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978-0-521-18368-0 - The Politics of Welfare State Reform in Continental Europe:
Modernization in Hard Times

Silja Häusermann

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The Politics of Welfare State Reform in Continental Europe

This book challenges existing theories of welfare state change by analyzing pension reforms in France, Germany, and Switzerland between 1970 and 2004. It explains why all three countries were able to adopt far-reaching reforms, adapting their pension regimes to both financial austerity and new social risks. In a radical departure from the neo-institutionalist emphasis on policy stability, the book argues that socio-structural change has led to a multidimensional pension-reform agenda. A variety of crosscutting lines of political conflict, emerging from the transition to a post-industrial economy, allowed governments to engage in strategies of political exchange and coalition building, thus fostering broad cross-class coalitions in support of major reform packages. Methodologically, the book proposes a novel strategy to analyze lines of conflict, configurations of political actors, and coalitional dynamics over time. This strategy combines quantitative analyses of actor configurations based on coded policy positions with in-depth case studies.

Silja Häusermann is Assistant Professor at the University of Zurich in Switzerland. She has been Visiting Fellow at Harvard University and a Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. She was awarded the Ernst B. Haas Best Dissertation Prize of the European Politics and Society section of the American Political Science Association, the Jean Blondel Ph.D. Prize of the European Consortium for Political Research, the Junior Scientist Award by the Swiss Political Science Association, and the Young Researcher Prize by the *Journal of European Social Policy* and the European Social Policy Analysis Network. She has published articles on comparative welfare state analysis, public opinion and welfare states, and the Europeanization of national politics in journals such as *European Journal of Political Research*, *Socio-Economic Review*, *European Societies*, *Journal of European Social Policy*, and *Journal of European Public Policy*.

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Preface

Who gets what and why? is not only a defining question of political science; it is also the question that drives the personal interest and intellectual commitment of many political scientists. I am no exception. Analyzing and explaining the distribution of resources and opportunities in our societies becomes even more important in hard times of fiscal austerity and increasing social needs. What happens when the pie gets smaller while the hunger – or at least the appetite – of the parties around the table grows? This is exactly the situation that has emerged in continental European welfare states since the late 1970s: new and old social needs grow in a context of fiscal austerity. Many political scientists view this distributional struggle as fought by essentially two sides: those who want to cut back on welfare and those who defend existing social rights. But this is wrong. Just as political actors – in Esping-Andersen's famous terms – do not fight for spending per se, they do not attack or defend the welfare state per se. Different actors, generally far more than two, want different things from the welfare state. Once we become aware of this complexity of actors and preferences, it is clear that the possibilities for changing alliances and various distributional reforms are manifold. Consequently, the question is not about whether we end up with more or less welfare but about who ends up with what. This is what this book is about: who gets what and why in the reform of continental pension regimes in hard times.

The idea for this book originated in the early 2000s, when I was a student assistant performing research on the internationalization of Swiss decision-making processes at the University of Lausanne. The project focused on strongly internationalized policy reforms, such as the liberalization of telecommunications, public procurement, and competition policy, but the project also directed my attention to a few pension and unemployment policy reforms, which had been selected as weakly internationalized control cases. As was the case with the other policy fields, I traced the institutions and procedures of decision making in the reforms. While doing so, I became more and more intrigued by the plurality of

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policy goals the different actors had set their sights on. Some actors fought for poverty relief, some for gender equality, others against gender equality, some for financial stability, some for privatization, and others for the status quo (i.e., for the preservation of the postwar achievements of the welfare state). There was much more to welfare politics, I saw, than a distributional class struggle.

These ideas remained in the back of my mind for some time, until I enrolled at the University of Zurich in 2003 and was given the opportunity to pick a topic of my choice for my Ph.D. research. That was when I decided to look more closely at the dynamics of post-industrial welfare reform politics. I came to Zurich to write a Ph.D., and I found so much more: fantastic advisers, plenty of opportunities to pursue and present my research in Zurich and abroad, the most wonderful colleagues, and a very special someone who supported this project from the dissertation proposal to the published book. I would like to express my gratitude to all of them and to name some in particular.

My deep gratitude goes first and foremost to Hanspeter Kriesi for his perspicacious advice, his generous support, and his constant encouragement. Thanks to him, I was able to develop both my theoretical thinking and my empirical work further than I would have on my own. His burning interest in understanding how politics affects people's lives has been a most impressive and motivating inspiration to me ever since I was his undergraduate student. I am also very grateful to Herbert Kitschelt for providing me so generously with many highly pertinent and stimulating comments. Many of the ideas in this dissertation stem from his work, and I feel truly honored that he invested so much time and intellectual effort in this project.

Furthermore, I wish to express my gratitude to Giuliano Bonoli, whose work was probably the single greatest inspiration for my own ideas, and to Bruno Palier for receiving my research with an equally supportive and critical eye. Both have been incredibly generous with their time and intellectual support; they have provided me with numerous opportunities to present and discuss my work with them and with other scholars in the field. I also feel deeply indebted to Yannis Papadopoulos and André Mach, under whose guidance I had the chance to enter the world of empirical research and who are very present in many of the ideas developed in this book.

My colleagues and friends at the University of Zurich have made my Ph.D. years both enjoyable and stimulating. My warm thanks to all of them; I wish to mention by name a few people to whom I am particularly indebted: Simon Bornschier for his patience and support, for countless discussions of my arguments both at home and in the office, and for having his critical eye on my fascination with cross-class alliances. Tim Frey for teaching me so many things about File-Maker and Illustrator, the design of a usable and useful database, and many lessons about work, computers, social skills, and (almost) everything else in life. Daniel Oesch, Romain Lachat, Philip Rehm, and Thomas Sattler provided extremely valuable and useful input at several stages of the research process. Furthermore, I warmly thank Sarah Nicolet and Isabelle Engeli for their consistently pertinent comments and their constant support.

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During the work on this project, I also had the chance to spend half a year as a visiting Fellow at the Department of Government of Harvard University and to travel to numerous international conferences to develop and present my research. It would be impossible to name all the people whose comments have contributed to the development of my ideas; I am grateful for all of them. My special thanks go to Peter A. Hall, Peter A. Gourevitch, Torben Iversen, Karen M. Anderson, Klaus Armingeon, Philip Manow, Julia Lynch, Christoffer Green-Pedersen, Kees van Kersbergen, Anton Hemerijck, Fabrizio Gilardi, Fiona Barker, Kyoko Sato, and Mathieu Leimgruber.

Spending a year as a postdoctoral researcher at the European University Institute in Florence in 2008–9 allowed me to finalize the manuscript in an intellectually, socially, and culturally heavenly context (not to speak of the culinary delights that come with living in Tuscany). I would like to thank Ramon Marimon and the Max Weber Program for this invaluable opportunity that was crucial for my work on this book. Extremely precious advice and support at the European University Institute came from Adrienne Héritier, Peter Mair, Ben Ansell, David Art, Jane Gingrich, Martin Kohli, Eleonora Pasotti, Roger Schoenman, Furio Stamati, and Sven Steinmo. They and many other colleagues at the European University Institute made this year a wonderful and unforgettable experience.

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Finally, my deep gratitude goes to my parents, Gerold and Elisabeth, and my brother, Lukas. Very early on – and more so than they probably know – they sparked my interest in politics around the kitchen table at dinner; remaining ever supportive of my decision to turn this interest into a profession, my parents also taught me that political science research must never be an end in itself but focus on real-life problems and on the distribution of resources and opportunities in the society it is part of.

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