

RECASTING THE WELFARE STATE 20 YEARS LATER

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Sala Europa

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■ INTRODUCTION

The welfare state is perhaps the most successful feat of mid-twentieth-century social engineering. Since the Second World War, West-European welfare states virtually eradicated old-age poverty, provided universal access to health care and education, and established social security in the cases of unemployment and sickness as a matter of social citizenship right. Over the long run, European welfare states have been hard pressed to reform by deep economic crises, but also by more slow-burning developments of demographic ageing, deindustrialization, the rise of the service sector, technological change, the feminization of the labour market, economic internationalization, European Union market integration, and intensified migration. Throughout, one of the surprising features of the post-war welfare state, confronted with many cumulative challenges, constitutes its very resilience. Public spending on social protection, health and education, today, in the aftermath of the Great Recession, matches the levels already achieved in the 1980s in the wake of the Stagflation crisis of the 1970s. Unsurprisingly, explaining the staying power of the welfare state became a favorite pastime in comparative research, spearheaded by the seminal work of Paul Pierson on 'irresistible forces' being deflected by 'immovable objects' in an age of 'permanent austerity'. But is institutional resilience merely about the frozen status quo? Constant aggregate spending there can hide significant reallocation between different welfare programs. By the same token, stable coverage rates is a poor indicator of performance, in terms of employment, relative poverty or inequality, as particular social risks intensify for particular groups while others subside for more privileged cohorts.

In the new millennium, the academic focus in comparative welfare state research decidedly shifted from change-resistant welfare states to an improved understandings of how welfare state in effect do change. Welfare reform is difficult, but it happens. As post-industrial change reconfigures the nature of social risks, life chances are modified, potentially raising augmented political pressures to reform welfare provision. The proliferation of 'new' social risks of working poverty, job instability, long-term unemployment, skill-depletion, single parenting, and work-life strain, alongside 'old' social risks of cyclical unemployment, sickness and old age, have, in recent decades, inescapably urged policy makers to embark on welfare reform trajectories to adapt their welfare system to the new post-industrial environment at a time of intensified economic interdependence, especially, for the Member States of the European Union.

On the 14th and 15th March 2019, many of the participants to the 1998-1999 European Forum,



organized by Maurizio Ferrera and Martin Rhodes at the EUI Schuman Center, reconvene for a two-day open workshop 'Recasting the Welfare State 20 years later'. The reunion aspires, once again, to make way for a rich exchange of ideas and opinions, on the past, present, and future state of comparative welfare research, this in particular with respect to the perennial political truth that reform is difficult. The discussion will be structured three broad themes, two of which are more academic and a third of greater political importance: (1) Looking back on how welfare states change; (2) conjecturing welfare state research futures; and (3) confronting the policy reform dilemma of political responsiveness and government responsibility in welfare chauvinist times.

■ PROGRAMME

14 MARCH

14.00 - 14.15 Kickoff: **Maurizio Ferrera** | University of Milan

14.15 - 15.45 ***How welfare states change***

Reflections by

Martin Rhodes | University of Denver (on EU)

Ann Orloff | Northwestern University (on gender),

Stein Kuhnle | University of Bergen (on the Nordic countries)

15.45 - 16.15 *Coffee break*

16.15 - 17.45 Reflections by

Ana Guillen | University of Oviedo (on post-austerity conditionality)

Valeria Fargion | University of Florence (on the EU's external dimension)

Daniel Clegg | University of Edinburgh (on the development of employment-conditional social benefits)

15 MARCH

09.00 - 10.30 ***Welfare state research futures***

Reflection by

Bruno Palier | Sciences Po (on growth strategies and welfare states)

Maurizio Ferrera | University of Milan (on the EU)

Ellen Immergut | Istituto Universitario Europeo (on health care futures)

10.30 - 10.45 *Coffee break*

10.45 - 12.15 Reflection by

Luis Moreno | Spanish National Research Council (on robotization)

Anton Hemerijck | European University Institute (on wellbeing returns on social investment)

Rosa Mule | Bologna University (on capabilities and social investment)

12.30 - 14.00 *Lunch break*

- 14.00 - 15.15 ***Welfare reform political dilemmas***
Kickoff: **Martin Rhodes** | University of Denver
László Andor | Corvinus University of Budapest
- 15.15 - 15.30 *Coffee break*
- 15.30 - 16.00 ***Welfare reform political dilemmas***
Jet Bussemaker | Leiden University
Enrico Giovannini | University of Rome Tor Vergata
- 16.00 - 16.30 Wrap up: **Maurizio Ferrera** | University of Milan and **Martin Rhodes** |
University of Denver