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## *A Prelude to the Welfare State: The Origins of Workers' Compensation.* Price V. Fishback and Shawn Everett Kantor. Review by Christopher R. Larrison

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have good jobs which would sustain their lives and give them dignity. The transition from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) to the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which offered jobs and wages was a natural progression for many New Dealers. Though not an historian, Hickok's lively writings, despite her biases, can serve as an informative and invaluable history of the early New Deal. The editors' work in compiling Hickok's reports is commendable and the University of Illinois Press's reprinting of this book is especially timely given current debates about the purpose and function of federally directed public welfare programs and services.

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Price V. Fishback and Shawn Everett Kantor, *A Prelude to the Welfare State: The Origins of Workers' Compensation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. \$37.50 hardcover

In *A Prelude to the Welfare State: The Origins of Workers' Compensation* Fishback and Kantor claim to "offer an alternative interpretation of the success of workers' compensation that builds on and enhances the analysis of earlier scholars." (p. 198). The authors' substantial, well-written, and compelling book does just that, integrating their earlier work concerning workers' compensation with the writings of other thoughtful scholars. The end result is an in-depth analysis of how workers' compensation was created and initially implemented in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The overall structure of the book, eight chapters and eleven appendices, allows for either a medium or in-depth reading. In total there are 316 pages of which 203 are the eight-chapter heart of the book. The layout of the chapters, an introduction wrapped around an example vignette, the concise defining of key players, the identification of the questions to be answered during the chapter, supporting evidence, findings, and summary provide a clean structure. The footnoting is lavish, with the use of multiple parallel examples that augment and support the authors' primary points. The appendices offer the kind of detailed

information sought by individuals interested in a critical analysis of any scholar's work.

The backbone of Fishback and Kantor's book is the sample of data and statistical analysis, which bring to life the creation and early implementation of workers' compensation. The comprehensive quantitative data, which is from a number of different federal, state, and private sources, is matched with elaborate and detailed qualitative data. The combination of strong quantitative analysis and well-organized example vignettes and case studies allows the reader to move from the personal to policy and back with ease.

The first three chapters of the book are spent carefully identifying and explaining how "the legislation [workers' compensation] evolved from the mutual desire of workers, employers, and insurers to resolve problems with workplace accident liability that had developed in the first decade of the twentieth century." (p. 199). The quantitative data show how the various interests represented by employers, workers, and insurers stood to benefit under workers' compensation. As well, the data show how the old negligence liability system, which relied upon the three judicial defenses of assumption of risk (unspoken *ex ante* contracts in the form of higher wages in exchange for increased work place risk), fellow servant (coworkers was at fault for harm), and contributory negligence (harm self inflicted) was becoming an increasingly ineffective policy for employers and workers. The data convincingly demonstrate why the idea of workers' compensation attracted a "broad-based coalition of divergent interests" (p. 136) and the authors' contentions are well founded based on the evidence presented.

The last four chapters of the book (Chapter 8 is an epilogue) are spent examining the complex wrangling between interest groups and politicians that occurs when legislation is in the process of adoption, even if it has broad-based support. In these chapters the qualitative data, which comes in the form of individual state case studies are used to delineated how states shared several features as well as how they were divergent in their process of adopting workers' compensation. The data confirm states differed significantly based on a variety of variables that were influenced by the unique political environment of each state. The authors organize and discuss the complex relationships

highlighted in the case study data in a digestible and interesting fashion. For example, they use the implementation of workers' compensation to examine the sticky question of whether broad based political movements or narrowly focused economic interest groups are the determining factor in the development of legislation (Chapter 6).

Fishback and Kantor's other significant contention is that "workers' compensation set precedents for government requirements of . . . Social Security, Medicare, and eventually to the entire network of modern social welfare programs in the United States." (p. 1). This point is not as convincingly argued as the authors' other points, particularly in the area of workers' compensation's connection to Social Security and modern social welfare. The authors have underestimated the effect of the great stock market crash of 1929 on the fabric of U.S. culture. For the first time, the general public accepted the possibility that poverty, failure, and unemployment could occur as a result of an environmental flaw rather than a personal one. This shift towards an ecological view of poverty provided the necessary impetus for the passage of Social Security and influenced the creation of modern welfare. Without the crash of 1929, workers' compensation in and of itself would not have led to Social Security and other modern social welfare programs. Furthermore, the contention that workers' compensation's set precedence for Social Security and modern welfare policy is not necessary to the authors' other arguments.

In conclusion, I highly recommend Fishback and Kantor's book for any scholar interested in the creation and initial implementation of workers' compensation in the United States. I also recommend the book to anyone looking to read a piece of model social policy analysis.

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Charles P. Blahous III, *Reforming Social Security for Ourselves and Our Posterity*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000. \$39.95 hardcover.

Few government programs have been the targets of so much public debate for so many years as Social Security. For much of the last half century in the United States there has been periodic