



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 31

Issue 1 March - Special Issue on Restorative
Justice and Responsive Regulation

Article 21

March 2004

*Restructuring the Welfare State: Political Institutions and Policy
Change.* Bo Rothstein & Sven Steinmo (Eds.).

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

(2004) "*Restructuring the Welfare State: Political Institutions and Policy Change.* Bo Rothstein & Sven Steinmo (Eds.).," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 31: Iss. 1, Article 21.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.2976>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol31/iss1/21>

This Book Note is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

their ability to connect theory to practice should appeal to a wide range of analysts and interventionists. It is hoped that those concerned about children in the 21st century will consider the relevance of the author's ideas for professional work and personal practice.

Bo Rothstein and Sven Steinmo (Eds.), *Restructuring the Welfare State: Political Institutions and Policy Change*. New York: Palgrave, 2002. \$ 75.00 hardcover, \$ 24.95 papercover.

There has been a good deal of discussion in the international social policy literature about the future of the 'welfare state'. Welfare states, it is said, have been severely damaged over the last twenty years as a result of the political ascendancy of the radical right and by budgetary retrenchments and privatization. In addition, it is widely believed that the forces of globalization are compelling governments of all political persuasions to reduce social expenditures and re-evaluate their commitment to welfare state ideals. This discussion has been accompanied by normative proposals for restructuring the welfare state in ways that are humane and that perpetuate the ideals of the welfare state's founders.

The title of this book, and its introductory section suggests that a rethinking of the welfare state is badly needed. Accordingly, the reader's interests are whetted by the prospect of a substantive analysis of the ways in which welfare states can indeed be overhauled so that they meet the needs of their citizens through judicious and appropriate state intervention. Although the existing literature on the subject is quite extensive, there is a need for a thorough review of the various normative proposals that have been proposed for addressing the challenge posed by politics of the radical right and by globalization.

Unfortunately, the book does not in fact grapple with these issues at any length and amounts instead to an eclectic and discursive account by political scientists on diverse issues affecting social policy today. The topics covered by these contributors include discussions of the role of political trust in the creation of welfare states, the reasons for American exceptionalism, the contribution of privatization and devolution in welfare state thinking, the role of racial politics in social policy, policies for including 'foreigners'

in welfare states and popular support for the welfare state. These tropics are thematically linked by a theoretical commitment to historical institutional analysis which is used to frame the discussion. Historical institutionalism differs from other dominant theories in political and public policy such as pluralism and rational choice in that it stresses the role of historically institutionalized practices in the analysis of policy decisions. This is undoubtedly a worthwhile enterprise but the reader is left with a sense of disappointment that bigger issues such as the future of the welfare state have not been addressed.

Nevertheless, the book does shed light on how historical institutionalism guides social policy thinking in political science circles today. In addition, some of the contributions address topics of current importance. The chapters on privatization, race and immigration are particularly useful. Some of the chapters also bring a welcome comparative perspective to the discussion, focusing on developments in Europe and the United States and also on Japan and other countries. Although this is not a book for undergraduates, it will be of interest to scholars concerned with political theories and the way they affect social welfare policy.

Ian Ferguson, Michael Lavalette and Gerry Mooney, *Rethinking Welfare: A Critical Perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002. \$92.00 hardcover, \$27.00 papercover.

The last decade has offered fertile ground for the continuing debate between the political Right and Left over the role and function of the welfare state. As Neo-Liberalism has become the dominant economic policy around the globe, welfare and welfare state policies have been redesigned. Fiscal austerity measures in the United Kingdom and the United States have resulted in planned reforms aimed at minimizing welfare state functions. The classic tension between those who advocate for an expanded state and those who view the state as exacerbating already existing inequalities has begun to play out on a global scale. Most of the welfare reform efforts have been driven by a dynamism from within the private sector, heralding consumer choice over state control.

Scholars working from the Marxist tradition have continued to provide critical analyses of these trends, which aim to identify