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BOOK REVIEW: MICHELA MINESSO (ED.): WELFARE POLICIES IN SWITZERLAND AND ITALY. INSTITUTIONS, MOTHERHOOD, FAMILY AND WORK IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

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Welfare Policies in Switzerland and Italy, edited by Michela Minesso, was published in 2021 by Peter Lang. The book comprises six studies, with a word from the editor at the beginning, and provides a broad overview of the whole system of Italian and Swiss welfare policies in the 19th and 20th centuries. The authors include Jean-Pierre Tabin, Brigitte Studer, Paolo Passaniti, Gianni Silei and Massimiliano Paniga, all eminent researchers in their fields. The studies in this volume provide insight into the development of family law, women's rights and social rights in this period. It makes a very interesting reading for those interested in the subject.

Government policies that aim to improve the quality of life of the population are collectively known as welfare policies. There is a long tradition of research on the welfare state in Europe, yet many aspects of it are not well researched. In Hungary, several authors have previously published studies[1] on the welfare state and welfare policy approaches to state theory. This review will examine a recent work on the characteristics of the Italian and Swiss systems in this field.

Edited by Michela Minesso, *Welfare Policies in Switzerland and Italy* puts welfare policies in Switzerland and Italy into a historical perspective. It focuses on their organisational systems, the relationship between family and work, and the situation of women. In addition to an introduction, the book contains six essays by prominent Italian and Swiss authors. Each of the studies examines the subject from a different angle, thus providing the reader with a comprehensive picture of the welfare conditions in the two countries in the 19th and 20th centuries. Overall, the book is easy to understand, interesting and well-stocked with literature.

In the introduction, the editor explains that European welfare systems have become an important issue in recent decades. The papers in this book are the work of respected authors who construct analyses comparing the welfare policies of the two countries from a historical perspective. They also highlight the reasons why welfare policies have developed in different directions in each of the countries. The book examines two countries with very different institutional systems: Switzerland, where the central government has limited power over local entities, and Italy, where policies are discussed and approved by the national parliament and implemented locally with a top-down approach. The author points out that the study of welfare policies is particularly important because of their considerable influence on European society, especially in the early 20th century. In the remainder of the introduction, the author reflects on the studies included in the book, thus stimulating the reader's interest in reading the studies.

The title of the first essay, by Jean-Pierre Tabin, is *Social Norms and Social Policies in Switzerland*. It briefly traces the genesis of social protection in Switzerland and analyses some of the norms produced by the legislator. The essay starts from the position that social policy is not the answer to social problems because social problems are constructed. Thus, when social problems and their solutions are constituted, they are institutionalised as mechanisms such as unemployment benefits. In this process, norms are created about employment and about what represents a 'good reason' for someone to be unemployed. When laws on poverty began to be made at the end of the 19th century, the Swiss cantons were intervening in an area that had previously been the domain of private charity and the church. As a general rule, the cantonal legislators considered that people without income or property should only be helped if they were citizens of the canton, if they were unable to work and if no one in their family could provide for them. Together with the development of social risks and social security, the groups supported by social assistance have undergone significant changes since

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[1]   See Fejes 2013: 17–34; Kristó 2014: 73–82.

then, and the number of poor people eligible for assistance has decreased. While public assistance, in general, remains the responsibility of the cantons, certain groups of poor people – asylum seekers, the disabled and elderly people – are now assisted at the federal level. To enjoy full social rights in a country like Switzerland, one must be employed throughout one's working life and have as few interruptions in one's career as possible. There are many problems with this in relation to gender: firstly, in Switzerland, women are less likely than men to be in paid work. Second, if they are employed, women – unlike men – often work part-time. Thirdly, women's wages are on average much lower than men's. This means that women's social security contributions are lower and this is reflected in the pensions they receive. In addition, women's careers are less linear than men's, which affects their access to managerial positions and the social protection associated with such positions. This has led to a clear gender stratification in access to social benefits.

The second essay is entitled *The Welfare State in the 20th Century Italy from "Political Discontinuity" to "Institutional Continuity"* written by Michela Minesso. The author begins by pointing out that the study examines the development of the institutions of the welfare state in Italy. Particular attention is paid to the policies of welfare, assistance and health.[2] Focusing on welfare and, to a certain extent, on social security and health, this study deals with the history of 'welfare from above', which has developed along two lines in Italy: on the one hand, the Italian political situation in the 20th century and on the other hand, the Italian institutional system in the 20th century. This paper focuses on the discontinuity in the Italian political system in the 20th century, which comprised three main phases – the liberal system, the fascist system and the republic, thus amplifying the diversity of political goals and forms of citizenship underlying the development of Italian welfare in the 20th century, and affecting the continuity of the institutional framework in the definition of national social policies. In Italy, Bismarck's Germany was taken as a model for the framework of social policy interventions, thus making access to social protection conditional on employment. It was only in the early 20th century that the state started to finance social policy directly. After the war, various social reforms were adopted. One of the most important measures taken during the period was the introduction of compulsory invalidity and pension insurance in 1919, which was extended to all male and female workers with a financial contribution from the state. In the post-war period, it should also be noted that from this time onwards, Italian welfare developments were increasingly linked to the wider international arena through new bodies organised by the League of Nations.

The third essay is *Family and Motherhood in 20th Century Swiss Social Policies,* by Brigitte Studer. This essay analyses some key steps in the development of the Swiss welfare system, distinguishing four specific historical periods over the last 150 years. In particular, Switzerland introduced social measures for the benefit of mothers and working women in the recent past, consolidating the gender gap that is still visible today.

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2   See ESPING-ANDERSEN 1990: 248.

The author points out that wages have always been seen as the best form of social protection, with social security intervening only when illness, old age, unemployment or accidents prevented an individual from working. Switzerland was a pioneer in the field of occupational safety and health but lagged far behind in social security and women's social security rights.[3] One important indicator of inequality in Switzerland is the gender pension gap, which measures how much higher men's average monthly and annual pensions are than women's. Both are associated with a higher risk of poverty for older women than for older men. In Switzerland, the pension gap between women and men is, on average, 37%. Over the past 150 years of Swiss social policy, four distinct periods can be distinguished. A liberal, progressive period of labour protection, between the factory law of 1877 with its gendered provisions and the end of the First World War; a short but politically intense period after the First World War, when various forms of social insurance seemed to be devised. This was followed by a long period of several decades up to the 1970s, when the protection of the traditional family was at the forefront of society's anxieties. The era after the 1970s is contradictory as it saw the country catching up with European standards of social security, and policies being adopted that were more egalitarian in some parts of Swiss social security, while at the same time access to social security and social welfare was being increasingly restricted.

In Switzerland, the individualisation of social security desired by politicians is based on a model of one and a half (or perhaps one and three quarters) earners. This means that women remain financially dependent on men and also that they have limited opportunities for 'exit' from marriage or relationships. Separation often means impoverishment for them. Recently, both politicians and economists have been sharply critical of women's part-time employment, which is seen as an untapped labour market potential. For nearly a century, social policy has sought to discourage mothers and sometimes wives from participating fully in the labour market and to consolidate the traditional family order. Social redistribution has been organised not only along class, age and nationality lines but in some cases more emphatically along gender and marital status lines. Paradoxically, it is social security that has recently become the most egalitarian.

The title of the fourth essay is *Family, Law, Women's Legal Status and Family Care Work in 20th Century Italy (and Switzerland)* written by Paolo Passaniti. This essay examines the role of family law, gender equality and women in society in Switzerland and Italy by providing a historical overview. Italy is an almost perfect model of the relationship between family law, the legal status of women and the distribution of types of care activities. This stems from its archaic and patriarchal culture, and is also characterised by differences between North and South. From the outside, Switzerland seems to be the opposite, since, although it had around 5,000 women's associations and higher education was open to women, it differs from the main European models for the emancipation of women. In Italy in the 19th century, the patrimonial family model was essentially predominant. A series of regulations formalised male domination. While other parts of Europe and the world were

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3   See Hobson 1990: 235–250.

Review •

already working to promote gender equality, in Italy the liberal state ended this period with divorce provisions and a 1919 decree enacting a law with an endless list of professions forbidden to women. The fascist era was characterised by rigid gender segregation in education, as women were pushed into female secondary schools, which were designed to educate them for a life as housewives. The division between productive work, from which women were generally excluded, and family care work, which was designated as women's work, became a fundamental element of fascist social policy. Women's work was considered worthless if it was done outside the home, in competition with men's work. The Civil Code of 1942 left the 19th-century legacy virtually intact, reinforcing the norms relating to the rights and obligations of spouses. In the post-war period of great social transformation the Constitutional Court, in the spirit of the times, abolished the convention of adultery based on inequality between spouses and in 1970 a law permitting divorce was adopted. While the legal model has changed radically, the state's attitude towards welfare policies has not.[4]

In terms of welfare after the 20th century, Italy and Switzerland face the same issues, such as the need to reconcile family and work. Family-based welfare has arrived at the present day in the context of a series of minor laws in Italian political history, but without the symbolic backdrop of the adoption of referendums. In Switzerland, it was the result of conscious decisions which were much debated and opposed.

The fifth essay is entitled *Between State and Voluntary Action: the Evolution of the Italian Third Sector* written by Gianni Silei. The author describes the evolution of the Italian "third" sector. The paper starts with an interpretation of the third sector. For Italy, the definition of the third sector is explained in Article 1 of Law 106/2016, a definition characterised by complexity, which is due to the historical roots of the institutions that constitute it, which are both old and new. The definition of the third sector covers private institutions which, at the time of national unification, were defined at the time as "public utilities", but which also included the more recent autonomous initiatives that today seek to meet the social needs of the third millennium.[5]

Taking into account the diversity of public attitudes to third sector subjects, four phases can be distinguished. The period from the first Italian unification to the rise of fascism was characterised by the strong vitality of organised civil society. The second phase, which coincided with the end of the fascist regime, was characterised instead by open hostility between the state and social organisations. The third phase, which began after the election of the Constituent Assembly and lasted until the 1970s, was characterised by a desire to put an end to the earlier confrontation. Finally, the fourth stage, which began in the 1980s, seems to be characterised more by a more general rethinking of the traditional categories of 'public' and 'private'. The author describes these phases and their characteristics in this paper. The institutional and organisational changes are described in great detail, which makes it easy to understand the changes that occurred during the period.

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[4]   See Minesso 2016.
[5]   See Loffredo 2018.

The sixth essay is entitled *Public Assistance in Canton Ticino in the 20th Century History and Historiography* written by Massimiliano Paniga. It focuses on the achievements of Italian and Swiss historiography in recent years in the study of the public and private care sectors in the canton of Ticino. The chapter analyses in detail the various provisions of the public institutions of Ticino, from the 1855 law, the first law on assistance in the cantonal legislature, to the laws of the 20th century. At the beginning of the study, the author presents the relevant works on the subject that have been published previously, summarising their essential content. He notes, however, that most of the works mentioned do not make use of archival sources, most of them being based instead on bibliographical sources and newspaper articles. He notes that the Catholic Church played a major role in the field of relief work, but that over time local initiatives developed in 1-1 parishes came to the fore. It was only in the 1920s that the ecclesiastical authorities began to step up their activities and take a leading role, particularly in the field of assistance to the elderly and care for orphans. Indeed, it was only in the mid-19th century that formal public assistance measures were established in Ticino. On 27 November 1855, the first law in this area was passed, which considered relief and public order two aspects of the same activity and made local councils responsible for the economic assistance of the poor and the unemployed, and gave them the right to reduce the amount of aid without limit in the event of neglect or misbehaviour. Subsequently, the process of industrialisation and urbanisation at the end of the 19th century made it necessary to renew earlier regulations. In 1890, the focus of public assistance turned to orphans and the mentally ill and a new law was passed, which anticipated the creation of a new law on relief in 1903. The task of providing relief remained the responsibility of the local councils, while the legislature managed to strike a balance between meeting urban and rural needs. Despite its neutrality, Switzerland felt the effects of the First World War and many social problems emerged. In the field of welfare, the Church sought to provide as much assistance as possible, while in the field of social policy, the state institutions sought to exercise greater control, mostly in the form of agreements between cantons. Another step forward in state aid was the 1926 decree allowing local councils,[6] which were in increasing financial difficulties because of the cost of aid, to receive state support. The real turning point was the 1944 law, which opened a new chapter in the history of public assistance and came into force in 1945. The funds to be allocated annually to assist the needy were to be provided by a 1.5% ad valorem tax on top of existing resources and by a cantonal appropriation of 500,000 francs. The Act also conferred on the municipalities several powers which were to be exercised by the appointment of a municipal relief committee.

The essays in this book are all excellent works, each of which is extremely detailed in its subject matter, both in legal and political theory terms. The work is easy to read, but also provides the reader with a wealth of new knowledge. Overall, I would recommend this volume to anyone interested in the history of the welfare state and welfare policies.

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[6]   See Saltini 2004.

Review •

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Péter Belcsák graduated from the University of Public Service (UPS) with a Master's Degree in Public Administration. Afterwards, he continued his studies as a doctoral student at the UPS Doctoral School of Public Administration. His research theme is: The challenges of the border and cross-border governance in the 21st century in a state-theoretical approach. In parallel, he is a law student at Eötvös Lóránd University. He is a founding research fellow of the UPS-CESCI Research Group on Cross-border Cooperation, where he is actively involved in professional work and research activities. He also works at the University of Public Service, where he is a member of the Strategic Development Office; he is involved in the formulation and development of university strategies.

Review •