
Preface

The future of the welfare state is being decided on here and now, but much of the decision-making goes unseen. The grand visions of the welfare state as a lodestar have faded and have been replaced by many small and unrelated decisions, the sum of which is staking out a path we might not have followed had we known where it was leading us. Many are now worried about the future of the welfare state. The authors of this book share these worries, both as concerned human beings and as puzzled social scientists groping for an understanding of the processes guiding this development.

This book evolved from these worries – which multiplied as our work progressed. The terrain we have moved into is not only difficult to force intellectually. It is also difficult to penetrate politically because of the many economic, moral, private and public interests tied into the welfare state, which constitute efficient barriers to investigation and lead the analysis into detours and blind alleys.

But the challenge is there to be met. Our analysis is a step towards a better understanding of the many different forms of welfare distribution and their future. On our way we have sought comfort in the words of Theon, philosopher and director of the University in Alexandria in Egypt *c.* 380 BC, who advised his daughter Hypatia: 'Reserve your right to think, for even to think wrongly is better than not to think at all.' It is less comforting to know she took up the challenge – and was stoned to death by an outraged mob, manipulated by the moral and financial powers of that time.

The initiative for the book was taken by The Research Committee on Poverty, Social Welfare and Social Policy of The International Sociological Association. Its members met at the Xth World Congress of Sociology held in Mexico in 1982, and made comparisons of future welfare state development, one of the main topics of discussion. The work continued throughout the following year when Universität Bielefeld, the Federal Republic of Germany, generously provided hospitality and a grant which made it possible for the authors to meet at Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Forschung, Bielefeld, to discuss the problems raised and make comparisons across national boundaries.

The book is an invitation to use comparative research as a basis for a theoretical approach which is not tied to national welfare states. It is also an invitation to understand better how national welfare states can

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be brought out of their cocoons and comprehend the need for an *international* welfare state, bridging the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

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