

HUBER, Evelyn; STEPHENS, John D. Development and Crisis of the Welfare State: Parties and Policies in Global Markets. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, 416 p.

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The book deals with the development of the welfare state in advanced industrial democracies (OECD), in the first three decades of post-World War II, and its crisis and decline in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

The changes from country to country, some of which started their crisis in the late 1970s and others in the 1980s, are taken into account. The analysis is focused on the role of political parties in this process, i.e., one of the authors' theses is that the parties' policies were the most important factor for developing the welfare state, alternating its results in different countries.

They showed that the government party composition, the constitutional structure and the participation of women's workforce are seen as consistently and substantially important for developing several dimensions of the welfare state.

The authors, so as to evidence their theses, question the participation of women's workforce, impelled where the social-democrat parties rule. In this case, researches show that where there was increasing mobilization of women, there was also expansion of the services provided by the welfare state, chiefly as regards the female market.

The analysis privileges the result of the constitutional decision structure, through the government system adopted in each country. In other words, the current government system may favor the existence of many veto points in the political process. Examples of these are those with a strong bicameralism, presidential system, federalism and with referendum. However, constitutions with few or no veto points (e.g., unicameralism, parliamentary system, unitary system, and with no referendum) tend to accept the changes more quickly.

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Hence, in the expansion era of the welfare state, government systems with many veto points and, thus, with power diffusion hinder the expansion of political economy.

In effect, the authors' perusal points to the merit of reciprocal relations and interdependent on the party politics, the feminist movement and the constitutional structure in conducting the welfare state.

It can be observed that, amidst a number of researches pointing to the decline of the confidence in political parties in the very advanced industrial democracies¹, the work of Huber and Stephens advocates the importance of parties and their policies in the development and application of social policies.

One of the subjacent theses is that the left-right dyad makes a great difference in the government. Thus, the political choice is still important, although it is forced by the development of the internationalized economy, that is, the international economy influences the formation and suppression of the welfare state for its conjuncture and structural aspects.

Concurrently, the authors tend to poorly support the thesis that the decline of the welfare state is associated to the increase of the commercial competition in the new global economy. In this regard, Huber and Stephens think that the deregulation of the financial market increase constrains the political choice of the government related to unemployment problems.

But, how do Huber and Stephens methodologically build up their arguments? The research is based upon an extensive quantitative verification of national data, as well as an extensive historical comparison among countries.

In chapter 2, the authors show their methodology and the form of facing the theoretical challenges of the research. They also establish

¹ See NORRIS, Pippa (Org.). *The Growth of Critical Citizens?* In: *Critical Citizens: global support for democratic government*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, Dalton, R. *Value Change and Democracy*. In: Pharr, S. J., Putnam, R. D. (Org.). *Disaffected democracies: what's troubling the trilateral countries?* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000, Dalton, R., Wattenberg, M. *Parties Without Partisans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, Fuchs, D. *The Democratic Culture of Unified Germany*. In: Norris, P. (Org.). *Critical Citizens: global support for democratic government*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

their objective: to explain, in the long term, the development models of the welfare state. For a historical-comparative, empirical evidence, the authors warn:

The analyst should attempt to lengthen the time period examined and increase the range of cases in order to reveal how structural factors, which are more likely to vary across a wider variety of social settings, have an impact on the phenomena to be explained (p. 38).

Whereas in the case of the quantitative analysis, the study of Huber and Stephens points to the need for the attention to be drawn to the long-run change, and not to yearly changes, nor to the changes in the short run. The authors' justification is that, in order to suitably assess the causative factors of the build-up and suppression of the welfare state, the short term may mask and point out tendencies that are not confirmed, obfuscating the impact of the balance of society power. In this manner, the authors opted for four types of causative mechanisms that show up better in the long term: *structural limitation*, *ideological hegemony*, *the policy ratchet effect* and *regime legacies*.

But, how was the welfare state built? Two political tendencies are deemed important for its implementation, collaborating for the premise that the role played by political parties was fundamental for adopting the welfare state doctrine in the countries, namely: the social democracy and the Christian democracy. This difference was reflected on the application of the type of welfare state by each party, despite the differences between these parties, chiefly on their supporting base, with the Christian democracy more plural and the social democracy more supported by the organized workers, the unions.

The book also attests that there is a difference in the administrations of the social-democrat and the Christian parties as far as the community of women is concerned. In these, the participation of the women's workforce remained more restricted.

What are the causes for suppression, or a way for such, of the welfare state in the last decades? The authors realized that the immediate cause of the decline of the adoption of the welfare state policy was the rise of unemployment. The causes are supported by the very policy implementation, that is, as many people depended on the State's assistance, a smaller number paid their taxes to provide for this policy.

Therefore, the government is obliged to reduce costs, sanctioning cuts.

The study reveals – based on surveys carried out at the OECD – that, in the decline period of the welfare state, a significant increase in poverty indices and in the number of poor single mothers occurred simultaneously in the U.S. and the United Kingdom. However, the change in other countries was much less visible.

There seems to be an equivocation, especially for a lay reader, in the fact that the authors used different indices to comparatively explain the data of some countries; that is, in order to measure the poverty in the U.S. and the United Kingdom, they point to their percentage, while for the Nordic countries they point to the Gini index. It is worth pointing out that the indices difference may mask larger differences than the ones found out, however, it does not mean that this will necessarily happen.

Anyhow, the data show that the deregulation of the labor market plus the suppression (reduction) of the welfare state in these countries have substantially increased poverty and inequality.

Development and crisis of the welfare state: parties and policies in global markets points out that, on the whole, the decline of the welfare state occurs in the OECD countries, however, it must not be said that it occurred similarly, concurrently in all of them. Each one had its particularity, which may even be similar to the other, but it was not conducted in the same manner.

The study also reveals that the Nordic countries, namely Norway, Finland and Sweden, escaped the unemployment crisis – what did not occur in the remainder cases studied – with the increase of rights, and the most significant case was the gender equality with egalitarian social policies.

The authors understand that the gender relationship is a great variable for analyzing the advanced industrial democracies, particularly in the last three decades. In this regard, it is found in a perfect relationship with the welfare state, which enabled the enlargement of the labor market and the consequent participation of women in it and their movements for gender equality. The support of this policy by political parties, chiefly leftist ones, made the fight for the end of women's segregation an important banner in welfare state policies.

The research is focused particularly on the case of women in

the rise and fall of the welfare state, advocating that, for instance, the pension system consists of the best protection of the welfare state policy.

According the study of Huber and Stephens, the Nordic welfare state doubly benefitted women: first, by expanding the public sector, which opened doors to the former, only, housewives; next, because they started to work outside their homes, either in the private or the state initiative. But it did not happen only in the Nordic countries, as also in Australia and New Zealand the feminist movement association with leftist governments achieved the expansion of rights for the referred social group.

In summary, for the authors, the women's achievements are related to three factors: 1) leftist parties in the power; 2) the existence and the actual work of strong feminist movements; 3) the work of women who work as government officials, the so-called *femocrats*.

Consequently, the women's organization is twofold important for the welfare state: first, because it is a fight for inclusion or gender equality; next, because this inclusion calls for State's policies favoring the enlargement of employment. In short, what the authors tried to show in their quantitative and historical, comparative analysis is that the participation of the women's workforce and its mobilization were an important addition to mold the welfare state, i.e., the increase of this workforce in the market strengthened, thus, women's participation in politics, especially in social-democrat parties and in the unions. And this forced the leftist parties to claim not only the class equality, but also the gender.

Finally, a last critical reflection on the authors' writings is necessary. It is impressive how the choice of sources strongly influences these concluding remarks. Another study could be implemented with conclusions absolutely dissimilar to these, pointing out, for instance, the fact that both leftist and conservative parties have carried out public policies typical of the welfare state, e.g. social security and labor rights, from around 1920 to 1970, in the OECD countries; therefore, breaking up the authors' central argument. Undoubtedly, in Latin America, the poor labor and social security rights were legalized by authoritarian parties with doubtful ideological affiliation, with only one thing certain: they were not leftist. Concluding, Huber and Stephens should tell us how these parties, social-democrats, strongly worked against the rights

created in the above-mentioned period, the last three decades. In this regard, it seems better to understand the creation of rights from the workers' struggle, strong between 1910 and 1970 and increasingly weaker and more disorganized between 1980 and 2010. The women's struggle is a case apart, as their social ascension, related to an increasingly greater independence – a result of their individualized and collective fight – is rising against all forces, and it would not be, therefore, captive to party policies.