

I should begin by acknowledging that I am reviewing this book, not as an expert in this field but rather as someone with casual interest in the book's subject matter and a passing familiarity with the relevant literature.

This ambitious book reports the findings of a research project on how corporatism fared in the wake of the Great Recession. What is at stake is testing the proposition that corporatism has been weakened as states are on the same track, moving towards a neoliberal approach to policy making. To test the proposition the author focuses to three countries, i.e. Denmark, Austria and the Netherlands which the author claims are critical cases as the literature on corporatism indicates that these three countries have not gone down the neoliberal path to any significant extent. Thus, if the data show a weakening of corporatist arrangements in any of these three countries then we can be fairly certain that the same thing is happening elsewhere.

The author proposes three research questions to determine if this is the case (p.4):

1. To what extent are tripartite arrangements still used in work- and welfare related policy areas?
2. Are the social partners still able to influence the regulation of societal challenges through tripartite arrangements following the Great Recession?
3. Which factors best explain the development in the quantity and quality of corporatist arrangements?

As the author intends to examine the issue in depth he must necessarily limit the scope of inquiry and does so by focusing on three policy areas that cover large areas of work and welfare policy which are also traditional areas of social partner involvement, namely 1) active labour market policies, 2) unemployment insurance, and 3) continuing vocational training. The study is also focuses on agenda setting and to a lesser extent on policy formulation.

The data used to answer these question is composed of 42 semi-structured interviews with

key decision makers from government, social partners and researchers in the three countries under scrutiny.

This book has a lot to recommend it. It is clearly written and well structured. The author's review of relevant literatures is both concise and comprehensive and makes a good introduction for the lay reader whether they are new to the subject or need a brief refresher. The chapters on each country contain a lot of interesting information. The author is also admirably honest about the limitation of his study.

Does the author accomplish his task? The findings suggest that while corporatism seems to be holding its ground in Denmark it has fared slightly less well in Austria and the Netherlands. As these are critical cases, we can then assume that corporatism is on the defensive in most countries. The author, however, correctly points out that his findings does not show in what direction corporatism is retreating, whether it is moving uniformly towards neoliberalism, some other direction or even if all countries are moving in the same direction.

In fact Mailand's findings do suggest that changes to corporatist arrangement depend heavily on context. Nothing much happening in Denmark, whereas challenges to corporatism in Austria stem from political challenges and to a lesser extent worker 's organisational loss of power whereas the latter is the primary driver of changes in the Netherlands.

Strangely much of the praise for *Corporatism Since the Great Recession* claims that it demonstrates that corporatism is alive and well. To demonstrate that the critical cases would have had to be countries where we would expect corporatism to be particularly vulnerable and the findings should have shown that that corporatism was still going strong in those countries. Even then there would be ample room for doubt.

The literature on corporatism is riddled with conceptual and empirical problems and much of it is concerned with trying to determine which conditions give rise to corporatist arrangements. While there is nothing wrong with this preoccupation it is hard to resist the conclusion that it is nevertheless misguided. As Mailand observes, the wide range of ideas about what gives rise to tripartite corporatist arrangement, many of which have some

empirical support, is a source of confusion rather than clarity. Could it be any different?

It is here where I feel that *Corporatism Since the Great Recession* falls short. What is truly interesting about Mailand's findings is not that they lend support to the case that corporatist arrangements are under pressure. A casual glance at the literature reveals that we knew as much. By making that the point of departure for his study the important contribution of his study is relegated to the role of slightly bothersome facts that limit the book's contribution to the field.

In my view what is truly interesting about this study is the fact that drivers and directions of change would be so different in such a small sample of countries all of which can be seen as bastions of tripartite corporatism. This may indicate that rather than trying to come up with a general theory of corporatist arrangements the way towards understanding what is going on with corporatism today is rather to focus on governments and the social partners as strategic actors with specific objective acting in diverse and changing contexts. While neoliberal ideas may well be a part of many contexts it is likely only one influence among many, with history, culture, power resources, economic conditions and key actors probably playing substantial roles and pulling in different directions. But then, that wouldn't be the study of corporatism as a thing but rather the study of strategic interactions around policy making.

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