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Power Resources Theory and the Welfare State: A Critical Approach

Essays collected in honour of Walter Korpi

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Introduction
Understanding the Welfare State: Power Resources Theory and Its Critics

GREGG M. OLSEN and JULIA S. O'CONNOR

The 1970s witnessed an outpouring of competing theoretical accounts of the origin, development, character, and impact of modern welfare states. One of the most fruitful approaches to emerge during this period of expansion was the power resources perspective advanced by a Scandinavian school of researchers and closely associated with the pioneering work of Walter Korpi (1978, 1980, 1983, 1985), Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1985a, 1985b, 1990; also Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1985, 1987), and John Stephens (1980; see also Ulf Himmelstrand et al, 1981). Although the approach was not without shortcomings and blind spots, the emphasis power resources theory (PRT) placed on comparative and quantitative studies of the relationship between social policy and labour mobilization enabled it to provide a more satisfying explanation for wide variations in the development and outcome of welfare states across the industrialized nations than that of many other accounts. While other approaches, conservative and radical alike, tended to ignore or minimize such diversity, PRT attempted to order the welfare states of Scandinavia, Western Europe, and North America on the basis of salient characteristics and their impact on social inequality. In particular, such models often highlighted differences between the generous, comprehensive, universal, and coordinated social policies which comprise welfare states like Sweden's, and their relatively underdeveloped counterparts found in, for example, the American welfare state. This article provides an introduction to PRT; critically examines its contribution to the development of (welfare) state theory, as well as its flaws; and evaluates its usefulness in the current era of globalization and welfare retrenchment.[1]

The Origin and Growth of Welfare States: From Structural–Functional Imperatives and Interest Groups to Labour Mobilization

Prior to the dramatic expansion of the welfare state in advanced capitalist nations in the late 1960s and early 1970s, most accounts of its origins and growth stemmed from only a few broad theoretical traditions. Structural functionalism, associated with the work of pre-eminent macro-sociologists such as Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, and the pluralist theory of Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblom were two of the most predominant schools, holding sway for over two decades. However, while both approaches came to prominence during roughly the same period and explicitly or implicitly served to legitimate the status quo, they began from rather different assumptions.

Writing around the turn of the century, Durkheim argued that political institutions arose in response to universal stresses and needs which emerged as simple societies evolved into more complex entities. Much later, Parsons also acknowledged the restoration of equilibrium in changing societies in this way, but placed more emphasis on the need for 'shared values' among society's members in order for it to set and realize its goals. New institutions allowed for such 'goal attainment' and for the maintenance of 'consensus' among the citizenry. Structural-functionalists, then, saw the development of the welfare state as a society's way of adapting gradually to the changes brought about by modernization, industrialization (with its impact on employment levels and workplace health), urbanization, and population growth, rather than as the result of philanthropy, innovation, or political machination.

Much of the work in this tradition tended towards descriptive accounts of public intervention focusing on economic development and/or dominant values (e.g., individualism vs collectivism) in particular nations (Lipset, 1963, 1969, 1990; Tomasson, 1970). However, a number of researchers attempted to provide more empirical support for some of the central functionalist tenets. Examining a multitude of advanced and less-developed nations, they demonstrated that welfare programs emerged and expanded primarily in those countries which had experienced high levels of economic growth, industrialization, and demographic change – especially the dramatic expansion of the elderly population which resulted from increasing longevity and lower rates of infant mortality (cf. Cutright, 1965; Rimlinger, 1966; Wilensky, 1975, 1976; Wilensky and Lebeaux, 1965). More important, they noted that it was the most-developed nations which had the highest levels of *expenditure* on social welfare programs.[2] From this perspective, politics were not seen as the primary determinant of the welfare state. Moreover, as the logic of industrialism, or modernization, continued to spread, nations would grow increasingly similar (convergence theory) and political ideologies of the left and right would become irrelevant (end-of-ideology theory) (Galbraith, 1967; Kerr et al, 1964; Kuznets, 1965; Lipset, 1960).

Rooted in liberal political philosophy, pluralist accounts of welfare-state development take a fundamentally different tack from that of functionalist approaches. Rather than emphasizing structural imperatives, pluralism focuses on agency or the role of various actors in bringing about change. Contrary to the central premises of elite theory and Marxism, Dahlian pluralism maintained that power is widely diffused among a variety of competing interest groups and not held by ruling elites or classes. While highlighting conflict rather than consensus, pluralists stressed the fact that individuals are often members of several different associations and organizations (cross-cutting cleavages) and maintained that no one particular group predominates at all times over all issues. From this perspective, social welfare policies and programs are viewed as the state's response to the demands of various lobbies representing women, the elderly, small business, farmers, and numerous other pressure groups (e.g., Fox, 1981; Janowitz, 1976). More recently, attempts have been made to combine the logic of both functionalism and pluralism. These studies maintain that both the size of the aged population and the actions of interest groups are the strongest determinants of *welfare spending* (Pampel and Williamson, 1988, 1989).

Amidst the radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, neo-Marxist theories were among the first to take issue with central planks of both theoretical traditions, castigating their conservative and false presentation of societal stability.[3] Consensus, if it existed at all – and labour disputes, strikes, demonstrations, and other frequent outbursts of radicalism and dissatisfaction belied such a suggestion – was seen as enforced through economic and political domination. Neo-Marxists maintained that, far from diffuse, power was concentrated in the hands of a capitalist class which was thereby largely able to control a state that was anything but neutral. One strand of neo-Marxist theory, so-called instrumentalism, attempted to demonstrate this state bias empirically by highlighting the many direct or indirect personal, social, and professional ties between capitalists and political elites (e.g., Domhoff, 1983; Miliband, 1969). Instrumentalists concluded that welfare programs emerged because capitalists wanted them – a notion often referred to as 'corporate liberalism.' Enlightened

and far-sighted capitalists thus oversaw and hastened the introduction of poor relief, unemployment insurance, educational reform, and other public and private social welfare policies in a conscious effort to increase output, stabilize or revitalize the economy, and pre-empt or defuse working-class militancy (cf. Brody, 1980; McQuaid, 1978; Weinstein, 1968). Structuralist versions of neo-Marxist theory were better able to explain those instances when welfare programs were implemented against the wishes of particular prominent and powerful capitalists by referring to the long-term interests of the entire capitalist class and by stressing that the state was 'relatively autonomous' from direct manipulation and much more structurally determined (Poulantzas, 1969, 1976, 1978). Ironically, its focus on the state's functions – including almost automatically responding to the needs of the capitalist system and restoring social order – gave this latter approach a rather functionalist cast.[4]

Power resources theory (PRT) emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s in an attempt to redress some of the problems with existing mainstream and radical accounts of the welfare state. Despite the central role of class conflict in Marx's work, both earlier neo-Marxist theories tended to ignore or depreciate the efforts of the working class in the creation of various social programs and largely failed to acknowledge significant variation in the growth and development of welfare states across nations.[5] Like instrumentalism and structuralism, PRT rejected the pluralist notion that power was widespread, and viewed the capitalist class as, by far, the most powerful actor in society by virtue of its control over economic resources (the means of production). However, unlike these radical approaches, it maintained that the balance of power between labour and capital was fluid, and therefore variable. While capital would always have the upper hand within a capitalist framework, labour had potential access to political resources which could increase its power, and thereby allow it to implement social reform and alter distributional inequalities to a significant degree. Creating a political party and mobilizing its numerical majority in the party's support was one way the working class could increase its power. However, the success of social-democratic, labour, or other parties of the left would depend upon a well-organized labour movement. High rates of unionization and the organization of unions into a cohesive labour central or confederation were therefore crucial (Korpi, 1980, 1983). It was also acknowledged that labour strength could be augmented if the working class was able to form coalitions with other classes, such as agrarian or white-collar workers (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Esping-Andersen and Friedland, 1982). PRT maintained that welfare states would develop the farthest in nations where labour was strongest as measured along such dimensions.

Such suggestions, of course, contradicted the functionalist research which had concluded that it was economics, not politics, which mattered most to welfare development. Power resources theorists maintained that, while a high level of economic development was necessary in order to fund expensive welfare programs – partially explaining the bifurcation in welfare spending between advanced and underdeveloped nations reported in the functionalist studies discussed above – it was not a sufficient explanation. After all, the commitment to social welfare was much greater in Sweden than in the United States, although both were rich, developed nations. Without politics, there was nothing compelling rich nations to commit resources to the development of a welfare state. Power resources theorists limited their studies to twenty-four or fewer advanced capitalist nations.[6] Controlling for level of economic development in this manner, they demonstrated substantial variation among the advanced nations which had been missed by overly inclusive functionalist studies of sixty or more nations at various developmental stages and with various types of political systems, and found the indicators of power resources to have a significant relationship to levels of welfare *expenditure* (Cameron, 1978; Hicks and Swank, 1984, 1992; O'Connor, 1988; Stephens, 1980).[7]

Power resources theorists have also taken issue with functionalist and structuralist explanations for the *introduction* of major welfare programs. From these perspectives, the emergence of a number of early social insurance programs, such as workers' compensation, sickness and maternity benefits, and old-age pensions, was closely related to the level of economic development (functionalism) and/or to political unrest and the consequent need to integrate workers (structuralism). According to the latter view, early welfare programs selectively targeted the working class in an attempt to co-opt it (Alber, 1988; Schneider, 1982). However, this overemphasis on economic development or the ulterior and preemptive actions of the state depreciates the role and demands of organized workers. As Esping-Andersen and Korpi (1985) point out, the nations in which social insurance programs emerged first, such as Germany and Austria, were often also those in which labour was mobilized and relatively strong, prompting reaction from the state. [8]

The politicians who pioneered the introduction of social insurance in the 1880s, Otto von Bismarck in Germany and Eduard von Taaffe in the Habsburg Empire, did not see themselves as reacting to factors such as demographic changes and

increasing economic resources in their nations. Instead, taking warning from the Paris Commune, they consciously used state power to develop social policy as the second leg of a strategy to undercut the threat to the existing social order from *the growing organizational strength of an emerging industrial working class*; the first leg of the strategy was the use of repressive measures. (Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1985: 179; emphasis added)

In addition, it is clear that some welfare programs, such as unemployment insurance and family allowances, emerged long after industrialization had taken place in most nations, contrary to the logic of functionalist explanations (see table 1). Moreover, power resources theorists maintained that it was much more important to examine the impact and character of welfare states than the early introduction of particular social insurance programs or welfare expenditures alone.

TABLE 1
Introduction of Social Programs in Eighteen Nations

	Workers' compensation	Sickness & maternity	Old-age pensions	Unemployment insurance	Family allowances
Austria	1887	1888	1906	1920	1948
Belgium	1903	1894	1924	1920	1930
Canada	1908[1]	1957	1927	1940	1944
Denmark	1894	1892	1891	1907	1952
Finland	1893	1963	1937	1917	1948
France	1898	1928	1910	1905	1932
Germany	1884	1883	1889	1927	1954
Great Britain	1897	1911	1908	1911	1945
Greece	1914	1922	1934	1945	1958
Ireland	1897	1911	1908	1911	1944
Italy	1898	1912	1912	1919	1937
Luxembourg	1902	1901	1911	1921	1947
Netherlands	1901	1913	1913	1916/49	1939
Norway	1895	1909	1936	1906	1946
Portugal	1913	1935	1935	1975	1942
Spain	1932	1932	1919	1919	1938
Sweden	1901	1891	1913	1934	1947
United States	1910[1]	1965[2]	1935	1935	–

[1] Subnational (state or provincial programs).
[2] The United States does not have a national health care system.
Source: Schneider, 1982.

The Impact of Welfare States: Acknowledging the Variation

Complementing their research on welfare spending, functionalists had argued that there was a positive, linear relationship between a nation's level of economic development and its level of social equality. Not surprisingly, they found that material rewards – especially income – were more equally distributed in the more economically advanced, industrialized nations (Kuznets, 1955; Cutright, 1967). In later research they discovered that the relationship was more curvilinear, suggesting that a threshold is reached in the later phases of economic development, after which the impact of industrialization on social inequality becomes progressively weaker and nations become much more alike (Jackman, 1974; Branco and Williamson, 1988).

However, as the data presented in table 2 indicate, income inequality and poverty levels varied greatly among advanced, industrialized nations in the early 1980s. The Gini index – a measure of income distribution – indicates that income inequality was much lower in the Scandinavian countries (Norway and Sweden) and Germany than in it was in the Anglo nations (the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia) examined here. An identical pattern emerges when poverty levels are analysed. The poverty rate, defined as the percentage of all persons whose income was less than half the median national income of the population, was more than twice as high in the Anglo nations as it was in Scandinavia and Germany in 1982. Poverty rates among some of the most vulnerable groups, such as single-parent families and the elderly, followed a similar pattern across these nations.

A measure of the poverty gap, presented in the last two columns of table 2, directly indicates the impact of the welfare state on poverty. Column 5 indicates how much income, measured as a percentage of each nation's GDP, it would take to bring those persons living in poverty up to the poverty-line income prior to receiving their transfer payments. Column 6 provides a measure of the poverty gap after transfers have been paid out. A comparison of the figures in both columns suggests that the impact of the welfare state has been weakest in the Anglo nations (with the exception of the United Kingdom) and strongest in Scandinavia and Germany, where poverty rates were reduced by 90 per cent or more via welfare measures.[9]

Given such variation, power resources theorists rejected functionalist accounts of declining social inequality among industrialized nations. Again

TABLE 2
Income Inequality and Poverty in Nine Industrial Nations circa 1980

	Gini index[1]	Poverty Rate[2] % of Poor: All persons[3]	Lone parent with children[4]	Single elderly persons (65–74) (years)	Poverty Gap as a % of GDP, early 1980s: Pre-transfer	Post-transfer
Australia	.292	11.4	55.4	30.1	4.5	0.4
Canada	.290	12.3	46.3	32.0	4.2	1.3
Germany	.249	4.9	7.2	12.9	6.4	0.6
Netherlands	.291	7.5	21.0	2.0	6.5	1.4
Norway	.222	4.8	8.1	4.9	4.6	0.5
Sweden	.197	5.0	9.8	0.9	4.1	0.4
Switzerland	.275	8.2	21.2	16.9	4.9	1.2
United Kingdom	.275	11.7	29.3	51.5	3.3	0.2
United States	.315	16.6	54.0	39.6	5.6	2.3

[1] The Gini index is the most commonly used measure of income inequality. It varies between zero (perfect equality) and one (perfect inequality). The index here has been adjusted for family size.

[2] The poverty rate is defined here as the percentage of all persons whose income was less than half the median national income. Poverty rates have been adjusted for family size. Poverty rates are actually higher in some countries, such as the United States, than listed here because of the existence of a large, unregistered homeless population which does not show up in statistical reports.

[3] All persons includes all persons in families.

[4] Lone parent includes children living in families with one adult under age sixty-five and no other adults in the household.

Sources: Mitchell, 1991; Osberg, 1992; and Smeeding, 1991.

they argued that, when analyses are restricted to the economically advanced nations, labour strength provides the best explanation for reductions in income inequality and for the variation observed across countries (Dryzek, 1978; Hewitt, 1977; Hicks, 1991; Korpi, 1980; Stephens, 1980).[10] Moreover, they demonstrated that, in Scandinavia and other nations where labour was more highly mobilized, the character of welfare states differed significantly; they were generally more generous (with higher income-replacement rates, greater coverage, and fewer waiting days) and more preventative in nature than elsewhere (Kangas, 1991; Olsen, ed., 1988, article 6 in this volume). These programs have tended

to mitigate numerous forms of inequality (Erikson and Åberg, 1987), including those associated with, for example, old age (Myles, 1989; Palme, 1990) and gender (Ruggie, 1984; Sundström, 1991).

Included in part I of this volume ('The Power Resources Perspective: Labour Strength and Welfare Regimes') is an early article by Walter Korpi which critically assesses dominant definitions and analyses of power extant in the social science literature and introduces and sets out the rationale for a power resources approach. PRT, according to Korpi, 'indicates that the distribution of power resources between collectivities or classes and the changes in this distribution are of crucial importance for societal processes and social change.' This article is followed by five more recent studies which examine various programs and dimensions of the welfare state. In two of these studies, an attempt is made to identify factors that moderate the direct and linear relationship between welfare state development and level of power resources assumed in the early PRT studies.[11] For example, Irene Wennemo also specifies the relationship between labour mobilization and social welfare in her examination of the introduction and nature of family policy in eighteen OECD nations. She suggests that one power resource – the strength of left (labour or social democratic) parties – has a significant impact on the level of benefits provided through family allowances, but very little impact on fiscal welfare (tax deductions). Similarly, Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens, leading exponents of the PRT tradition, show that social democratic party rule is more closely associated with the *quality* of old-age pensions and lower levels of inequality among the elderly than it is with overall expenditures on pensions. The latter, they conclude, appears to be more closely related to Christian democratic-party incumbency associated with high levels of transfer payments. They also challenge the pluralist notion that interest groups are primarily responsible for explaining cross-national variation in welfare provision for the elderly.

The Character of Welfare States: From Bipolar Models to Welfare State Regimes

The proliferation of research on social policy in the 1970s led not only to debates over the origins and impact of various social programs but also to attempts at distinguishing among types of welfare states. Given the focus on welfare spending, government outlay on social programs originally played a central role in the determination of whether a nation was labelled as a 'welfare leader' or a 'welfare laggard,' but it was not the

only consideration. Welfare typologies were usually conceptualized as bipolar and linear. At one end of the continuum was the 'residual' welfare state, characterized by lower spending, a restricted range of provision, targeted programs (through means- and/or needs-testing), meagre support, and a tight connection between welfare benefits and paid labour. Misfortune and need are the basis for welfare provision here when private alternatives (the family, the market, and charities) have been exhausted. The American welfare state comes closest to this description. At the other end of the continuum was the 'institutional' welfare state, characterized by a wide range of generous, universal, public social programs provided as a right of citizenship, and by a reluctance to set fixed boundaries on the provision of welfare (cf. Esping-Andersen and Korpi, 1987; Jones, 1985; Furniss and Tilton, 1977; Titmuss, 1958, 1974). Sweden approximates this ideal type most closely. Other nations were situated somewhere between these two poles.

By the 1980s, it already was evident that bipolar, linear models of social welfare provision could not represent adequately the many dimensions of the welfare states of several nations. Expenditure levels alone were clearly unsatisfactory as a means of understanding and classifying welfare states. High levels of spending on particular labour market, old-age, or medical programs, for example, might simply reflect high levels of unemployment (Britain in the 1980s), the provision of lavish pensions for civil servants (Germany and France), or an attempt to provide health care in a huge country where the population is widely dispersed (Canada).

A more meaningful way to distinguish among welfare-state types, based upon T.H. Marshall's (1964) well-known work on the rights of citizenship, was developed by Esping-Andersen.[12] He drew attention to welfare states' variable capacity to reduce people's reliance upon the market through the provision of public alternatives which allow them to maintain a normal and socially acceptable standard of living. 'Decommodification,' or protection from total dependence on the labour market for survival, highlighted the distinction between weak and strong welfare states, but it did not identify important differences among those nations which provided expensive, universal, public programs. Following Wilensky and Lebeaux (1965) and Titmuss (1974), among others, Esping-Andersen (1990) thus developed a tripolar typology describing three 'worlds' or 'regimes' of welfare capitalism: (1) the social-democratic world, best exemplified by Sweden and Norway; (2) the liberal world, typified by the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom; and (3) a conservative or status-based world comprising nations such as Germany, Austria, France, and Italy.

The welfare state regime concept – a key theoretical construct in the PRT tradition – is detailed by Gøsta Esping-Andersen in part I of this book. It links decommodification to the various types of social rights that predominate in different industrialized nations. While all welfare states make use of three different criteria of eligibility for social programs and benefits – means and/or income testing, social insurance contributions, and citizenship – the dominance of one criterion over the others serves to differentiate types of welfare states. In the social-democratic welfare state, the citizenship criterion predominates, whereas the liberal welfare state is characterized by a strong emphasis on means-tested programs, and the conservative welfare state is distinguished by its variety of class and status-based social insurance schemes. Welfare state regimes, Esping-Andersen notes, also vary in the primacy they accord to the state, the market, or the family. While the social-democratic regime largely utilizes the state to meet social needs, the liberal regime depends mostly on the market, and the conservative regime is heavily reliant upon the family.

The liberal and social-democratic regimes identified by Esping-Andersen resemble the residual and institutional welfare states, respectively, of earlier welfare typologies discussed above, but the conservative regime cannot easily be placed at a mid-point on a continuum. While the nations in the conservative welfare world often assume an intermediate position between the other two worlds with regard to total welfare spending, their welfare states possess unique features. Influenced heavily by the Church, conservative or status-based welfare states seek to maintain traditional institutions, hierarchies, and roles. For example, unlike those in the social-democratic world, family policies in the conservative regime are designed to preserve the public and private spheres as the domains of men and women, respectively. And, unlike those found in the liberal world, benefits provided in the conservative world often are relatively generous, publicly administered, and provided as a right. However, they are constructed through a variety of social insurance schemes to preserve status and income differentials among classes and occupational groups. The social-democratic and liberal welfare states play an equally important role in structuring the stratification systems extant in their respective worlds.

Using a broader compass than the articles by Wennemo, and Huber and Stephens – each of which focused on only one key policy component of the welfare state – Julia S. O'Connor examines overall 'welfare effort' and policy orientation in Canada from a comparative perspective. Canadian patterns over the 1960–90 period are considered in the context of seventeen other C 'D countries, with a focus on four key dimensions of

welfare effort associated welfare regimes: decommodification, solidarity, redistribution, and full employment.

Although the welfare regime approach has, in many ways, proven more useful than previous dichotomous leader–laggard models, it has also garnered criticism. For example, the welfare world triad cannot properly accommodate the 'Latin rim' nations (Spain, Portugal, Greece) which, it has been argued, constitute a separate, fourth welfare world (Leibfried, 1992). On the grounds that strong labour movements and high-benefit equality distinguishes Australia and New Zealand from other members of the liberal world such as Canada and the United States, Castles and Mitchell (1992) have also put forth an alternative four-world welfare model. However, as Gregg M. Olsen argues in part I of this volume, distinct differences within the liberal world also exist between the U.S. and Canadian welfare states when social services (particularly health care), rather than just transfer programs, are examined closely. He points out that welfare states in each regime are not necessarily very uniform or coherent, and may concurrently possess programs which can be categorized into more than one regime. Moreover, he suggests that any specific social program or policy (e.g., health care) may simultaneously possess qualities or features associated with more than one of the welfare state regimes.

Articles 2 to 6 in part I point to some problems with PRT and/or the closely associated welfare worlds model, and suggest, after a closer examination and armed with new empirical evidence, certain theoretical modifications. Most of the authors, however, remain largely, if cautiously, committed to the perspective.[13] In part II ('Power Resources Theory: A Critical Approach'), more serious charges are brought to bear against PRT's almost exclusive focus on labour strength and the three-regime typology. Emphasizing gender, race, political institutions, and class, these six articles suggest that the PRT/welfare worlds approach needs to be seriously overhauled if it is to remain relevant – especially in an era of globalization.

Bringing Gender and Race In

Gender, Class, and Citizenship

One of the most well-developed critiques of Esping-Andersen's three-regime typology has been made by scholars interested in a more gender-sensitive welfare state analysis. Until the early 1990s, feminist studies of

the welfare state and PRT research developed in parallel, rather than in recognition of one another.[14] Research in the PRT tradition tended to emphasize class over gender and was usually comparative and quantitative.[15] Most feminist research, however, has been country-specific and qualitative. The focus on welfare state regimes by power resources analysts and the relatively recent interest in more comparative research by several feminist theorists has afforded an opportunity for dialogue between these two streams of research.

While recognizing the innovative character of the welfare regime concept, feminist critics of the model focus on its emphasis on the class-citizenship aspect of social rights, its minimal attention to other bases of stratification, and its tendency to ignore the family in the state–market–family triad (O'Connor, 1996). Some analysts have argued not only for a gendered understanding of decommodification, stratification, and state/market/family relations, but also for the need to supplement these dimensions with additional ones, including access to paid work and the associated services to facilitate this (e.g., daycare), personal autonomy, and the capacity to form an autonomous household(e.g., Orloff, 1993a).

In this vein, Julia S. O'Connor argues in article 7 that the incorporation of gender into a comparative analytical framework must entail a reassessment of the conventional conception of citizenship, a broadening of conventional definitions of political mobilization and participation, and a modification of the welfare state regime model. The concept of decommodification, or insulation from total dependence on the labour market, must be supplemented by the concept of personal autonomy, or insulation from involuntary personal economic dependence on family members and/or public reliance upon on state agencies. The idea of personal autonomy relates directly to the articulation of the relations of production and reproduction, or activities within the labour market and the family. It addresses the issue of services that facilitate labour market participation and points to the welfare state as an important mechanism of gender stratification. The emphasis upon personal autonomy is predicated upon the recognition that benefit structures may facilitate independence for some people while creating or perpetuating dependence for others. It also highlights the fact that it is necessary to be a participant in the labour market before decommodification can occur.

Ann Orloff (1993a) has suggested that a measure of the capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household is necessary to capture the effects of state social provision on gender relations. Her rationale for this dimension is as follows: 'If decommodification is important because it

frees wage earners from the compulsion of participating in the market, a parallel dimension is needed to indicate the ability of those who do most of the domestic and caring work – almost all women – to form and maintain autonomous households, that is, to survive and support their children without having to marry to gain access to breadwinners' income' (Orloff, 1993a: 319). The objective of such a measure is to identify how benefits, such as those for lone mothers, contribute to a capacity to maintain autonomous households and enhance women's power *vis-à-vis* men within marriages and families. And it would need to capture variation in the extent to which welfare states meet the needs of those who are not in the labour market (i.e., non-commodified) and whose economic dependence is on male breadwinners. Orloff envisages two ways of conceptualizing this capacity. First, a new, broader, and more generic measure of self-determination or autonomy could be created by merging Esping-Andersen's notion of decommodification with the concept of individual independence from markets and marriage. Second, the concept of decommodification could be supplemented with a separate dimension that measures the level of success that women's movements have had in securing economic independence for women through, for example, increasing access to the paid labour force, creating services that ease the burden of caring on individual households, and ensuring secure incomes for women engaged in full-time domestic work. The focus on women's agency in fostering such independence would be analogous to PRT's emphasis on the role labour movements have played in securing protection from the market for workers.

The studies considered in this section so far are complementary to Esping-Andersen's welfare-worlds approach, arguing for the gendering of key components of the model and bolstering it with specifically gendered dimensions to construct an approach that recognizes the importance of class and gender and their interaction. Other analysts suggest alternative bases for gender-sensitive welfare state analysis. In her critique of the welfare regime model (article 8 in this volume), Jane Lewis agrees that the Esping-Andersen typology is gender-blind because it ignores women's segregation (or partial segregation) in the unpaid domestic sphere, their consequently limited opportunity for decommodification, and their subsequent reliance upon meagre, means-tested benefits or coverage provided through a spouse's insurance. She thus proposes a new model which evaluates and categorizes welfare states on the basis of their commitment to the concept of a 'male breadwinner.' She argues that, although it has varied by degree, a male-breadwinner

family arrangement has historically cut across established typologies of welfare states.[16]

All of these analyses build upon earlier work on women and the welfare state, most of which was directed towards identifying the impact of the welfare state on women and making women visible in welfare state analysis (e.g., Wilson, 1977). Consequently, there are a number of common themes in feminist analyses of welfare states, irrespective of country of origin. These include the following: women's pivotal position within the welfare state, not only as paid workers but as unpaid community caregivers; the centrality of the welfare state for women as clients, consumers of services, and political citizens; issues of patriarchy, social reproduction, social control, and dependency; and the relationship among women's roles as unpaid carers, paid workers, and political citizens. Less common themes include the role of women as political activists in welfare state development, and the welfare state as a mechanism of empowerment for women (Skocpol, 1992; Gordon, 1994; Hernes, 1987).[17]

A significant problem with some of the early work on women and the welfare state is that its conclusions tend to be generalized to *the* welfare state, even though they are based on studies of individual countries. This is problematic, since it cannot be assumed that what is evident about the welfare state in one country can be generalized across all welfare states, or over time in any particular nation. While there are common issues across welfare states, such as the gendered nature of caring and dependency, the connotation of terms and the salience of issues vary across countries. Differences in emphasis coincide in part with the theoretical framework of the researcher and, to a large extent, with the particular welfare state regime under scrutiny (O'Connor, 1996).

For the most part, single-country studies based on U.K., U.S., or Canadian experience tend to emphasize the oppressive characteristics of the welfare state for women and the role of the welfare state in the reproduction of patriarchy (e.g., Wilson, 1977; Nelson, 1984; Fraser, 1989; Dickinson and Russell, 1986), whereas comparative studies and those based on Scandinavian experience, while recognizing the subordination of women, emphasize the possibility for the empowerment of women through the welfare state (e.g., Ruggie, 1984; Borchorst and Siim, 1987; Dahlerup, 1987; Hernes, 1987; Norris, 1987). This difference is not surprising when women's experience with welfare state institutions in different countries is considered. Women's experience is more negative in nations where they encounter the welfare state primarily as social assistance clients rather than as consumers, employees, or political citizens.

This also explains, in part, the concentration on women's dependence and powerlessness in much of the Anglo-American literature.

In contrast to their experience in liberal welfare states, women in social-democratic welfare states are less likely to be welfare or social assistance clients. This difference in experience is reflected in a relatively optimistic view of state potential. For example, Helga Hernes, a Norwegian analyst, discusses the possibility of creating a 'woman-friendly state,' that is, 'a state where injustice on the basis of gender would be largely eliminated without an increase in other forms of inequality such as among groups of women' (Hernes, 1977: 15). Comparative analysis affords an opportunity to identify the factors that are conducive to the development of such a state.

Race, Gender, and Citizenship in Welfare State Analysis

Theories and typologies which incorporate gender into their analyses are still inadequate to explain the complexity of mechanisms which structure welfare states. Race, in particular, is central to the development and formation of many welfare states, perhaps most notably that in the United States. In article 9, Jill Quadagno argues that class struggle has been emphasized as the central dynamic in the formation of the U.S. welfare state, while race and gender as major factors in its organization commonly have been overlooked. She supports this argument through a historical examination of a Family Assistance Plan proposed during the Nixon administration. Her analysis suggests that, while social policy may be used to increase female dependence, under certain historical conditions it also may enhance gender and racial equality (cf. Piven, 1984). Quadagno's article in this volume and her recent book (1994) are part of a burgeoning body of scholarship which attempts to integrate race, gender, and class. Not surprisingly, much of this work has emanated from the United States (e.g., Gordon, 1994; Mink, 1990, Boris, 1995).[18] However, this literature largely involves country-specific, historical studies which have received little attention in the PRT debates.

More recently, Fiona Williams (1995) has proposed a framework more sensitive to race and the interrelationship among gender, race, class, and welfare states which *is* comparative. She calls for an examination of states' relationship, via social policies (or welfare states), to the family, work, and the nation. The last dimension includes an account of systems of migration, colonialism and imperialism and processes of inclusion and

exclusion from the nation-state as reflected in citizenship rights. Williams maintains that such considerations are necessary in order to grasp the diversity of welfare settlements in different nations.

The absence of a comparative body of work incorporating class, gender, and race is not surprising. Clearly, with the inclusion of each additional dimension, the complexity of the analysis and the difficulty of large-scale comparative research increase. But the use of quantitative and qualitative historical approaches affords an opportunity for a more multifaceted analysis which can better inform our understanding of social policy as a potentially liberating force. In the 1990s, however, this potential appears increasingly undermined by the ongoing restructuring of welfare states and the consequent impact upon women and others intimately linked to them.

Power Resources Theory in an Era of Globalization: Identifying Actors and Structures

In the mid-1980s, PRT and other critical and mainstream 'society-centred' theories rightfully were taken to task for largely overlooking the state, or treating it as epiphenomenal. Neo-Weberian 'state-centred' theorists argued that state officials might pursue their own distinctive goals, rather than those of interest groups or capitalists – indeed, sometimes challenging the wishes or demands of such actors. State structures, for example, administrative systems and bureaucracies, rules of electoral competition, party systems, constitutional frameworks, relations among levels of government and governmental agencies, and historical patterns of democratization, also were viewed as important determinants of social policy from this perspective (e.g., Evans, Rueschmeyer, and Skocpol, 1985; March and Olsen, 1989; Skocpol and Amenta, 1986; Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth, 1992). More recently, the role of 'social policy feedback' and a variety of other political factors have been highlighted by this 'neo-institutional' or polity-centred, approach (cf. Weir, Orloff, and Skocpol, 1988; Orloff, 1993b).[19] The central role of state structures and their interaction with other variables is appearing increasingly in comparative social welfare research (e.g., Olsen and Brym, 1996). In article 10, Bo Rothstein seeks to combine the strengths of PRT and the neo-institutional approach. He highlights the impact of labour-market institutions upon working-class strength and argues that, in nations where unemployment insurance has been administered by unions or their representatives (the

'Ghent System') rather than by the state, union density, and hence labour strength, has been reinforced. Rothstein's article helps clarify the relationship between political structures and agency.

If PRT underplayed the role of the state in shaping social programs and the expansion of the welfare state, its overemphasis on unions and social-democratic/labour parties also eclipsed the impact of other political and class actors in the construction and shaping of welfare states. While agreeing that 'politics matter,' Francis Castles (1978; Castles, ed., 1982; Castles and McKinlay, 1979), for example, pointed out early on that the degree of unity or division among political parties on the right is an important determinant of whether left-wing parties will succeed in their attempts to implement social programs and reduce inequality. In his historical examination of the welfare state in Scandinavia (article 11), Peter Baldwin also suggests that the impetus for the development of the welfare state was not provided by only the working class and social-democratic/labour parties, because it emerged long before they came to power. He highlights, instead, the important role played by the agrarian class.[20] While Baldwin undoubtedly overstates his case, reaching conclusions about the 'welfare state' while examining only its social insurance component (and only one social insurance policy at that – pensions), his work is important because it draws attention to other important social actors often neglected by PRT.[21]

Despite its valuable contribution to our understanding of welfare states and its dominant position in the social policy literature over the past decade, PRT appeared rather less persuasive by the 1990s. It is true that, in those nations where workers are more organized and the welfare state is most deeply entrenched, labour has been somewhat more insulated from the introduction of the new workplace technologies and practices associated with 'lean production,' the intense competition from newly industrializing nations, and over two decades of persistently sluggish growth. Unlike in the United States, for example, where a more flexible economy has encouraged the proliferation of low-wage jobs, dramatically swelling the numbers of the working poor, many European countries have sought to preserve their high-wage economies. This strategy, however, has become increasingly associated with chronically high levels of unemployment. Moreover, poverty and income inequality have risen steadily on both sides of the Atlantic in recent years. Although the United States has easily maintained its long-standing reputation as one of the most inegalitarian of the advanced capitalist nations, the

occurrence of such developments in countries where labour's power resources were greatest was an eventuality which PRT had some difficulty explaining.

While purportedly examining a 'balance of power,' power resources theorists concentrated almost exclusively on the power resources of labour while largely ignoring structural developments which were rapidly and decisively increasing the strength of capital (Olsen, 1991a, 1992). The transformation of the 'capitalist world economy' into a 'world capitalist economy' – characterized by the emergence of new patterns of production, consumption, and distribution, and by new or modified supranational agreements and organizations (e.g., the North American Free Trade Agreement, European Union, and World Trade Organization) – left labour in a much weaker position *vis-à-vis* capital in every advanced capitalist nation. This shift in the balance of power between capital and labour is, as Gregg M. Olsen argues in article 12, one of the most important aspects of 'globalization.'[22]

In the new, more global environment, financial capital, transnational corporations, and other actors play a significantly greater role in determining what is desirable, or even possible, with little if any regard for 'strong' national labour movements. This may be done purposefully or, as with the actions of bond traders, currency speculators, credit-rating agencies, and others who buy, sell, and deal in capital markets, more unintentionally. Keynesian policies, protective regulations, social programs, and other progressive distributional policies associated with the 'golden age of welfare capitalism,' thus soon were defined as market 'rigidities.' They have given way to deregulation, massively regressive shifts in taxation policy, balanced-budget legislation, and the dismantling or downgrading of welfare states. In this global environment, all governments – even incumbent social-democratic or labour governments with an 'institutionalized commitment to full employment' (Therborn, 1986) – have much less room to manoeuvre. This is reflected in mass unemployment and/or the increasingly frequent use of part-time work, contingent employment, subcontracting, and self-employment today.[23]

Olsen documents the impact of globalization in Sweden, a nation renowned as a labour stronghold and welfare leader, where, only two decades ago, blueprints to transform Swedish capitalism were enthusiastically drafted from within the Swedish labour movement. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, Swedish labour had long abandoned radical proposals for industrial and economic democracy and was scrambling to

halt the erosion of its welfare state and industrial relations system, which were under attack – an effort which has been spectacularly unsuccessful to date (Olsen, 1995).

Labour's inability to preserve the Swedish model was also due to fracturing from within the Swedish labour movement. New fault lines emerged and grew between the social-democratic party (SAP) and the blue-collar labour confederation (LO), as well as between and within the blue-collar and white-collar (TCO) labour centrals (Olsen, 1991b, 1992). PRT's quantitative measures of labour strength, such as unionization rates or the electoral durability of parties of the left, can mask potentially serious rifts and fractures to the labour movement and, consequently, provide a misleading reading of labour strength.[24] If it is to remain useful, PRT clearly must address the growing asymmetry in power between capital and labour and the structural developments upon which it is based, and identify the 'power resources' which are most salient in the new, more global market economy.

Few studies today would assert the primacy of any monocausal determinant of social policy, although they are sometimes still geared towards finding the 'best' theoretical approach. However, in light of all of the valuable, critical appraisals of PRT cited above and elaborated upon in this volume, most researchers are now concerned with identifying the interactions among a wide range of factors of varying significance, dependent upon the nation, historical period, and specific social policy under scrutiny. The difficult work of identifying these variables and interactions remains to be done.

Notes

1 Power resources theory is also referred to as the 'Social Democratic Model,' the 'Working Class Mobilization Model,' or 'Political Class Struggle' theory.
2 The conventional index of welfare spending focuses upon total government expenses allocated to welfare programs ('transfers' and/or services) expressed as a proportion of GDP (gross domestic product) rather than as a percentage of total government expenditures. This measure indicates the amount of resources committed to welfare in relation to total national resources.
3 Despite their inherent conservatism, functionalist explanations can and have been used to defend welfare states against attacks on expenditure levels, as evident in the conclusion reached in a study by Coughlin and Armour

(1983: 195): 'In contrast to the popular notion that irresponsible "big spenders" or the "shiftless" poor are at the root of the fiscal crisis of the welfare state, our analysis reveals that large, impersonal forces – demographic and economic – are more proximate causes of the continuing expansion of the two largest sectors of social security [old age and public health].'
4 Structuralist accounts which suggest, for example, that the introduction of factory legislation to protect women in several industrialized countries in the late 1800s was *really* about preserving capitalism by ensuring the reproduction of a future labour force bear a strong resemblance to the functionalism of Robert Merton, with its concept of manifest and latent functions. Similarly, in their study of the welfare state in the United States, Piven and Cloward (1971) maintain that the primary objective of social welfare programs was to restore, maintain, and enforce social order. However, unlike many others in the structuralist tradition, they view the emergence of these programs as largely a response to civil disorder and outbursts of protest by the poor.
5 When variation was acknowledged, it made little difference to their analysis. Structuralists, for example, alternately argued that highly developed and decidedly underdeveloped welfare states served to maintain the capitalist system.
6 These studies commonly focused on the eighteen nations which have been consistently democratic in the post–Second World War period (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States).
7 The significance of the sample used for the conclusions reached is pointed out by Uusitalo (1984: 405). 'By including countries from the whole range of developmental sequence, from least to most advanced, you maximize the variance of economic level and thereby create statistical conditions for its explanatory power. If the sample includes only developed countries, the variance of their economic performance is much smaller, and it cannot be expected to have much explanatory power.' However, later functionalist studies by Wilensky (1975, 1976), who focused on a limited number of advanced nations, still found support for the 'logic of industrialism' thesis. The contrary conclusions reached by Wilensky and power resources theorists such as Stephens (1980) were due to the different measures of 'welfare effort' (spending) they used. While the former focused on 'social security expenditures' furnished by the ILO (International Labour Organization), the latter used 'civil public expenditure.' Both measures are problematic, as O'Connor and Brym (1988) note, because they are either too limited,

largely focusing on 'transfer payments' while excluding spending on other central elements of the welfare state such as social services (e.g., Wilensky), or too broad, including all non-military forms of public expenditure (e.g., foreign affairs, internal security, research, road construction, and municipal services) (e.g., Stephens). Problems of measurement and other methodological issues are addressed in Gilbert and Moon (1988), Huber, Ragin, and Stephens (1993), Janoski and Hicks (1994), O'Connor and Brym (1988), and Uusitalo (1984).

8 Neo-Marxist structuralist accounts of the emergence of social security programs in Germany, for example, are not necessarily at odds with PRT. While the latter highlights labour mobilization, the former has tended to focus on the state's response to that threat. Interestingly, German chancellor Otto von Bismarck's oft-quoted justification for the introduction of old-age security in the late 1800s ('One who can look forward to an old-age pension is far more contented and much easier to manage' – quoted in King, 1983: 14) is routinely taken at face value by structuralists – a courtesy rarely granted to contemporary rulers and politicians.

9 The United Kingdom was also extremely successful in reducing its poverty rate, but, because its initial level of poverty was so high, its post-transfer poverty rate remained rather high. Many more recent studies also have demonstrated that poverty levels and income inequality is much lower in Scandinavia and other north European nations such as Germany and the Netherlands (e.g., Atkinson, Rainwater, and Smeeding, 1995).

10 However, the ongoing debate between functionalism and PRT is far from clear cut. For example, Jackman (1980) notes that, while socialist parties may have redistributed income away from the most-privileged income quintile, they have not effected any significant redistribution in favour of the bottom 40 per cent of income-earners. In his comparative study of public assistance in the United States and (West) Germany, Leibfried (1978: 60) also concludes that 'social democracy does not ... guarantee a clear difference with respect to welfare policy "outcomes."' Of course, like many others, these studies examine the effects of only one indicator of labour mobilization – 'socialist' political parties.

11 This also is done by Göran Therborn (1986). He argues that low rates of unemployment over the long term are as dependent upon the establishment of an 'institutionalized commitment to full employment' as they are on labour mobilization, although these factors are often closely linked to one another. This helps explain why a nation such as Japan, where labour has not been very strong, has had one of the most successful employment records in the industrialized world in recent decades.

12 Marshall (1963, 1964) argued that the process of modernization over the past three centuries involved an expansion of the rights of citizenship and an increase in the numbers of inhabitants given status as citizens. He identified three different types of rights which emerged progressively: 'civil rights' (e.g., freedom of speech, thought, and faith), 'political rights' (e.g., the right to vote), and 'social rights' (e.g., education and the welfare state).

13 In light of some of the criticisms of the welfare worlds approach, Korpi and Palme (1998) have recently constructed a more elaborate model.

14 'Feminist' here refers to work that recognizes gender as a fundamental structuring mechanism in all societies and as crucial to understanding welfare states. Despite considerable diversity in theoretical orientation among feminist analysts, this is the common orientation that unites them. The particular aspect of gender difference that is emphasized varies by theoretical orientation (see Williams, 1989: 82–5).

15 Important exceptions were the analysis by Pippa Norris on the comparative position of women in OECD countries (Norris, 1987) and Mary Ruggie's analysis of the state and working women in Britain and Sweden (1984).

16 Diane Sainsbury (1994) has extended this analysis by contrasting the 'male breadwinner' model with an 'individual' model and identifying ten dimensions of variation that differentiate them (e.g., familial ideology, the basis of entitlement, the unit of benefits and contributions, the gendered priority of employment and wage policies, the public or private provision of care, and whether caring work is unpaid or has a paid component). She suggests that the male-breadwinner model is inadequate as an exclusive model for gendering welfare states, and demonstrates the usefulness of comparison across a broader range of dimensions.

17 Several of these issues are discussed by Caroline Andrew in her analysis of women and the Canadian welfare state. She highlights the role of women's organizations in the development of welfare state services as well as the roles of women as workers and women as clients (Andrew, 1984).

18 One of the earliest proponents of such an approach, however, was Fiona Williams (1989), whose work has focused on Britain.

19 It should be acknowledged that PRT did not totally ignore the state or policy feedback. State structures were seen as the 'residue' of class struggle, which, in turn, would have an impact on future struggles (see, e.g., Esping-Andersen, Friedland, and Wright, 1976; Korpi, 1980). However, this aspect was not usually highlighted.

20 This argument is more fully developed in Baldwin (1990). Here Balwin argues that coalitions of middle-class interests were the central catalyst for the emergence of 'solidaristic' social policies (comprehensive social insurance).

21 For a critique of Baldwin, see Olsson (1990). Although he does not focus on the emergence of the welfare state, Gordon Laxer (1989) highlights the role of agrarian movements in the Canadian scene during the period of industrialization.

22 'Globalization' is often understood in a very narrow sense, i.e., the integration of nations into the global economy through increased trade. This circumscribed definition, however, fails to address directly the impact of the changing imbalance of power among class forces on social inequality and the welfare state.

23 See Walter Korpi (1991) for an explanation for the emergence of mass unemployment from a PRT perspective.

24 Other useful critiques of the measures of labour strength utilized by PRT have been put forward by Keman (1990) and Shalev (1983, 1992).

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