

STUDIES FROM THE PROJECT ON THE FEDERAL SOCIAL ROLE

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The Politics of Social Policy in the United States

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Democracy and the Welfare State

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tardy in arriving, or that U.S. social benefits will eventually "mature" into a European-style system. Not only is the contemporary U.S. system of public social provision cross-nationally unusual, but also the trajectory along which the United States traveled to arrive at this system has been strikingly different from what students of European social policies have led us to believe is the inevitable course of welfare state development. The aim of this chapter is to describe and to explain the development of American social policies up through the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935. Because it is customary to treat U.S. national welfare programs as beginning in the 1930s, many people know little of what preceded this period. Thus, I will begin with a fresh overview of the overall trajectory of American social policy developments.

AN OVERVIEW OF AMERICAN SOCIAL POLICY

Histories of American social provision often presume that the federal government had no role in providing welfare benefits until the 1930s, when President Franklin Roosevelt introduced social security programs as part of his New Deal. Until then, the story goes, the needs of those Americans unable to care for themselves through participation in the labor market were addressed only, if at all, by the state and—especially—local levels of government. This account is superficially accurate but potentially quite misleading. For there was one rather spectacular exception to local predominance in the welfare field in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was the Civil War pension system, remarkable in its own right and also consequential for later social policy developments in the United States.

Originally, the federal government paid pensions only to veterans who had been disabled in the battles of the Civil War and to the dependents of soldiers killed in the war, as one might expect of a military pension system. But then, in the decades following Appomattox, the Civil War pensions were changed into de facto old-age and disability pensions that provided coverage for some one million elderly Americans, reaching about one half of all elderly, native-born men in the North around the turn of the century. While analysts today tend to overlook the social welfare function of these pensions, it was well recognized by contemporaries. In 1917, prominent social reformer Edward Devine called Civil War pensions "a main national provision for old age."¹ And University of Chicago sociologist Charles Henderson, a leading advocate of social insurance, noted in 1909 that "the military pension system has acted in great meas-

¹ Edward Devine, quoted in John Gillen, *Poverty and Dependency* (New York: Century, 1926), p. 284.

ure as a workingmen's pension system."² Isaac Rubinow, another leader in the U.S. social insurance movement, wrote of the Civil War pensions in 1913:

After all, it is idle to speak of a popular system of old-age pensions as a radical departure from American traditions, when our pension roll numbers several hundred thousand more names than that of Great Britain. It is preposterous to claim that the cost of such a pension would be excessive, when the cost of our pensions is over \$160,000,000, or more than three times as great as that of the British system. . . . We are clearly dealing here with an economic measure which aims to solve the problem of dependent old age and widowhood.³

Indeed, in the period between the 1880s and World War I, while reformers, labor leaders, and politicians throughout the West initially were discussing the possibilities for adopting modern social insurance and old-age pensions to protect the "respectable" working class—and especially the "worthy aged" among them—from the indignities of the traditional poor laws, many elderly working and middle-class Americans were actually already so protected.

Logically then, we might expect that U.S. reformers around the turn of the century would have been interested in building upon the Civil War pension experience to extend old-age benefits to all elderly Americans. During the Progressive Era of about 1900 to 1919, Americans were active participants in transnational debates over social insurance and pension proposals. Even so, only a few Progressive reformers advocated the extension of the Civil War pension system into a modern, universal system of old-age protection. These pensions were allowed to pass from existence with the dying of the Civil War cohorts, and there was no federal-level public replacement until the enactment of contributory old-age insurance plus assistance for the elderly poor under the 1935 Social Security Act.

During the Progressive period, most states did adopt laws establishing workers' compensation and so-called widows' or mothers' pensions—the forerunner of today's Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).⁴ This period of reform also witnessed the passage of many laws regulating a wide range of industrial conditions. Yet the more expensive and admini-

² Charles Henderson, *Industrial Insurance in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1909), p. 277.

³ Isaac M. Rubinow, *Social Insurance* (New York: Henry Holt, 1913), p. 404.

⁴ Elizabeth Brandeis, "Labor Legislation," in Don Lescohier and Elizabeth Brandeis, *History of Labor in the United States, 1896-1932*, vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan, 1935), pp. 399-700; Mark Leff, "Consensus for Reform: The Mother's-Pension Movement in the Progressive Era," *Social Service Review* 47 (1973): 397-417.

istratively demanding social spending programs that formed the core of nascent systems of social protection in Europe and some parts of the British Commonwealth—old-age pensions and insurance, health and unemployment insurance—were politically unsuccessful in the United States between the 1880s and World War I. And in the wake of the war, America decisively rejected new *public* social protections and embraced instead the ideal of “welfare capitalism.”⁵

Only in the midst of a political crisis triggered by the Depression of the 1930s did Americans—belatedly, from the European perspective—initiate nationwide public social protections. Yet the delay was not without consequences for the character of the set of policies established by the 1935 Social Security Act, the “charter legislation” for the U.S. version of the modern welfare state. Two telling features of the 1935 legislation were the omission of national health insurance and the institutionalization of existing state-level differences in benefits and coverage for most programs. The Social Security Act did lead to the establishment of nationwide welfare programs, although they demonstrated varying levels of federal control. There was a fully national, compulsory system of contributory old-age insurance for those who worked in covered industries. Also established was a federal-state contributory insurance system for the unemployed in which the states were induced, but not mandated, to participate—and for which the states set benefit levels and eligibility requirements. In addition, there were optional programs of noncontributory, means-tested social assistance that remained under state-level administration, with costs to be shared by the states and the federal government. These public assistance programs, established at the discretion of the states, could aid dependent children in single-parent families and needy elderly people who did not qualify for insurance benefits. Significantly, the framers of the American social security system chose not to follow the European pattern of adding to the contributory insurance programs government subsidies financed from general revenues; nor did they establish *national* benefit programs financed entirely from the federal government’s revenues.

How are we to make sense of the historical development of the modern system of U.S. public social provision—the trajectory of its development and the character of the Social Security Act which established almost all of the programs that compose it? Three important dimensions of analysis have emerged from previous research on the development of the welfare state; taken together, they form the elements of an *institutional-political process approach*. At the most fundamental analytic level—the develop-

⁵ Stuart Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

ment of institutions—we attend to the ways in which U.S. state formation shaped the American political universe, within which alliances were formed and policies were formulated. In particular, we focus on the sequence of bureaucratization and democratization, two fundamental processes that transformed the political structure of America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This changing political structure formed the context in which modern social policies were debated and met their initial legislative fate in the United States. Then, we focus on the political process, which comprises the second and third elements of this approach: the character of the political alliances that helped to launch (and delay) the American version of a welfare state and the feedback effects of earlier social policies on subsequent politics and policy debates. Before developing an explanation for the *American* pattern of social-welfare provision, let us first see how these analytic elements central to the institutional-political process approach help to explain the emergence of modern welfare states more generally.

EXPLAINING THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN WELFARE STATES

In the last years of the nineteenth and the first years of the twentieth century, social reformers, labor leaders, and political elites across Europe and North America were actively debating social policy issues. Given the new social and political conditions created by industrialization, urbanization, the rise of capitalism, and the political incorporation of the working class, their questions centered on whether the deterrent poor law system should be replaced (at least for some groups in the population) with contributory social insurance or noncontributory pension programs. In addition, in both Europe and North America, popular movements, often based on labor organizations, pressed for new social protections, particularly for publicly funded old-age pensions that would not require tax contributions from workers. Yet neither the concern of elites about the “social question” nor the actual initiation of new welfare programs in Europe were responses simply to popular demands or to social problems newly created by industrialization, urbanization, and concomitant changes in the family.

Recent comparative research on the origins of welfare states in Europe suggests, instead, that political and bureaucratic elites instituted social insurance and pension programs, utilizing existing or readily created state administrative organizations, as part of efforts aimed at the “anticipatory political incorporation of the industrial working class.”⁶ The issue of

⁶ Theda Skocpol and John Ikenberry, “The Political Formation of the American Welfare State,” *Comparative Social Research* 6 (1983): 90.

working-class participation in the polity—on whose terms and through which organizations—was of great concern to European elites and middle classes in this period, as extensions of the suffrage to non-propertied groups were occurring across that continent. This response suggests, in turn, that some element of political incentive, flowing from a threat to political control or from an opportunity to gain organizational or electoral advantage, especially in periods of electoral competitiveness or when new voters are entering the polity, must be operating in order to stimulate elite interest and coalition-building in the social welfare field. Indeed, a review of analyses of the initiation of social insurance and pensions suggests that the political force responsible for the introduction of new public protections was that of a *cross-class coalition* for new public social spending. The support of reformist elites and new middle-class groups as well as the working classes was a necessary condition for the political success of the new programs in this early period.

European reformers within and outside the state suggested social insurance and pensions as a means for respectable members of the working classes to avoid the cruelties of the traditional poor law. These measures were also to serve as a means for governments and propertied classes to head off the threat to the social order and to their political hegemony posed by leaving no recourse to the lower classes in times of need but the poor law system. The poor law policy itself served as the starting point for debates about what should replace it. The broader analytic implications of this point are worth noting. Policy debates are regularly informed by ideas about how best to correct the perceived imperfections of past policy, rather than simply how best to respond to social conditions as such. This means that the goals and demands of politically active groups cannot be gauged simply from their current social positions or solely from ideological and value preferences. Meaningful reactions to existing policy—a part of what we have referred to in the Introduction as *policy feedback*, and what Hugh Hecló has called “political learning” about the “policy inheritance”—color the very interests and goals that groups or politicians define for themselves in public policy struggles.⁷

To implement the proposed welfare programs, policy reformers looked to state administrative organizations. In late-nineteenth-century Europe, these agencies either had been recently rid of patronage practices and been professionalized through the passage of effective civil service statutes or had longstanding traditions of bureaucratic autonomy. The European experience suggests that processes of *state formation* had important implications for the development of systems of modern, public social

⁷ Hugh Hecló, *Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

provision. First, for the new social insurance and pension programs to succeed, the state administration had to have the capacity to plan and administer relatively complex programs. Groups of influential public officials could then play key roles in formulating new social policies with existing administrative resources, pressing them on political executives and working out compromises with organized interest groups. This pattern of policy development was especially noticeable in the case of contributory social insurance. Because these programs, in addition to providing benefits, taxed workers and involved the state in activities previously within the domain of working-class voluntary associations, they often were less popular initially than noncontributory old-age pensions. Popular movements frequently arose to demand noncontributory pensions—which would not tax workers or threaten the autonomy of their organizations. The substantial popular support for state social spending initiatives could sometimes be utilized by leaders of political coalitions to overcome resistance to social insurance programs, especially if well-placed civil servants had laid the groundwork for those programs.

Second, elite (and, to a lesser extent, popular) support for social policy initiatives was conditioned on there being a suitable instrument for administering the new programs efficiently and honestly. After all, definitions of what is feasible or desirable in politics depend in part on the capacities and qualities that political actors attribute to state organizations and to the officials who operate them. Just as there is political learning about past policies, a kind of political learning about the government itself also occurs. Thus, the appeal of any given policy will depend to some extent on how well groups think it could be officially implemented, as well as on how it may affect the fortunes of groups struggling over the control of official organizations. When state organizations adequate to the administrative tasks at hand are believed to be available, elites are more likely to respond to political incentives arising from popular mobilization by building or joining a cross-class alliance to support new social spending for income protection.

Finally, the process of state formation affects the operating modes of the very political organizations—especially parties and state administrative organs—through which public social policies can be collectively formulated and socially supported. In particular, the sequence in which bureaucratization and electoral democratization occur is critical in this regard, as the work of political scientist Martin Shefter on patronage and political parties would suggest.⁸ State bureaucratization preceded electoral democratization in most European absolute monarchies; in such instances, when political parties emerged and sought popular support, they

⁸ Martin Shefter, “Party and Patronage,” *Politics and Society* 7 (1977): 404–51.

could not simply offer the spoils of office as an inducement to voters and party activists, for access to jobs in civil administration was controlled by established bureaucratic elites. Thus, parties were forced to rely upon programmatic appeals, based on ideology or promises about how state power might be used for policies advocated by, or potentially appealing to, organized groups of constituents. At the same time, state administrations in these polities could (further) rationalize and professionalize their operations free from the partisan political concerns that dominated the calculations of elected officials. In contrast, in countries where mass electoral democratization preceded state bureaucratization, as it did in the United States, the civil administration was not protected from partisan use, and parties could use government jobs and resources for patronage. Under this set of conditions, parties would tend to rely on patronage rather than on programmatic or ideological appeals to mobilize their constituencies and reward activists. The electoral calculus of party politicians would dominate the operations of state organizations, rendering such organizations less able to use bureaucratic resources to plan autonomous state interventions into civil society.

By the mid-nineteenth century, all Western states were coming under pressures to become more efficient and professionalized. Industrialization, urbanization, and the need to compete internationally, both economically and militarily, generated these imperatives. In those countries where patronage still held sway over state administrations, there were struggles over how to overcome the "political corruption" of patronage in order to create an "efficient"—that is, nonpartisan, predictable, and expert—civil service. If civil service reform succeeded before full democratization—as it did in Great Britain, for example—political parties were encouraged, as more people were granted the franchise, to change their mode of operation and to reorient their electoral appeals from the patronage system toward more programmatic appeals and constituency-based organization. The civil administration could then be changed in ways that enhanced its capacity for intervention in civil society. However, if patronage was established in a fully (or almost fully) democratic polity—as it was in the United States—it was quite difficult to uproot afterwards. Mass electorates, and the party politicians appealing to them, had a continuing interest in using government as a source of patronage, and civil service reformers had to wage difficult, eventually only partially successful, struggles to overcome democratized "political corruption" in government and party politics.

Thus, to fully understand the forces that gave shape to the contemporary American social welfare system, we need to begin with the sociopolitical processes transforming the American state and party system in the nineteenth century. Critical to the entire trajectory of American social

policy is the fact that the United States was the world's first mass democracy. The extension of suffrage to all white males in America had occurred by the 1830s, well before the democratization of the electorate in European countries. More importantly, this happened before the development of any political constituency interested in building an autonomous, professionalized, and nonpartisan state organization. Without such a "coalition for bureaucratic autonomy" (to use Shefter's term), positions in the state administration were used by party leaders as resources for mobilizing the mass electorate and maintaining party organizations. This was the essence of the well-known spoils system, which dominated U.S. politics throughout the nineteenth century. Reinforcing the effects of early democratization and the dominance of patronage parties over the civil administration was the relatively protected geopolitical position of the United States. Bureaucratic state-making was not stimulated by war-making, as in the early modern European cases so well analyzed by Charles Tilly.⁹

Patronage Democracy and the Civil War Pension System

In industrializing America after the Civil War, parties mobilized the electorate through popularly rooted political machines whose very lifeblood was patronage. Ideological and programmatic appeals were not prominent, but politically discretionary distributional programs that provided jobs, services, or other goods, such as Civil War pensions, were quite popular with politicians and their constituencies.¹⁰ These distributional policies were of critical importance to elected officials, for it was in the late nineteenth century that American politics were at their most competitive outside the South. In the North and Midwest, Democrats and Republicans faced each other with nearly equivalent popular electoral support, and they regularly replaced each other in office. Electoral participation was at an all-time high, and given the nearly equal division of support, a few hundred votes—however secured—in the most politically competitive states, such as Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, and New York, could mean the difference between winning and losing an election.¹¹

⁹ Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 169–91.

¹⁰ Richard McCormick, "The Party Period and Public Policy: An Exploratory Hypothesis," *Journal of American History* 66 (1979): 279–98.

¹¹ Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), chaps. 7, 8, 14; Heywood Sanders, "Paying for the 'Bloody Shirt': The Politics of Civil War Pensions," in Barry Rundquist, ed., *Political Benefits* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1980), pp. 137–59.

The Civil War pension system was an excellent example of the sort of policies generated by the operations of patronage democracy. It allowed politicians, especially Republicans, to channel to many individuals in numerous (non-Southern) communities pensions financed out of the surplus revenues coming from the constantly readjusted tariffs they sponsored to benefit various industries and areas.¹² Given the extensive mobilization of voters and the extremely competitive electoral conditions of late-nineteenth-century patronage democracy, it is not surprising that during the 1880s and 1890s, the pension system was changed from a provision for compensation of combat injuries and war deaths to the functional equivalent of an old-age and disability pension system for a politically important segment of the U.S. electorate. In the Northern and Midwestern states, veterans of the Civil War constituted fully 12 to 15 percent of the electorate, making the "soldier vote a prize of great worth," a "prize" that increased in value with the growth of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the veterans' lobbying group.¹³

Figure 1.1 helps to show the effects of the transformation and expansion of the post-Civil War pension system by charting the trends in disbursements, number of pensioners, and private pension bills between the late 1860s and 1920. Benefits under the original 1862 law were extended only to soldiers actually injured in combat or to the dependents of those disabled or killed. As one might expect, the number of beneficiaries and total expenditures were falling off in the late 1870s. Subsequently, however, under the pressure of the intense electoral competition of the times, both Republican and Democratic Congressmen supported legislative liberalizations, the most important in 1879 and 1890, that effectively transformed the character of the pension system.¹⁴ The 1879 Arrears Act allowed soldiers who "discovered" Civil War-related disabilities to sign up and receive in one lump sum all of the pension payments they would have been eligible for had they been receiving benefits since the 1860s! Then the 1890 Dependent Pension Act severed altogether the link between

¹² Richard Bensel, *Sectionalism and American Political Development* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 60–73.

¹³ Leonard D. White, *The Republican Era: A Study in Administrative History, 1869–1901* (New York: The Free Press, 1958), p. 218. GAR membership increased from 60,000 in 1880 to 428,000 in 1890, when the organization included about one-third of all Union Army veterans who survived the Civil War. Yet the initial legislative liberalization of pensions—the Arrears Act of 1879—was not a product of GAR lobbying; rather, the growth of the GAR was stimulated by the Arrears Act. On the GAR, see Mary Dearing, *Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), and Donald McMurry, "The Political Significance of the Pension Question, 1885–1897," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 9 (1922): 19–36.

¹⁴ William Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918); McMurry, "Political Significance of the Pension Question."

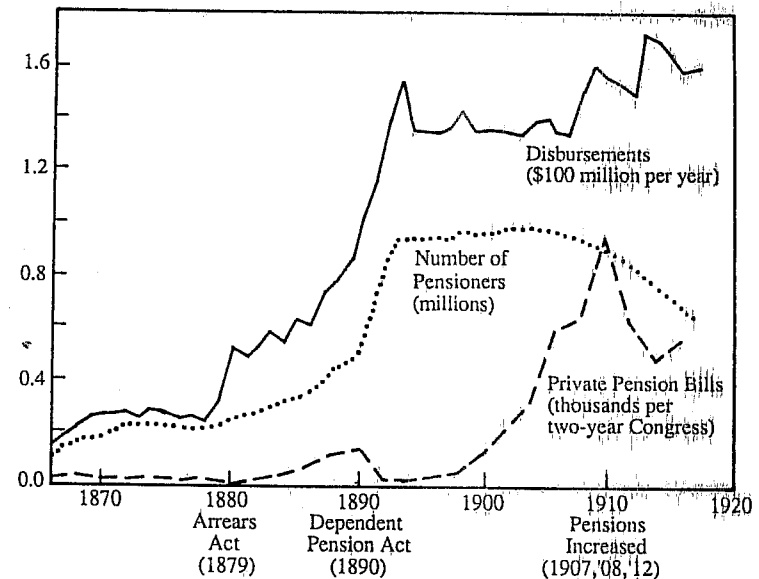


FIGURE 1.1 The expansion of Civil War pensions, 1866–1917. Source: William Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918), pp. 273, 280.

combat-related injuries and benefits under the pension system. Any veteran who had served ninety days in the Union Army, whether or not he saw combat or was injured in the Civil War, could sign up for a pension if at some point he became unable to perform manual labor. In practice, after the 1890 legislation, old age alone became a sufficient disability, and in 1906 the law was further amended to state explicitly that "the age of sixty-two years and over shall be considered a permanent specific disability within the meaning of the pension laws."¹⁵ By this time, about 90 percent of the surviving Union veterans were pensioners. In essence, America had a de facto old-age and disability pension system for those who had served in the Civil War and a survivors' allowance for many of their dependents.¹⁶

Members of Congress were kept quite busy by the operations of the

¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of Pensions, *Laws of the United States Governing the Granting of Army and Navy Pensions* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1925), p. 43; Carple Haber, *Beyond Sixty-Five* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 112.

¹⁶ Ann Shola Orloff, "The Politics of Pensions: A Comparative Analysis of the Origins of Pensions and Old Age Insurance in Canada, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880s–1930s" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1985), p. 71.

pension system in the 1880s and 1890s. Not only were there the recurrent legal liberalizations of the terms of eligibility for pensions, but, in addition, congressmen and senators devoted a large amount of time to helping their constituents establish their eligibility for pensions through personal intervention with the U.S. Pension Bureau and by sponsoring thousands of special private-pension bills tailored to allow specific individuals to collect benefits even when they did not qualify under the very liberal legislated qualifications.¹⁷ The U.S. Pension Bureau itself was the "most uncompromisingly political branch of the late nineteenth century federal bureaucracy," where there was wide discretion in the processing of claims due to a huge backlog.¹⁸ Under such circumstances, control of the civil administration was an important political resource. The partisan appointees in the Pension Bureau, most notably the Republicans, utilized this resource particularly at election time, when pension agents would be sent into the field to sign up pensioners—for their benefits and for the Grand Old Party!¹⁹

Given that a considerable proportion of men then in their twenties and thirties served in the Civil War regiments, and given that these men were in their sixties by 1890 to 1910, it is not surprising that at least one-half of all elderly, native-born men in the North, as well as many old and young widows, were receiving what were in effect federal old-age and survivors' pensions during this period. Of course, the post-Civil War pension system was uneven in its coverage of the American population, with the distribution of pensions favoring native-born men and pre-Civil War immigrants living in the North and Midwest. A majority of the elderly white Southern participants in the Civil War were veterans of the Confederate Army and therefore not eligible for federal benefits, although most of the Southern states began to give (relatively meager) state pensions to disabled or impoverished Confederate veterans in the 1890s.²⁰ Also excluded were blacks and all post-Civil War immigrants; this meant that relatively few unskilled workers were among the system's beneficiaries.

It seems clear that benefits under the Civil War pension system flowed primarily to members of the middle class and the upper strata of the working class, rather than to the neediest Americans. Yet in Europe it was precisely the "respectable" and better-off members of the working classes

¹⁷ McMurry, "Political Significance of the Pension Question," p. 28.

¹⁸ Keller, *Affairs of State*, p. 311.

¹⁹ Sanders, "Paying for the 'Bloody Shirt.'" ²⁰

²⁰ William Glasson, "The South's Care for Her Confederate Veterans," *American Monthly Review of Reviews* 36 (1907): 40–47; Rubinow, *Social Insurance*, pp. 408–9; Ann Shola Orloff and Theda Skocpol, "Why Not Equal Protection?: Explaining the Politics of Public Social Spending in Britain, 1900–1911, and the United States, 1880s–1920," *American Sociological Review* 49 (1984): 728.

who were of most concern to those reformers proposing social insurance and pensions. The problem of the pauperization of these "worthy" (and often newly enfranchised) people through the operation of traditional poor laws, which left no alternative to destitution but degrading, insufficient, and disfranchising poor relief, was in fact a major stimulant to the consideration of social policy reform in Europe. In the United States, not every Civil War pensioner would have been a pauper without the aid of a federal pension, but as Charles Henderson wrote in his important 1909 work, *Industrial Insurance in the United States*, "Many of the old men and women who, in Europe, would be in almshouses, are found in the United States living upon pensions with their children or in homes to which paupers are not sent and they feel themselves to be the honored guests of the nation for which they gave the last full measure of devotion."²¹

Although Civil War pensions were a form of public aid expanded to meet the needs of some fortunate older Americans, not all who were elderly, disabled, or impoverished around the turn of the century received Civil War pensions. For some unemployed people, there were occasionally positions in work-relief projects funded by municipalities during business downturns, when the plight of the jobless was most visible.²² But for the non-able-bodied poor, the only alternative to destitution was charity. Charity, whether dispensed by local public poor law authorities or private philanthropic agencies, was at best inadequate. At worst, it involved disfranchisement and residence in a semi-penal workhouse. Significantly, public poor relief was offered as an alternative to, rather than as a right of, citizenship.²³

The financing and administration of the poor laws throughout nineteenth-century Europe and North America had several commonalities: local administration was the rule, and poor relief everywhere was meager and degrading.²⁴ The distinguishing feature of late-nineteenth-century U.S. poor relief administration was the predominance of patronage practices. A wide variety of governmental forms existed in American localities, but whatever the form, the patronage organizations of Democrats

²¹ Henderson, *Industrial Insurance*, p. 277.

²² Leah Hannah Feder, *Unemployment Relief in Periods of Depression* (New York: Russell Sage, 1936), pp. 168–88.

²³ Raymond Mohl, "Three Centuries of American Public Welfare," *Current History* 65 (1973): 6–10, 38–39.

²⁴ By the latter half of the century, some central administrative supervision of poor relief functions had emerged; in European countries, this was often at the level of the national government, while in the U.S., it was at the state level. On early U.S. poor relief administrative practices, see Josephine Brown, *Public Relief, 1929–1939* (New York: Henry Holt, 1940), chap. 1, and Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), pt. 1.

and Republicans dominated city, town, and county governments.²⁵ The partisan control of American local governments meant—as did the dominance of patronage politicians in the federal government—that administration was nonprofessional and “permeated . . . to the core” by party politics.²⁶ Control of poor relief provided politicians with opportunities for patronage appointments and for exercising partisan preference in the awarding of contracts for building and supplying poorhouses, asylums, and other welfare institutions.²⁷ In addition, because local officials had discretion in granting outdoor relief and work relief, electoral considerations could enter easily into the determination of eligibility for aid.²⁸ Describing the use of public works as a relief measure in New York City in the 1890s, sociologist Leah Feder noted that “partisan politics entered into its expenditure; workers referred by social agencies were dropped more quickly than those sent by politicians . . . carelessness, extravagance, and misappropriation in administration were rife . . . [although] the fund undoubtedly provided an important resource in relieving unusual distress.”²⁹ Public charity was sometimes supplemented by the gifts of party bosses, who on occasion distributed food and fuel to the poor. Typically, they paid for this largesse out of the “private” funds they garnered through graft or “macing” (the practice of levying assessments on the salaries of public employees).³⁰

Late-nineteenth-century patronage democracy was effective in mobilizing broad popular support, but it also produced serious opposition. Populists and labor groups denounced the links between politicians and the “robber barons”—the capitalists dominating the economy through their control of railroads, manufacturing, and banking, newly national in scope. At the same time, university-educated professionals criticized especially the “corruption” and “inefficiency” of the personnel practices of the spoils system. They were dissatisfied as well with the kinds of policies fostered by patronage democracy, which, they charged, lacked any justification in terms of the “public interest.” Instead, noted critics, the devel-

²⁵ Keller, *Affairs of State*, p. 377.

²⁶ Ari Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils: A History of the Civil Service Reform Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968), p. 1.

²⁷ Frank Bruno, *Trends in Social Work, 1874–1956* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 79; Sophonisba Breckinridge, *Public Welfare Administration in the United States: Select Documents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), sec. 4; Harry C. Evans, *The American Poorfarm and its Inmates* (Des Moines, Iowa: Loyal Order of Moose, 1926); Keller, *Affairs of State*, p. 501.

²⁸ Brown, *Public Relief*, p. 16.

²⁹ Feder, *Unemployment Relief*, p. 188; see also pp. 22, 158.

³⁰ John Pratt, “Boss Tweed’s Welfare Program,” *New York Historical Quarterly* 45 (1961): 396–411; William L. Riordan, *Plunkett of Tammany Hall* (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1905).

opment of American public policy was above all tied to the partisan political exigencies of winning elections. These exigencies did not at all preclude—in fact, probably stimulated—out and out corruption and fraud. Even the normal functioning of the patronage system was coming under fire as “political corruption.” For example, the chairman of the committee on the merit system in public institutions of the National Conference of Charities and Correction (NCCC), America’s leading association of charity workers and social reformers in the late 1800s, forcefully challenged the rationale and practices of the spoils system, calling that system “treasonable robbery, although not treason in the eyes of the law.”³¹

The Civil War pension system was targeted as a particularly egregious example of the problems to which patronage democracy led. By the 1880s and 1890s, the pension system’s partisan uses were clear to many in the broad middle-class public, despite the attempts of elected officials to legitimize the repeated expansions of the system through the use of patriotic rhetoric and waving the “bloody shirt.” As one observer noted in an investigatory article appearing in an 1884 issue of the reform-oriented magazine *Century*, “It is safe to assert that most of the legislation adopted since the war closed, to pay money on account of service in the Union armies, has had for its real motive not justice nor generosity, but a desire to cultivate the ‘soldier vote’ for party purposes.”³² For the remainder of the nineteenth century and in the Progressive Era of the twentieth, these “abuses” of the pension system and other “perversions of democracy” associated with mass patronage politics provided a continuing stimulus for political reform, as well as a powerful symbol of all that was considered to be amiss with existing political practices.

The initial proponents of ending patronage through civil service reform in the United States were “Mugwumps,” upper- and upper-middle-class reformers located in the Northeast, especially New York and Massachusetts. Like their European counterparts of the late nineteenth century, the Mugwumps wanted public administration taken out of patronage politics, so that expertise and predictability could prevail.³³ At first, however, the Mugwumps’ reform proposals made only limited headway, for American party politicians had secure roots in the fully democratized, tauntly

³¹ Philip Garret, “The Merit System in Public Institutions,” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction* (Boston: George Ellis, 1896), p. 369.

³² Eugene Smalley, “The United States Pension Office,” *Century Magazine* 28 (1884): 427.

³³ Martin Schiesl, *The Politics of Efficiency: Municipal Administration and Reform in America, 1880–1920* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), chap. 2; Martin Shefter, “Party, Bureaucracy and Political Change in the United States,” in Louis Maisel and Joseph Cooper, eds., *Political Parties: Development and Decay* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1978), pp. 211–65.

mobilized mass white-male electorate. As Stephen Skowronek has pointed out in his study of American state-building, "to build a merit system in American government, government officers would have to move against resources and procedures vital to their power and position."³⁴

Through the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the conflict between politicians and the various good government reformers resulted in overall defeat for the Mugwumps. Following the extremely close presidential election of 1880 and the patronage-related assassination of President James Garfield, the Republican administration of President Chester Alan Arthur and the Republican-controlled Congress in early 1883 approved the establishment of a Civil Service Commission under the Pendleton Act, largely as a concession to the Mugwumps to avoid losing their votes.³⁵ Analysts agree that the impact of the law was quite limited; Skowronek notes that it dried up "selected pockets of patronage so as to improve efficiency and, at the same time, serve strategic party goals . . . ; [it] supplanted the dominant patronage relationship rather than supplanting it."³⁶ In fact, because of the growth in federal employment, a larger number of jobs were available for patronage by the end of the century than had been before the enactment of the Pendleton Act, even with the growth in the proportion of classified (i.e., civil service) jobs. Thus, significant civil service reform was delayed until the Progressive Era, when electoral competitiveness declined somewhat, although even then, reformers never fully succeeded in uprooting patronage. Nevertheless, the crisis of the patronage system formed the backdrop to the policy debates of the early twentieth century.

The Progressive Era: Debate and Defeat of Proposed Social-Spending Measures

Around the turn of the twentieth century, Americans, along with people in almost all the industrializing nations of the West, took part in debates over what the state should do in the face of the increasingly well-publicized problems of income insecurity. But the political legacies of nineteenth-century patronage democracy were far from conducive to the establishment of modern social insurance and pensions in Progressive-Era America. The incomplete success of civil service reform in the late nineteenth century had left the U.S. state with relatively underdeveloped capacities for regulating an industrial-capitalist economy and administering

³⁴ Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 68 and chap. 3 generally.

³⁵ Shefter, "Party, Bureaucracy and Political Change," p. 228.

³⁶ Skowronek, *Building a New American State*, pp. 68-69.

social programs designed to deal with its casualties. In addition, Progressive reformers were in the midst of battles against democratized "political corruption"; these overshadowed debates about social policies. At this point in American history, modern social-spending programs were neither governmentally feasible nor politically acceptable.

Workers' compensation legislation was the first modern welfare program to receive consideration in America, as it was across Europe, and it was substantially successful, achieving passage in thirty-eight states by 1919.³⁷ After the passage of workers' compensation laws, many European reformers had moved toward dealing with the situation of the aged poor, whose plight had helped to stimulate popular movements for pensions. As pensions were established, reformers and government officials were concerned to add a contributory element to programs designed to deal with unemployment, sickness, and dependency, and the political support for pensions was utilized in the service of social insurance. For example, in Britain, the problems of the aged served as a unifying focus for the political activities of reformers and some labor leaders, helping to cement a cross-class alliance in favor of new social-spending programs.³⁸ In contrast, in the United States, the problems associated with the aged—poverty, but also mismanaged Civil War pensions—served to drive apart groups who might otherwise have cooperated politically to push for a modern system of social protection. Thus, the trajectory of events in the United States was quite different from that in Europe, and the successful establishment of workers' compensation in many states was not followed by similar successes in instituting old-age pensions or social insurance.

Although they hesitated to press for new social-spending measures, Progressive reformers were not anti-statist in their orientation. On the contrary, they saw the state as having the potential to be an ethical agency, and this vision helped to inspire the movement for civil service reform. Therefore, it is important to be very specific about exactly what kind of cross-class coalitions were not possible in Progressive-Era America. Although middle-class reformers and organized labor were sometimes at odds over the issue of political "reform"—especially in Eastern cities where political machines had made inroads into working class constituencies—they did manage to cooperate on campaigns for workmen's compensation, labor standards legislation, and mothers' pensions. In general, middle-class reformers supported the expansion of the regulatory capacity of the government, which in fact kept pace with European developments.³⁹

What can account for the American pattern of social reform legislation

³⁷ Brandeis, "Labor Legislation," pp. 575-77.

³⁸ Orloff, *The Politics of Pensions*, chap. 6.

³⁹ Irwin Yellowitz, *Labor and the Progressive Movement in New York State, 1897-1916* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 10.

in the years between the turn of the century and World War I? Why were social-spending initiatives so weakly supported by elites and ultimately unsuccessful? And why did other welfare innovations, such as workers' compensation and labor regulations, fare better?

Conventional historical portraits show Americans as culturally and ideologically opposed to new state welfare programs. The failure to enact new social insurance and pension programs is explained by invoking the strength of traditional U.S. liberalism among both educated elites and the population at large.⁴⁰ In fact, similar ideas were employed in support of the reform proposals in both Europe and America, as early social scientists demonstrated empirically the social causes of poverty and income insecurity, and politically active innovators grappled with the problem of integrating industrial workers into the polity.⁴¹ In liberal-democratic countries such as Britain and the United States, support for new policy proposals came from a reworking of traditional liberal ideas away from pure self-help and distrust of state intervention toward "new liberal" or "progressive" conceptions.⁴² Those inspired by "new liberal" ideas came to see that industrial society made people interdependent. Many noted that individual liberty could be thwarted as much by a lack of life's necessities as by the presence of governmental restrictions.⁴³ In modern society, argued new liberals, government could be an indispensable support for individual liberty, providing security against socially caused misfortunes and regulating competition to allow for individual initiatives. Thus, new state welfare activities could be—and were, on both sides of the Atlantic—advocated without violating the traditional liberal aim of enhancing individual freedom.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ See, for one example among many, Gaston Rimlinger's *Welfare Policy and Industrialization in Europe, America and Russia* (New York: John Wiley, 1971).

⁴¹ Among the better-known social-scientific surveys were, in the United States, Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), and, in Britain, Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People of London* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1889 and 1891) and *The Aged Poor in England and Wales* (New York and London: Macmillan, 1894). On the "social question"—that is, how to incorporate industrial workers into the democratic polity, see, for example, John Graham Brooks, *The Social Unrest* (New York: Macmillan, 1903), and J. A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy* (London: P. S. King and Son, 1909).

⁴² On the British "New Liberals," see Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); P.F. Clarke, "The Progressive Movement in England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 24 (1974): 159–82; and Stefan Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). On their American counterparts, see Sidney Fine, *Laissez-Faire and the General Welfare State* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), and Robert Bremner, *From the Depths* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), chap. 8.

⁴³ See, e.g., Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism*, pp. 92–113.

⁴⁴ Orloff, *The Politics of Pensions*, chap. 3.; Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, p. 107;

What is more, turn-of-the-century American popular support for new welfare measures has been underestimated in conventional historical accounts. Consider the voting in the presidential election of 1912. The Progressive Party, led by former President Theodore Roosevelt, garnered the second-highest vote total, gaining four million votes to Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson's six million, and edging out incumbent Republican President William Taft. The Progressives achieved this impressive vote total with a platform that endorsed "the protection of home life against the hazards of sickness, irregular employment, and old age through the adoption of a system of social insurance adapted to American use."⁴⁵ More precise and convincing evidence comes from Massachusetts, where eight cities held popular referenda on old age pensions in 1915 and 1916. Pensions were approved by Bay State voters by a margin of more than four to one, belying the notion that American popular values precluded this policy innovation.⁴⁶

Organized labor in the United States prior to the New Deal also has been described as uniformly hostile to social welfare programs.⁴⁷ It is true that some national leaders of the American Federation of Labor (AFL)—most notably AFL President Samuel Gompers—opposed contributory social insurance, which would tax workers. Yet in the pre-New Deal era, most legislative activity on labor and welfare matters took place at the state and local levels, and it was here that labor unions and federations of labor exercised most of their political influence.⁴⁸ In the more industrialized states, where organized labor was relatively more weighty than in the United States as a whole, unions were often supportive of both pensions and contributory social insurance. During the Progressive Era, state labor federations endorsed a number of health and unemployment insurance bills, along with workers' compensation, mothers' pensions, and old-age pensions. The recession of 1914–15 induced reformers and labor organizations alike to support steps toward implementing unemployment insurance in California, Massachusetts, and New York.⁴⁹ By 1918, nine

Henderson, *Industrial Insurance*; Henry Seager, *Social Insurance* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 4–5, 148–50.

⁴⁵ Kirk Porter and Donald B. Johnson, eds., *National Party Platforms* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), p. 177; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 682.

⁴⁶ Massachusetts Special Commission on Social Insurance, *Report* (Massachusetts House No. 1850) (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1917), p. 57.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Rimlinger, *Welfare Policy and Industrialization*, pp. 80–84.

⁴⁸ Phillip Taft, *Organized Labor in American History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 233; Gary Fink, *Labor's Search for Political Order: The Political Behavior of the Missouri Labor Movement, 1890–1940* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), pp. 161–82.

⁴⁹ "Unemployment Survey," *American Labor Legislation Review* 5 (1915): 591–92;

state labor federations had endorsed unemployment benefits proposals.⁵⁰ Likewise, the labor federations from the industrialized states of Ohio, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Missouri, in addition to those from California, Massachusetts, and New York, endorsed health insurance proposals between 1915 and 1919.⁵¹

Interestingly, events in Britain (and elsewhere in Europe) reveal that it was not working-class groups who were responsible for the introduction of contributory social insurance. Instead, it was politicians and ministers who persuaded initially reluctant leaders of unions and other interest groups to go along with the new programs by negotiating about specific methods of implementing taxes and payments.⁵² Since U.S. state and local unions were at least as willing as British labor groups to support social insurance programs, it is quite likely that comparable co-optive efforts directed at them by state-level elected or appointed officials would have succeeded. In the United States, government leaders did not make such efforts—and it was surely this lack, rather than lack of demands and political support from the unions, that explains why the social insurances failed in America.

In the case of old-age pensions, it is even clearer that the failure of this form of social provision in Progressive-Era America was not due to the failure of U.S. unions to support such measures. Leaders at all levels of the labor movement generally favored noncontributory old-age pensions. Even Samuel Gompers favored *noncontributory* old-age pensions, stating in 1916 that pensions “carry with them the conviction of their self-evident necessity and justice.”⁵³ Moreover, national conventions of the AFL passed resolutions in favor of pensions in 1908, 1911, 1912, and 1913.⁵⁴

Daniel Nelson, *Unemployment Insurance: The American Experience, 1915–1935* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 18.

⁵⁰ Nelson, *Unemployment Insurance*, pp. 70–71.

⁵¹ Ronald Numbers, *Almost Persuaded: American Physicians and Compulsory Health Insurance, 1912–1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 79; Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 250; Haze C. Tishler, *Self-Reliance and Social Security, 1870–1917* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1971), p. 173: “Labor Getting Behind Health Insurance,” *The Survey* 39 (1918): 708–9.

⁵² On the British case, see C. L. Mowat, “Social Legislation in Britain and the United States in the Early Twentieth Century: A Problem in the History of Ideas,” in J. C. Beckett, ed., *Historical Studies: Papers Read Before the Irish Conference of Historians* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969), pp. 81–96; Bentley Gilbert, *The Evolution of National Insurance in Great Britain* (London: Michael Joseph, 1966), chaps. 5–7; and Hecló, *Modern Social Politics*, pp. 78–90.

⁵³ Louis Reed, *The Labor Philosophy of Samuel Gompers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), p. 117.

⁵⁴ American Federation of Labor, *History, Encyclopedia, Reference Book* (Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Labor, 1919), pp. 303–4.

Indeed, the first pension proposal introduced in the U.S. Congress came from former United Mine Workers leader William B. Wilson in 1909, and it was soon endorsed by the AFL and by many state and local labor leaders.⁵⁵ The Wilson bill borrowed from the positive symbolism of Civil War pensions by proposing to deal with poverty among the working-class aged through the creation of an “Old Home Guard,” in which all Americans aged sixty-five or over were invited to enlist if their annual income fell below \$240; their sole duty would be to report to the War Department on the state of patriotism in their communities, for which they would be paid \$120 per year.⁵⁶

During the Progressive Era, it was not working-class groups, but many social reformers—and the middle-class and professional strata from which they came and to whom they oriented their arguments—who were reluctant to accept, let alone champion, social-spending measures such as old-age pensions. These sorts of programs had been advocated by a cross-class alliance in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, but in the United States, such a coalition was not politically possible. This can be seen in the way that U.S. reformers dealt with the issue of old-age poverty—the issue that had brought together a cross-class coalition for social spending in Britain.

The first serious official investigation of old-age poverty occurred in Massachusetts in the wake of the introduction of several old-age pension bills in the state legislature from 1903 to 1906. The Massachusetts Commission on Old Age Pensions, Annuities, and Insurance was appointed in 1907 and issued its report in 1910. This investigatory commission, staffed predominantly with professionals and upper-class Bostonians, gathered data on the elderly poor in Massachusetts, considered various pension proposals, and reported that public pensions were neither necessary nor morally desirable. Given that Massachusetts had long been a pioneer in social and labor legislation, serving as a gateway to the United States for British social policy innovations and as an example to other states, the setback in the Bay State was critical to developments everywhere in America. Indeed, the report dealt a virtual death blow to what had previously been a promising movement toward old-age pensions in that state and elsewhere.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ David Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 171.

⁵⁶ The text of the bill is reprinted in the *Report* of the Massachusetts Commission on Old Age Pensions, Annuities, and Insurance (Massachusetts House Document No. 1400) (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1910), pp. 339–40.

⁵⁷ On events in Massachusetts, see Alton Linford, *Old Age Assistance in Massachusetts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), chap. 1; Massachusetts Commission on Old Age Pensions, Annuities, and Insurance, *Report*; and Fischer, *Growing Old in America*, p. 161.

A labor representative, Arthur M. Huddell, expressed his disagreement with the commission's recommendations and questioned their arguments about the preferability of contributory pensions over noncontributory pensions, citing Civil War pensions as a *favorable* precedent: "The pension to the veterans of the Civil War has built up the American family . . . [and] the old veteran and his widow are made comfortable in their old age . . . and have a feeling of independence that old people should have."⁵⁸ But the willingness of Huddell and other reformers from labor's ranks to endorse noncontributory pensions for the "veterans of industry" was not complemented by a similar attitude on the part of elites in Massachusetts or in the rest of the United States.

Throughout Progressive-Era America, old-age pensions were downplayed even by the most socially progressive elites, such as the members of the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL). In 1913–14—just as the AFL was solidifying its commitment to old-age pensions—the AALL made the decision to promote health insurance rather than old-age pensions as the "next great step" after workers' compensation in the "inevitable" progress toward a comprehensive program of modern social protections in America.⁵⁹ Following the massive unemployment in the recession of 1913–15, the AALL also advocated a model bill for unemployment insurance, along with other measures to help the jobless.⁶⁰ Yet leaders of the AALL decided to forego a campaign for old-age pensions after their successes in promoting workers' compensation and industrial safety laws. Such a campaign assuredly would have appealed to organized labor and to broader working-class electorate—as pensions did in Britain, for example. A campaign for contributory social insurance was less able to appeal to all segments of the labor movement, particularly since there had been no momentum for new government social-spending programs built up from prior reform activities on behalf of pensions. Yet pensions were unappealing to many of the leaders and members of the AALL itself, as well as to the broader middle-class political public.

Why did U.S. elites and middle-class people generally oppose new state social-spending initiatives? And why were the capacities and character of the U.S. state not conducive to the introduction of modern welfare measures? To understand these facts, we must turn to the institutional context formed by the particular patterns of American state-building, and to the ramifications this had for coalition-building and for the character of parties and the civil administration.

In Progressive-Era America, civil service reform made some headway,

⁵⁸ Massachusetts Commission on Old Age Pensions, Annuities, and Insurance, *Report*, p. 335.

⁵⁹ "Social Insurance," *American Labor Legislation Review* 4 (1914): 578–79.

⁶⁰ "Unemployment Survey," *American Labor Legislation Review* 5 (1915): 573–75.

though less at the national level than at the state and local levels.⁶¹ The demand for reforms in government broadened from the very elite ranks of Mugwumptry to include the growing ranks of the educated, professionalizing middle class and, in many places, farmers and organized labor as well.⁶² In the newly noncompetitive political situation ushered in by the realigning election of 1896, there was increased freedom for officials in the executive branch, especially the president himself, to move against patronage practices, and to establish bureaucratic organizations useful in augmenting executive power.⁶³

Yet the legacies of nineteenth-century patronage democracy and the crisis it precipitated in the Progressive Era created a relatively unfavorable context for the enactment of social reforms such as old-age pensions and social insurance. At the most basic level, the civil administration of the early twentieth-century American state was quite weak, given the lack of an established state bureaucracy and the dispersion of authority inherent in U.S. federalism and division of powers. Civil service reform, which might have enhanced the capacities of American government for certain types of interventions in civil life, had still not achieved much progress by the early 1900s. In contrast to the situation in many European countries, there were in the United States no strategically placed officials to pave the way for new social welfare programs. Thus, reforms in this period did not have their source within the underdeveloped American bureaucracy. Instead, they were supported by broad coalitions of interest groups and pressed upon state legislatures.⁶⁴

American political parties did not tend to be the vehicles of reform, either. They were not—as were many of their European counterparts—programmatic parties looking for new policies to attract newly enfranchised working-class voters. Rather, they were patronage parties with an already mobilized working-class following whose mode of operation was under attack as "corruption" by many reformers. The clear challenge for party leaders in the Progressive Era was to find ways to appeal to middle-class reformers and their organizations while not alienating their traditional, patronage-oriented supporters. New social-spending measures tended not to meet that challenge, for elites and middle-class groups were still not convinced that officials in control of the state administration had been sufficiently cleansed of "corruption" to be entrusted with such activities.

⁶¹ Schiesl, *The Politics of Efficiency*.

⁶² Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), chap. 5; John D. Buenker, *Urban Liberalism and Progressive Reform* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), chap. 6.

⁶³ Skowronek, *Building a New American State*, chap. 6.

⁶⁴ Buenker, *Urban Liberalism*.

The possibility of continuing "political corruption" in new government interventions worried elites and middle-class groups. The struggle against the patronage system was far from complete, and the debate over new social welfare spending programs was additionally entangled by issues of administrative probity and competence. By contrast, in most European countries, where bureaucratization was effectively implemented prior to mass extension of the suffrage and the emergence of debates over workmen's insurance, such entanglements were avoided. Thus, even as proposals for new social insurance or pension schemes were being debated, Civil War pensions continued to be a symbol of all that was wrong with mass patronage democracy and public policy. In 1911 and 1912, Charles Francis Adams, a well-known journalist and reformer, carried out an investigation of the abuses of the military pension system which was published in the reform magazine *World's Work*.⁶⁵ The series' title when reprinted as a book in 1912—*The Civil War Pension Lack-of-System, a four-thousand million dollar record of legislative incompetence tending to political corruption*—summarizes well the reformer's view of the link between patronage democracy and pensions.

Although worries about political corruption undermined cross-class coalitions for social spending, especially on old-age pensions, some important social-welfare innovations did occur in many states during the Progressive Era. Labor regulations were strengthened, especially for women and children, and mothers' pension legislation, which provided means-tested allowances to widows outside of the poor law, was also widely successful. Workers' compensation laws, too, were enacted by numbers of state legislatures.⁶⁶ Why was it possible for these to be enacted in a political climate so hostile to public initiatives that involved social spending? Regulatory activities, unlike social-spending programs, could address the new needs of industrial society—and appeal to both working- and middle-class voters—without adding to the potential for political "corruption" or overtaxing U.S. administrative capacities. The two new welfare programs that were successful in Progressive-Era America, workmen's compensation and mothers' pensions, represented the reworking of government functions already being carried out in the courts, and they did not significantly increase government spending. In Massachusetts and Wisconsin, reformers were able to overcome business op-

⁶⁵ See Charles Francis Adams, "Pensions—Worse and More of Them," *World's Work* 23 (1911–12): 188–92, 327–33, 385–98. *World's Work* carried many articles on pension abuse even as it championed various social, political, and labor reforms during the years between the turn of the century and the outbreak of World War I.

⁶⁶ Leff, "Consensus for Reform"; the entire third volume of *The History of Labor in the United States* by Lescohier and Brandeis chronicles the progress of workers' compensation and legislation regulating work conditions, wages, hours, and related topics in this era.

position to enact legislation establishing savings bank and government life insurance, programs that were not perceived to have a high potential for abuse.⁶⁷

Progressive social reformism quickly lost its momentum with the entry of the United States into World War I. However, with the creation of centralized federal administrative agencies to mobilize American resources for the war effort, many reform-minded Americans expected that the new agencies could be reoriented to peacetime activities in the aftermath of the war. Of particular importance to reformers were the United States Employment Service (USES) and war risk insurance. The USES, set up as an independent agency in 1918, was operating over eight hundred field offices at its peak of operations in 1919. These offices provided some job referrals and also collected statistics on unemployment. Members of the AALL and others interested in problems of unemployment and labor market organization hoped that the USES would come to serve as the foundation for the administration of unemployment insurance, as had been the case in Britain, where the world's first unemployment insurance system (initiated in 1911) had soon followed the establishment of national labor exchanges (1909).⁶⁸ War risk insurance (established by law in 1917), explicitly designed to avoid the pitfalls associated with the post-Civil War pension system,⁶⁹ was also the cause for hopeful projections on the part of progressive reformers. Samuel McCune Lindsay, in his 1919 presidential address to the AALL, described soldiers' insurance as "so striking a forward step that it may almost be said to atone for our previous backwardness," and he called on "those who believe in social insurance . . . to see that our next step shall be to hold on to this gain" and to extend it to the civilian population.⁷⁰

Yet reformers' hopes for extending wartime organizations and programs were dashed in the aftermath of the war. In Europe, the effect of national mobilization for war was to stimulate political trends favoring social insurance, but in the United States, the opposite happened. Congress—giving political expression to the opposition of state, local, and private interests to the extraordinary federal powers developed during the war—quickly dismantled the emergency war organizations, including the

⁶⁷ John Commons and John Andrews, *Principles of Labor Legislation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), p. 471; Lee Welling Squier, *Old Age Dependency in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), pp. 286–91.

⁶⁸ Roy Lubove, *The Struggle for Social Security, 1900–1935* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 149–57; on British unemployment insurance, see José Harris, *Unemployment and Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

⁶⁹ Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions*, p. 283.

⁷⁰ Samuel McCune Lindsay, "Next Steps in Social Insurance in the United States," *American Labor Legislation Review* 9 (1919): 111.

USES, after the Armistice. When Congress slashed the appropriations for USES in 1919, the agency was forced to disband its field offices and to depend for unemployment statistics on voluntary submissions of information from business, states, and localities.⁷¹ Without sufficient funding and support for the USES, there was little immediate chance for the development of an unemployment insurance program. And in the postwar reaction against federal government intervention in civil society, public old-age, disability, and survivors' insurance for civilians was not to be built up from war risk insurance.

In essence, the postwar United States opted not to institute the modern public social provision considered during the Progressive Era, or to build upon and extend wartime government activities such as the USES or war risk insurance. Yet the Progressive-Era attempts to build new realms of public activity free from patronage were not without implications for the future of social policy. Two structural effects were the enhancement of the importance of sub-national governments and the intensification of administrative fragmentation inherent in a federal system. Partially because civil service reform had made most headway at the sub-national level, states were the locus of administration for successful labor and welfare innovations in the Progressive Era itself and into the 1920s, and interests in such state-level programs became institutionalized. When social reform again emerged on the policy agenda in the wake of the Great Depression, policymakers would have to contend with this Progressive state-building legacy as they designed new programs.

In the postwar years, reformers and political leaders, as well as many average Americans, believed that businessmen could and would look after the American economy and Americans' economic well-being. To the extent that the problems of income insecurity associated with industrial capitalism were given any attention at all, they were to be addressed through "welfare capitalism"—programs run by employers for their workers—or through private and local charity. Welfare capitalist schemes reached only a tiny proportion of the work force, but they were important in the 1920s as a cultural ideal in opposition to public social efforts.⁷² The conservative Republican presidents of the 1920s were not at all interested in building a professionalized bureaucracy to administer social programs; rather, they embraced the vision of an anti-bureaucratic "as-

⁷¹ Carroll Woody, *The Growth of Federal Government, 1915-1932* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1934), pp. 371-72; I. W. Litchfield, "United States Employment Service and Demobilization," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 81 (1919): 19-27.

⁷² David Brody, "The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism," in Brody, *Workers in Industrial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 61; see also Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism*.

sociative state" developed by Herbert Hoover, who served as secretary of commerce for Presidents Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge before becoming chief executive himself in 1928. Hoover worked in his capacity as a public servant to encourage research, planning, and cooperation on the part of private groups; these activities would help citizens, under the "enlightened" leadership of corporate capitalists, to "meet the needs of industrial democracy without the interference of government bureaucrats."⁷³ A striking example of the "associative state" approach to social problems was the 1921 President's Conference on Unemployment, organized by Hoover to gain backing from the invited politicians, labor leaders, and social policy experts (including some from the AALL) for plans—already largely formulated—to deal with the severe recession of that year. Harding and Hoover ruled out any kind of governmental action from the beginning, and the conference was left to recommend better coordination of private and local charitable efforts.⁷⁴

Social reformers recognized that the 1920s were a remarkably unpropitious time for advocating public solutions to the problems of industrial capitalism.⁷⁵ Many—most importantly the members of the AALL—accommodated themselves to the new political climate by downplaying state initiatives and emphasizing the so-called "preventive approach" associated with the work of University of Wisconsin economist John R. Commons.⁷⁶ Commons and his disciples called for labor and social insurance legislation that would give individual businessmen tangible financial incentives for increasing workplace safety, stabilizing employment, and otherwise improving workers' and social welfare. Expert, coordinated administration of labor regulations at the state level was also an important part of the Commons approach to industrial relations.⁷⁷ It was in his home state of Wisconsin, with its unusually strong network of ties between state government and state-research university, that this type of

⁷³ Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), p. 89 and chap. 4 generally; Ellis Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretary, and the Vision of an 'Associative State,' 1921-28," *Journal of American History* 61 (1974): 116-40.

⁷⁴ William Cheney, "Unemployment at Washington," *Survey* 37 (1921): 47; *ibid.*, "The President's Conference and Unemployment in the United States," *International Labour Review* 5 (1922): 359-76; Carolyn Grin, "The Unemployment Conference of 1921: An Experiment in National Cooperative Planning," *Mid-America* 55 (1973): 83-107; Wilson, *Herbert Hoover*, pp. 90-93.

⁷⁵ Clarke Chambers, *Paul U. Kellogg and the Survey* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 77.

⁷⁶ Lafayette Harter, *John R. Commons: His Assault on Laissez-Faire* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1962); Nelson, *Unemployment Insurance*, chap. 6; Lubove, *The Struggle for Social Security*, chap. 7.

⁷⁷ John R. Commons, *Labor and Administration* (New York: August Kelley, [1913] 1964); Commons and Andrews, *Principles of Labor Legislation*.

administration was best developed. The Wisconsin State Industrial Commission was staffed by labor economists schooled in the Commons philosophy. The commission engaged in research and was empowered by the legislature to enforce and adjust all the state's industrial regulations.⁷⁸ In the absence of other reform activity, the AALL became increasingly oriented to the experiences and policy ideas of the Wisconsin State Industrial Commission, where—almost alone among state government agencies in the 1920s—social reform-minded “experts” (albeit of the “preventive” stripe) were still in a position of political influence. Only in the state of Wisconsin was there continuing activity around proposed unemployment insurance legislation through the 1920s. In 1921, an unemployment insurance bill based on the preventive approach and including employers' incentives came close to passing in the state legislature. The reformers continued their campaign until a similar bill finally succeeded in 1932—the first in the United States.⁷⁹

Outside Wisconsin, popular political activity for welfare reform in the 1920s consisted almost exclusively of state-level campaigns for noncontributory old-age pensions led by the Fraternal Order of Eagles, a predominantly working- and lower-middle-class, white fraternal order. At times, the Eagles worked in uneasy alliance with professional, middle-class reformers of the AALL or the newly formed American Association for Old Age Security (later the American Association for Social Security); a handful of progressive Republican and Northern Democratic politicians supported the pension cause as well.⁸⁰ But by 1928, the only fruits of the extensive campaigning for new public spending for old-age protection were six state-level pension laws, all of them “county-optional,” meaning that counties were *allowed*, but not mandated, to pay pensions to some of their aged residents. As it turned out, not many counties exercised their option, and only about one thousand elderly people were receiving these pensions in 1928, fewer than those still collecting Civil War pensions!⁸¹

⁷⁸ Lubove, *The Struggle for Social Security*, p. 33.

⁷⁹ Nelson, *Unemployment Insurance*, chap. 6.

⁸⁰ Louis Leotta, “Abraham Epstein and the Movement for Old Age Security,” *Labor History* 16 (1975): 359–78; Jackson Putnam, *Old Age Politics in California* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1970), pp. 18–24; Fraternal Order of Eagles, *The Fraternal Order of Eagles: What it Is, What it Does, What it Stands For* (Kansas City, Mo.: Organization Department, Fraternal Order of Eagles, 1929); Fischer, *Growing Old in America*, pp. 173–74.

⁸¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the U.S.*, p. 738; Fischer, *Growing Old in America*, pp. 173–74; Massachusetts Commission on Pensions, *Report on Old Age Pensions* (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1925), p. 37; U.S. Social Security Board, *Social Security in America: The Factual Background of the Social Security Act as Summarized from the Staff Reports to the Committee on Economic Security* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937), p. 161.

From Welfare Capitalism to the Welfare State

It was in the years of the Great Depression that the United States initiated nationwide programs of social protection through the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935. The economic crisis transformed the American political world as it had existed in the 1920s and set into motion political changes that allowed for the success of the New Deal social-welfare legislation. Nationally, the ideological and policy inheritance represented by welfare capitalism was utterly discredited. And American citizens, politically quiescent throughout the 1920s, became politically engaged on a mass scale. The social insurance and assistance legislation passed during the Depression era bears the imprint of these factors, but it was also shaped by institutional arrangements and policy feedbacks that were themselves the legacy of the struggles for civil service reform and social welfare innovation of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

THE ROLE OF POPULAR PRESSURES IN NEW DEAL SOCIAL-WELFARE INITIATIVES

By the time of the 1932 election, close to four years of the Great Depression had shattered the ideas that businessmen could guarantee the economic and social well-being of Americans, and that limited private and local charity and corporate welfare programs could serve as a substitute for public social provision in times of economic downturn. President Hoover had responded to demonstrably increased need and to rising demands for federal relief within the framework of his voluntarist philosophy, in which the state's welfare role was limited to encouragement of private philanthropic efforts.⁸² But with the persistence of the Depression, and the blatant failure of voluntary efforts to alleviate need, the demands for federal action to cope with the economic crisis mounted. Popular and expert interest again turned toward *public* policy solutions to economic and social problems.

Franklin Roosevelt's mandate was hardly definitive in terms of what national policies he would pursue to achieve economic recovery or to end economic insecurity; the 1932 platform of the Democrats pledged only old-age and unemployment insurance at the *state* level.⁸³ Yet Roosevelt was known as a reformer—when he served as governor of New York, he encouraged the initiation of public programs for old-age protection—and though he made no pledge as to what he would do beyond “bold experi-

⁸² Wilson, *Herbert Hoover*, chap. 5.

⁸³ Porter and Johnson, eds., *National Party Platforms*, p. 331.

mentation," his campaign promised to involve the federal government actively in dealing with the problems caused by the economic crisis.⁸⁴ Frances Perkins, FDR's close advisor and labor secretary, later wrote that it was "basic in the appeal for votes that suffering would be relieved immediately" through federal action, a stance completely different from Hoover's.⁸⁵ In this way, popular support for a new political orientation toward problems of economic security, as expressed by the 1932 election, was critical in providing an opening for the Roosevelt administration or congressional Democrats to initiate new public social programs.

The democratic upsurge in American politics did more than sweep Roosevelt into office, of course. There was increased mass political activity throughout the decade—in addition to an increase in voting among new-stock urban dwellers, there were marches of the unemployed, sit-down strikes, and farmers' protests.⁸⁶ Of critical importance to New Deal social policy developments were the social movements that arose demanding extended government welfare activities and new public social spending: Huey Long's "Share Our Wealth" movement, Father Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice, and Dr. Francis Townsend's old-age pension movement.⁸⁷ Indeed, an explanation commonly offered for the New Deal social-welfare breakthroughs is that they resulted from popular pressures.⁸⁸ It is certainly true that such pressures played a critical role in the formation of the American system of social insurance and welfare, but it is not the case that the Social Security Act was a direct product of mass movements.

How, then, did popular demands for new state welfare activity affect the course of policy development? During the 1930s, the mass movements dedicated to expanded public social protection continued to press for state action—indeed, they made such action a political necessity.

⁸⁴ James Holt, "The New Deal and the American Anti-Statist Tradition," in John Braeman, Robert Bremner, and David Brody, eds., *The New Deal: The National Level* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), p. 29; Daniel Fusfeld, *The Economic Thought of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Origins of the New Deal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), pp. 158–59. See also Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew* (New York: Viking, [1946] 1964), pp. 166–67, 182.

⁸⁵ Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, p. 182.

⁸⁶ Two classics in a huge literature on the New Deal and the popular political upsurge include William Leuchtenberg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Politics of Upheaval*, vol. 3 of *The Age of Roosevelt* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960).

⁸⁷ Abraham Holtzman, *The Townsend Movement* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1963); Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

⁸⁸ See, especially, the work of Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor* (New York: Random House, 1971), pt. 1, and *ibid.*, *Poor People's Movements* (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 30–31.

Without popular pressure, and the electoral incentive it represented to congressmen, the policy initiatives taken by the Roosevelt administration probably would not have been successful. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, a key policymaker for social security, saw popular political activity as creating a unique political opening for the enactment of social insurance programs.⁸⁹ She later recalled, in reference to the passage of old-age protections in the New Deal, that "without the Townsend Plan it is possible that the Old Age Insurance system would not have received the attention which it did at the hands of Congress."⁹⁰ Indeed, given the character of the American state structure in the 1930s, executive policy initiatives depended for their success on mass pressure being exerted on Congress. The divided authority of the American state meant that extremely broad coalitions had to come together to overcome the many potential vetoes and to achieve coordination among the various branches and levels of the government; this was especially the case in the New Deal period, before the emergence of the bureaucracy as a substantial factor in policymaking.⁹¹

Yet popular demands were not directly transmitted into the circles of policy formation. U.S. political parties were still far from being programmatic or committed to coherent social policies, and they were not organized to channel the policy proposals of groups to the elected and appointed officials who actually made policy, as did many European parties.⁹² In fact, the very strength of mass movements pressing for the extension of state welfare activities had a somewhat paradoxical effect: it reinforced the fears of Roosevelt and his advisors that "unwise" legislation might be enacted, and thereby intensified their cautiousness on matters of social policy and their determination to exclude radical voices from policy discussions.⁹³

⁸⁹ George Martin, *Madame Secretary: Frances Perkins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), p. 341.

⁹⁰ Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, p. vi.

⁹¹ Christopher Leman, "Patterns of Policy-Development: Social Security in Canada and the United States," *Public Policy* 25 (1977): 264; *ibid.*, *The Collapse of Welfare Reform: Political Institutions, Policy, and the Poor in Canada and the United States* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980), pp. 135, 165.

⁹² The fact that U.S. parties had not completely given up patronage practices, or moved toward thoroughly programmatic electoral appeals, reflected the uneven and incomplete success of earlier attempts to reform the civil administration. Patronage politicians remained strong in many areas of the United States and coexisted with politicians making more issue-oriented appeals. On the character of American political parties, see Theodore Lowi, "Party, Policy, and Constitution in America," in W. Chambers and W. Burnham, eds., *The American Party Systems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 238–76.

⁹³ This effect was reinforced by the fact that Roosevelt and his closest advisors had been influenced quite negatively by European experiences with unemployment insurance in the 1920s; there—at least partially in response to popular political pressure—benefits had lost

This cautious approach in response to mass pressure is perhaps best illustrated in the case of old-age protection. The Townsendites were the largest and politically best connected of the various organizations pressing for new state welfare activities. The movement consisted of thousands of elderly Americans, many of them middle-class, organized into "Townsend Clubs." The Townsend movement was especially influential in Congress, both because of the elderly's high propensity to vote and because of the organizational structure of the movement, with local clubs in almost every congressional district.⁹⁴ In contrast to the usual maximum monthly payments of about \$30 under the state old-age assistance programs that had proliferated after 1929,⁹⁵ the Townsendites advocated a rather remarkable \$200 monthly pension for all Americans aged sixty or more, given on the condition that they cease working and spend the pension payment within thirty days.⁹⁶ The Townsend Plan and others like it, though clearly popular with many Americans, were completely dismissed by the Roosevelt administration officials drafting the Social Security Act's old-age pension and insurance provisions.⁹⁷ Roosevelt insisted to his advisors that any program instituted be on a sound actuarial basis—as opposed to the "unsound" Townsend plan and other popular "panaceas." This meant some sort of contributory scheme, as opposed to one drawing exclusively on general revenues.⁹⁸ Noting that "Congress can't stand the pressure of the Townsend Plan unless we have a real old age insurance system," FDR resolved to take the initiative in the development of social programs, and to maintain careful control of the entire process of legislating social security.⁹⁹ Looking toward the future, Roosevelt was espe-

any connection to contributions and had become a "dole." Thus, Roosevelt noted in a 1934 address, "Let us profit by the mistakes of foreign countries and keep out of unemployment insurance every element which is actuarially unsound." See Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Addresses to the Advisory Council on Social Security" (November 14, 1934), in Samuel Rosenman, ed., *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 3 (New York: Random House, 1938), pp. 453–54. On the issue of the effects of popular pressures, see also Skocpol and Ikenberry, "The Political Formation of the American Welfare State," pp. 123–26.

⁹⁴ Irving Bernstein, *A Caring Society: The New Deal Confronts the Great Depression* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), p. 66; Holtzman, *The Townsend Movement*, chaps. 1–6; W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in a New Land* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 129, 132.

⁹⁵ While only six states had passed old-age pension legislation prior to 1929, twenty-eight states had initiated programs by the beginning of 1935, when the Roosevelt administration's draft social security legislation was introduced in Congress. See U.S. Social Security Board, *Social Security in America*, pp. 161, 166.

⁹⁶ Achenbaum, *Old Age in a New Land*, p. 129.

⁹⁷ Theron Schlabach, *Edwin E. Witte: Cautious Reformer* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1969), pp. 109–10.

⁹⁸ Mark Leff, "Taxing the 'Forgotten Man': The Politics of Social Security Finance in the New Deal," *Journal of American History* 70 (1983): 359–81.

⁹⁹ Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, p. 294.

cially concerned to insulate his legislation from popular and political pressure for expansion by including contributions from beneficiaries.

Roosevelt's timing in introducing permanent as opposed to "emergency" measures also reflects the cautiousness of his approach. Planning for social insurance initiatives was undertaken immediately, but no legislation was proposed by the administration. In contrast, the president introduced federal emergency relief legislation almost immediately upon taking office, thus responding to the plight of the unemployed—and to the not inconsiderable protests of state and local welfare officials, whose agencies were overwhelmed financially by the proportions of need produced by the crisis.¹⁰⁰ By 1934, the year Roosevelt appointed the Committee on Economic Security (CES)—the group responsible for drafting the administration's proposed social security legislation—the most urgent demands for relief had been satisfied by public works and relief programs, so that the permanent program to be designed by these advisors could more easily be kept separate from the "dole" so abhorred by FDR, but so politically necessary in the first months of his administration.¹⁰¹

What, then, can be said of the role of mass pressures in stimulating the development of new state social-spending measures in the United States? Given the character of the U.S. state structure, popular pressures were critical in providing an opening for elite initiatives. Indeed, popular political activity encouraged policymakers in the Roosevelt administration to take initiatives, but, as we shall see below, they were largely able to insulate the process of formulating policy from popular demands. There is no doubt that some kind of social-welfare initiative was politically necessary, but the specific form it took was shaped by the institutional arrangements of the American state, the power of certain congressional groups, and the reaction of New Deal policymakers to the U.S. policy inheritance.

PRESIDENTIAL INITIATIVES FOR SOCIAL SECURITY

Roosevelt had long harbored political ambitions—for himself as well as for the Democratic party and the cause of progressive reform—and he eagerly worked to build and lead a cross-class coalition for social policy reform at the national level. There was substantial legislative activity on proposed pension and unemployment benefits legislation in Congress during 1933 and 1934, yet Roosevelt was interested in developing a comprehensive approach to social security, as well as in taking political credit for any legislation that did succeed. Roosevelt seized the initiative in formulating policy and was able to maintain control over the policymaking

¹⁰⁰ Bernstein, *A Caring Society*, chap. 1; Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, pp. 216–22; Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, chap. 2.

¹⁰¹ Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, p. 284.

process by setting up the CES.¹⁰² This group of cabinet officers, established in early June of 1934, was chaired by Secretary of Labor and longtime social reform advocate Frances Perkins, who had come to Washington with Roosevelt from the position of Industrial Commissioner in his gubernatorial administration in New York.¹⁰³ The CES would study social insurance and assistance, aided by an expert staff, and have a legislative proposal ready for the start of the 1935 congressional session. The key position of executive director was filled by Edwin Witte, a former Commons student trained at the University of Wisconsin and a veteran of years of administrative service in Wisconsin with the State Industrial Commission and the Legislative Reference Library (another state agency with progressive origins).¹⁰⁴

Roosevelt's choice of personnel for the important task of drafting the social security bill reflected his generally cautious approach to social policy. Roosevelt and the people he chose to be the architects of the Social Security Act came of age politically in the Progressive Era; as products of the progressive movement, they shared its concerns with "good government" and fiscal "responsibility." Moreover, they had received their political training and developed their distinctive outlook in the "expert," state-level administrative agencies dealing with labor and social legislation that were the enduring result of progressive state-building and social reform efforts. In particular, Roosevelt's social policymakers came from backgrounds that ensured their concern with fiscal "soundness." They would attempt to build programs able to withstand what they perceived as the ever-present danger of democratic pressure for expansion of government benefits into fiscally irresponsible and politically motivated "handouts."¹⁰⁵ Social policy experts who advocated more liberal policies were excluded from the inner circles of policy formulation, relegated to relatively powerless positions within advisory bodies, or left out of the official policy formation process altogether.¹⁰⁶

THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC SECURITY

From the very outset of the deliberations of the CES, the tension between national standards and coordination and state-level autonomy and

¹⁰² Bernstein, *A Caring Society*, pp. 41–42, 51–53; Edwin Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), pp. 4–7, 18.

¹⁰³ Martin, *Madame Secretary*, pp. 205–6.

¹⁰⁴ Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*, chaps. 2, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, chap. 1, 2; Bernstein, *A Caring Society*, pp. 43–45; Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*.

¹⁰⁶ Lubove, *The Struggle for Social Security*, p. 176; Skocpol and Ikenberry, "The Political Formation of the American Welfare State," pp. 127–28.

diversity was of overriding importance in debates over the character of the programs it would propose.¹⁰⁷ Although politics had acquired a more national focus in the 1930s, there were substantial obstacles to national uniformity and centralized administration. Policymakers faced the threat of any national social insurance programs they recommended being declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. In addition, they had to cope with the political exigencies represented by the distribution of power within the Democratic party, which favored the representatives of conservative and states'-rights viewpoints as much as or more than those of urban liberalism. In particular, the extraordinary political leverage of Southern representatives in Congress, out of proportion to the population and economic might of their states, was a fact that could never be ignored as FDR and the CES formulated the bill.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the fact that states had been the principal actors in social policy until the mid-1930s meant that diverse programmatic and administrative interests in the various state programs were politically well entrenched and difficult to bypass by the time the CES began its work. Indeed, Roosevelt, Witte, and Perkins, all of whom had been involved in state-level labor and welfare administration, actually preferred to maintain the states as important administrative actors, even as they hoped to increase the uniformity and adequacy of social programs. Other politicians representing the interests of progressive Northern states, such as Senator Robert Wagner of New York, the Roosevelt administration's chief ally in the Senate, also took some stances which undercut nationalizing trends for programmatic uniformity in order to protect favored state legislation.¹⁰⁹

One can see the working out of the tensions around national uniformity and state-level autonomy especially clearly in the struggles over the character of unemployment protection. Despite the many obstacles to national uniformity and administrative coordination, it is clear from these debates that important nationalizing tendencies coexisted with tendencies favoring decentralization of administration and lack of standardization. The policy options for unemployment insurance being debated by the CES and the U.S. community of social insurance experts included a purely national plan and a federal subsidy plan that would allow the federal government substantial control over standards, in addition to the favorite plan of Roosevelt, Perkins, and Witte—a federal-state tax-offset scheme, in which states would retain complete decision-making power over many

¹⁰⁷ Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*, pp. 114–15.

¹⁰⁸ See Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, p. 291; Arthur Altmeyer, *The Formative Years of Social Security* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), pp. 14–15; and the paper by Jill Quadagno in this volume (Chapter 6).

¹⁰⁹ J. Joseph Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism* (New York: Atheneum, 1968).

aspects of their unemployment programs.¹¹⁰ Some sort of nationally standardized plan (either purely federal or a federal subsidy program that allowed substantial national control while addressing fears about constitutionality) was the overwhelming choice of policy experts, including those serving in technical positions within the CES.¹¹¹ Further, the more national approaches were favored by trade union leaders and the few businessmen who had not already rejected the New Deal, and social security along with it.¹¹² Despite this support for national standards, Roosevelt, Perkins, and Witte managed—after considerable resistance from their own technical staff, members of the official advisory council, and outside experts—to get the CES to recommend the tax-offset approach that preserved the most state-level autonomy.¹¹³ The tax-offset plan left to the states the politically difficult decisions about merit rating, employee contributions, and pooled versus individual reserves. This meant the CES could avoid taking stands on these tense issues, and Witte in particular would not have to undermine the Wisconsin experiment in “preventive” unemployment legislation.¹¹⁴

In the area of old-age protection, the tension between nationalizing and decentralizing tendencies played itself out slightly differently, and the debate was complicated by the politically sensitive issue of whether to include contributions from future beneficiaries. Policymakers in the CES had to contend with the growing strength of Townsendism and other movements calling for noncontributory federal pensions, and with the fact that members of Congress were far more supportive of pensions than of contributory insurance for the aged. Roosevelt and Witte, reacting to a policy inheritance which dramatized the dangers of politically motivated expansion of benefits, were determined to keep the federal government out of the business of giving direct grants to citizens, and they never wavered from a commitment to contributory features for whatever permanent old-age program was settled on. The arguments of liberal New Dealers for a different approach found no favor. A vivid example of this intransigence came when Harry Hopkins, federal emergency relief administrator and member of the CES, eloquently argued for noncontributory old-age and unemployment benefits as a matter of right for citizens. Roosevelt saw

¹¹⁰ Altmeyer, *Formative Years*, pp. 17–25; Nelson, *Unemployment Insurance*, chap. 9; Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act*.

¹¹¹ Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*, pp. 117–26; Bernstein, *A Caring Society*, p. 55.

¹¹² Skocpol and Ikenberry, “The Political Formation of the American Welfare State,” pp. 126–31; Nelson, *Unemployment Insurance*, pp. 192–97, 202–3.

¹¹³ Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*, p. 129.

¹¹⁴ Although Witte himself did not believe the preventive approach was satisfactory, neither did he wish to interfere with the operation of Wisconsin’s law. See Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*, pp. 119–31.

this as being “the very thing he had been saying he was against for years—the dole,” and he vetoed any such proposals.¹¹⁵

Roosevelt, Perkins, and Witte preferred to develop what they saw as the only reasonable and “fiscally sound” long-term solution to the problem of old-age dependency: a contributory program of old-age benefits, to be firmly distinguished from noncontributory social assistance. Even so, Witte and the members of the CES were willing to include a governmental contribution to the old-age insurance fund once payroll taxes and the contributory principle were well established; the draft bill used by the CES showed a subsidy from federal revenues beginning in 1965.¹¹⁶ Yet Roosevelt, upon discovering at the last moment that the CES plan included a future subsidy from general revenues, demanded a redrafting of the proposed legislation so that it would always be self-sustaining from employer and beneficiary contributions alone. Even a governmental contribution to the social security fund was problematic for FDR, with his “prejudice about the ‘dole.’”¹¹⁷ In the end, Roosevelt’s view prevailed, and the U.S. social insurance program for the aged received no financial input from federal coffers, a logical outcome of Roosevelt’s concern to preserve a sharp distinction between social assistance and social insurance programs.

Given the preferences of the CES and FDR himself for state-level administration, it is worth explaining the fact that the contributory old-age insurance system was the only one of the several programs included in the Social Security Act that was administered completely at the federal level of government. To some extent this reflected the fact that Witte and Perkins were preoccupied with resolving the disputes about unemployment insurance, which by all accounts occasioned the most attention from the members of the CES and the policy experts who advised them.¹¹⁸ The staff members in charge of developing the old-age security portions of the program were strongly in favor of establishing a national old-age insurance system; they and the CES actuaries were unanimous in advising that, given extensive labor mobility, a federal-state scheme involving contributions over workers’ lifetimes would be unworkable from a technical point of view.¹¹⁹ Moreover, old-age insurance was the only area of policy in which the states had not enacted legislation and, hence, the only one in which

¹¹⁵ Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, p. 284.

¹¹⁶ Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*, pp. 127–28; Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, pp. 294–96.

¹¹⁷ Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, p. 296; Leff, “Taxing the ‘Forgotten Man.’”

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Altmeyer, *Formative Years*, chap. 1; Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act*; Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, chap. 23; and Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*, chap. 6.

¹¹⁹ Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*, pp. 111–12; Altmeyer, *Formative Years*, pp. 25–26.

there were no state-level vested administrative and political interests to defend, as there were in the old-age assistance and unemployment programs.

Despite their strong commitment to establishing contributory old-age insurance, CES members believed that some sort of old-age assistance was needed to cope with existing poverty among the aged, at least until the contributory schemes matured.¹²⁰ The fact that four times as many elderly people were collecting benefits under federal relief programs as under state old-age assistance systems worried Roosevelt administration policymakers, who did not want to encourage Americans to continue looking to the federal government to take care of the needs of aged citizens directly through noncontributory programs.¹²¹ State old-age assistance programs, with their inadequate financing and benefits, would have to be strengthened if the federal government was to be kept out of direct relief to the aged. The CES therefore recommended the enactment of the Old Age Assistance (OAA) program, a federal subsidy (of 50 percent) for state old-age assistance plans that met certain minimum requirements. Most importantly, the draft legislation required that plans be state-wide in operation, and that pensions be paid at a level that would ensure the "health and decency" of the elderly recipients.¹²² Though not seen by CES members as a long-term solution to poverty among the aged, OAA would please congressional Democrats and allow the popular enthusiasm for public old-age protection to be harnessed to the Social Security Act as a whole.

The bill submitted to Congress by the CES also recommended that the federal government initiate a program of subsidies to state-level assistance schemes for fatherless families with dependent children—Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). These state programs would be modified versions of the mothers' pension systems that had been enacted in most states in the Progressive Era and into the 1920s. As had been the case with OAA, the CES did not want to bypass state-level administration of existing programs and was opposed to establishing permanent federal assistance. Likewise, the CES saw a need to provide stronger financial backing of these programs, which were completely inadequate in the face of the economic crisis. The CES recommended the broadening of eligibility requirements, so that all children of single mothers could be aided; many mothers' pension schemes had extremely restrictive provisions.¹²³

¹²⁰ Achenbaum, *Old Age in a New Land*, p. 134; Committee on Economic Security, *Report to the President* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935), pp. 4–5.

¹²¹ Committee on Economic Security, *Report*, p. 27; Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*, p. 110.

¹²² Achenbaum, *Old Age in a New Land*, pp. 134–35.

¹²³ It is perhaps worth noting, in light of later developments, that policymakers deliberately designed this program to allow poor mothers to stay at home to care for their children,

Policymakers deliberately opted not to mandate assistance to all needy children regardless of family situation, a decision which has had far-reaching implications for the operations of and debates over public assistance to this day. In addition, the proportion of state expenses to be met by federal subsidy was substantially lower than that for OAA—one-third as opposed to one-half. Policymakers, noting the far greater interest of Congress in aid to the aged and the resistance of congressional conservatives to the bill as a whole, worried that more generous provisions would threaten passage of any program for poor children.¹²⁴

The politically motivated decision to omit health insurance from the legislation the CES proposed obviously had important consequences for the future of American social provision. Roosevelt and his advisors on the CES looked on health insurance quite favorably, although they—along with most social insurance experts—saw unemployment and old-age provision as more pressing.¹²⁵ Roosevelt had directed the CES to study health insurance, and to develop a legislative proposal. But even the decision merely to consider publicly run health insurance drew massive opposition from the medical profession. Although there was a brief moment in 1934 when Witte was "unsure that health insurance is out of the question"—because the American Medical Association (AMA) had been silenced temporarily by some concessions from the CES and by a desire to overcome internal dissension—FDR and the members of the CES ultimately decided that including health insurance in the proposed Economic Security Act was politically impossible.¹²⁶ Witte wrote that he believed the inclusion of health insurance "would spell defeat for the entire bill." Roosevelt was of the same opinion, and he would not authorize a health insurance title for the administration bill, or even the publication of a CES report favoring health insurance.¹²⁷ The hope of members of the CES and of FDR himself that health insurance would be introduced at a later date went unfulfilled as the conservative coalition in Congress gained ground in the years following the passage of the Social Security Act.¹²⁸

just as better-off mothers were expected to do. See U.S. Social Security Board, *Social Security in America*, p. 233, and Irwin Garfinkel and Sara S. McLanahan, *Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1986), pp. 101–5.

¹²⁴ Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act*, pp. 163–65; Winifred Bell, *Aid to Dependent Children* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), pp. 27–28.

¹²⁵ Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act*, p. 187; Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*, pp. 108, 112; Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, chap. 13.

¹²⁶ Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*, pp. 112–14; Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, pp. 266–69.

¹²⁷ Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act*, p. 188.

¹²⁸ James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967).

The adoption of universal national health insurance during the New Deal was ultimately precluded by the failure of social insurance in the Progressive Era. After the health insurance campaign of 1915–20 ended in failure, the field was left open for the foes of health insurance, principally the medical profession, to consolidate their position.¹²⁹ The AMA became virtually unopposable, given their capacity to pressure congressmen, especially in the absence of any significant and politically well-situated popular movement for health insurance (such as existed in the case of old-age protection). Thus, when the possibilities for social reform generally opened again in the 1930s, and despite public opinion favorable to new public health protections,¹³⁰ even so popular and powerful a politician as Franklin Roosevelt was unwilling to risk the passage of his other proposed programs by including health insurance in the package.

The fact that patronage practices continued unabated in many states, and had not been completely eradicated even from the federal government, meant that the CES faced a challenge in constructing realms of administration that could manage the new programs while avoiding entanglements in patronage politics. That it was willing to face the challenge, rather than await the development of a public administration more suited to its preferences, is testament to the crisis atmosphere produced by the Great Depression and to its conviction that the continuing popular pressure for some kind of federal action on the social welfare front would produce “unwise” legislation if it did not act. Yet the CES carefully included as many guarantees against corruption, patronage, and mismanagement as possible in its proposed permanent social security legislation, and it tried to design programs capable of withstanding periodic democratic onslaughts demanding “unwarranted” expansion.

THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT: CHARTER LEGISLATION OF AMERICA'S WELFARE STATE

The legislative recommendations of the CES included a federal-state contributory unemployment system; federal subsidies to state programs for the needy aged, dependent children, and the blind; and a purely federal contributory old-age benefits program.¹³¹ The pragmatic formulators

¹²⁹ Lubove, *The Struggle for Social Security*, p. 89.

¹³⁰ U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Social Security Administration, Office of Research and Statistics, *Public Attitudes Toward Social Security, 1935–1965*, by Michael E. Schlitz, Research Report No. 33 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), pp. 128–29.

¹³¹ To deal with concerns about the constitutionality of the fully national old-age insurance program, separate titles were used to establish taxes and benefits; the CES was depending on the taxing power of the federal government to ensure the plan's constitutionality. See Achenbaum, *Old Age in a New Land*, pp. 136–37.

of the CES social security proposals had opted for substantial state-level autonomy in most of the programs they recommended. Yet the *Report to the President of the Committee on Economic Security* also recommended the establishment of minimum national standards, such as the “health and decency” requirement for old-age assistance benefit levels, and practices that would lead to administrative regularity, such as the recommendation for merit personnel systems in state-level administration of the programs. Moreover, the CES hoped to see all social insurance administration united within a single social insurance board located in the Department of Labor, with the social assistance programs grouped together under the aegis of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Finally, the CES recommended continuing research and planning for national coordination of the new social welfare activities, endorsing the establishment of a national planning board.¹³²

The CES proposal had been designed to propitiate important congressional interests, of course, especially those representing the South. These had largely determined that an approach favoring state-level autonomy would be taken. But even more concessions were wrested from the congressional sponsors of the administration bill by Southern lawmakers and other conservatives.¹³³ Federal standards in general came under fire, and the CES proposal that state programs be administered along merit system lines had to be dropped. In addition, the administration of the insurance programs was taken away from the Department of Labor and grouped with the assistance programs in an independent administrative agency, the Social Security Board.¹³⁴ The CES recommendation that all employed persons be included in the unemployment and old-age insurance systems was not accepted by Congress, with the result that agricultural and domestic workers were excluded from coverage.¹³⁵ This meant that the insurance programs of the Social Security Act would not reach most American blacks, who were still overwhelmingly concentrated in rural, agricultural regions of the South.¹³⁶ Southern senators and congressmen led the fight for “states’ rights” and against national standards

¹³² Committee on Economic Security, *Report*, p. 9.

¹³³ On getting the Social Security Act through Congress, and the changes this necessitated, see Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act*; Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, pp. 296–301; Achenbaum, *Old Age in a New Land*, pp. 134–35; Altmeppen, *Formative Years*, p. 35; and the papers by Kenneth Finegold and Jill Quadagno in this volume (Chapters 5 and 6, respectively).

¹³⁴ Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act*, pp. 101, 144–45.

¹³⁵ Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act*, pp. 131, 152–53. On Roosevelt's preference for universal insurance coverage, see Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, pp. 282–83.

¹³⁶ Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 166–68.

and universal coverage. They especially attacked the provision of OAA that mandated that states pay pensions sufficient to provide, "when added to the income of the aged recipient, a reasonable subsistence compatible with decency and health," fearing it would represent an entering wedge for federal interference in their states' system of segregation and discrimination. In the end, the Southern-led bloc won on that fight and the requirement was dropped.¹³⁷

After the compromises, the Social Security Act was finally signed into law in August of 1935. States soon acted to pass legislation establishing programs under the act, and by 1937, the programs were nationwide in operation. Also in 1937, the act was declared constitutional by the Supreme Court, and the first payroll taxes were taken out of covered employees' paychecks, though benefits under the old-age insurance program were not scheduled to begin until 1942. Yet before the first benefit check was ever mailed, important changes were made in the contributory old-age benefits part of social security. A new advisory council began discussions in 1937 on certain controversial aspects of the social security program.¹³⁸ In addition to dissatisfactions with some of the more technical aspects of the law, there was widespread support for adding survivors' benefits. As a result of the council's recommendations and new negotiations in Congress, the 1939 amendments to the Social Security Act were passed. The most notable changes included a shift from full reserves to a modified pay-as-you-go system, and, in an early demonstration of the potential for expansion that even contributory social insurance systems can have in the United States, benefit payments became payable two years earlier (in 1940), payroll tax increases were delayed, and benefits for wage-earners' dependents and survivors were added.¹³⁹ Whatever its shortcomings as a system of social protection, it was already clear that social security represented an expandable set of social programs, despite the intentions of its formulators.

While the 1939 amendments to the Social Security Act showed the channels along which the nascent U.S. welfare state might be expanded, other events in the late 1930s undermined the capacity of social security programs to ensure Americans' economic well-being. The CES had believed that the success of their package of social programs in guaranteeing social security for the American people depended upon "employment assurance"—the government's provision of suitable jobs for all who wanted to work.¹⁴⁰ As the *Report* of the CES pointed out:

¹³⁷ Witte, *The Development of the Social Security Act*, pp. 144–45.

¹³⁸ Schlabach, *Cautious Reformer*, chap. 8.

¹³⁹ Achenbaum, *Old Age in a New Land*, pp. 136–37; Altmeyer, *Formative Years*, chap.

3.

¹⁴⁰ Committee on Economic Security, *Report*, pp. 3–4, 7–10.

Any program for economic security that is devised must be more comprehensive than unemployment compensation, which of necessity can be given only for a limited period. In proposing unemployment compensation we recognize that it is but a complementary part of an adequate program for protection against the hazards of unemployment, in which stimulation of private employment and provision of public employment . . . are the other major elements.¹⁴¹

The CES expected that employment assurance would come through the institutionalization of the New Deal public employment programs; as the papers by Margaret Weir and Theda Skocpol in this volume detail, however, this did not happen, and social insurance and assistance programs—however inadequate to the task—were left to deal with problems of economic and social insecurity.¹⁴² 1935 turned out to have been the high-point of congressional willingness to go along with Roosevelt's social reform initiatives, as a coalition of congressional conservatives gained strength in the late 1930s.¹⁴³ During this period, FDR was thwarted in his attempts at administrative and judicial reform—which likely would have enhanced the capacity of the American state to undertake economic and social interventions—and new social reforms were turned back as well.¹⁴⁴ It would be many years before Americans again enjoyed an era hospitable to social reform.

The Social Security Act represented one of the most important of all the New Deal reforms of American social and political life. Along with such legislation as the National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act, it established critical social rights for American citizens. Yet these rights were compromised by uneven national standards, the sharp distinction between assistance and insurance, and the omissions of health insurance, employment assurance, and allowances for all needy children. This largely reflected the inability of the New Deal social reform coalition, led by the Roosevelt administration, to overcome the deep resistance of congressional conservatives and some congressional constituencies to the changes they wanted to effect in American social policy, but the policymakers themselves were responsible for some of the choices that left the U.S. welfare system incomplete. Ultimately, it was the larger obstacles produced by the legacies of U.S. state-building, state structure, and past policy that prevented the achievement of a more complete welfare state in New Deal America.

¹⁴¹ Committee on Economic Security, *Report*, pp. 7–8.

¹⁴² See also Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, pp. 227–33, on the problems of institutionalizing work relief in the New Deal United States.

¹⁴³ Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal*.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Polenberg, "The Decline of the New Deal, 1937–1940," in Braeman, Bremner, and Brody, eds., *The New Deal*, pp. 246–66.

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TITMUS, R.M.: *War and Social Policy*. In: Titmuss, R.M., *Essays on 'The Welfare State'*, Beacon Press, Boston 1963, pp. 75 - 87.

the forces of social and fiscal policy are moving raises fundamental issues of justice and equality; not simply issues of justice between taxpayers as a separate class, or between contributors as a separate class, but between all citizens. Already it is possible to see two nations in old age; greater inequalities in living standards after work than in work; two contrasting social services for distinct groups based on different principles, and operating in isolation of each other as separate, autonomous, social instruments of change.

CHAPTER 4

*War and Social Policy*¹

PROFESSOR GIBBS, in reappraising the contribution made by Clausewitz to military studies,² has politely but firmly criticized past historians for bringing their histories to a stop when the guns started firing, and in opening a new chapter only with the return of peace—of normal diplomatic and institutional relationships between sovereign States. Following Clausewitz—a much misunderstood thinker—Professor Gibbs deplored this historical interregnum. He was faced with a lack of balance in the material available to him in reflecting about the nature of war and society. He could hardly complain, however, about the quantity of historical studies at his disposal. Military and naval documents, regimental histories, the lives of captains and kings, political, diplomatic and even philosophical works jostle each other for a place in the crowded 'war' index and bear witness to the energy and interests of past students of war, and to the endemic character of war in the history of man.

By contrast, I am doubly handicapped in discussing the relationship of war and social policy. So far as the story of modern war before 1939 is concerned, little has been recorded in any systematic way about the social and economic effects of war on the population as a whole. Only long and patient research in out-of-the-way documentary places can reveal something of the

¹ Delivered at King's College, London, on March 3, 1955, in a series of public lectures on 'War and Society'. A shortened version was published in *The Listener*, November 3, 1955.

² Printed in *The Listener*, October 6, 1955.

characteristics and flavour of social life during the experience of wars in the past. And these records are often undisciplined and unreliable. There are, for example, somewhat highly-coloured accounts of popular reactions on the south coasts of England to the threat of invasion when Napoleon Bonaparte was master of all Western Europe; of the effects of the Crimean and Boer Wars on poor law policy in those days; of a remarkable decline in criminal behaviour among civilians in Britain during the First World War and an equally remarkable outbreak of panic among the civilians of London when the first Zeppelins arrived with their primitive bombs, most of which failed to explode.¹ But even such accounts, unreliable as they may be, are hard to come by. And, strangely enough, one often turns away from the novelists in disappointment; it is difficult to believe, for instance, that some of Jane Austen's novels were written during one of the great wars in history; a war which signified for this country, if the late Professor Greenwood got his sums right, a proportionately greater loss of life among soldiers and sailors than during the First World War and, consequently, more widespread effects among the families of those who served in the Armed Forces.²

These are some of the reflections which I have recalled—though in a more tranquil mood—from the days when I was engaged on the Social Policy History of the Second World War. In studying the effects of the evacuation of civilians from London and other cities, I was led to wonder whether there were any recorded accounts of the movement of civilian populations in past wars as a calculated element in war strategy. I had to go back to the Greeks—to the great Hellenic wars—before I was rewarded. Here is Plutarch's description of the evacuation of the civilian population of Athens as a military necessity during the Persian invasion in 480 bc. The Peloponnesian city of Troezen,

¹ See Titmuss, Richard M., *Problems of Social Policy*, 1950, and Trotter, W. *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War*, 1916, and *British Medical Journal* (1940) i, 270.

² Greenwood, M., 'British Loss of Life in the Wars of 1794–1815 and 1914–8', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. CV, Pt 1, 1942.

on the far side of the Saronic Gulf, became (what we now call) a 'reception area'. According to Plutarch, 'The most part of them [the Athenians] did convey their aged fathers and mothers, their wives and little children, into the city of Troezen, where the Troezenians received them very lovingly and gently. For they gave order that they should be entertained of the common charge, allowing them apiece, two oboloes of their money a day, and suffered the young children to gather fruit wheresoever they found it, and furthermore, did hire schoolmasters at the charge of the commonwealth, to bring them up at school.'³

From this account it would seem that conscious thought was given by the responsible authorities to the social and psychological needs of the evacuated population. There was, in fact, a plan; a concerted social policy; a deliberate public attempt to foresee events; to estimate behaviour; to minimize hardships and to control a social situation in the interests of a community at war.

It was this fragment of history, illuminating the way in which war and social policy influence each other, that helped to shape the ideas for this essay. In discussing social policy, I mean those acts of Governments deliberately designed and taken to improve the welfare of the civil population in time of war. I am not, therefore, simply concerned with the social and biological consequences of war; my main interest, then, is with the organized attempts of Governments to control these consequences. Much of what I have to say will be confined to the experiences of this country since the middle of the nineteenth century. For a definition of 'social', I take, for convenience, the scope of the two published volumes on social policy during the Second World War. There is, however, a difficulty here which cannot be so lightly resolved. In essence, it is the problem of distinguishing between policies related to peace-time needs and policies concerned only with the immediate war-time situation. It is bound up with the assumption that war is an abnormal situation; that peace is—or ought to be—the normal lot of mankind.

In considering, however, the results of deliberate attempts to

³ *Vita Themistoclis*, 10, 5 (North's translation).

organize a society for war—either in the military, economic or social spheres—we are confronted with one of the major characteristics of large-scale, modern war; the fact that modern war casts its shadow long before it happens and that its social effects are felt for longer and longer periods after armed conflict has ceased. In the time-scale of these effects, modern war stretches over a greater span of men's lives, unlike the wars of religion and those wars which Toynbee called in his studies of *War and Civilization*, 'The sport of Kings'.¹ Many of them started abruptly, without planning; without any preparatory action to provide for the needs of the civilian population; without any consideration of how war might affect the social and economic life of the country. They were, in fact, organized military wars; otherwise, and apart from the particular territories over which battles were fought, normal life proceeded—and was assumed to proceed—normally. By contrast, however, as the plans and policies of twentieth-century Governments for war and peace have become more inter-related it is, in consequence, increasingly difficult to detach the 'abnormal' from the 'normal', and to attribute precisely the acts of Government to one or other of these situations.

I turn now to consider how developments in modern war have affected social policy. It is a commonplace among students of the subject that in our recent Western history war has been following war in an ascending order of intensity. In scale, in depth and in time, war has been waged more intensively and ferociously. This crescendo in the organization of war has enveloped a larger proportion of the total population and, as I said earlier, has left its marks on them for a longer period of time. These developments during the past hundred years have affected social policy in a variety of ways. Among these, perhaps the dominating one has been the increasing concern of the State in time of war with the biological characteristics of its people. The growing scale and intensity of war has stimulated a growing concern about the quantity and quality of the population.

¹ Toynbee, A., *War and Civilization*, 1951.

We may mark certain well-defined stages in this progression of biological interests. The first stage of organized interest was with quantity; with the number of men available for battle. This, of course, developed as the scale upon which war was fought increased, and it was no longer safe for the authorities to assume that there were abundant supplies of men available. This growing concern with quantity at different periods and in different societies has been one of the forces which has stimulated the interest of Governments in population trends and in the taking of national censuses. As we know from our own history of vital statistics, opposition was raised in the nineteenth century to census operations because of a fear that they were being carried out for military reasons.

The second stage in this progression is marked by the increasing adoption of qualitative standards applied to military and naval recruits. No doubt a connection can be traced between secular changes in these standards as to what constitutes 'fitness for service' and the increasing mechanization and division of labour in the armed forces. The standards demanded have risen enormously in this country since the day, just over one hundred years ago, when Florence Nightingale discovered that the British Army Medical Service was staffed by a few clerks and an odd messenger boy or two. We now have the most complex system of standards comprising a variety of physical, functional, psychological and social attributes. According to the Editor of the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 'It was not love but war-time necessity which made American psychiatry turn towards Freud'.¹ He suggests that one of the principal reasons why psychiatry occupies such a commanding position in the American social scene today is because of what he calls the 'unforgettable role' that psychiatrists played in the organization of the war effort.

All this has two important implications for social policy; first, that increasingly higher demands are made upon society for those who are physically and psychologically fit, intellectually

¹ Hoffer, W., *Lancet* (1954), ii, 1234.

bright, and socially acceptable on grounds of personality and character; second, that, as a result, the proportion of men rejected and invalided from the Armed Forces tends to rise rather than fall. Many then become the clients of the social services. This is one example which shows that what is done in the name of 'defence' determines, in substantial measure, some of the roles and functions of the social services. The social costs of the Boer War and the First World War, as measured by expenditure on pensions, widows' benefits, medical care, rehabilitation, sickness claims, rent subsidies, and national assistance, represent a substantial proportion of the social service budget today.

The third stage of interest is reached when public concern about the standard of fitness of men of military age moves out, in a widening circle of policy, to embrace concern about the health and well-being of the whole population and, in particular, of children—the next generation of recruits. This stage was reached in Britain at the beginning of the century, and it is worth inquiring a little more closely into events at that time because of their importance for the subsequent development of public health policies.

It was the South African War, not one of the notable wars in human history to change the affairs of man, that touched off the personal health movement which led eventually to the National Health Service in 1948. Public concern was aroused at the end of the war by the facts that were published about sickness and mortality among the troops, and by a report from the Inspector-General of Recruiting which spoke of 'the gradual deterioration of the physique of the working classes from whom the bulk of the recruits must always be drawn'.¹ At a time when many leaders of opinion still held to the nineteenth-century doctrine of the inevitability of social progress, this report from the Inspector-General came as a shock. Could it be, at the end of a century of unprecedented material progress, that the health and fitness of the bulk of the population was deteriorating? There followed, in rapid succession, one commission of inquiry after another into

¹ See *Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration*, Vol. 1, especially App. 1, p. 96, Cd 2175, 1904.

these questions of physical deterioration, systems of medical inspection, the causes of high infant mortality and many other matters affecting the well-being of the population.

As a consequence of this ferment of inquiry we may trace the establishment in 1906 of the school medical service, the school feeding of children in elementary schools, a campaign to reduce infant mortality and many other social measures.

All these elements of social policy stemmed directly from the Boer War and show how, in modern times, our concern for communal fitness has followed closely upon the course of our military fortunes. The story repeats itself in the First World War. In 1917, for example, we may note the introduction of the first instalment of a free national health service when facilities were offered, to civilians and soldiers alike, for the treatment and prevention of venereal disease. At the close of the war a new phrase 'a Cs nation' crept into contemporary journalism after the Report of the Ministry of National Service had told the country that only one man in three of nearly two-and-a-half million examined was completely fit for military service.¹ Most of these men are now in their sixties and account, in substantial measure, for the high proportion who are retiring from work today on grounds of ill-health—a matter to which a recent report from the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance has drawn attention.² It is possible that, among many other reasons, the age of retirement for men in the national insurance scheme has not been raised because of the long-range effects of the First World War.

The ancient Greeks, in attaching some moral significance to the idea of keeping fit, almost as though they had convinced themselves that vigour of body was an absolute good, had, we may now remember, sound reasons for keeping fit. Their civilization involved the man in continuous wars; and so, we must admit, has our civilization of the twentieth century.

When we consider the effects of the Second World War, a war in Britain which depended not on the efforts of a fraction of

¹ *Report of the Ministry of National Service 1917-19*, Vol. 1.

² *Reasons for Retiring or Continuing at Work*, 1964.

the population but on virtually the efforts of all citizens, we reach a fourth stage in our ascending scale of interest. Not only was it necessary for the State to take positive steps in all spheres of the national economy to safeguard the physical health of the people; it was also an imperative for war strategy for the authorities to concern themselves with that elusive concept 'civilian morale'; with what Professor Cyril Falls called, in his Lees Knowles lectures in 1941, 'demostrategy'.¹ By this he meant, in military terms, that the war could not be won unless millions of ordinary people, in Britain and overseas, were convinced that we had something better to offer than had our enemies—not only during but after the war. This requirement of war strategy was stated, more explicitly, in a memorable leader in *The Times*² soon after the last British troops had left the Dunkirk beaches. It was a call for social justice; for the abolition of privilege, for a more equitable distribution of income and wealth; for drastic changes in the economic and social life of the country.

The effect on social policy of these ideas about war strategy was profound. It was increasingly sharpened as the war went on, for not until three years had passed, and victory was at last a rational—rather than an emotional—conception, could the enemy claim that he had killed as many British soldiers as women and children.

Much of the story of the war effort in terms of applied social policies is told in the series of volumes in the Official War History by myself and my colleagues. I shall not attempt to recount the story here, except to draw out of it one or two general conclusions.

The social measures that were developed during the war centred round the primary needs of the whole population irrespective of class, creed or military category. The distinctions and privileges, accorded to those in uniform in previous wars, were greatly diminished. Comprehensive systems of medical care and rehabilitation, for example, had to be organized by the State for those who were injured and disabled. They could not be ex-

¹ Falls, C., *The Nature of Modern Warfare*, 1941, p. 13.

² July 1, 1940.

clusively reserved for soldiers and sailors, as in the past, but had to be extended to include civilians as well—to those injured in the factories as well as the victims of bombing. The organization and structure of the Emergency Medical Service, initially designed to cater for a special section of the population, became in the end the prototype of a medical service for the whole population.

In the sphere of food policy, it was no longer thought appropriate for members of the Armed Forces to receive better diets than the civilian population. The scales of rationing—as in many other spheres of need as well—had to be kept in balance between civilian and non-civilian.

This war-time trend towards universalizing public provision for certain basic needs did not come about as a result of the traffic of ideas in one direction only. It also worked the other way; from civilians to non-civilians. Educational facilities in the form of music, drama and the arts, open to civilians in time of war, could not be withheld from men and women in the Forces. No longer could it be said that soldiers 'would get above themselves' if, instead of drinking, they read books and papers, and that army discipline would thereby be endangered—as was said in May 1855 by the War Office to Florence Nightingale when she opened a reading room for injured soldiers in Scutari.¹ By the 1940's the military authorities in Britain had taken to heart—no doubt unwittingly—Aristotle's epitaph on the 'Lycourgean' system of Spartan training for war. This was the way he summed it up:

'Peoples ought not to train themselves in the art of war with an eye to subjugating neighbours who do not deserve to be subjugated. . . . The paramount aim of any social system should be to frame military institutions, like all its other institutions, with an eye to the circumstances of peace-time, when the soldier is off duty; and this proposition is borne out by the facts of experience. For militaristic states are apt to survive only so long as they remain at war, while they go to

¹ Woodham-Smith, C., *Florence Nightingale*, 1950, p. 239.

ruin as soon as they have finished making their conquests. Peace causes their metal to lose its temper; and the fault lies with a social system which does not teach its soldiers what to make of their lives when they are off duty.'

To apply this Aristotelian precept to the modern world means, in effect, that a social system must be so organized as to enable all citizens (and not only soldiers) to learn what to make of their lives in peace-time. In this context, the Education Act of 1944 becomes intelligible; so does the Beveridge Report of 1942 and the National Insurance, Family Allowances and National Health Service Acts. All these measures of social policy were in part an expression of the needs of war-time strategy to fuse and unify the conditions of life of civilians and non-civilians alike. In practice, as we have seen, this involved the whole community in accepting an enlargement of obligations—an extension of social discipline—to attend to the primary needs of all citizens.

In no particular sphere of need is the imprint of war on social policy more vividly illustrated than in respect to *dependant* needs—the needs of wives, children and other relatives for income-maintenance allowances when husbands and fathers are serving in the Forces. To trace in detail the system of Service pay and allowances from the Napoleonic Wars to the Second World War is to see how, as war has followed war in an ascending order of intensity, so have the dependant needs of wives and children been increasingly recognized. The more, in fact, that the waging of war has come to require a total effort by the nation the more have the dependant needs of the family been recognized and accepted as a social responsibility.

This trend in the war-time recognition of family dependencies has also profoundly influenced social security policies in general. New systems of Service pay and allowances threw into sharper prominence the fact that in industrial society money rewards take no account of family responsibilities. Nor, until 1939, did many of the payments made under various social services. Thus, one immediate effect was that dependants' allowances were added to Workmen's Compensation and other schemes. Another

was that in many respects war pensions and industrial injury pensions had to be brought into line. This was done—as so many other things were done—because it seemed inappropriate to make distinctions between war and peace, civilians and non-civilians.

Looking back over the various points I have made about the relationship between the war effort of a community and its social policies in peace as well as in war one general conclusion may, I think, be ventured. The waging of modern war presupposes and imposes a great increase in social discipline; moreover, this discipline is only tolerable if—and only if—social inequalities are not intolerable. The need for less inequality is expressed, for example, in the changes that take place in what is socially approved behaviour—marked differences in standards of living, in dress, in luxury entertainment and in indulgences of many kinds are disapproved. They were not only disapproved in war-time Britain but, in fact, there is evidence to show that they were greatly reduced.

It follows that the acceptance of these social disciplines—of obligations as well as rights—made necessary by war, by preparations for war, and by the long-run consequences of war, must influence the aims and content of social policies not only during the war itself but in peace-time as well. 'The discipline of the army,' wrote Max Weber, 'gives birth to all discipline.'¹ In some senses he was not far wrong, but it should be remembered that this thesis rested on an analysis of military organization from the days of Sparta down to the professional European armies at the beginning of the twentieth century. Britain's war effort in 1939 did not rest on a professional military base. Nevertheless, it is, I think, a tenable proposition that military wars demand a military discipline, and that this kind of discipline (or 'warrior communism' as Weber described it) demands certain kinds of perfected conduct from a small section of the population. We have some classic examples of this perfection of discipline in the infantry drill of Spartan soldiers and the exquisite move-

¹ Gerth, H. H., and Wright Mills, C., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 1947, p. 261.

ments of Lord Cardigan's cavalry in the Crimean War. Both inevitably required—and this was the point of Weber's analysis—an 'aristocratic' structure in military organization and in society as a whole. Both essays in war came to a bad end. The social disciplines demanded by the civilians' war in Britain of 1939 were very different; they derived their strength from internal sources rather than from external commands, and had to rest on a social system which sought to teach all its soldiers what to make of their lives when off-duty.

The aims and content of social policy, both in peace and in war, are thus determined—at least to a substantial extent—by how far the co-operation of the masses is essential to the successful prosecution of war. If this co-operation is thought to be essential, then inequalities must be reduced and the pyramid of social stratification must be flattened. This, in part, is the thesis advanced by Andrzejewski in a sweeping, untidy but brilliant study recently published under the title 'Military Organization and Society'.¹ In analysing the character of war and its conduct from pastoral and pre-literate societies down to the advent of atomic war, he argues that what he calls the military participation ratio determines the social stratification of a society. Mass war, involving a high proportion of the total population, tends to a levelling in social class differences. On the other hand, professional wars, conducted by military leaders recruited from a social *élite* and depending on support from only a small proportion of the population, tend to heighten existing social inequalities. This study, in my view, effectively answers Herbert Spencer's theory that war conduces to greater social inequalities. It may have been true of some wars in some periods and cultures but not of all wars. However, we must fairly admit that Spencer was writing before the advent of the mass wars of the twentieth century.

The work of these sociologists does, in general, support the arguments I have advanced: that modern war has had—at least in Britain—a profound influence on social policy and that, reci-

procally, the direction of social policy has influenced the way in which war is prosecuted. But this, I am confident—more perhaps by faith than by reason—is not the whole of the story in the evolution of social policy. Man does not live by war alone. To explain the social life of a community in terms of aggression and struggle is to explain only part of 'this sorry scheme of things entire'.

¹Andrzejewski, S., *Military Organization and Society*, 1954.