

INTRODUCTION

David Brady

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This is the second volume in the *Research in the Sociology of Work* set on “Comparing European Workers.” The first volume focused on experiences and inequalities (Brady, 2011). This volume concentrates on policies and institutions. While the first volume identified many of the problems and challenges that European workers face, this volume considers potential solutions. Of course, the social policies and labor unions of Europe are hardly panaceas for the variety of challenges that European labor markets face. Nevertheless, this volume explores how well policies and institutions can address those challenges. In the process, it appraises how the classic solutions for workers are undergoing transformations and what those transformations mean for the future of work in Europe.

In some ways, there is a place for pessimism. We see a lot of evidence in this volume that European workers no longer exist in the world of security and protection that labor market institutions formerly guaranteed. Indeed, labor unions appear to be in decline almost everywhere and welfare states are being reformed in directions that could undermine egalitarianism. However, in other ways, there is still room for optimism. Many of the core social policies remain intact and labor market institutions in Europe are still more established than anywhere else in the world. More importantly, many of the criticisms of policies and institutions appear to be overblown. Several chapters demonstrate that egalitarianism and economic growth are compatible and that generous social

policies do not have counterproductive consequences. Instead, this volume deepens our understanding beyond the simplistic rhetoric we often hear in journalistic accounts. The policies and institutions are truly changing, often in fundamental ways, and the future of European labor markets is likely to be quite different from the past. Yet, the complexity and nuance of these changes require careful scrutiny to really understand European workers. This volume provides such depth and careful investigation.

Together, these two volumes compare the contemporary patterns and the recent history of European workers with other models of work worldwide. Like the companion volume, this volume is interdisciplinary and features chapters by sociologists and political scientists. Also like the companion volume, this volume expands the boundaries of traditional Europe. However, perhaps even more than its companion, this volume emphasizes macro-level historical change and compares beyond the affluent democracies. In this brief introduction, I describe the organization and content of this volume.

PREVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The chapters in the volume are organized into two sections. The first three chapters investigate the effects and evolution of "Social Policy." The next four chapters examine the changes in and consequences of "Labor Unions and Labor Market Institutions." The final chapter reflects on the contributions of both volumes. In this section, I provide a brief preview of each chapter and identify a few of the unique contributions of each.

Social Policy

The first chapter in the section on social policy is a study of the political economy of activation policies by Swank. Swank examines social policies geared toward helping the unemployed find work – including active labor market policies, passive unemployment compensation benefits, and the ratio of active to passive unemployment spending – in 18 affluent democracies from 1980 to 2002. Swank shows that Left parties and corporatism are powerful political actors driving the enactment and expansion of these policies. Also, trade openness and deindustrialization increase spending in this domain, while veto points and unemployment undermine it. Though economics matter to active labor market policies, politics are most important.

Destro and my chapter examines cross-national variation in single mother employment. Single mothers, perhaps above all other groups, are typically scrutinized for the purported disincentives that generous social policies have on their employment. Despite a great deal of debate, however, the literature has been strikingly concentrated on the United States. We exploit cross-national heterogeneity in social policies to conduct a multilevel analysis of single mother employment. We construct novel measures that are specifically designed to assess welfare disincentives. We find that single mother employment is widespread and that generous social policies have little effect. Rather, single mother employment is driven by the same individual-level factors that predict employment for mothers, women, and all.

Seeleib-Kaiser and colleagues trace the evolution of public and private European social policy for workers. They explain that recent reforms have led to varying degrees of welfare "dualism." Dualism is quickly emerging as a crucial concept for making sense of social policy in affluent democracies. Scholars advancing dualism contend that two tiers or tracks have been constructed within social policies and that the benefits, eligibility, and protections of the different tracks reflect the privileges of insiders and the exclusion of outsiders. Based on qualitative and quantitative comparative-historical analyses of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, Seeleib-Kaiser and colleagues study the political and structural sources of the shift to dualization. Through comparisons between countries and detailed historical narratives of each country, they demonstrate that coordinated and liberal market economies are functioning differently than as expected by varieties of capitalism theory.

Labor Unions and Labor Market Institutions

The next section brings together studies of organized labor, worker politics, and the solidaristic institutions that have provided security and stability for workers. Martin and Kaya begin the section by shifting our attention eastward to the former state socialist societies. Though labor unions were a standard part of state socialism, one of the more notable changes to European workers has been the rapid decline of labor unions in these countries as they transitioned to capitalism. Martin and Kaya utilize World Values Survey data on East European ex-communist countries from 1990 to 2006 to estimate rates of unionization. Then, they examine panel models of industrialization, globalization, and institutional sources of the decline of unionization. Though they find some supportive evidence for all three

explanations, the strongest evidence is for industrialization and business cycle factors. They conclude that with the decline of institutional buffers, unions became overwhelmed by market forces and lost their position in these societies.

Pinto and Beckfield bring us back to the classic arena for studying worker mobilization by updating and extending our understanding of unionization across affluent democracies. Framing their study as uniting concern with change over time and stable cross-national difference, Pinto and Beckfield scrutinize variation in unionization in 16 affluent democracies for the past 50 years. They provide compelling evidence of widespread union decline across liberal and coordinated market economies. Still, cross-national differences remain important, as a few Nordic countries have not declined. A secondary analysis examines European Social Survey data to show how unionization varies by gender, education, and sector and how these patterns vary cross-nationally. This chapter provides perhaps the most up-to-date and clearest portrait of the decline of organized labor across affluent democracies.

Becher and Pontusson cover a similar set of countries as Pinto and Beckfield in their study of labor unions. However, Becher and Pontusson advance a novel perspective on unions relative to most of the literature. They ask where unions are concentrated within the income distribution. Using European Social Survey data from 2006 to 2008, they show that workers with incomes above the median are more likely to be unionized than workers below the median. They then examine how the overrepresentation of the relatively affluent within unions affects the politics of redistribution. They demonstrate that the share of union members below the median is associated with a greater effect of union density on redistribution. Hence, Becher and Pontusson provide some of the first knowledge about where union members are in the income distribution and how this affects worker politics.

In an ambitious and wide-ranging chapter, Baccaro examines the relationship between unionization and inequality. He frames his study as assessing the effects of unionization in the most recent historical period – after unions and labor market institutions have weakened in recent decades. He compares over 50 countries, with particular attention to the differences between affluent democracies like Western Europe and developing regions. His main conclusion is that labor institutions are no longer as effective at reducing inequality in most countries. This critical appraisal is somewhat balanced by his conclusion that welfare states still continue to play a determinative role. Indeed, he corroborates some sociological research (e.g., Brady, 2009) showing that most

of the effects of unions now operate through the welfare state. If unions lead to lower inequality, it is by encouraging a more generous welfare state, which reduces inequality. The evidence that unions directly cause lower wage inequality is much weaker.

CONCLUSION

The final chapter in the volume is a concluding essay by Daniel and colleagues. These authors reflect on the contributions of the other chapters in this and the companion volume. This chapter makes a push for greater cross-pollination between cultural sociology and the study of European workers. They offer a reading of the chapters in both volumes from the perspective of cultural sociology, point to directions where the chapters could be extended to better incorporate a cultural perspective, and suggest a rich future agenda for scholars of European workers. Daniel and colleagues contend that we would gain deeper and original insights into the lives and subjectivities of European workers if scholars incorporate cultural sociology. Particularly helpful for scholars, they explain and apply the analytical tools offered by Small, Harding, and Lamont (2010) for studying culture.

Beyond Daniel and colleagues, it is worthwhile to comment on a few key contributions of the present volume. First, the chapters in this volume truly present a state-of-the-art evaluation of the labor market institutions and policies of Europe. Scholars have long contrasted the higher unionization of Western Europe against the weak unions of the United States. The chapters here provide up-to-date and truly cutting edge studies of this classic topic. Moreover, the studies on social policy diagnose several of the most urgent and pressing challenges facing welfare states. High unemployment, single motherhood, and dualization really are at the front of the minds of policymakers and publics. Second, this volume forces us to ask difficult questions about the future of egalitarianism. It seems unlikely that the traditional mix of unions and welfare states will work as effectively and exist exactly as they have in the past. Rather, the challenge will be to maintain the effectiveness of labor market institutions and policies in the face of pressures for reform and decline. In addition, debates need to be had about novel potential strategies for institutionalizing solidarity, security, and equality. If indeed unions have declined beyond some point of return and welfare states truly are evolving toward dualization, how will workers protect themselves against the inherent insecurities of the life cycle and capitalism? Going

forward, workers will need to cultivate new political coalitions, press for new and innovative social policies, and enact new and alternative institutions.

These final two points remind us again how essential it is to study European workers. The policies and institutions for European workers have long been models for scholarship and politics and European workers. As the realities of work in Europe have changed, it is imperative to make sense of these social changes and to continue to analyze how European labor markets work. Despite massive changes and daunting challenges, European workers continue to inform social theory and provide a crucial basis of comparison for all societies.

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SECTION I SOCIAL POLICY