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Dynamics of welfare – social work in the ascendant and under pressure

Trying to talk about the dynamics of welfare in 30 minutes is like the flight of Icarus. If you go too high, your words combust on the abstractness of the theories.¹ If you fly too low, you sink in the water of the various forms of welfare. So I will try to stay in the middle. Perhaps Icarus also managed it for at least 30 minutes.

“Welfare” is not a fixed quantity; it is the subject of political debate, and decisions about it are made in a discursive process. The participants do not, of course, have equal chances of influencing the decision. This presentation of a discourse on welfare goes beyond functionalist theories and looks for the normative bases for welfare.

Historical aspects

Functionalism can explain the intervention of the welfare state in society as a necessity that arose from the industrialisation and urbanisation that started in the 19th century. Social policy deals with the risks threatening the livelihood of wage-earners such as illness, old age, disability, family reproduction. The social insurance systems in European states have experienced a fairly stable development, and have been stepped up and extended to other risks. Social policy in the area of production related to workers' rights in the workplace and to labour market policy has undergone a different development in the different countries. European integration and the freedom of movement have put this area under pressure. Finally, there is a third type of social policy which relates to the area of reproduction. This deals with education and upbringing, care and medical treatment, social support in all emergency situations. Whilst we can find these welfare measures in all the countries of Europe, the extent of realisation is rather different. These differences can be explained on a historical basis. Here, the important question is how the social problem was defined in the respective country at the start of the development of the welfare state (Kaufmann 2003: 33). As a consequence, rather different forms of welfare pluralism developed in Europe. The same players are involved everywhere – the state and the market, social organisations and private households. The respective proportions of their activities are very different.

National discourse decides on the relationship of the players and the extent to which welfare is to be realised – the fact that this is no longer tenable in the process of European integration and globalisation will have to be discussed. One other aspect is

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important for narrowing the topic down further, i.e. so that I can then concentrate on social work: “welfare” is, to start with, a “problem formula for public communication ... that relates to the mediation between the particular forms of lifestyle and the condition or development prospects of a community” (Kaufmann 2003: 227). It makes discussion about the correct degree of welfare difficult, therefore, as a link is always established between the collective activities and the individuals and their behaviour. So who deserves to receive aid from the state? What conditions must the individual meet in order to be given institutional support?

We immediately recall the mechanisms for discrediting or privileging groups of people. The right to aid is granted to the deserving poor; it is denied to the undeserving poor. Despised groups such as foreigners, Sinti and Roma or other minorities are supposed to receive no help at all or, at the very least, to be strictly monitored. The questions asked today, however, also include: should old people really receive all the medical benefits? Shouldn't infringements of the requirements of the public employment services entail much tougher sanctions? For which members of the family should the social insurance benefits be available? Do children really have to have health insurance with their working parents?

Normative bases

These questions not only relate to the systematic concept of welfare production. They are also typical for a time in which the legitimacy of the welfare state has long been questioned. In any event, when welfare and welfare production are determined in such a way, the meaning of the word “social policy” becomes clear, as “social” addresses the relationship of people with their society and with the state – and vice versa. It is the same with the term “social pedagogy”.

For a long time, there was a conviction in Europe, shared by both the bourgeoisie and the labour movement and originating from the Enlightenment and Christian ideas. It was “the belief in the inherent value of every person and the perspective of a peaceful coexistence in liberty and equality”, as Franz Xaver Kaufmann expressed it (Kaufmann 2003: 38). This “social” idea sometimes kept capitalism somewhat under control; in particular, it was of benefit to the latter, promoted national loyalties and gave rise to social security benefits – on different levels, of course. Thomas Humphrey Marshall summarised this dynamic in his theory of citizenship. (Marshall 1992). It is, therefore, a matter of de-commodification in the sense that man is no longer a commodity on the labour market and other markets and is able to determine his relationship with the environment in his own way. To this end, the state, as the all-powerful player, must provide him with rights. If the state is no longer able or no longer wants to do this because it is driven into a corner by other powers or subscribes to nationalist ideas, there is a social crisis.

The welfare state

First, however, we must remember that a period of economic growth, which was also fostered by welfare policy, i.e. by the improvement of incomes, pension and labour market policy, co-determination and the expansion of the health system, was achieved in Europe after the Second World War. Burkart Lutz (1989) has analysed this period and shown that the improvement of the income of the majority of the population that was possible on the basis of full employment was the decisive driving force for development. At the same time, however, in “Der kurze Traum immerwährender Prosperität” (The Short-lived Dream of Perpetual Prosperity), he shows that this period was associated with a unique set of circumstances.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the experience of national solidarity during the war and in the post-war period and the political awareness that wars are always also made possible by capital for financing showed that the normative requirements for a welfare state also increased in this period.

Globalisation

There are doubtless a variety of causes for the crisis of the welfare state diagnosed from the middle of the 1970s. The most important may be the fall of the rate of profit that caused companies in Japan, Western Europe and North America to further expand their international markets. The expansion of the markets and production locations creates an international value creation chain which puts the domestic locations under pressure. Thus, globalisation becomes a boomerang that hits the employees in the central locations. The reduction of wages and social standards is pushed forward with the argument that cheaper production is possible elsewhere. The transformation from the “Keynesian welfare state” to the market state is far-reaching. The middle classes, which particularly benefitted from the welfare state, come under pressure. The hopes of an upswing felt in the 1950s and 1960s transform into fears of decline. To safeguard the location, the state mobilises cheap labour through on-going discipline.

The process that is forging ahead through globalisation was introduced through European integration. Within a common market, the states are trying to bring as much investment as possible to their country through the promotion of industry. One means is making labour cheaper. Germany has already taken this path for a long time and thus secured its hegemonic position in Europe. It is an irony of history that the European Central Bank is now asking the trade unions to demand hefty wage increases. Making labour cheaper leads to the growth in poverty, as well as wealth, in all the countries in Europe, with the result that the wealthy in Europe, along with the banks, form a power elite that has autocratic control of the state (“oligarchic rule”). Democracy is reduced to agreement to a policy that is sold as the only alternative.

Americanisation?

One feature of this policy is the European, especially the German, social policy coming significantly closer to the American model (Seeleib-Kaiser 2014). Belonging to a skilled workforce becomes, more than ever, the key condition for a secure livelihood. The social benefits for the unemployed and pensioners are reduced and get closer to the American level. Anyone who does not belong to the workforce continuously and anyone who is unemployed for a long time is threatened by poverty and really becomes poor in old age. The difference between the European social model and the American one is, however, retained, as there is a guaranteed minimum income in Europe at the level of social welfare. The citizens are not robbed of their social rights entirely; decommodification survives at a modest level. If however, as is the case in Germany, the sanctions of the public employment services also reduce the benefits to the minimum subsistence level, even this baseline of membership of society is destroyed. In any case, the divide between the population living in poverty and those in the workforce has increased. This has a disciplining effect, with result that even undesired and poorly paid work is accepted, up to the professional classes. Fixed terms in employment contracts are now found throughout the area.

When thinking about the future there are also, at first glance – contrary to the hitherto somewhat pessimistic assessment – more favourable models. Thus the question arises of which circumstances were relevant to the periods of prosperity before the First and after the Second World War. Whilst welfare state policies were decisive for the prosperity after the Second World War, Lutz makes the following diagnosis for the period before the First World War: “Before the First World War, the strong national state, which protected foreign trade and, within the country, ensured law and order and secured low labour costs, was an essential condition for imperialist land acquisition through the conquest of colonial empires and the development of economic spheres of influence” (Lutz 1989: 261) Now the constant expansion of the European Union since its establishment in 1957 can be regarded as land acquisition for the modern market of centres. Although the stages of expansion are now questionable from the perspective of politics and human rights, the expansion is forging ahead and has taken up the states between the EU and Russia. The Kosovo War in 1999 shows that states do not even shy away from a military seizure of land. If we now consider the investment of American concerns and the EU in the Ukraine, the crisis in the Ukraine no longer seems surprising. The West has already won one cold war and now another such war seems imminent, this time against Russia alone.

The activating welfare state

The deliberations on the labour market do not go far enough; they are confined to economic aspects. The conversion of the preventative welfare state to an activating welfare state is associated with a fundamental reinvention of the social aspect (Lessenich 2008). The individual value preferences are now also the state's control imperatives. The individuals are interested in autonomy, flexibility, mobility and self-determination. And that is precisely what the state and society require of them. "Be subjective and rule yourself"- that is the slogan. "But you will not do justice to your responsibility for yourself and society in doing so!" The social aspect, i.e. the social cohesion in which the individual must be interested for reasons of self-preservation, is reinvented in the paradoxical form of the subjective will. Thus, the earlier pedagogic formula of "prompting self-activity", which has matured into a working principle in social pedagogy, becomes a socio-political programme. Also in this respect, we can speak of an upswing for social pedagogy. However the formula is no longer being tested in an educational situation, but is being implemented in social reality. Here, there is no room for the testing that characterised the educational domain. Moral standards are piled for the government of society ("don't eat too much", "don't get fat; stay fit", "don't smoke; drink in moderation") and the media is taking on the implementation of this programme. "In the new welfare state, society is constituted as a subject that is working towards socially compatible action by the subjects. As a result of the initiation of socially responsible independent activity by the individuals, a new pattern for welfare state relations is established that relates the subjects, *uno actu* so to speak, to themselves (their "self-interest") and to the social community (the "common good")." (Lessenich 2008: 85)

The programme of "promoting and demanding" has also transformed a formula from within social work into policy. Advice and support are merged with permanent control and threats of sanctions in "case management".

The activating welfare state that took the place of the state of de-commodification has a pleasant side. Those who are to be encouraged to work need training, childcare and care for old people, so that the people of working age are actually able to work. The mobilisation of a workforce, especially women or mothers, gives a boost to social work and the education system. The financial allowances are to be reduced, whereas social services are to be extended, insofar as they promote employability. Just as states compete for the best location, the citizens are to fight for secure positions in the labour market by availing themselves of professional development opportunities and through self-management. And those who are still in the workforce must discipline themselves and overcome their weaknesses.

This is why all the reports from the world of work point to permanent stress, to overtaking, to increasing speeds and intensification, to burning out and to exhaustion.

Social work is in demand in this situation too, as it is to use its support skills purposefully for the rehabilitation of the exhausted members of the workforce.

In the ascendant and under pressure

The two faces of the pedagogisation of society come to light in many areas of the present development. Thus, the area of youth welfare has been growing steadily in Germany for years. Here, we cannot talk of the dismantling of the welfare state. Pre-school education is expanding rapidly; the costs of youth welfare are increasing every year. The number of people working in youth welfare rose from approx. 510,000 in 2000 to approx. 700,000 in 2013. Between 2006 and 2012, the expenditure increased from 20.9 to 32.2 billion euros. Between 1998 and 2012, the expenditure almost doubled. (Komdat 1&2/2014) If we consider the whole set of social work occupations, we can see the following picture: the number of people working in this area in 2010 is estimated at 2.2 to 2.5 million; that is 8% of all people liable for social insurance. In 1980, barely 300,000 people were engaged in “social” work; since then, the annual rate of increase has been 5.6%. However, it must also be mentioned that almost half of them only work half days (Nodes/Wohlfahrt 2012).

In Germany, work in childcare centres, in particular, has been pedagogised in that a continuous observation of the children is conducted and documented. Support, prevention and control go hand in hand.

The contradictory expansion of social pedagogy is also visible in the programmes for child protection and for dealing with juvenile delinquency. One of the structural changes in the management of youth welfare is the shift from “welfare” to “security” as the target formula (cf. Dollinger 2014). This change is fundamental and affects all areas of policy. At the same time, “security” is broader than the “social security” that was at the fore in the first phase of modernisation. At that time, “the social aspect” had to be reinvented, after detachment from feudal structures of security and dependence, through employment contract security in capitalism. In the Second Modern Age, people are activated and mobilised to find employment in any place in their own country or the whole of Europe. Within society, this mobilisation relates, in particular, to women who, in the past, were responsible for the family, bringing up the children and looking after the old people –often working part time at the same time– and in many cases still are today. Social security is now the security and freedom of the individual who becomes more dependent on social insurance, the more he/she has been mobilised. For mobilisation means detachment from communities; thus, the various “social bolsters” between the individual and society get thinner.

Social control has always been the work of the communities. It has also provided orientation and, without it, uncertainty becomes the over-arching experience of everyday life. In this case, security of orientation is primarily established by the media – from mass media to the “social networks”. The mass media, in particular, not only generate security but produce fear through their fixation on crime and the

dramatisation of the extraordinary. They attend to people's delight in sensations and increase this need in their struggle for market shares. Particularly lucrative in this respect are reports about disasters with innocent victims, reprehensible perpetrators and serious damage, ideally with atrocities. Such reports make the need for security boundless and legitimise any form of preventative and protective security policy. In the area of child protection and criminality, in particular, individual reports in the media are sufficient for setting the legislative machinery in motion and developing a policy of detention and incarceration of perpetrators. Social problems are translated "into questions of security and the guarantee of security" (Dollinger 2014: 299). When these are dealt with, the complexity of the causes disappears; the rigidity of the simple solution dominates.

However, such a spiral of state repression (and social control of the neighbourhood in the case of child protection) cannot continue indefinitely. For the policy of security produces further needs for more security. And punishment instead of therapy generates recidivism. Therefore, there is a recurring discussion about sophisticated forms of intervention that are managed professionally. As these are expensive, they are avoided and society is supposed to protect itself. Militancy returns to the self-help of the "preventative" organisations.

Social policy is taking the form of an intensive policy of risk avoidance. Comprehensive diagnoses and monitoring procedures aim to avoid disasters – but they also always reveal precarious life situations and call for further forms of intervention. As these are not affordable, there is only one solution: the "guilty" are not worth the help and support. If social work deals with them, it should do it with an iron fist.

Social work is also massively involved in these processes. Its quantitative expansion is, however, connected to qualitative formation. It is no longer concepts that mediate between subjective claims and social requirements, but procedures that implement the social requirements under the mantle of individualisation that are socially desirable. The friendly visitor with his puritanical behaviour has returned.

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