

Editorial Note

This issue of *Scandinavian Political Studies* features a series of articles centered around the theory of flexibilization. They represent a part of the research presented at a conference in April 1988 addressing this problem. The conference was organized by Ove K. Pedersen and Klaus Nielsen, both at the Roskilde University Center in Denmark, Hans Kastendiek, University of Edinburgh, and Bob Jessop, University of Essex.

The theory of flexibilization attempts to describe the relationship between institutional and political stability on the one hand and economic flexibility on the other. More specifically, it tries to assess the relationship between different models for accommodating organized social interests while executing policies aiming at economic change. Clearly, the theory is particularly susceptible to political systems with two basic characteristics: first, the existence of extensive social organization, i.e. with organized interests participating in the formulation and implementation of public policy; and secondly, politico-economic systems with complex patterns of international economic dependency. In these respects the Scandinavian countries offer interesting cases for theory testing and development. This is the background for this theme issue.

This elaboration of the neo-corporatist theory was originally advanced by Peter Katzenstein in his works 'Corporatism and Change' and 'Small States in World Markets'. To some extent taking issue with Mancur Olson's argument that the 'decline of nations' can be largely attributed to the role of corporatist arrangements of interest mediation, Katzenstein's analysis suggests that organizations are by no means *ex definitione* obstacles to policy change or to a policy of economic flexibilization. Rather, by engaging in the making and enforcement of public policy, organized interests may play key roles providing political support and legitimacy for policies triggering economic change and flexibility.

Moreover, the processes of rapid change in the structure of Scandinavian industry, along with international pressures for financial deregulation of the Scandinavian financial markets, have exacerbated the need for an overall relaxation of regulations and political restrictions on the economic systems. As Katzenstein points out, industries in the Scandinavian countries are typical 'price takers', who have to adapt to changes in the international market without having very much influence on the market.

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in society that we find the theory of flexibilization. The key problems here include: What challenges do economic flexibility pose to the prevailing institutional arrangements? How can political stability be combined with economic flexibility? What is the interrelationship between highly dynamic processes within the economy and the existing arrangements of interest accommodation? And, most significantly, to what extent are stable systems of interest representation, institutionalized in sets of regulation and continuity, capable of enforcing policies generating economic change?

In the articles, Klaus Nielsen's introductory article on 'Flexible Adjustment and Political Stability: The Terms of the Debate' elaborates on the vantage points of this analysis and gives a detailed presentation of the theory. Following that, three articles present studies of economic change and economic flexibilization policies in Denmark, Finland and Norway respectively.

Needless to say, the space available here can by no means offer a complete account of any of the huge problems raised here. Our intention is rather to offer an introduction to an exciting area of political-economy research. The articles are examples of research output in this area, as well as general analyses of the Scandinavian cases in these respects.

The editors wish to acknowledge the very generous assistance of Ove K. Pedersen and Klaus Nielsen in the preparation of this theme issue. Substantial gratitude is also due to Lars Mjösset and Jan Otto Andersson for revising their articles to conform to the structure of the theme issue.

RL & JP