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THE CLAIM TO SOCIAL RESOURCES: A CONTESTED ISSUE IN TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE, 1776 TO THE PRESENT

Daniel Letwin

Workshop at the GHI, September 22-24, 2000. Conveners: Daniel Letwin (Pennsylvania State University), Christof Mauch (GHI), and Richard F. Wetzell (GHI). Participants: Thomas M. Adams (National Endowment for the Humanities), Keith Allen (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum), Christopher Capozzola (Columbia University), Karl Christian Führer (Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte, Hamburg), Edward Larkey (University of Maryland at Baltimore County), Sascha Liebermann (University of Dortmund), Timothy Patrick McCarthy (Harvard University), Sonya Michel (University of Illinois at Chicago), Sam A. Mustafa (College of Charleston), Karen Riechert (University of Tübingen), Lutz Sauerteig (University of Freiburg), Georg Schild (University of Bonn), James C. Van Hook (Trinity University).

Ever since the American and French revolutions signaled the emergence of democracy, nationalism, and market capitalism, debate over the claim to social resources - from food to health care, employment to education, housing to suffrage - has animated political life on each side of the Atlantic. To what extent are such benefits the birthright of all, and to what extent are privileges to be restricted by gender, class, ethnicity, race, or other social distinctions? By what principles (liberty, equality, rights of citizenship, universal rights, etc.) should popular access to social resources be expanded or curtailed? How these questions have been contested and resolved across the transatlantic world provided the focus for this stimulating three-day workshop. The workshop was divided into four sessions, each devoted to a different period.

The two opening papers went back to the revolutionary epoch of the late-eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth century - an age when modern debate over the scope and meanings of democracy, equality, and citizenship began to take shape. Sam A. Mustafa examined the civic sensibilities of the mercantile bourgeoisies of the American port towns and German Hanseatic cities. As leading political actors in cities like New York and Hamburg, Baltimore and Bremen, and Philadelphia and Lübeck, such figures embraced an egalitarian republicanism, expressed through philanthropic enterprises. Here, Mustafa argued, was "capitalism with a strong social conscience, practiced remarkably similarly on both sides of the Atlantic." In his review of African-American crusades for emancipation and racial equality (both within and beyond the abolitionist movement) Timothy Patrick McCarthy discussed how a nascent print culture served to popularize debate over race and equality. Although neither dealt

centrally with contested claims to social resources, each paper illuminated ideological tensions that would come to frame such contestation: in particular that between the egalitarian thrust of bourgeois liberalism and the material inequalities of emerging capitalism, and that between egalitarianism and inequalities of race, gender, and ethnicity.

The following session surveyed issues of rights and resources as they arose from the late-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries. The transformative epochs of war figured prominently here. Christopher Capozzola considered how World War I altered America's ideological landscape. If wartime mobilization reflected (and redoubled) a coercive "culture of obligation," it also inspired a current of opposition to conscription, political repression, and inequalities of race and sex. Although swiftly curtailed, such crusades foreshadowed a more socially inclusive, rights-oriented vision of citizenship. Notably, this budding culture of rights in America only began to address the distribution of social resources. The latter, however, was central to Karl Christian Führer's study of housing confiscation in Germany during the eras of the two world wars. The modern German state has long assumed a role in the allocation of this vital resource - but never more dramatically than during and following World Wars I and II, as state authorities took to quartering the homeless in private homes. Although justified by the exigencies of war, this practice triggered "charged debates on the rights of those citizens who had a roof over their head and those who sought or needed one."

Other contributions on this period explored the issue of social resources in comparative perspective. Looking at the distribution of "life's most precious social resource" - food - Keith Allen asked why Berlin (and London) lagged behind Paris in the public provision of midday meals to children outside the home (a remarkable fact, Allen observed, given Germany's oft-noted place on the leading edge of social entitlement programs). Detailing the emergence of this issue during a time (1890-1930) when growing numbers of women worked outside the home, Allen cited Germany's stubborn adherence to traditional ideas of family life, "complete with a male breadwinner, female homemaker, and parental authority over children's consumption." Karen Riechert reviewed the impact of the newly founded International Labor Organization - "the first truly international legislative organization" - on the domestic politics of interwar France and America. She found that although the adoption of international labor standards were greeted with apprehension by the French and American governments, they left their stamp on public discourse over labor policy in each country.

The workshop next turned to the second half of the twentieth century. In her study of the complex postwar policy debates over the provision of old-age pensions, Sonya Michel detailed the efforts of the American business sector (as represented by the National Association of Manufacturers, or NAM) to tip the balance of support for

social entitlements from the state to private employers. Motivated by a blend of free-market doctrine and strategies of management and investment, and bolstered by support from organized labor, NAM's campaign for social security for the elderly hastened the coming of a largely privatized, individualized welfare structure - "an increasingly bifurcated, nonegalitarian, nonredistributive system that allowed the inequities of the market to pursue less privileged Americans even into their 'golden years.'" If Michel was concerned with the limited reach of social welfare (even at its height) in the United States, Lutz Sauerteig was interested in the corrosion of Germany's ambitious welfare state. Sauerteig highlighted shifts in debate over the German healthcare system, as its impressive postwar growth ran up against a range of obstacles - escalating costs, economic recession, and a rising pool of elderly patients, among others - starting in the 1970s. These pressures, he observed, sharpened the tension between imperatives of "solidarity" on the one hand and those of "self-responsibility" and "cost containment" on the other. The mounting influence of these latter principles was manifested in controversial trends toward higher premiums, direct patient contributions, and shrinking of health benefits. Along a similar vein, James C. Van Hook analyzed the introduction of the West German "social market economy" by the neoliberal Ludwig Erhard during the late 1940s and 1950s. Challenging the social-democratic insistence on redistributive state action as the chief means to overcome inequality and want, the social market economy preferred measures (such as anticartel legislation) to ensure equal access to the market. Interestingly, each side invoked its own explanation for the rise of Nazism on behalf of its position - social democrats stressing the inherent inequities of capitalism and neoliberals emphasizing Germany's progressive tradition of state intervention. Edward Larkey took the story of social resources onto unusual terrain with his study of regional government subsidization of popular music in postwar Germany, particularly during the culturally charged decades of the 1960s and 1970s.

The final set of papers addressed issues and models pertaining to the distribution of social resources in today's transatlantic world. Georg Schild asked why no counterpart to the German system of *Kindergeld* (state child support) has taken root in the United States, notwithstanding that country's outspoken devotion to "family values." Thus, Schild took on a familiar problem: the comparative weakness of social welfare provisions in the United States. In the case of state policy on children, he held, the American position reflected a tendency to tie social welfare to need or prior contribution, and to weigh to the material cost of public entitlements more highly than the social benefits. Antonia Kupfer outlined the comparative origins and trajectories of affirmative action. Focusing on the promotion of women and (in America) minorities in higher education, Kupfer highlighted many contrasts in the German and American variants of affirmative action - in its legal and ideological foundations, its implementation, its scope, its reception, and its impact. Sascha Liebermann challenged the broad linkage, on both sides of the Atlantic, between one's claim to social resources and his or her station as a wage-earner. As technological displacement

renders human labor ever more marginal to the production of a nation's wealth, he contended, job status becomes increasingly untenable as a basis for its just distribution. Thomas M. Adams placed the recent incarnation of a European Union-vintage "European Social Model" (and the clash between neoliberal and social-democratic variants of that model) into deep historical perspective, going back even further than the papers that opened the workshop. Although recognizing novel aspects to the current model, Adams found much in present-day thinking that echoes traditions of social provision (including charity, public assistance, and market regulation) long predating the seminal state welfare initiatives of the late-nineteenth century.

Spanning a diversity of topics, settings, and periods, this workshop underscored just how varied and elastic has been the claim to social resources across the transatlantic world. Exchanges at the sessions were no less wide-ranging than the papers themselves. What have been the meanings of democracy, equality, and citizenship? What has been seen as the rightful scope of state intervention? In what respective measures has social entitlement been anchored in employment status or citizenship? What explains the relative weakness of material entitlements in America or the growing fragility of social welfare in Europe? How has the appearance of international standards shaped the resolution of such questions? These were among the salient points of inquiry throughout the proceedings. Without a doubt, the workshop did more to sharpen than to resolve these issues. Just as surely, it reconfirmed the power of historical and comparative perspectives to illuminate the issue of social resources, as it moves - alive as ever - into the new century.