Politics 317:
THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WELFARE STATE

Chris Howell
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Class: King 335, Tuesday 1.00-2.45pm
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Introduction

The contemporary welfare state is undergoing a fundamental transformation. Between the last quarter of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and the middle of the 1970s, industrialized societies throughout Western Europe and North America created a panoply of social programs which became known as welfare states. The generosity, scope and coverage of these programs varied from one country to another, but by the 1960s, across the advanced capitalist world, the state had taken responsibility for a wide range of activities that had previously been provided either by the market or by unpaid labor within the family (usually performed by women). These elements of the welfare state tended to include income support, family benefits, healthcare, pensions, childcare, and so on.

Beginning in the 1970s, welfare states everywhere found themselves threatened by ideological criticism from both the Right and the Left, and a raft of economic and social challenges, including the aging of the population, globalization, feminization of the labor force, and deindustrialization. The question of the compatibility of welfare states and market capitalism was again raised for the first time since the 1930s. Initially, the response of governments tended to be to curtail the generosity of welfare programs and generally ratchet down the scope and scale of social spending. But in the last decade or so, a more fundamental transformation has begun to become apparent. Welfare spending has shrunk in some areas, while expanding in others, tax-credits have replaced state programs, and the balance of state, market and family provision of welfare has changed in important ways. This course investigates this process of transformation. It looks at the scholarly debates which seek to explain the causes and trajectory of change, and evaluates arguments about the extent of divergence of welfare states across advanced capitalist societies. The impact of gender and race upon the fate of the welfare state will be examined, and particular attention will be paid to changes to welfare and healthcare programs.

Engaging in a significant research project is a major aim of this research seminar. Part of the semester will be taken up with discussion of student research papers, as students present their papers, and other students and the instructor offer comments and constructive criticism.
Requirements

This is a seminar and so the primary requirement is that students do the assigned reading (which is about 200 pages a week) on time and be prepared to discuss it in class. Each student must write comments (anywhere from a paragraph or two to a page or two) on the readings each week. The purpose of the comments is to identify the main issues, questions and criticisms so that we can incorporate them into class discussion. A description of what I expect from these comments is available on the Blackboard web site for this class, and you should read it carefully. The comments should be posted to the ‘Discussion Board’ tab of Blackboard by 6.00am on the morning of class (i.e each Tuesday for which we have class readings). Students will often make oral presentations of the readings in class. The written comments, oral presentations, and general class participation, will be worth one third of the grade.

The other two thirds of the grade will come from a long (roughly 20-25 page) research paper on a topic chosen by the student, due at the end of the semester. In addition, each student must hand in a prospectus for their research paper (the topic plus a preliminary bibliography) by Monday October 18th at 8.00am. The October 19th class period will be devoted to a discussion of those proposals. For the last three weeks of the semester, class periods will be devoted to discussion of draft research papers with students acting as discussants. The research paper is due at 11.00am on Monday December 20th.

Finally, there will inevitably be some changes to the course as the semester progresses – changes in the readings, additional details of assignments, questions for the weekly comments, and so on – which are not included on this syllabus. I will provide weekly updates in the “Announcements” section of the Blackboard web site for this course along with a syllabus and other materials. We will also use Blackboard for posting drafts of research papers and proposals. Check the Blackboard site at least once a week. In the unlikely event that you miss a class, you should always check the web site in case I have announced something of importance.

Course readings

There are no books to buy for this course. All the readings will be available electronically, and can be found at the “Course Readings” tab on Blackboard. You can then read (and if you wish, print) this material. The readings are listed alphabetically by the last name of the first author on the syllabus. Check page numbers carefully, so that you read the correct section of each reading at the correct time. In many cases I have had some sections of a book scanned in that you do not need to read, or that you read at different points in the semester, so do be aware of page numbers.
Class Schedule:

September 7th

Introduction

No reading

September 14th

Theorizing


Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation, chapters 11 and 12 (pages 130-150).

Claus Offe, Contradictions of the Welfare State, chapter 6 (pages 147-161).

Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, Regulating The Poor, chapter 1 (pages 3-42).

David Goodhart, “The Discomfort of Strangers” (9 pages) in The Guardian [February 24, 2004].


September 21st

Gendering and Categorizing


Politics, 60, 2008 (pages 642-664)


September 28th

Change and Crisis of the Welfare State


October 5th

Varieties of Welfare State Change


Articles by Palier, Manow & Seils, Rhodes, Kuhnle, and Hemerijck & Visser (pages 113-186, and 209-256) in the special issue, “Recasting the Welfare State,” of West European
Politics [2000].

October 12th  

No Class

No reading or class. Consult with me. Write paper proposals.

October 19th  

Discussion of Paper Proposals

No reading. Circulate paper proposals by Monday October 18th at 8.00am.

November 2nd  

Welfare Reform

William Julius Wilson, When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor, chapters 1,2 & 6, 7 (pages 3-50 and 149-207).


Jason DeParle, American Dream. Selections TBA.

November 9th  

Healthcare: The European Experience


November 16th  Healthcare Reform in the United States


Robert Kuttner, Everything for Sale, chapter 4 (pages 110-158).


John Canham-Clyne, Steffie Woolhandler, and David Himmelstein, The Rational Option, all (pages 17-91).

November 23rd  No Class

No reading or class. Consult with me. Write draft research papers.

November 30th, December 7th & 14th  Discussion of Paper Drafts

Discussion of research paper drafts. To be circulated to class participants by 11.00am on Monday before class.