

well-educated people are more likely to support spending increases on education as they will be likely beneficiaries of these benefits (p. 252).

This book contributes to the current thinking on the causes and consequences of stratification of education systems and the path dependencies engrained in welfare-state regimes and the results they have on inequalities found in Western societies. The highlighted role of the VET on the stratification of education systems and overall income distribution is especially interesting and has strong policy relevance.

This book addresses two very important aspects that have been discussed in higher education studies literature for decades: access to higher education and the financing of higher education. It discusses these issues in the context of political struggles and preferences and the stratification of education systems. The author could have done more justice to the literature on these two very important aspects in higher education studies which have explored a number of factors influencing the reforms to widen participation and access to higher education and to 'privatise' higher education across a wide range of governance regimes. This could have helped to supplement the evidence base beyond OECD and UNESCO data. I also wish I could have seen more evidence of the links between primary and secondary education, as this is where the differentiation of paths of students towards access to professional or higher education opportunities strongly lies and where parents make important choices based on their preferences. I would also have liked the author to address the issue of migration—both low and high skilled—and how that has influenced popular attitudes and the stratification of VET and higher education. One could hypothesise that economies that depend more on an immigrant labour force may have different attitudes to the institutional design of the

paths towards education compared to those that do not depend much on immigrant labour.

Another aspect that could have contributed to the study would have been the longitudinal data collected by the author regarding public preferences for different types of VET and different types of higher education. The data used from the survey of public attitudes at one point in time uses questions which do not fully fit the present study—as noted by the author himself. Also, higher education systems that do not have strong VET have quite stratified higher education sectors (e.g. the UK or the US). Accounting for this possibility would provide further nuances in understanding the public preference differences regarding the funding of and access to education. I also wonder what the results would look like regarding the stratification and the role of VET in welfare regimes if one paid more attention to the size and types of industry found in different Western welfare states. Lastly, I would have enjoyed seeing less emphasis on methodological descriptions and more graphic presentations of the hypotheses and main findings, which would have made it easier to follow the red thread of the book.

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Armin Schäfer and Wolfgang Streeck
(eds.): *Politics in the Age of Austerity*
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'Democracy depends on choice. Citizens must be able to influence the course of government through elections' (p. 1). Political sociologists Schäfer and Streeck open this edited volume with this statement, on which the bulk of the book's argument rests and develops. The book covers a wide variety of topics: the evolution of Euro-

pean public finances, the analysis of the Swedish case as a free market, European monetary policy of the last decades, the evolution of representation in advanced parliamentary democracies, the differences in voter turnout by social classes, the influence of big corporations in democracy, and the rise of right-wing parties are all touched upon. The chapters' common denominator is to look for the effects of the economic crisis and the current fiscal constraints on fiscal policy and party politics in Europe. To be sure, the volume sometimes lacks continuity, but it makes for an excellent read.

The book's argument can be summarised as follows: In the presence of strong budget constraints, democratic decision-making mechanisms may become irrelevant and may be superseded by financial markets, which will become the single most important factor influencing decisions. This argument can be catchy and, as events in 2015 in Greece have shown, politically plausible. Nevertheless, there are many possible criticisms that have been widely debated in public spheres by politicians, academics, and analysts.

If the book's central thesis is to be taken seriously, public deficits weaken democracy; just as much as public surpluses should strengthen it. If the latter were true, it would be difficult to imagine why EMU countries with surpluses consistently decide to bail out countries with deficits, when the expected democratic outcome is to invest that money in their own people. Furthermore, accepting that political decisions are taken by the financial markets neglects that politics and democracy consist of a balance of alternatives. In such a process the only ones who are actually making the decisions are the representatives of the people, governments or parliaments. Those representatives are elected by the people, including those who abstain from voting. Even during the worst economic circumstances, disowning the mar-

kets' will, if such a thing exists, is a political and democratic decision. As confirmation, one just has to review the experiences of Latin America in the last two decades. There, some democratic governments decided not to pay their debts, or forced a restructuring on their lenders. The only difference from the current European state of affairs was that they were willing, sometimes even keen, to accept the economic consequences.

Aside from this general criticism, this work is insightful and engaging. Its ability to stimulate new ideas on current issues is laudable. The first two chapters, by Armin Schäfer and Wolfgang Streeck and Wolfgang Streeck and Daniel Mertens, start with a discussion of the evolution of public finances in Europe from 1970 to 2010, which reads as a history of the accumulation of public debt, as the only way to finance public deficits. Three reasons are listed as key: first, the abandonment of government financing through monetary emissions (i.e. seigniorage), which affected public revenues negatively; second, the maturation of welfare policies led by growing shares of the population entitled to receive benefits from the state; third, an ageing population that reduced the base of the economically active compared to the retired population, thereby reducing social-security contributions and tax revenues.

Philipp Genschel and Peter Schwarz explore why countries avoid raising taxes to deal with the growing deficits (Chapter 3). The two authors provide a remarkable account of the literature on tax competition and statistical evidence on its effects on redistribution and public deficits. Following the premise that 'true fiscal democracy occurs when voters have the power to change the government and the government has the power to change fiscal policies in light of voter preferences' (p. 59), the authors argue that the new realities of international capital mobility and free trade constrain the extent to which democracies

can tax returns on capital. The capacity of governments to raise or even maintain tax revenues is diminished because relatively high tax rates affect competitiveness. Nevertheless, the asymmetries between small and big economies influence the effect of tax cuts on fiscal democracy. In small economies a low relative tax rate increases the government's revenue and increases fiscal democracy, while in big economies the effect is negative.

Fritz Scharpf investigates how a monetary union affects democracy (Chapter 5). He analyses the effects on the legitimacy and accountability of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). After a brief discussion of the history of economic policies in Europe, ranging from post-war Keynesianism to Monetarism, the chapter discusses the beginnings of the EMU. The European Central Bank was created under the model of the German Bundesbank (i.e. independent from the Member States' governments) and its mission was to maintain price stability. The chapter then discusses the events leading to the economic crisis starting in 2008, explains the evolution of private debt and public finances in the Mediterranean Countries, and analyses the policies implemented until 2013. In light of the latest developments in Greece, this chapter is a necessary reference for scholars dealing with the topic.

In the sixth chapter, the late Peter Mair explores the demands for representative governments in parliamentary democracies. Two main functions are to be fulfilled by those in power. On the one hand, the executive should be effective in its mission of management (government). On the other hand, due to its parliamentary origins, it should also be representative of the interests of its constituencies. According to the author, these two missions have often been in conflict in the last two decades. The main argument is that elected representatives are 'less willing or able to respond to the voice of the ordinary voter' (p. 145) ow-

ing to the increasing influence of powerful interest groups that bypass the democratic process and directly lobby governments and MPs. The chapter illustrates this argument by reinterpreting the evolution of events stemming from the 2008 financial crisis in Ireland.

The book continues by exploring the challenges that economic liberalisation poses on inequality and voters' turnout. Armin Schäfer (Chapter 7) and Claus Offe (Chapter 8) resume the history of economic policies from the 1970s on. The authors analyse the arguments according to which conservative governments are more likely to privatise public services and firms and to cut several welfare benefits. Then they discuss the effects of economic liberalisation on economic inequality and, in turn, those of inequality on the turnout of voters and their satisfaction with democratic institutions. Finally, Offe suggests the need for further research on the mechanisms that may decrease abstentionism. The chapters offer a somewhat grey view of the future as, in line with the main argument of the book, they contend that economic liberalisation makes ideological differences between parties or governments irrelevant for the policies they implement. Given such prospects, 'citizens' faith in democratic politics is likely to erode further' (p. 192) and 'new procedures may not be sufficient to increase and broaden participation by citizens' (p. 216).

In Chapter 9, Colin Crouch presents a reinterpretation of the influence of corporations in government policies and their relation with the market. Starting with a definition of neoliberalism as the defence of free markets and their distributive functions, the author argues that big corporations and their interaction with governments have nothing neoliberal to them but their name, or better that the ideology itself is hypocritical. For the author neoliberalism is 'devoted to the dominance of public life by the giant corporation' (p. 219).

Corporations dominate governments not only through lobbying, which is outside the decision-making process, but also from within that process. Big corporations go beyond national jurisdictions, they influence economic theory, share high officials who had served both in public service and business, and produce much of the goods and services the state should provide to its citizens. To counterbalance their influence in political life, the author suggests that stronger European institutions, fostering deeper integration, could be the solution.

Mabel Berezin discusses the radicalisation of right-wing parties in recent decades. Going through the evolution of the National Front (FN) in France, this chapter shows a slow process in which the right across Europe was able to normalise its discourse. Although extremist parties are not new in European politics, their influence after World War II was diminished. In fact, 'in the early 1980s, ... the French media establishment was vociferously criticizing Le Pen' (p. 246), the leader of the National Front. Nevertheless, his positions always enjoyed some popular support, and slowly the party made way to the public opinion mainstream. The evolution of FN went from an initial period when its stance was openly Islamophobic and against globalisation, to a current one in which the strategy is to criticise European institutions. The attack against the European Union and the EMU during the economic crisis has increased the success of the National Front, as much as of its right-wing peers in countries like Sweden or Finland. At the same time this evolution has also changed the political discourse of centre-right parties, such as the Conservative Party in England and Christian Democracy in Germany. The effects of this mix of nationalist politics and European crisis are yet to be seen.

In sum, *Politics in the Age of Austerity* poses important questions on the evolution

of democracy as we know it in the light of new economic, demographic, and political realities. Even though it does not offer conclusive answers to the proposed puzzles, it sets the agenda for future research and stimulates the reader's mind to the extent that new and interesting research ideas come like drops in a rainstorm.

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Carsten Jensen: *The Right and the Welfare State*

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This book addresses the behaviour of right-wing governments in welfare-state reforms, particularly in the domains of health and unemployment. Carsten Jensen challenges two widespread—if often implicit—assumptions of the literature on comparative welfare-state reform. The first assumption is that right-wing parties are overwhelmingly hostile to the expansion of public social-security schemes. Since they represent middle-to-high-income voters who can purchase private insurance, right-wing parties should generally oppose state-sponsored welfare programmes that involve some form of redistribution from rich to poor. The second assumption is that the welfare state constitutes a monolithic bloc where politics is relatively homogeneous, and where preferences for state intervention are consistent across schemes. Indeed, countless studies seek to explain the determinants of social spending as a whole, or try to uncover the factors that shape individual preferences for 'welfare' or 'redistribution' without discriminating between health care, pensions, unemployment, family policy, or other programmes. The implicit assumption is that voters and parties