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*Ola Listhaug, University of Trondheim*

Erik Damgaard, Peter Gerlich & J. J. Richardson (eds.): *The Politics of Economic Crisis. Lessons from Western Europe*. Avebury: Aldershot, 1989, 205 pp.

The study of economic policy and performance has become increasingly popular among political scientists. The major explanation for this upsurge of interest is no doubt the economic crisis experienced virtually everywhere in the Western world from the early 1970s and onwards. The basic similarity of the stimulus – the first oil crisis in late 1973 at least served as a catalyst – and the considerable variation in governmental responses to the crisis, both in terms of coping strategies and eventual results, have provided us with as close to a laboratory setting as we will ever get with respect to macropolitical phenomena. However, despite considerable work by both economists and political scientists we are still very far from any authoritative statement or theory in this area. Nor, I believe, will we ever have such a theory, given the complexity of the phenomena.

The book reviewed here is a contribution to this growing literature on the post-1973 economic crisis. Under the auspices of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), a research group has collected case-studies from nine countries: Austria, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, The Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. Three sets of research questions have guided the enterprise: firstly, when and how have governments perceived the economic crisis?; secondly, what responses were designed to cope with the crisis?; and finally, what were the results of these efforts at crisis management?

Obviously, the theoretical ambitions of the book are quite modest. There is little or no effort to relate systematically either research questions or results to other important work in the area. Even if this may be understandable with respect to contributions by economists, it seems to me quite unacceptable as regards recent key works by fellow political scientists (see, in particular, P. Whiteley's *Political*

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*Control of the Macro-economy* (Sage, 1986) and H. Keman et al.'s *Coping with the Economic Crisis* (Sage, 1987) – reporting the work of another ECPR research group!).

The book may claim some originality for its emphasis on the role of perceptions in governmental efforts to cope with crisis. Particularly fruitful – both in the general discussion and in many of the country reports – is the adoption of an agenda perspective. It may seem obvious that economic problems and policies are in constant competition with other urgent government tasks. But this is rarely systematically accounted for in research on economic policy; not surprisingly this perspective does not come naturally to economists. The book reminds us of the extent to which an economic crisis is a matter of definition. Spain, for example, had more important things to do – build democracy – during the immediate post-Franco period in the late 1970s. Only when that political and constitutional crisis was resolved in the early 1980s was there sufficient time and energy left to perceive and act on the economic problems of the country.

Apart from this emphasis on the importance of viewing economic policy in an agenda perspective, little comes out of the analysis of the perceptions of crisis. Half-hearted attempts are made in the book to discuss government responses in terms of symbolic policies. But the result is essentially a set of often unsubstantiated observations that a particular response was partly or wholly predicated on symbolic considerations. This is a difficult area, and if attempts at an analysis of this kind are undertaken, they should be more seriously pursued. It is a pity that this is not done in the book since I believe it may turn out to be a particularly rewarding effort in the area of economic-crisis management. However, such an effort must be built on a much more profound understanding of prescriptive macroeconomics than is revealed in the book reviewed here. This is due to the fact that there are few if any policy areas where the role of theoretical knowledge, of scientific expertise, is more important. Such knowledge is not important in the sense that there is a 'best-solution' strategy available. (This has never been, and will in my view never be, the case as far as social-scientific knowledge is concerned.) But it is true in the sense that most national policy makers are perceiving problems, contemplating responses and judging results on the basis of 'some defunct economist', to use Keynes's words. To understand governmental policy – which is always a mixture of symbols and concrete actions – we have to understand who these defunct economists are and what prescriptions follow from their ideas.

This lack of interest in and/or knowledge of prescriptive macroeconomics is probably also largely responsible for the unsatisfactory discussion of policy impacts or results in the book. The best effort is made by Erik Damgaard who, starting from work by Harry Eckstein, tries to develop a set of criteria which includes both economic and political indicators. But generally it is again quite unsatisfactory that no serious attempt is made to tie in with the existing, quite ambitious contributions by political scientists, as in F. Castles's *Managing Mixed Economies* (de Gruyter, 1987).

The chapters reporting developments in the nine countries – the bulk of the book – are, as could be expected (and as reviewers always point out), of varying quality. In particular, those by the three editors – Erik Damgaard on Denmark, Peter Gerlich on Austria (with Wolfgang Müller) and Jeremy Richardson on Britain – provide interesting answers to the three sets of research questions. Others are interesting anyway; due to a dearth of English-language accounts and also because of the nature of the analysis of agenda building, I find Joan Subirats's piece on Spain especially worthwhile reading. A few contributions, however, are not at

all impressive even as descriptive accounts. This is true, for example, of Gunnel Gustafsson's chapter on Sweden. Relying largely on her own earlier work in various areas, particularly on local government, and on a wealth of rather undigested statistics she does not manage to provide interesting answers to the overall research questions. Some individual remarks are also a bit off the mark. For example, she argues that 'The post-1974 crisis period thus coincides with an unstable *parliamentary* situation. But there is no direct relationship between the two developments.' (p. 166). The truth is, of course, that the parliamentary situation is a key to an understanding of the perceptions as well as the responses of the various Swedish governments throughout the period.

In sum, then, this is a book with very modest theoretical ambitions. To end on a more positive note, however, I do not hesitate to recommend it to readers with a special interest in the area. Altogether, it adds significantly to our empirical knowledge about governmental responses in a number of Western countries to economic crisis in the 1970s and 1980s.

Rune Premfors, University of Stockholm

Risto Alapuro: *State and Revolution in Finland*. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1988, 315 pp.

The collapse of the three East European empires (the Ottoman, the Habsburg and the Russian) gave rise to all of twelve new states in Europe between 1830 and 1918. Among these, Finland occupies a special position through its political stability, democratic continuity and unbroken sovereignty. The present book is a major contribution to a broader understanding of the preconditions of this specifically Finnish path of political and social development.

The title of the book, and its cover design in particular, might lead one to believe that Alapuro has produced an intensive case-study of the 1918 Finnish Civil War. The study is, however, much broader in focus. The author wants to explain both the political mass mobilization of 1907, the rise and fall of the revolution in 1918 and the fascist-type reaction at the beginning of the 1930s. Explanatory factors are sought in the process of state making, in the external dependence of the county as well as in the Finnish class structure. The analysis is related to an East European, and to some extent a Scandinavian, comparison throughout the book.

The most obvious merit of this book is precisely this comparative design. The queries addressed by Alapuro have received ample attention in previous research; among other things, several solid English-language monographs have been published. Another one-country case study would hardly have been a major innovation in the field. Comparative studies, on the other hand, have the quality of pointing at new and interesting aspects of previously known facts and sources, and this is precisely the case with Alapuro's work as well. At the same time the author has not, eminently knowledgeable as he is concerning the historical source material in Finland, entirely kept to the limits posed by the comparative logic. His analysis of the Finnish case contains a number of interesting and potentially important observations beyond the strictly comparative frame of reference. The temptation to present large portions of his previous Finnish research to a broader international readership may lie behind Alapuro's choice here. Be that as it may, the result is