

mind us that public health-care provision and other government policies have cultural and cultural-institutional dimensions that are crucial to their legitimacy and efficiency. The shaping of the collective imaginaries of the modern European nation states in such a way as to promote increased inclusiveness towards minority cultures, as Kymlicka suggests, can cement social cohesion and solidarity, which are presently under growing strain. The legitimisation of the definitions of worthy life specific to various minorities and marginalised groups, proposed by Lamont, can also foster cohesion and solidarity. Keeping the public authorities alert and accountable through civil society mobilisation as Evans argues might prove to be an essential moment in the effort to preserve the capacity of the European welfare states to provide public goods in a future situation in which most socio-economic conditions will be much less favourable than they are today.

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***Agnieszka Paczyńska: State, Labor,
and the Transition to a Market Economy:
Egypt, Poland, Mexico and the Czech
Republic***

University Park, PA, 2009: Pennsylvania
State University Press, 256 pp.

Paczyńska has written an ambitious and thought-provoking book that seeks to explain labour's different degree of influence over the contentious issue of privatisation in four countries – Poland, Egypt, Mexico and the Czech Republic. The book makes a two-stage argument. First, labour's influence depends on the resources it holds when the struggle over privatisation begins. The most important resources are legal prerogatives, financial autonomy from

the state, and the experience of past labour-state confrontations. The second stage of the argument asks how labour was able to obtain those resources in certain cases. The answer lies in historical legacies, particularly the past (in)ability of ruling parties to construct sufficiently corporatist labour institutions. The ability of each ruling party to do so was in turn a product of the presence of internal struggles within the elite. When such divisions were present, they created political opportunities for labour, which was then able to extract concessions, and at least some of these concessions were central to shaping future labour-state conflicts.

Of the four cases, Mexico and the Czech Republic experienced limited elite divisions, and much more successful labour incorporation. In Egypt and Poland, in contrast, divisions within the ruling parties facilitated labour protests, which in both cases amounted to numerous contentious encounters with the state. These encounters led to considerable concessions, some of which were translated into resources (including the experience itself of such successful encounters), which were later used during the struggle over privatisation.

The ruling parties of all four cases looked to labour as a major pillar of support, at least nominally. The cases include two post-communist democracies, and two authoritarian polities (for Mexico, during the period examined). Each 'regime type' contains, from labour's perspective, a successful and unsuccessful case. The case selection thus controls for different type of ruling party (communist and authoritarian) as well as for the scope of the public sector to the privatised (ranging from little over 300 state-owned enterprises in Egypt to just under seven thousand in Poland).

Paczyńska begins with a puzzle (some of which is explicit in her writing, and some implicit). In both Poland and Egypt relatively powerful labour movements ap-

peared under very different repressive regimes. Labour protests arose in both countries in response to almost any attempt by the state to revise an implicit social contract (Paczyńska does not use this term, but it might have helped to explore its usefulness). In Poland price hikes most often prompted strikes. In a later period, despite democratisation in Poland and continued authoritarianism in Egypt, labour in both countries was able to protest impending privatisation, and shape the formation and implementation of privatisation policy. This is implicitly then a 'most different' case comparison: despite the many differences between Egypt and Poland, what do they have in common, in contrast to the control cases, that explains this similar outcome?

This reviewer must confess he knows little about the Mexican case, and even less about the Egyptian one. But Paczyńska argues convincingly that along with Poland's history of workers' uprisings and the Solidarity movement itself, the self-management strain of Solidarity was institutionalised in workers' councils, as well as the perception of social (as opposed to state) ownership. The power of these workers' councils persisted into the post-communist period, and helps explain why Poland, despite the implementation of 'shock therapy', experienced a much slower pace of privatisation compared with its neighbours (or even Russia).

The book makes a valuable distinction between substantive and procedural concessions to labour. In the case of Poland at least, substantive concessions led to procedural ones, as substantive concessions of a consumerist nature led eventually to economic problems such as foreign debt, which led to austerity measures and further strikes, which left only procedural concessions. These seemed a less costly option in the short term, but often had substantial and lasting consequences.

The shortcomings of the book come about from trying to distil the many varia-

bles in four different cases down to a small handful. The logic of choosing the Czech Republic as a contrast to Poland is clear enough, but there is no real explanation given for why Mexico was chosen as a contrast to Egypt. Some of the similarities between the very different cases of Poland and Egypt appear to be spurious. One factor that Poland and Egypt are said to share is the level of financial autonomy of their unions. Yet while Egyptian unions were permitted and even encouraged to engage in developing profitable enterprises on the side (something largely forbidden in the Communist setting), Poland's Solidarity gained its autonomy via financial support from abroad. While this helped Solidarity to survive martial law and re-emerge toward the end of the Communist period, it is unclear that this was a critical factor in explaining Poland's privatisation policy in the post-communist era.

Another shared factor, said to be a key variable explaining labour's ability to press its demands, is the internal management of ruling party disputes. However, while there may be a correlation between elite divisions and labour conflict, it is not clear there is causation, or at least that the causal arrow goes from intra-party divisions to labour protest. In Egypt, elite divisions meant different factions competed directly for labour support, and at times tried to mobilise workers as leverage. However, in Poland price increases typically led to strike waves, and the challenge of resolving these protests tended to deepen existing elite divisions, thus providing an opportunity for certain leaders and factions of Poland's ruling party to take power. Thus if anything it appears in Poland that, rather than elite divisions providing opportunities for workers, it was the reverse. (Paczyńska argues that elite divisions led to incoherence over economic policy, which created economic problems, but this is a difficult case to make.) Nor in the Czechoslovak case did elite divisions prompt worker protest.

While there were fewer such divisions in Czechoslovakia, and fewer strikes, even during the Prague Spring 'most workers remained disengaged' (p. 72) even if union leaders were supportive of reformers. (Yet before Solidarity, in Poland it was often unions rather than workers who were disengaged.)

Indeed, even between the 'most similar cases' of Poland and Czechoslovakia there are many other factors to consider, not least their differing past legacies of protest and resistance. As Paczyńska notes, '[t]he postwar history of Czechoslovakia evolved in marked contrast to the turbulent history of Poland' (p. 69), a statement that, with some exceptions, would be true of pre-war history as well. Thus, in Poland elite divisions were arguably less central than a deeper historical legacy of resistance, seen not only in worker protest but in the ability of peasants to successfully resist collectivisation and the Catholic Church to maintain substantial independence.

Thus, while the book is convincing that workers' councils in particular were able to influence the direction and scope of privatisation to a considerable degree, Polish Solidarity was arguably the largest and most successful workers' movement in history; that it would have some measurable impact on public policy, particularly when a 'Solidarity' government came to power with democratisation, is unsurprising. Viewed from 1989, this difference between Poland and the Czech lands would have been predictable.

What was surprising was that Polish labour had influence over public policy in rather unpredictable ways. As Paczyńska notes, the Solidarity union provided a 'protective umbrella' over reforms for the crucial initial period, refraining from strikes and other attempts to block shock therapy. Indeed, 'the Solidarity leadership did not just express premarket sentiments. It worked to ensure that these ideas became a reality' (p 160). Even workers' councils initially supported radical market reforms,

going so far as to fire managers who were not proceeding quickly enough with privatisation. While others, most notably David Ost, have discussed in detail the causes and consequences of Polish union leaders promoting policies clearly detrimental to workers' material interests, some more discussion of this point is warranted.

On the other hand, Paczyńska does make clear that despite what some might consider the ideological confusion of the Solidarity union leadership, workers' councils in Poland's enterprises did exert considerable influence over the implementation of privatisation policies, and thereby considerably slowed and shaped the privatisation process. Thus it would be misleading to say that in Poland labour was weak. Here it might be helpful to distinguish between the workplace or micro-level power of Poland's workers, including through workers' councils, compared with the very different and rather less influence that peak union federations (as opposed to Solidarity governments) had at the national level. This distinction helps explain why Polish workers had the most influence over privatisation, since this was a struggle over the workplaces themselves, rather than over other policies that were often set on the national level.

While the attempt to reduce these very different cases to a couple of independent variables is not ultimately satisfying, Paczyńska reminds us that even in this era of globalisation and union retrenchment, the ability of labour (and other social groups) to influence important policies is not uniform. Moreover, the case studies that make up the core of this book shed new light on even such familiar stories as labour's impact in Poland.

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