

## Social Rights and the Politics of Obligation in History

This pioneering volume explores the long-neglected history of social rights, from the Middle Ages to the present. It debunks the myth that social rights are ‘second-generation rights’ that appeared after the Second World War as additions to a rights corpus stretching back to the Enlightenment. Not only do social rights extend that far back; they arguably predate the Enlightenment. In tracing their long history across various global contexts, this volume reveals how debates over social rights have often turned on deeper struggles over social obligation – over determining who owes what to whom, morally and legally. In the modern period, these struggles have been intertwined with questions of freedom, democracy, equality and dignity. Many factors have shaped the history of social rights, from class, gender and race to religion, empire and capitalism. With incomparable chronological depth, geographical breadth and conceptual nuance, *Social Rights and the Politics of Obligation in History* sets an agenda for future histories of human rights.

Steven L. B. Jensen is a senior researcher at the Danish Institute for Human Rights. He is author of the multiple prize-winning book *The Making of International Human Rights: The 1960s, Decolonization and the Reconstruction of Global Values* (2016) and co-editor of *Histories of Global Inequality: New Perspectives* (2019). He has worked previously for UNAIDS and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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*Edited by*

Steven L. B. Jensen

*The Danish Institute for Human Rights*

Charles Walton

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The story behind this volume starts with a workshop on ‘Writing the History of Socioeconomic Rights’, which was held at the University of Warwick in May 2015 and which focused on establishing a research network to examine the long history of economic and social rights. Soon after, the Leverhulme Trust awarded Charles Walton a multi-year International Network Grant to develop a *Socioeconomic Rights in History Network*. Between 2015 and 2018, six workshops were held in collaboration with partner institutions in four countries (France, Germany, Switzerland and the United States). These efforts form the basis for the history of social rights presented in this volume. Its two editors met at Warwick for the first time and eventually joined forces to prepare this volume.

Our aim has been to nurture a currently underdeveloped historiography on economic and social rights.

We do, however, come to this project from two different scholarly perspectives. Charles Walton approached it as a historian of the French Revolution. He noticed that the recent historiography on this event, and especially on French Revolutionary rights, had neglected debates over social rights, which were discussed as early as 1789 and included in the Jacobin Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1793. He sought to revise a chronology, common in much human rights scholarship, that tended to locate the origins of social rights in the twentieth century. Steven L. B. Jensen came to this project having written a book on the history of human rights after 1945 that emphasised the important role played by a group of countries from the Global South. During the 2010s, international scholarship on the evolution of post-war human rights was rapidly expanding, but the history of economic and social rights remained a blind spot. With his professional background also in working with health and human rights, Jensen saw clearly that this was a major omission that needed to be remedied for human rights historiography to fully mature. At the time of the Warwick workshop, he was embarking on a research

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