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Title: Social Security as a Means for Political Stability: A Law and Society Analysis

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Abstract

Although social security is recognized as a social right in the international law, it tends to be mainly the countries of Western Europe (mostly EU member states) that have well-developed and extensive social security systems. There has been no thorough analysis of why the development of these rights greatly varies across countries and regions. Significantly for an understanding of this variation, little reference has been made to historical reasons and conditions for the development of social security systems. In this regard, as an antidote to severe political and social turbulence in the 19th and 20th centuries, Western European countries have implemented ambitious social policies that covered broader sections of the population, as social security was an effective and legitimate instrument for maintaining political and social stability. Due to an unwillingness and inability to use coercive structures, social security was a means for the propagation of state authority.

This paper begins to redress this lacuna by historicizing international trends regarding social security; and it will, by taking Sweden as a case study, test the controversial association between social rights and political stability. In undertaking this task, the paper provides a historical account of welfare reforms in Sweden. In this article, I argue and demonstrate with historical evidence that even in the Swedish context, social rights legislation was, in every respect, a political stability and security project retooled by Swedish policymakers to promote political stability and security in times of crises. Thus, this article is based on the hypothesis that when coercive structures fail or do not adequately address political instability, welfare reforms (as a non-coercive strategy) can become an alternative means for maintaining political and social stability. Conversely, when non-coercive measures fail, governments largely opt for coercive measures to ensure political stability. In this regard, the findings of this article will have policy implications for those countries that suffer from chronic political and social instability.