

Social Justice in Twentieth-Century Europe

Social justice has returned to the heart of political debate in present-day Europe. But what does it mean in different national histories and political regimes, and how has this changed over time? This book provides the first historical account of the evolution of notions of social justice across Europe since the late nineteenth century. Written by an international team of leading historians, the book analyses the often-divergent ways in which political movements, state institutions, intellectual groups, and social organisations have understood and sought to achieve social justice. Conceived as an emphatically European analysis covering both the eastern and western halves of the continent, *Social Justice in Twentieth-Century Europe* demonstrates that no political movement ever held exclusive ownership of the meaning of social justice. Conversely, its definition has always been strongly contested, between those who would define it in terms of equality of conditions or of opportunity; the security provided by state authority or the freedom of personal initiative; the individual rights of a liberal order or the social solidarities of class, nation, confession, or *Volk*.

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Acknowledgements

All notions of social justice contain at their heart a vision of a future that lies ahead. In the writing of this book, we sometimes felt that the lack of a defined terminus point that is so characteristic of conceptions of social justice might become the distinctive feature of our project too.

That this should have been so owes much to the broader context within which this book was written. This volume has had an unusually long gestation and its completion was complicated by the vicissitudes of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted individual lives and collective writing schedules. The contributors of this volume met at four workshops, held in Amsterdam (March 2018), Oxford (July 2019), and subsequently online (September 2020 and April 2021). The result is a volume that reflects our collective effort as a team to grapple with the history of social justice. We are, therefore, indebted to all contributors for the ways in which they have left their imprint on how we have come to think about the subject as a group.

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x Acknowledgements

The present book is not intended as the definitive word on the history of social justice. Rather, its primary ambition is to put social justice on the map for historians, who, in contrast to practitioners from other disciplines, have hitherto largely eschewed the subject. If this volume manages to act as a stimulus to others to explore further the intricacies of social justice in twentieth-century Europe, then its objectives will have been achieved.

Martin Conway and Camilo Erlichman
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