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Post-war Welfare Policies

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The Great War gave new impulses to the further development of public welfare systems which had emerged in previous decades. The desire for the social protection of the population and the restoration of economic and living conditions destroyed by the conflict supported the increase of public intervention, social insurance systems and modern services. Even though the dramatic conditions of the 1920s reduced the capacity of many measures, they laid the foundations for the future development of universalistic social security systems.

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Introduction

Scholars in recent decades have shown the importance of World War I in establishing new state interventions in the economic and social field. The planning efforts of the state during the mobilization for war brought to the implementation of compensation measures for the civil population, for the workers employed in the war industries and the millions of wounded and family members of fallen soldiers. There was a nexus between the warfare state and the welfare state, insofar as the reaction to the social consequences of a [total conflict](#) and the need for national efficiency brought about an

increase in the planning capacity of states in the sphere of social security.^[1] The temporary public policies of wartime were maintained and consolidated after the war in order to face the increasing needs of post-war societies. Demobilization and the reconversion of the economy was far from painless and peaceful: unemployment became a large problem, not only for millions of soldiers returning home, but also for many persons dismissed from war factories. State intervention became necessary to ease the transition and stabilize the labour market. There was an additional urgency to assist millions of war disabled, widows and orphans who found themselves in dramatically poor conditions after the war.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, acute social tensions pushed governments to continue state intervention in the social and economic sphere. Mass society held the state responsible for the social question and the accomplishment of extensive social reforms. This new pressure came from below, from those who had served in national armies or had been mobilized for the war economy. Trade unions, which had cooperated with the state and employers during the war, now wanted more influence for the working class in the production system. In addition, war victims and veterans organized themselves into large pressure movements. For example, the international organization CIAMAC (*Conférence internationale des associations de mutilés et anciens combattants*) represented the interests of about 10 million veterans from all belligerent countries in the interwar period.

Soldiers, workers, invalids and survivors wanted the national “debt of gratitude” paid not only with symbolic pensions, but with extended public programs of economic protection. In several countries the masses asked not to return to the pre-1914 status quo. On the contrary, they requested the acknowledgment of new social rights.

Projects of state restructuring in more democratic and inclusive terms took shape in Central Europe (Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia) under pressure from revolutionary movements. Here social democratic governments used social reforms to modify capitalism but at the same time to avoid its overthrow by the revolution. Social democratic leaders like Friedrich Ebert (1871-1925) in Germany or Otto Bauer (1881-1934) in Austria declared that reforms were as radical as a revolution but were less costly and were indubitably less socially dangerous.^[2]

The defense of internal peace through the establishment of social reforms was not only needed in states born out of the fall of the Central Powers. Victorious nations including France and the United States also saw social policies as an essential compensation tool. In pre-fascist Italy, liberal governments tried to mitigate social conflicts by starting an intense program of social reforms in 1919. It was intended to establish, as Prime Minister Francesco Saverio Nitti (1868-1953) emphasized, a democracy founded on social principles. Though Britain experienced social conflicts of a lower intensity than other countries, it did not underestimate the political importance of reforms. In his 1919 election campaign, David Lloyd George (1863-1945) declared that he wanted to build “a country fit for the heroes,” recognizing the enormous contribution made by veterans and war victims to the nation. Already in 1917 the Ministry of Reconstruction headed by Christopher Addison (1869-

1951) had fixed its aim not on the return to the conditions of 1914, but on “moulding a better world out of social and economic conditions which have come into being during the war.”^[3] For this reason it became necessary to complete a program of reforms including health, housing, education and unemployment policies.

Issues of social justice and the need for order in post-war governments were both central to the development of social legislations after 1918, the dual nature of which was represented by the persistent interconnection between material and financial matters on the one hand and symbolic and moral aspects on the other. These emerged, however, in a context of emergency and suffered the instability of the first half of the 1920s. Even so, they brought about new innovative approaches in confronting social questions and anticipated future tendencies of “total” intervention of the state in social security.

This article will provide a general overview of the development of social policies in the first post-war years. It will stress the birth of a new international debate on the most urgent social issues. Labour represented the first field in which different nations tried to find a common ground for the discussion of adequate solutions. In this way the Great War produced a process of interconnection between individual national contexts and the emergence of a common perception of the social question. This article will also show how social problems pushed, often in similar ways, several former belligerent countries to develop large scale health, education and war victims relief systems.

Labour and Unemployment Policies

The regeneration of national economies at the end of war was closely linked to the need to find a solution to labour problems where the greatest social tensions were nested. All countries faced similar problems concerning labor reconversion and the risk of mass unemployment. During the Paris peace conference all belligerent powers declared their concern for the new dimension of the social question and admitted the importance of activating an international debate on the most urgent labour issues. The internationalization of labour problems became one of the most peculiar aspects of the immediate aftermath of World War I. Transnational connections between labour and social policy experts, politicians and members of trade unions existed already before the war for the purpose of developing better labour conditions across the industrial sector. Their earlier partnership originated some important results, such as the resolutions of the International Association for Labour Legislation in Bern in 1913 for the prohibition of night work for young persons and the ten hour work day.

The Treaty of Versailles reconnected with these precedents by sanctioning the creation of an International Labour Organization (ILO) with a base in Geneva. The ILO was born as body of the League of Nations which would share individual national approaches to labour problems and find common solutions. According to Stephan Bauer (1865-1934), the first director of the Labour Office, the primary objective of the ILO was to achieve “a society of nations founded on peace and social

justice”^[4] through “social efficiency” in every country and the uniformity of labor legislations. One of the organization’s primary goals was the acknowledgment by all nations of the objective risk inherent in industrial labour. Principal points of the ILO’s program in its first session in Washington in 1919 were the introduction of the eight hour day, unemployment prevention and the regulation of women and children’s working conditions. The ILO developed international models for accident insurance which would also protect the rights of immigrant workers in other countries.^[5] The ILO tried to give recommendations and issue general guidelines for the modernization of national legislations, heading their integration in an international socio-economic context. It stimulated not only the international debate on social reforms, but also the foundation of an international labour law. ILO’s agreements concerning the fight against unemployment, the improvement of labour conditions of industrial and agricultural workers and the regulation of work for women and children demonstrated in fact the internationalization of these issues. Nevertheless, the results of ILO’s work could be seen only in the aftermath of World War II when the organization received more resources and authority. In the interwar period, even before the crisis of 1929 which reduced drastically the space for international cooperation in the creation of social policies, it had only a limited influence on national legislations.^[6]

In the field of codification of labour relations, Germany was the country which most embraced the tendencies initially expressed by the ILO. While compulsory accident, sickness and old age insurances had already been introduced in the 1880s, labour relations remained backwards in Wilhelmine Germany. After the war the importance given to the regulation of labour relations was linked to the will of social democratic governments to reduce the revolutionary potential of soldiers and workers councils, institutionalizing them inside an ordered socio-economic system. By the end of 1918, the demobilization office indicated the principal objectives of the new German welfare state: an eight hour day, national collective contracts and state arbitration in labour conflicts. All these were introduced by the first half of 1919. Article 165 of the May 1919 constitution established the creation of industrial councils with equal representation of employers and employed. Labour relations assumed a conciliar nature, even if not in as radical a way as in Soviet Russia. Similar measures can be found in Austria where the Social Democrats contrasted the radicalization of political conflicts with an intense program of social reforms. Industrial councils were introduced in 1919 and in 1920 the Chamber of Labour was created. The measures of both Germany and Austria had the double objective of fixing the social structure of the new republican regimes while at the same time preserving the capitalist system from the soviet “drift.” They tried to mitigate the most dramatic effects of capitalism by giving the working classes limited access to the means of production and providing an enduring state intervention in labour conflicts. However, it is necessary to remember that these programs achieved only partial results and represented a temporary compromise between employers and trade unions, both in the case of the Stinnes-Legien agreement in Germany and in the Austrian case where employers challenged the reforms introduced as soon as the revolutionary wave subsided after 1920.

The governments of other countries did not go so deep into the regulation of labour relations. Instead, they prioritized the further extension of accident insurance to new groups and the improvement of

safety standards in the factories. This occurred thanks to the active cooperation of trade unions in developing improvement measures in the social system after their complete acknowledgment as legitimate organizing bodies by the state and employers associations. The institutionalization of labour relations was viewed with some distrust, above all in nations with older liberal traditions. In Britain for example, the state interference in labour contracts was taboo as was the resistance of the trade unions to every regulation in this area. Trade unions thought that they had reached a decisive influence on the economic system thanks to the increased mobilization capacity of workers. Thus, they wanted to compete on the same level as employers organizations in a free play of opposing forces. The principle of bargaining freedom prevailed against too restrictive institutional controls. This turned out to be disadvantageous for the workers in the long run, as the bitter epilogue to trade union struggles in the 1920s demonstrated.

Deeper interventions in labour policies were connected almost everywhere to the control of the labour market which allowed for the elimination of some acute imbalances. Unemployment became a constant problem in many countries after 1918. Most had not yet introduced public measures to safeguard against it before 1914 and during the conflict they were misled by a wartime context of full employment. The destabilization of the labour market at the end of war changed the perception of unemployment which was no more a temporary and delimited problem for a specific category of workers, but an enduring and widespread one. Only Britain could count on pre-war unemployment insurance. The British National Insurance Act of 1911 had a limited extension which covered a restricted number of workers, about 2.3 million. During demobilization the system was extended with the introduction of "out-of-work-donations" for soldiers and civilians. It guaranteed a minimum level of assistance for a large number of persons waiting to be reemployed. The persistence of high levels of unemployment two years after the conflict brought about the introduction of a structural reform of insurance. The Unemployment Insurance Act of 1920 extended insurance to some 20 million workers. The state, which had abstained from any intervention in labour relationships, put social security at the centre of the protections against market dysfunctions.

The war also stimulated the development of the Italian welfare state. In 1917 accident insurance for agrarian workers was introduced as a reward for their enormous blood sacrifice at the front. Another program of reforms in the post-war years began with the reorganization and consolidation of the National Insurance Institute founded in 1912. In 1919 accident insurance was extended to all male and female employees under the age of seventy and compulsory unemployment insurance was instated. The law was structured around temporary allowances and a tight net of local and national employment agencies.

In Austria unemployment insurance was introduced in the most radical phase of the revolution and was used to plug all the old legislative gaps of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and to develop a strict public control over the labour market. It limited the dismissal right of employers and all private enterprises were required to extend their employee quotas in order to reduce the unemployment rate. In May 1920 compulsory insurance was established which covered all employees who had been registered for health care insurance since 1918. The state had to cover a third of the cost, while the

remainder was shared equally by the insured and their employers.

In Hungary reforms were hampered by the chaotic situation created by the Council Dictatorship of [Béla Kun \(1886-1938\)](#) and the following counter-revolutionary reaction. Social measures such as the eight hour day or the introduction of labour rights for women had only limited effects while unemployment and land reform remained unresolved problems.

In Germany the demobilization of 8 million soldiers and 3 million employees in the war industry proceeded very rapidly and seemed initially successful. A Labour Ministry with a huge bureaucratic apparatus was created. The Ministry accelerated the reinstatement of unemployed in new places of work through the organization of a national system of employment agencies. At the beginning of 1919, 1 million workers were registered as unemployed. The authorities hoped to support these workers temporarily with extraordinary allowances. These were dispensed mostly by the cities. However, the situation did not improve in the post-war economic climate which was further damaged by the Ruhr Crisis of 1923. The decree on unemployment allowances made by the demobilization office was modified eighteen times in the 1920s, demonstrating the republican government's insecure approach to the problem. Only in 1927, when the municipalities could no longer bear the costs of assistance, compulsory insurance was introduced by the Labour Ministry to be financed by the contribution of the state, employers and the insured.

During the war, France had developed a limited system of employment aids through the creation of local employment offices and the allocation of temporary allowances for those production sectors which were put in crisis by the war. However, a national unemployment law similar to the industrial accident pensions of 1898 was not introduced. Even if in comparison with the pre-war years state expenditure for unemployment relief grew, after the war the question was left largely to the cities. France's economic situation in the 1920s was also somewhat peculiar in the post-war years as there was a lack of workforce in some expanding sectors, heavy industry in particular. Therefore, the threat of mass unemployment was less felt in France than in other countries.^[7]

In the United States there were no public programs to combat unemployment until the 1930s. A large opposition to "statism" or "state socialism" and the attempt to dismantle the economic regulations of war period halted every measure of great significance. However, some forms of public intervention, above all employment policies under state supervision in some economic sectors, survived as legacy of war. To facilitate the return of the veterans to their previous workplaces and to protect the integrity of the labour market, a system of employment boards were created, especially in the agrarian states. Similar measures were carried out in Canada and [Australia](#) where there were larger measures for the integration of veterans into the public administration.

Every state was confronted with unemployment but only in some cases were national systems of protection introduced. Even if unemployment was no longer seen as an individual responsibility but ever more as a natural collateral risk of capitalism, public interventions were in many cases still uncertain. Unemployment measures were mostly experiments which not infrequently came up

against the many problems of post-war years. The British system suffered immediately from a dramatic lack of funds in the face of 12 percent unemployment (17 percent of all insured) in 1921. The state encountered constant difficulties in paying allowances and the system continued with ups and downs until the depression of 1929 when it entered a phase of profound crisis. The British authorities were then forced to turn increasingly to the doles system for the poor. In Italy employment agencies found hard to function properly and insurance remained almost completely on paper.

[Fascism](#) gradually abandoned the unemployment insurance system and suppressed unemployment agencies towards the middle of the 1920s.

Though many countries refused to legally codify labour relations and unemployment insurances remained limited in their development, the unemployment policies of the 1920s were important. They provided a precedent for the further and more effective state intervention in the crisis period of the 1930s and after World War II. Minimal state intervention in economic and social matters, which was idealized in some liberal circles and all the enemies of “state socialism,” was no more practicable. A return to “business as usual” was not possible. From this point of view, the war brought about a radical change because it made generally acceptable the idea of state control, or at least supervision, of all aspects concerning labour.

Health Care, Education and Housing

The economic recovery of nations did not depend only on the labour question. National governments were called to satisfy primary needs of populations impoverished and weakened by the long war. The increase of state competences in many sectors during the war resolved itself in the following years in an attempt to consolidate centralized social systems.

The improvement of hospital structures and social services for the disabled represented a point of departure for the modernization of health care systems under state control. Already existing health insurances were expanded by increasing services for more recipients. Due to the dramatic losses of wartime, countries concentrated on the demographic issue, acknowledging the right of a minimum guaranteed aid for disability or sickness. France estimated the loss of one inhabitant every thirty and Germany one for every thirty-five. The support of motherhood became important to reverse the negative trend of female and infant mortality which had dramatically increased during the war and in particular in the aftermath of the 1918 [Spanish flu](#) epidemic. Thus, relief for mothers and children was gradually removed from philanthropic efforts, though often a strong dualism remained between public and private assistance. At any rate, state intervention was indispensable to rationalize many different assistance activities.^[8]

Public policies for youth education were connected with post-war governments' tendency to extend their responsibility to guarantee the revitalization of society through the moral development of future citizens and workers. The German law for young relief of 1922 (*Reichsjugendwohlfahrtsgesetz*) represented a significant effort in this vein. The law highlighted above all education aspects, as confirmed by the introduction of a general right to education and the state's obligation to intervene

where families could not provide for the education of their children. Germany's financial difficulties and the resistance of regional and local authorities to the law reduced its impact considerably. However, the law did reorder the chaotic situation of youth and childhood relief of the *Kaiserreich* through the bureaucratization of activities previously under the control of philanthropic initiatives and the creation of youth agencies all over the country.

Family policies were particularly important in France where the persistent problem of the decreasing birthrate was front and center. French authorities paid attention to the improvement of health service and intervened, although not in the place of private and local organizations, to improve their efficiency. The services delivered by municipal health agencies were extended and subjected to an intense process of bureaucratization. A veritable administrative revolution occurred during the 1920s, even though the autonomy of many local authorities was not completely eroded. Numerous municipal "mini welfare states" were born in those years. They compensated with ever more modern and rational services for the absence of a national relief system. These efforts, as well as the brief political experience of the *Cartel des gauches* in the mid 1920s, bore fruits later when Raymond Poincaré's (1860-1934) government introduced national health care insurance in 1928. The law had many limits (for example unemployed persons were excluded) but also some innovative elements, such as the partial or total covering of most costs for medical treatments, medicaments and hospitalization. In Britain a Ministry of Health was created in 1919. This integrated the tasks of the old poor law but did not take the place of its divisions. Some services provided by the poor law were modernized and extended to the whole population. British authorities paid particular attention to the improvement of child education and tried for some time to develop a system "from nursery to university" with the abolition of school fees for poorer classes and increased access to higher levels of education. In Italy the most important fascist social measure in the 1920s was the creation of a National Board for Motherhood and Childhood (*Opera nazionale maternità e infanzia* or ONMI) in 1925. Fascism was here influenced by the family policies of wartime and especially by the law regarding the patronage of war orphans of 1917. Despite the many limits of its organization, ONMI was indispensable in bringing order to a galaxy of more than 6,000 public and private bodies which previously managed autonomously health and economic care for mothers and children.

Post-war authorities gave great consideration to housing problems which were also connected to health and hygiene issues. Housing conditions had dramatically worsened during the war and after 1918 a housing shortage became particularly problematic.^[9] The situation was worst above all in industrial cities where the massive immigration of workers during the war had produced overpopulation and poor living conditions. Thus, when resources and a workforce for civil construction became available once again after 1918, the foundations were laid for public housing programs on a large scale. In many cases, however, the houses offered by authorities were limited or inadequate for the increasing demand and the results were sometimes nullified by the financial weakness of governments. British authorities made great efforts until 1922 and oversaw the construction of over 110,000 houses. In Germany public housing policies increased considerably. Here state intervention was concentrated on the internal colonization of rural regions and the

consequent protection of small landowners. The state tried to support the agrarian sector after the war and to block the excessive concentration of properties in the hands of few large landowners. In a similar way the French *Loi Loucheur* of 1928 provided funds for the construction of about 260,000 houses, though the program was interrupted in 1929. Even US federal authorities had some interest in the housing condition of workers. In United States there was no federal housing policy before the war. However, the social needs of many workers employed in the war industries led the national administration to start several programs of public constructions. The United States Housing Corporation built houses for 7,000 single persons and 6,000 families, while another organization, the Emergency Fleet Corporation, provided about 8,000 houses for workers and their families in war shipyards.

War Victims Policies

A special area of development for public social policies was war victims relief. State intervention for disabled soldiers, widows and orphans expanded gradually during the war since the old military pensions and traditional local relief appeared inadequate. The victims included all classes and labour groups and therefore necessitated the development of systems able to provide more services and give common guidelines for the relief of entire national territories. The centralization of war victims relief was common to all belligerent nations. Everywhere central bodies – Britain, Italy and France created a specific ministry in 1916, 1917 and 1920 respectively – assumed the supervision of local institutions, philanthropic organization and civil committees.

The transnational tendency should not be underestimated in this completely new field of social relief. Every country took great interest in what other belligerents were doing to solve the problem and was particularly open to assimilating approaches from abroad. Of particular importance were international contacts between orthopedic experts. Though limited by the war, the interconnection was not totally lost. German doctors' approach to the rehabilitation of the disabled provided a model for Italian experts who continued to observe their German colleagues as much as those from France and Britain. In 1917 the Entente powers decided to develop common solutions for the labour reinstatement and protection against unemployment for millions of disabled soldiers. There was an intense confrontation between doctors, public functionaries and social policy experts who met in annual interallied conferences (Paris 1917, London 1918, Rome 1919) where they showed their own nation's approaches and tried to find common strategies for the post-war years.

The limited nature of temporary war relief did not guarantee satisfying results, in particular since the problem assumed mass proportion after the war. By the end of war Germany calculated over 1.5 million disabled persons and almost 2 million widows and orphans, to whom at least another million families of "great invalids" and other dead soldiers' relatives had to be added. France had the same number of disabled as Germany, 630,000 soldiers' relatives and about 1.4 million widows and orphans. Countries like Britain and Italy had more than a million victims. The numbers in smaller countries were far from irrelevant: in Czechoslovakia 575,000 disabled and survivors represented

approximately 4 percent of entire population. The situation in Austria, Hungary, [Romania](#) and [Poland](#) was similar. The ILO in 1923 estimated around 7 million war disabled, although it did not include statistics from some countries.^[10]

The existence of millions of victims often in dire conditions represented a common legacy of the Great War for all belligerent countries. The introduction of national relief systems became the first essential step towards healing the open wounds of the society and to reabsorb the traumatic experience of the war. War victims relief, which was emphasized as a demonstration of gratitude of the whole nation, represented a proof of legitimacy for the governments called on to repair the damages of a catastrophic conflict. All former belligerent countries made huge efforts to do their “moral duty” for war victims. Most pension and relief laws were introduced between 1919 and 1920.^[11]

In some cases there was a totally new legal interpretation of the state’s intervention abilities for war victims and the founding of laws around novel ideas of social rights. The French law of March 1919 was the first to introduce a right to compensation (*droit à réparation*) for war victims. The war became understood as an objective risk to which all mobilized citizens were subjected. The state was called upon to compensate automatically for all physical damages and deaths caused by military service. It had to provide not only pensions but also health services for all disabled veterans and reinstatement policies for all those still able to work. The return to work (*les remettre au travail*) required an intense state intervention in the labour market to control the dynamics of supply and demand. The state had to guarantee its disabled the opportunity to be active citizens and not passive recipients of public charity. At the same time it was responsible for the protection of orphans who had been declared the children of the nation (*pupilles de la nation*) during the war. The state had to provide for their health, education and future as productive citizens with all resources at its disposal. As a mark of the extent of French measures, in 1939 10 percent of the French population received a pension connected with the war and 16 percent of tax incomes was assigned to the war victim’s relief.^[12]

The return to work as a social therapy was also at the center of German legislation. Pensions remained relatively low compared to the cost of living. In fact it was expected that those receiving assistance would rapidly become independent by working again. However, the state was now obliged to provide directly all necessary means to reintegrate the disabled into society as productive citizens. In 1920 the national relief law (*Reichsversorgungsgesetz*) guaranteed free health care, physical rehabilitation and work retraining. Combined with the law on compulsory employment, public offices and private enterprises were bound to employ a number of war disabled in proportion to the overall amount of those employed. For those seriously disabled and widows with children who were unable to work or had difficulties in finding a job, the state assured more protections such as higher pensions and allowances against inflation. The implementation of all social measures demanded the supervision of a centralized state. To this end, a specific bureaucracy of 45,000 employees and 330 national and local offices was created. The expenditure for war pensions and social relief amounted

to between 10 and 17 percent of the ordinary state budget in the years 1919-1922. The war victims' relief law was one of the first expressions of Germany's constitutional guarantee of new social rights to work and protection against economic risks. It also represented an effort which was greater than Germany's post-war resources could handle. State responsibility for war victims suffered and, with the dramatic consequences of hyperinflation, it was drastically reduced by the returning of many duties to local administrations.

Much less oriented to the acknowledgment of a right to compensation was the legislation in Britain, the British Dominions and USA. Britain intended to avoid at all costs the creation of a specific social group of war victims which would benefit from specific rights. The "royal warrant" of 1919 established economic compensation on the basis of national gratitude. This was not a right because the receiver had to give a proof of the connection between the physical damage and military service. The wounded could alternatively choose a pension connected to pre-war income if it was higher than the normal pension. The "alternative pension" undermined the principles of solidarity and equality among the war victims because it advantaged those with higher incomes and stressed the social differences. The British law distanced itself from the French model, in which the only parameter was physical disability. It was also far from the German model, in which income differences were compensated by a progressive system of taxation of pensions. Following the liberal tradition of British philanthropy, the state in Britain played a less active role with regards to the war victims as compared to other European countries. Its intervention was limited to support the aid programs promoted by voluntary organizations. These did their best to assist war victims in their reinstatement, providing them with economic relief in the difficult post-war years. Voluntarism and philanthropism mobilized people's solidarity and played an essential role of "mediation" between the state and war victims. Thus, disabled veterans and survivors were included in post-war society despite the lack of adequate public policies.

Far from granting an expressed right to work or reintegrate into post-war society, the legislation of the United States was based on a vague principle of national gratitude. Besides the pensions already introduced after the Civil War, the United States created a system of individual insurance through a Bureau of War Risk Insurance. The pensions were provided with parsimony and the system restrictive. Unlike the British law, there were no further medical examinations after the delivery of pension and so there was no risk that war victims would see their benefits cancelled or reduced.

A middle way between the British and United States model were the legislations of countries like Canada, Australia and [New Zealand](#). In these cases the state assumed only limited tasks. In addition, the number of war victims was comparatively lower in these countries, 75,000 in Australia and 20,000 in New Zealand, and did not require large public interventions. These countries found a solution in the provision of subsidized credits from banks to improve agricultural colonization and in the facilitation of employers who voluntarily decided to reemploy the war disabled.

The idea of national gratitude was particularly stressed by governments of Eastern European countries where the material relief of war victims intersected with the rhetoric of national unity. This

was the case in Czechoslovakia where the social democratic government placed the care and glorification of victims who had made a sacrifice for the national cause at the forefront of their political program. The Czechoslovak bureaucracy was also moved by a strong will to act better than the old Austro-Hungarian authorities which had remained guiltily passive in regards to social policies until end of the war. After November 1918 the new Austrian authorities felt themselves responsible for a change of approach in social matters and introduced the *Invalidenentschädigungsgesetz* (disabled compensation law) in 1919, one of the first and most advanced measures of the new Austrian Republic. In Poland the debate was influenced by Germany and France's discourse about the right to work. Therefore, Polish legislation was strongly oriented towards employment measures in favour of war victims. On the other hand, the disabled who had fought in other armies represented a category of minor importance for public relief compared to the soldiers and veterans of the newly constituted Polish National Army.

In 1917 Italy was the first belligerent country to introduce a national agency for war disabled relief (ONIG) and made some innovative interventions in favour of orphans. The institutional continuity between wartime and post-war period represented an obstacle for the development of a war victims law. The weak liberal governments after 1918 failed to unify the emergency measures of wartime into an organic reform. The only important measure of the post-war period was the obligation for all private enterprises to employ one disabled veteran for every twenty people employed. In larger sectors, for example in heavy industry, the war disabled had to constitute 5 percent of the entire workforce. After 1923, however, fascism limited these dispositions and directed most of the disabled veterans to public employment. This was a general tendency for all belligerents and also Germany, Austria, Poland and France oriented themselves in this direction.

Post-war states often had extreme difficulties in enacting measures for invalids and survivors because of chronic financial scarcities and the lack of coordination between different local institutions. Attention to war victims relief further decreased when in the first half of 1920s there was a large scale deterioration of social and economic conditions and governments had to assist more social groups than before. The experimental legislation of the immediate post-war period was gradually readjusted and cut down. In many countries it was turned over again to local authorities or philanthropic endeavours in order to reduce the high costs of the national relief systems. At any rate, Pensions could not keep up with rising inflation and not infrequently risked bringing the bearer under the minimum standard of living. Labour reinstatement, which had been the primary objective in all countries, encountered enormous difficulties in conjunction with increasing unemployment rates. On the one hand, the market could not reemploy large quantities of disabled workers. On the other hand, many employers did not observe the guidelines while governments hesitated to sanction too sharply those who were neglectful in order to avoid a further depression of economic system. In a large part the reinstatement of war victims in the free market remained on the paper. The alternative then became the progressive diversion of many war disabled to the public employment in the postal service, railways or communal offices of social insurances.

Nevertheless, the effort made by many governments in the aftermath of war to introduce, even if

only in partial ways, a control on the labour market in favour of weaker and less competitive groups must be underlined. Also widow and orphan relief produced important impulses to reinforce state capacity to intervene in the family sphere, both to preserve incomes and living conditions and to promote better social opportunities for children. State intervention, in particular in the material relief and education of orphans, implied a visible weakening of traditional private or confessional charity structures which often had represented on a local level a parallel reality, essentially free from the state's intrusion.

Of particular significance was the role of war disabled relief in the development of public health care systems. Where previously health services were left to a multitude of public and private bodies, the post-war period brought about the clearing of obsolete systems, the consolidation of public hospitals and the standardization of services on a national level. Health services developed for the war disabled, including surgical and orthopaedic relief, physical rehabilitation, therapy for physical or psychic diseases, provided important impulses for the foundation of future public and free national health systems.

Even the decentralization of the 1920s was never really a step backwards, as it was seen by war victims. The cuts made to the system were useful in reducing the costs of bureaucracies which had increased too much in the previous years. On the other hand, the passage of many services to municipalities, such as health care, pensions supply and employment reinstatement, stressed a process of modernization of local institutions and also involved many private organisations. This signalled a progressive departure from the old individualistic and charitable approach to the poor relief and to the development of modern social services for large groups of people.

Conclusion

The social policies in the aftermath of Great War mark an essential transition phase in the development of universalistic welfare state systems. The state was asked to interact with new forces in mass society and to confront social problems which were no longer only connected to the issues of the working class. The need to mediate between opposing interests in modern societies and to repair the unbalances of the economic system increased the compensatory role of states. The bureaucratization and better organization of social structures as well as the legal statement of social rights were the most evident results of this new configuration. Even if old assistance traditions survived – workhouses for the poor were abolished in Britain only in 1929 – they appeared definitively obsolete in comparison with more modern insurance systems.

There was not, however, any irreversible process of state control of social relief. On the contrary, philanthropy continued to play an important role after the war. Traditional bodies, like charity organisations, friendly societies and mutual associations tenaciously resisted the emergence of the centralized state which they saw as a menace to their survival. These organisations also proved necessary to close the gaps in state intervention. This explains, for example, why, despite the push towards the centralization of relief systems, new modern social security systems and old local

structures of the poor relief coexisted for a long time. Wartime regulation was mainly useful to rationalize and make their activities more efficacious.

Change and continuity characterized the history of social policies in the 1920s. Social laws were developed in a period of great instability which sometimes nullified their consolidation or contributed to their limited extent. As governments faced increased difficulty with moving their social programs forward, private organisations earned again their positions lost at the end of war. The crisis of 1929 brought to light the fragility of the social legislations of the previous decade. The dramatic economic situation of the 1930s and after World War II led the way to much more pervasive initiatives for the consolidation of universalistic public systems of social security. The experiments of the 1920s provided the essential impulses for the programs of the following decades and established the fundamentals for a “total” state intervention in the social question.

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Notes

1. ↑ On the nexus between warfare and welfare state cf. De Maria, William: *Combat and Concern: The Warfare-Welfare Nexus*, in: *War & Society* 7 (1989), pp. 72-85; Klausen, Jytte: *War and Welfare. Europe and the United States, 1945 to the Present*, New York 1998.
2. ↑ Hanisch, Ernst: *Der lange Schatten des Staates. Österreichische Gesellschaftsgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*, Vienna 1994, p. 275.
3. ↑ Fraser, Derek: *The Evolution of the British Welfare State. A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution*, New York 2009, p. 211.
4. ↑ Bauer, Stephan: *International Labour Legislation and the Society of Nations* (Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics No. 254), Washington 1919, p. 115.
5. ↑ Other resolutions concerned better labour conditions for seamen and agricultural workers and regulation of conditions in many others productive sectors. Cf. Barnes, George: *History of the International Labour Office*, London 1926, pp. 100-103.
6. ↑ On importance of ILO see the recent book by Cabanes, Bruno: *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924*, Cambridge 2014, especially pp. 75-136.
7. ↑ Unemployment in France increased visibly in the 1930s. However, the French rate remained during the whole interwar period much lower than most European countries. Cf. Perry, Matt: *Prisoners of Want. The Experience and Protest of the Unemployed in France, 1921-45*, Ashgate and Aldershot 2007.
8. ↑ An implicit objective was the stimulation of birthrate with the improvement of health conditions for mothers and children and the introduction at the same time of restrictive measures (for example the interdiction of contraceptive and abortion in France in 1920).
9. ↑ Belgium and France in particular were confronted with the dramatic situation of entire regions destroyed by the enemy occupation.

10. † Internationales Arbeitsamt: Die Arbeitsfürsorge für Beschädigte (Sachverständigenzusammenkunft auf dem Gebiete der Arbeitsfürsorge für Beschädigte), Geneva 1923, p. 13.
11. † Cf. Dick, Alfred: Die Kriegsbeschädigtenversorgung, Frankfurt Main 1930. See Cabanes, The Origins of Humanitarianism 2014, pp. 17-74.
12. † Jackson, Harriet: L'impact de la guerre 1914-1918 sur la protection sociale. In: Gueslin, André and Guillaume, Pierre (eds.): De la Charité Médiévale à la Sécurité Sociale. Paris 1992, pp. 117-122.

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