prior to industrialization, and "non-statist" nations, such as England, that lacked such pre-modern institutional arrangements. Yet Wittrock and Wagner do not reify this as the only comparative-historical distinction that matters. They go on to show that differences among governmental institutions within the "statist" and "non-statist" categories also

matter for the purpose of making sense of cross-national variations in ideas and politics.

Wittrock and Wagner's chapter marks an appropriate transition to Parts II and III of this book, where their call for careful cross-national analysis of actors within varying institutional configurations is put into practice. Each chapter in Part II, "Reformist Social Scientists and Public Policymaking," features a close comparison of analogous groups of policy-oriented reformist intellectuals in two nations. Actors with ideas and reformist policy goals thus become the entering point of discussion, rather than the content of idea systems as such. Likewise in Part III, "State Managers and the Uses of Social Knowledge," actors remain at the center; these chapters look at groups of officials in parallel governmental agencies of two or more national states. The authors of each of the chapters in Parts II and III move "outward" from the groups of actors they have chosen to juxtapose, toward an analysis of the cultural, social, and institutional conditions that explain cross-national similarities and differences in intellectual and policy developments.

Germany and Great Britain were among the first Western nations to use national social policies to address the insecurities of the industrial working class during industrialization; and the German Verein für Sozialpolitik and the English Fabian Society were groups of reformist intellectuals centrally involved in the social investigations and policy debates that shaped these pioneering welfare states. In the first chapter of Part II, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Ronan Van Rossem compare the sociopolitical contexts within which these two knowledge-wielding nations emerged, operated, and changed over time. Both the content of authoritative social knowledge and the nature of knowledge-bearing groups are shown to depend on larger socio-institutional patterns.

The authority and effectiveness on public policymaking of the German Verein was originally grounded in the status and bureaucratic structures of the Imperial German "Kulturstaat," Rueschemeyer and Van Rossem argue. As Germany partially democratized, the Verein's distinctive fusion of cognitive and moral-political authority dissolved, putting the emerging German social sciences on a new academic trajectory. Meanwhile in Britain, the nature and modes of operations of the Fabian Society depended equally on the porousness of the British state, social status structure, and emerging moderate labor movement. As the liberal British oligarchy of the nineteenth century gradually democratized, the Fabians' "amateur" empiricist style of social research persisted through its incorporation into a wing of the Labour Party.

Reform-minded British social investigators also figure in Libby Schweber's chapter which seeks to compare them to their counterparts in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States. Schweber analyt-

ically revisits a historical paradox first noted by the historical sociologist Philip Abrams, who argued that there was an elective affinity between the persistence of amateur social inquiry and the early emergence of a national welfare state in Britain and the converse turn toward academic, professional social science, while early efforts at national welfare-state-building were failing in the United States.[5] Schweber introduces both greater complexity and more analytical specificity into this comparative insight. She traces in detail the modes of politics used, more or less effectively, by reformist social scientists promoting new governmental responses to industrial unemployment in Britain and the United States. In order to explain the differences she notes in the involvements of intellectuals in policy formation, Schweber brings together a historical and institutional account of transformations in political institutions, and changes in universities in relation to states and social structures.

The final chapter of Part II takes us further into North American history. John Sutton is fascinated by early developments in an area of modern social policy, child welfare policy, where the United States, even at the national level, actually took earlier programmatic steps than did other nations, including Canada. Canada has often been seen by scholars as closer to the pioneering welfare states of Europe, while the United States has been considered an extreme laggard in modern social policy, but in the area of child welfare policy this overall pattern does not hold. Sutton analyzes two federal-level governmental agencies—the U.S. Children's Bureau and the Canadian Council on Child Welfare—both of which grew out of social-reform movements spearheaded by women's groups wielding new research methods and ideas about families and the needs of children. After noting a series of telling differences between the reform movements and the agencies, Sutton relates them to differences between the U.S. and Canadian colonial experiences and constitutional and party structures. He argues, moreover, that especially in "weak" states such as Canada and the United States, nonofficial groups serve as crucial intervening agents in the setting of policy agendas and the definition of the modes of research and information that can influence state policymaking. The exact characteristics, capacities, and proclivities of those groups may have a great deal to do with the substantive evolution of a policy area such as child welfare.

Taken together, the chapters of Part II suggest that the social composition, ideas, and favored modes of research and argument of knowledge-bearing groups are profoundly influenced by the social-status arrangements and the political institutions of their respective societies. In turn, these larger contexts influence whether and how (that is, through what kinds of knowledge-claims) policy-oriented intellectuals can have influence within national politics. The chapters show, as well, that national contexts are not unbreakable, essentialist entities; there can be important, analyt-

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