

## Book review

Jan Keller, (2010): *Das Zugrundegehen des Sozialstaates (The Twilight of the Welfare State)*  
Published by Books on Demand ([www.bod.de](http://www.bod.de))

The book deals with the development of the welfare state – i.e. of an institution the existence and future form of which is at present the subject of a bitter political struggle in all countries of Europe. The author defines the nature of the welfare state, follows the main stages of its evolution and provides a description of the main arguments used in the criticism which has accompanied the welfare state from its outset, coming both from the left and the right parts of the political spectrum.

The author analyses the present problems of welfare state functioning in a wider context. He briefly examines some of the impacts caused by the arrival of the society of services, the transformations of the labour market, the changing patterns of married life and population ageing as well as the causes of declining solidarity in society. He explores the decline in solidarity not only in the labour market, but also in the relations between the healthy and the ill or between senior citizens and young people in the conditions of sharp competition between firms and whole states.

The author also pays attention to external factors in the form of globalisation and illustrates how the factors which lead to higher profits for supranational firms at the same time make financing of the welfare state difficult and thus endanger the functioning of its insurance systems.

The author's typology of the welfare state is based on works by Esping-Andersen, however, much attention is devoted to the impacts of globalisation on the financing of these individual types.

The following part of the book investigates the various types of social risks (unemployment, maternity, health-related risks, pension assurance) and again, shows how the individual types of the welfare state cope with these risks.

Detailed attention is also given to the issues of welfare state modernisation while emphasis is placed on the many paradoxes which the so called modernisation often leads to.

The topic which has attracted the author's long-term attention is the middle classes and their transformations in the conditions of modern society. This is why he has been studying the relationship of the middle classes towards the welfare state and why he has attempted to substantiate that there is mutual interconnection between the prosperity of the middle classes and the future prospects of the welfare state.

In the last part of the book, the author critically evaluates the individual proposals of solutions that are to deal with the deepening crisis of the welfare state. Besides the criticism of Giddens's and Blair's concept of the Third Way, the author also outlines proposals which aspire to solve the problems of the welfare state either by opening more space for the actions of civil society (Pierre Rosanvallon), or by supporting women's economic activity in the labour market (Esping-Andersen) or through radical transformation of the tax and welfare system of the European Union (Horst Afheldt).

Among the topics mentioned in the book are the issues of the old and the new social risks, the issues of vicious circles in the functioning of social policy; also the current transformations of The Social Question are looked at. The book draws on a wealth of English, German and especially French professional literature in an effort to tackle the issue under scrutiny from various angles and to make use of as varied as possible national experience.

In the preface to the second edition, the author observes that the somewhat gloomy title of the book is not an exaggeration. In the countries of Europe, the social system has been undergoing a profound transformation. While in the thirty post-war years, its role was to

protect employees against randomness of the labour market, today, it is supposed to serve as an instrument of obedient and as complete as possible adjustment of citizens to any form of market randomness. The social system has thus become a silent accomplice in the transfer of a maximum degree of market uncertainty from firms to employees. In principle, a very asocial use has been found for an instrument of social justice – the welfare state. Now the question is what social consequences this fundamental shift will have.

The book was translated into German and it may be obtained at the following address:

[www.bod.de](http://www.bod.de)

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