Excerpts from 6 book reviews

   
   ‘Quite an extraordinary book. One rarely reads an edited volume in which contributors engage each other the way they do in this book. This is largely the accomplishment of the editors ... As with their earlier work they have set a tight, novel theoretical agenda, which stimulated and guided the exemplary crew who contributed to the volume. The volume offers a persuasive historical institutional analysis of East European welfare states ... this is a balanced evaluation of path-dependency and path departure, continuity and change. ... Pieter Vanhuysse persuasively argues that the construction of this emergency welfare state to a large extent was driven by immediate political needs of ruling political elites. In the new democracies the core of the electorate had to be protected from the high social costs of market transitions. In the Visegrad countries, sending laid-off workers into pensions, which were relatively well protected (p. 87) was the mechanism to buy political peace from older people who were more likely to vote anyway. In the Baltic States the same aim was achieved by not giving citizenship to the Russian minorities, hence dislodging class conflict into an ethnic one (pp. 68-69). These largely ad hoc, politically motivated emergency measures were frozen into lasting structures and this resulted in the hybrid character of post-communist welfare states, which carry elements of conservative, social democratic, and neoliberal systems. ... This is an agenda setting book, the most comprehensive, theoretically sophisticated work in the emergent large body of literature on post-communist welfare regimes.’

2. Critical Social Policy, Vol. 30, No. 4, pp. 594-596:

   ‘Surprisingly, and in contrast to the voluminous literature on the economic transition from communism to capitalist democracy in Europe, the transformation of welfare after communism has remained largely uncharted. With the present edited volume, Alfio Cerami and Pieter Vanhuysse have gone some way to address this situation. In it, they bring together contributions on nine different post-communist countries and across a variety of social policy fields, in a wide-ranging discussion of institutional transformation and path dependency (and departure) in Central and Eastern European (CEE) welfare states. ... Power features explicitly in Vanhuysse's chapter, but elsewhere is more of an 'add-on'. ... Yet issues rooted in the trans-formation of power relations silently pervade the book – the chapters by Rat and Orenstein provide two illustrations ... this book is a step forward in the study of post-communist welfare.’


   ‘Cerami and Vanhuysse's edited collection is an ambitious conspectus of the principal changes taking place in countries in the Central and Eastern regions of Europe. The focus is on the experience of the nine newer members of the EU. ... This cluster of countries forms what Offe in his closing chapter calls ‘terra incognita’, in terms of their welfare states. The editors' intention is to chart similarities and diversities in the pathways of the development of the latter. ... Vanhuysse makes reference to them in his attempt to bring in power politics into the picture, deploying the categories of ‘voice’ and ‘exit’, which Hirschman (1970) developed in his seminal work. The dense aggregation of analyses in this book will repay dipping into and re-visiting, as there is much to digest here.’

"[Vanhuysse's] thesis that postcommunist governments have used their state power in order to consolidate their own regimes through the preservation of social order in the sense of preventing protests, is plausible. This explains the practice of politically promoted early retirement in many countries in the early 1990s, which aimed to solve labor market problems. The results was rapidly increasing rates of dependency between contribution payers and pension recipients, which subsequently necessitated radical cutbacks one decade later. ... The existence of hybrid welfare state models runs like a red thred through the country case studies. ... The analysis of this trait, which has long been ignored by the social sciences, is the great merit of this book."


"The great merit of this book is that it offers a mass of new information on the evolution of postcommunist welfare states and proposes a wide range of instruments and concepts to understand it. The volume impresses by its historical depth and empirical richness. Its theoretical coherence and the debate engaged in by the different contributors are proof of excellent work by the editors. ... (this book) represents a necessary starting point for all those who want to understand the evolutions of the postcommunist welfare states."


"a valuable addition to the rapidly growing literature on Central and East European welfare states. ... The editors are to be commended for including policy areas and countries (such as Bulgaria and Romania) which have received inadequate attention in many comparative studies of postcommunist welfare states. The book integrates several strands of the existing literature – ranging from national social policy models to specific policy areas – which have rarely been examined together. This is very valuable, as it is only by confronting theories with detailed country case studies and analyses of specific policy areas that scholars will gain a nuanced understanding. ... The excellent concluding chapters by Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman and by Claus Offe contextualise the study of post-communist welfare states and raise a number of important issues for future research. ... No one interested in post-communist welfare states can afford to ignore this volume edited by Cerami and Vanhuysse, and it is likely to stimulate further research on this topic. Any scholar working on the region will learn a lot from this book, and it should also be of interest to academics studying welfare states in comparative perspective."