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ABSTRACT

The question of the social bases for support of the welfare state has been a major concern of theoretical and practical arguments about the development of social policy. Some writers have argued that the (un)popularity of welfare services is strongly influenced by institutional regimes, which range from the universal to the residual type. Others have drawn attention to the lack of support for certain categories of recipients of government assistance in all types of regime. Underlying most of these arguments are the notions of the class basis for support of the welfare state, of collectivities that have an interest in defending or attacking the arrangements for social assistance and of the formation of coalitions that have had a major impact on the development of social policies. This paper assesses the significance of theories about the institutional correlates and social bases for support of the welfare state. It also examines data from a survey of opinions in a 'liberal' welfare state regime which are relevant to these debates.

INTRODUCTION

Analyses of the social bases for support of the welfare state include three approaches. The first emphasizes 'class politics' and the lasting influence of political coalitions formed at critical historical periods. The second highlights the influence of self-interested rational actors, especially the participation by the middle classes in the welfare state. The third is concerned about the influence of 'transfer classes', especially of groups (like age pensioners or the unemployed or single mothers) who are more directly dependent on the welfare state than others. These approaches are complementary, with their emphasis on the working class or the middle class or transfer classes on policy outcomes. They all tend to derive interests from social location.

The class politics approach is highly critical of structural-functional accounts, which have played down the significance of political ideologies on the development of the welfare state and focused rather on levels of economic development and changes in the demographic structure. Structural functionalists like Wilensky and Lebeaux have examined levels of industrial development and the creation of surplus resources to fund the welfare state. Others have adapted Weberian and Durkheimian social theory by linking the development of the welfare state to the rise of the modern bureaucratic state, to the rational, goal-oriented organization in which there would be centralized, hierarchical and impersonal control of tasks; and to the destruction of traditional forms of association and communities and to refinement of the division of labour.¹

Writers on class politics have suggested close parallels between marxist accounts (which have posited the inevitable emergence of the welfare state from the capitalist mode of production) and structural functionalism.² However, when they focus on how political actors operate in the interests of different collectivities and classes, writers on class politics have much in common with marxist accounts. In a comparative study of Italy, Britain, Sweden and West Germany Esping-Andersen and Friedland have argued that their economic development is best explained by the alignment of class forces and class coalitions, that the political relations between classes are the 'primary determinant of what kind of capitalism develops'; similarly, Esping-Andersen and Korpi, in rejecting the characterization of Wilensky of post-war development of social policy as consensual and lacking in political conflict, have drawn attention to the 'class specific' nature of the strategies and goals pursued by 'opposing interests' and the 'significant conflicts' between different collectivities.³

Arguments about a solidaristic class, working-class mobilization and the influence of labour movements and social democratic parties on the development of social policy have been criticized on the following grounds. Baldwin has shown how in Sweden, after the Second World War, the initiative for universalist social policies was taken by groups purporting to represent the middle class (namely, bourgeois parties) rather than the working class (namely, Social Democratic parties). Although the Social Democrats adapted swiftly to pressures for universal provision, some elements were concerned about wastefulness and conferring benefits to those who needed them least. In Denmark, support for universalism came from the left. However, the right not only accepted these changes but 'drove a hard bargain in the pension reform of 1956 and took the lead in introducing complete universalism in the early 1960s, this time against the objections of the far left and those Social Democrats who were unwilling to draw the full consequences of indiscriminate social policy generosity'.⁴ In Britain too, universal provision was supported by both major parties.

This suggests a radically different interpretation of the shift to universalism. Whereas writers in the social democratic tradition have portrayed the development of the welfare state in terms of the relationship between 'class politics, democratic socialist partisan control and working class strategy',⁵ Baldwin has drawn attention to the 'self-interested acceptance' of universalism by the middle classes. The argument that the middle classes are among the primary beneficiaries of the welfare state is not novel.⁶ Some writers have shown how the 'beneficial' or self-interested involvement of the middle classes at critical historical moments influences 'the conditions under which welfare states emerge and enjoy dramatic spurts of growth, the particular shapes that these programmes take, and the circumstances under which they will come under successful and unsuccessful attack'.⁷

The notion of class interests has also been applied to groups that rely on the welfare state for direct material support. For an increasing proportion of the population in western societies income from formal work has become a less important determinant of life chances than that derived from social transfers. It has been suggested that this has weakened traditional class conflicts.⁸ However, it may also have given birth to new conflicts between so-called transfer classes and those in paid employment. Lepsius has developed the notion of transfer classes by extending the distinction by Weber between property and status groups to include this new category.⁹ Rather than identifying a homogeneous transfer class, he distinguishes between a wide range of groups (whose composition is continuously influenced by changes in personal circumstances and by the life cycle). These include the rising number of women who (through divorce from or death of their partner) have come to rely on government assistance, of age pensioners as a proportion of the population and of low income groups, especially the unemployed.

Before examining the significance of these claims about the relationship between class and support for the welfare state, with particular reference to the 'liberal' regime in Australia, I will explore two issues. The claim by writers in the class politics tradition that institutional arrangements or regime type determines the popularity of welfare provision will be assessed, thus placing into context the analysis of the Australian regime. I will also examine the difficulties surrounding arguments about the impact of either the working class or the middle classes or transfer classes on social policy. This allows us to gain some understanding of why these different accounts may or may not be successful in predicting support for the welfare state.

WELFARE REGIMES AND CLASS INTERESTS

The most influential claim by writers in the class politics tradition is that a strategy of universal provision will lead to the greatest support for a welfare regime. By contrast to Wilensky who has argued that 'welfare backlash' results from the visibility of taxes, Korpi and Esping-Andersen have posited that the institutional character of the welfare state (for instance, whether it provides for universal transfers or is primarily based on means-tests) will influence decisively support for it.¹⁰ The type of regime will be a crucial determinant of support for social policies: in those nations where most of the population does not benefit directly from social policy, where benefits are targetted onto specific groups and where there are few universal benefits, the prospects for welfare backlash are greatest. The influence of such claims extends to countries like Australia, which has been characterized as a residual or liberal regime in which there has been a powerful backlash against welfare provision.¹¹

Welfare backlash is also seen in terms of class formation and class coalition. The lack of direct benefits to most of the population means that there is no 'rational basis' for a coalition between those above and below the poverty line: 'The poverty line, in effect, splits the working class and tends to generate coalitions between the better-off workers and the middle class against the lower sections of the working class. Marginalistic social policies thus create a large constituency for a welfare backlash'.¹² The 'most decisive' influence in explaining differences between welfare states is 'the history of political class coalitions'.¹³ Support for the welfare state is apparently considerably weaker in liberal regimes (including Australia) than in others:

Middle-class welfare states, be they social democratic (as in Scandinavia) or corporatist (as in Germany), forge middle-class loyalties. In contrast, the liberal, residualist welfare states found in the United States, Canada and, increasingly, Britain, depend on the loyalties of a numerically weak, and often politically residual, social stratum. In this sense, the class coalitions in which the three welfare-state regime-types were founded, explain not only their past evolution but also their future prospects.¹⁴

So far, however, there has been a lack of evidence to back this claim of attachment by the middle classes to universal welfare regimes and hostility towards the poor in liberal ones. By contrast, some studies have shown that even in social democratic regimes there are significant problems in securing support for further taxes and spending.¹⁵ Our understanding of support for social provision in liberal regimes is, however, very limited and merits further attention.

A cross-national study of social and political attitudes sheds some light on the claim that the type of welfare-state regime will be a crucial

TABLE I: *Statutory intervention in social and economic policies – Australia and other countries* (per cent)*

	Australia	UK	USA	Italy	Germany	Austria
Provide a job for everyone who wants one	53	72	35	89	82	84
Provide health care for the sick	93	99	83	100	98	98
Provide a decent standard of living for the old	96	98	88	99	97	99
Provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed	59	86	50	85	85	68
Reduce income differences between the rich and poor	54	75	39	84	67	78
N =	1528	1530	677	1580	1048	987

Note: * The figures in this table are for the respondents who agreed that the government either 'should' or 'definitely should' be responsible for these aspects of statutory provision.

Source: The data are from the International Social Survey Programme, 1985. They were made available by the Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung, University of Cologne and collected by independent institutions in each country. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the Zentralarchiv bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

determinant of support for social policies.¹⁶ The data in Table I are from the International Social Survey Programme's Role of Government Survey conducted in 1985–6. Six countries took part in this survey: the respective samples sizes are 1528 for Australia, 1048 for West Germany, 1530 for Great Britain, 677 for the USA, 987 for Austria and 1580 for Italy. Respondents were asked about their support for statutory intervention in the following way: 'On the whole do you think it should or should not be the government's responsibility to . . . (a) provide a job for everyone who wants one, (b) provide health care for the sick, (c) provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed, (d) provide a decent standard of living for the aged and (e) reduce income differences between rich and poor? . . . Definitely should? Probably should? Probably should not? Definitely should not?'

Of the countries listed in Table I, Austria comes closest to the classification by Esping-Andersen (see footnote 16) of a social democratic regime which aims 'to promote equality of the highest standards' through universal provision, Italy and Germany are conservative regimes in which the state took on a central role both in accepting the legitimacy of social rights and in retaining differences of class and status, and Australia, the UK and the USA are liberal since they provide benefits predominantly through means-tests and a low level of universal transfers. A preliminary analysis of Table I appears to lend further support to the classification adopted by Esping-Andersen, especially with respect to Australia. In Australia and the

USA there is less support than in the other countries for statutory intervention.

However, the characterization of Australia as a distinctively liberal welfare-state regime is only partially accurate. It does not apply to several major areas of expenditure. The questions about providing jobs for everyone who wants one, about decent standard of living for the unemployed and about reducing income differences between rich and poor do show significant differences between Australia and conservative regimes. However, the differences over major areas of expenditure like health care for the sick and a decent standard of living for the aged are insignificant.

Unfortunately, Scandinavian countries like Sweden, which are prized as model social democratic regimes, did not participate in the survey. However, one can compare some of the claims made by writers like Korpi to empirical research carried out in Sweden. With respect to universal regimes, Korpi has argued that, at least until the mid-seventies, support for the Swedish welfare state was fairly stable. However, Hadenius, from a study carried out in 1981, found strong latent opposition to the Swedish welfare state.¹⁷ Whereas Korpi has argued that Swedes 'consciously opted' for the welfare state, Hadenius emphasized the significance of institutional factors (including the absence of mechanisms for referenda and a political culture characterized by the absence of rebellion against political authority).

Writers in the class politics tradition have extended their analysis of different regimes to argue that in countries like Australia, which has a strong tradition of targetting benefits, there is a far greater potential for welfare backlash than in universal regimes. It is also argued that services which only cater for minorities will fail to attract the support of the majority. The data in Table I and in Table II partially support this argument. Table II, which is also derived from the International Social Survey Programme, uses the following questions: 'Listed below are various areas of government spending. Please show whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area (. . . health; education; old age pensions; unemployment benefits.) Spend much more? Spend more? Spend the same as now? Spend less? Spend much less?' In Table II support for spending on services like health and education easily outstrip support for unemployment benefits. Similarly, in Table I, support for provision for the sick and the aged is greater than support for the unemployed. However, it should be stressed that contrary to arguments about narrow, egoistic behaviour a substantial proportion of those who do not receive unemployment benefits also support the same or more spending on them – even in a 'liberal' regime like Australia. As I shall argue later, self-interest is not necessarily a good predictor of support for statutory provision. Moral commitments may be just as important.

TABLE II: *Support for government spending – Australia and other countries (per cent)*

	Australia	UK	USA	Italy	Germany	Austria
<i>Health</i>						
Spend much more	21	36	13	32	19	22
More	41	53	46	47	33	38
Same	32	11	34	14	41	38
Less/much less	6	1	8	6	8	2
<i>Education</i>						
Spend much more	22	23	21	17	10	9
More	42	52	43	47	31	27
Same	32	23	31	32	53	55
Less/much less	4	2	5	4	7	9
<i>Age pensions</i>						
Spend much more	17	25	13	22	11	13
More	38	50	31	54	36	38
Same	41	24	42	21	50	47
Less/much less	4	1	14	5	4	2
<i>Unemployment benefits</i>						
Spend much more	4	12	8	15	8	3
More	9	29	18	41	27	12
Same	36	40	49	27	52	44
Less	30	15	17	11	11	31
Much less	22	4	8	7	3	10
N =	1528	1530	677	1580	1048	987

Source: See Table I.

The data from Table I and Table II also show that the welfare state is very popular even in liberal regimes. Although these data are only cross-sectional, this conclusion is supported by time-series analyses of the popularity of the welfare state.¹⁸ In addition, support for more spending on education is markedly greater in liberal regimes like Australia, the UK and the USA than in conservative or 'non-liberal' regimes like Germany and Austria and, to a lesser extent, Italy. Similarly, the pattern of support for spending on health and age pensions (and to a lesser extent on unemployment benefits) does not correspond to the ranking of welfare state regimes devised by writers like Esping-Andersen. One reason for the high level of support for spending in liberal regimes may be that they have lagged behind other types of regime in their levels of expenditure. However, as I shall argue below, there are reasons which are common to all regime types as to why the middle classes support the welfare state. The main point so far is that support for the welfare state differs between regimes over certain policies and is remarkably similar over others.

Since our principal concern is with the influence of class interests, the remainder of this paper explores why support for the welfare state

may or may not be forthcoming by (a) examining the problems involved in arguing for the impact of class on social policy and (b) developing an empirical test of the relationship between class forces and social policy in a liberal regime, namely Australia.

CLASS AND SELF-INTEREST

(i) *The Working Class*

Some of the well-known shortcomings of marxist accounts of the welfare state are shared by writers in the class politics tradition. In marxist accounts there is a tension between the emphasis on structural constraints (hence, the relative autonomy of the forces of production) and the claim that these constraints will be overcome by social actors through their political struggles. A similar ambiguity arises in the work on class politics.¹⁹ At one level Esping-Andersen and Korpi assume that 'class interests' are an objective feature of the capitalist welfare state; at another, they identify organizations (parties and trade unions) that represent these interests. Class analysis, including the analysis of social policy, does not explain how these two levels are connected.²⁰ The organization of class politics by trade unions and political parties is referred back or reducible to a more fundamental level of class interests. The notion of class politics, by contrast, implies that certain elements are not entirely determined by class interests. By invoking arguments about class interests and linking them (a) to universal regimes for social policy and (b) to strategies of mobilization for collective action, they presuppose a correspondence between the organizations of class politics and the members or sympathizers of these organizations.²¹

One way to side-step this problem is to focus on the institutional articulation of class politics. Esping-Andersen also examines the relations between classes rather than classes as social categories. This move is derived from the thesis by Barrington Moore on the formation of coalitions between classes and the transformation of the modern state. Although this does not overcome any of the objections about the use of the concept of class to characterize social actors, it does at least focus on organizations, the coalitions between them and their influence on the formation of social policy.

A similar approach is used to assess the influence of democratic socialism or of organizations that 'mediate' working class influence either through tenure of government office or through trade union pressure on governments of all political shades. These organizations seek to develop strategies for 'enhancing working class interests' and compromises between them are seen as compromises between classes.²² These arguments, as I have suggested, are only persuasive

insofar as they refer to the institutionalization of compromises between major organizations.²³

Esping-Andersen attempts to combine institutional and behavioural explanations by arguing that: 'In liberal regimes the middle classes became institutionally wedded to the market. And in Scandinavia the fortunes of social democracy over the past decades were closely tied to the establishment of a middle-class welfare state that benefits both its traditional working-class clientele and the new white-collar strata'.²⁴ One problem with this account is that it appears to confuse individual preferences with institutional structures. There is no necessary relationship between these structures and individual preferences.²⁵ Furthermore, if one takes seriously arguments about individual preferences, institutions may distort preferences by closing off certain options. Esping-Andersen admits so much when he argues that the ties between the middle classes and the Scandinavian welfare states were strong 'in part because the private welfare market was relatively undeveloped and in part because they were capable of building a welfare state with features of sufficient luxury to satisfy the wants of a more discriminating public'.²⁶ Esping-Andersen also posits a strong association between the incentives offered to the middle class (namely, services from which they benefit directly) and their support for the welfare state. Although there is widespread agreement about the political significance of ensuring the middle classes have a stake in the welfare state, he presupposes that the initiative for alliances across social groups emanated from working-class organizations. Baldwin has shown that this was often not the case. In attempting to explain the association between different types of regime and popular support for the welfare state, Esping-Andersen is responding to a long-standing problem in the analysis of social policy. The mechanism used by many social reformers to counter the stigma associated with poor relief is to broaden access to all citizens. This mechanism was widely used after the Second World War as a means for attracting middle-class support for the welfare state.²⁷

There is a close parallel between this argument and the thesis that universal regimes engender strong loyalty whereas liberal regimes, which target resources, undermine solidarity and create a distance between the middle classes and the working classes. With reference to Sweden, it is argued that the popularity of the welfare state 'depends on middle-class support which, in turn, requires expanding and improving the quality of services'.²⁸ Middle-class support therefore requires much more than maintenance of current levels of provision.

(ii) The Middle Classes

Though most writers agree on the importance of middle-class support for the welfare state, only a few have drawn attention to the

mechanisms that may link individual preferences and institutional structures. Similarly, only a few writers have focused on the difficulties in predicting how, when and why individuals or collectivities will express support for particular aspects of the welfare state. The tendency has been to associate middle-class support with particular services from which they benefit directly. This argument, derived from notions of self-interest, is (understandably) used, for instance by Baldwin, to counter the ingenious argument that there is a connection between middle-class involvement and a politics of 'solidarity' across classes.

The link between class background and support for different aspects of the welfare state is less than straightforward. Some writers have argued that as producers and consumers of education, housing and health services the 'salaried middle class' has developed a 'class interest' in the welfare state. This class apparently shares 'a common commitment to career structures, meritocratic opportunities and hierarchical values' and comprises (among others) managers and engineers in private industry, administrators or professionals in public service, officials in left or right wing political associations or unions and left-wing academics and their political choices are driven by material self-interest, by their knowledge of 'which side their bread is buttered'.²⁹

This approach underplays the diversity of interests the 'middle classes' may have in the development of the welfare state. The middle classes may not only be consumers and providers of services but are also taxpayers.³⁰ As taxpayers, people may be less than enthusiastic supporters of the welfare state, even though as consumers or producers they may have the opportunity to benefit from its expansion. The middle classes are employed as doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, administrators and managers within the welfare state. They also appear to benefit disproportionately as consumers of health and education services and to gain considerable advantages through occupational welfare schemes and fiscal arrangements sanctioned by the state.³¹ The middle classes have also benefitted from programmes which were originally designed for the poor.³²

The middle classes are better able than the poor to mobilize resources to influence policy makers. It is therefore not entirely surprising that there should be a fairly consistent association between public spending on programmes like health, secondary education, child benefit and housing in the UK and the proportion of middle-class beneficiaries and the proportion of middle-class suppliers.³³ Most individuals or collectivities (like the 'middle classes') will 'defend those parts of the welfare state from which they see themselves as benefitting or likely to benefit, while supporting reductions in those parts from which they do not'.³⁴ Titmuss, like the defenders of the Swedish welfare state, has argued strongly for universalism as a means

of social integration. The major changes in social policy after the Second World War are seen 'as ideological pleas to the middle- and upper-income classes to share in the benefits (as well as the costs) of public welfare'.³⁵ Though the middle classes may welcome the benefits to be derived from the broadening of the welfare state, they have not fulfilled the hopes of reformers like Titmuss. There is also considerable empirical evidence to support the notion that certain services are more popular than others and that this may be associated with access to these services.

However, it is easy to exaggerate claims of self-interested influence by the middle classes on policy. There are many situations in which the middle classes may support services even if the material benefits to themselves are not so obvious. Moral commitment to the welfare state may compete with narrow, egoistic self-interest.³⁶ There is, for example, strong support for services from which only a small minority actually benefit, like provision for the sick and disabled. Even services for groups that are generally considered as less deserving than others enjoy considerable support in all types of welfare regime. Similarly, vast numbers among those who do not use services (like public transport) are prepared to subsidise them.

Arguments about self-interested behaviour also tend to gloss over (a) the different reasons given by citizens for supporting some services rather than others, (b) the difficulty of determining who actually pays for the welfare state and (c) what these interests are.³⁷ Most of the literature on interests and the welfare state relies on a variant of 'class analysis'. The problem is to link structural variables like class with individual preferences. The institutionalization of pressure for reform at critical historical junctures means that programmes may operate independently of the levels of support for them by particular collectivities. This could explain the survival of programmes which serve the poor despite the radical attack on them by neo-conservative governments in the 1980s.³⁸

(iii) Transfer Classes

The term transfer class was first used by Lepsius to examine the ways in which differences in incomes derived from social transfers and differences in access to public goods and services influence class location (in other words, income, status and outlook on life). Lepsius has laid down stricter guidelines for defining a class than most other writers on the welfare state: classes in themselves are not 'social' units and to identify classes one needs at least to examine marriage patterns, political behaviour, attitudes, self-perceptions and economic circumstances. He is deeply sceptical about the usefulness of traditional class analysis in explaining the emergence of new forms of inequality and stratification.

Other writers have suggested that the growing number of people outside the paid workforce may come into conflict with those who are employed and paying taxes.³⁹ In a detailed study of the social composition of people seeking government assistance in West Germany, Alber has suggested that they have a 'common interest' in maintaining the purchasing power of social transfers, though he has also drawn attention to their heterogeneity.⁴⁰ Alber has questioned claims about the formation of new interest groups to represent the interests of transfer classes since many of the problems with social transfers have been articulated by established political and industrial organizations. Claims for social benefits are usually seen as legitimate because most people are said to have earned their entitlements. For many recipients reliance on government assistance is a temporary experience which provides only a limited basis for collective action. Conflicts may, however, emerge in two spheres. First, the rise in the proportion of age pensioners may place heavy demands on those in employment. This could imply a conflict between different generations. Second, the combination of a rise in unemployment and the inclusion among the unemployed of a growing number of young people, especially of highly-trained 'academic plebeians' may pose new challenges to the political system.⁴¹

Data from another opinion survey are now used to examine the relative influence of the three broad accounts of class interests in explaining the (un)popularity of a liberal welfare state regime.

THE SURVEY

The survey was based on a systematic random sample of 3507 respondents covering all Australian States and Territories except South Australia. It was drawn by the Australian Electoral office in April 1988. The sample for South Australia was selected manually from the electoral rolls of the South Australian Electoral Commission. The method of data collection was by questionnaire sent out by mail. The actual sample size was 2943 after removing 'non-contacts' (mainly people who were no longer resident at a particular address) and the 1814 replies represented a response rate of 62 per cent.⁴²

Some of the questions in this survey are identical to the ones used by the International Social Survey Programme, especially in relation to government spending and to statutory intervention. Many of the issues covered by the survey relate to the popularity of social policies and to political debates and arguments about the management of the contemporary welfare state. The analysis of the welfare state differentiates between services (for instance, health, education and so on). These services are examined in order to reflect some of the ways in which needs might be met (for instance by the private sector or by

statutory intervention). Opinions about different services have also been grouped together in order to create general indicators of support for the welfare state. The focus is on patterns of opinion about major services, the structural (socio-economic and political) correlates of these opinions and the relative influence of these variables on the popularity of the welfare state. In controlling for factors like occupational and employment status as well as party identification, an attempt is made to identify variation in the attitudes of different social groups. This allows us to assess the significance of arguments which have also drawn attention to these factors in structuring support for the welfare state.⁴³

A SOCIAL BASIS FOR SUPPORT OF THE WELFARE STATE?

In order to reflect some of the variation in approaches to analyzing the 'crisis' of the welfare state, support for it was measured in several different ways.⁴⁴ The following are used as dependent variables: opinions about statutory intervention; views about the relative importance of government and private provision; opinions about government spending; and views about the trade-off between taxes and spending. The indicator for *statutory intervention* in Table III was derived from the same question as the one used by the International Social Survey Project in Table I.⁴⁵ Similarly, the indicator for *government spending* is identical to the one used in Table II.

The indicator for *the relative importance of government and private provision* was derived from the following questions: 'How important is it to people in this country that the government health service (education service) (age pensions) continues in its current form? Is it very important? Fairly important? Not very important? Not at all important?' and 'How important is it to people in this country that private medical care (private education) (superannuation) is available? Is it very important? Fairly important? Not very important? Not at all important?'⁴⁶ The indicator for views about the trade-off between taxes and spending was derived from the following questions: 'If the government had a choice between reducing taxes or spending more on social services (health services) (education services), which do you think it should do? Strongly favour reducing taxes; mildly favour reducing taxes; mildly favour spending more on services; strongly favour spending more on services?'

In order to gain some understanding of the significance of arguments outlined above on class as a predictor of support for the welfare state six independent variables have been used. There is of course some overlap between each of these arguments as well as between the variables used to measure them. The first pair of variables relates to accounts which posit a direct correspondence between class

and the popularity of the welfare state. Class is measured by the occupation of the respondent and by a subjective measure of class location.⁴⁷ The second set of measures, party identification and left-right policy orientations, relate to institutional models of class politics, to accounts that emphasize the central role of organizations in articulating 'class interests'. The variable for party identification is based on the following question: 'Generally speaking, in federal politics do you usually think of yourself as Liberal, Labor, National Party, Australian Democrat, Nuclear Disarmament Party (and so on)?' The variable for left-right policy orientations is meant to capture more fully the influence of politics on public opinion. Respondents were asked: 'In political matters, people talk of the "left" and the "right". Where would you say you are? Strongly to the left, somewhat to the left, in the centre, somewhat to the right, strongly to the right?'⁴⁸ The final set of measures, employment status and total annual household income, represent an attempt to estimate the importance of arguments about transfer classes. The variable for employment status distinguishes between four groups of people: those in full-time paid employment, people in part-time paid employment, people who are not in the paid labour force (retired, keeping house, out of work due to temporary illness, students) and the unemployed.⁴⁹

Table III provides an initial guide to the strength of the relationship between the various measures for the popularity of the welfare state and class politics (party identification), transfer classes (employment status and income) and social location (subjective perceptions of class and occupational prestige). The direct relationship between support for statutory intervention (column 1) and party identification is substantial ($r = .33$). Supporters of the Labor Party are far more likely than those of the Liberal Party and the National Party to express support for statutory intervention. The relationship is fairly substantial for many of the other measures including views about more spending on unemployment benefits ($r = .27$), views about the relative importance of government and private health care ($r = .30$) and views about the trade-off between taxes and spending on social services ($r = .22$).

Social location (measured here by occupational prestige)⁵⁰ is far less strongly related to support for the welfare state. The more significant relationships pertain to views about government intervention ($r = .23$) and spending on age pensions ($r = .19$) and unemployment benefits ($r = .20$). Respondents in low prestige occupational groups were always more likely than those in higher ones to support the welfare state. The relationships between total annual household income and the popularity of the welfare state are strikingly similar to those associated with occupational prestige.

Turning to employment status and transfer classes, those in formal paid employment were more likely than those who were not in formal

TABLE III: *Support for the welfare state by class, income, party and employment status*

	Statutory intervention	Relative importance of government and private provision			Government spending			Taxes versus spending		
		Health	Education	Age Pensions/ Superannuation	Health	Education	Age Pensions	Unemployment benefits	Social Services	Health Education
Self-perceived class	.19	.09	.05 (.02)	.08 (.001)	.16	.11	.23	.16	.06 (.01)	.08 (.02)
Class	.23	.13	.09	.05	.16	.13	.19	.20	.01	.05 (.03)
(Occupational prestige)					(.02)				(.33)	(.02)
Total annual income	.22	.14	.08 (.01)	.15	.11	.09	.16	.21	.09	.06 (.11)
Party identification	.33	.30	.17 (.01)	.06 (.01)	.18	.18	.16	.27	.01 (.01)	.04 (.017)
Employment status	.20	.08	.03 (.11)	.12	.09	.04 (.04)	.13	.20	.14	.08 (.21)

Note: The entries in the table are Pearson correlation coefficients. Apart from the figures in brackets, the significance level was less than .001 for all correlations.

Source: E. Papadakis, *Attitudes to State and Private Welfare*, Social Science Data Archives, Research School of Social Sciences, The Australian National University, 1990.

TABLE IV: *Support for statutory intervention by class and politics (per cent)*

		Support for statutory intervention				(N =)
	Very strong	Strong	Moderate	Weak	Very weak	
<i>Occupational Prestige</i>						
High 1	8	21	24	26	21	(280)
2	15	19	28	21	17	(294)
3	11	29	27	20	13	(272)
4	19	27	23	20	10	(310)
Low 5	27	30	24	12	7	(285)
<i>Party identification</i>						
Liberal/National	10	19	27	24	20	(686)
Labor	27	31	24	13	6	(695)
Other	19	29	24	19	9	(119)
<i>Self-perceived class</i>						
Lower	47	30	16	5	2	(136)
Working	17	30	26	18	9	(695)
Middle/Upper	12	20	26	23	19	(674)
Don't Know/no reply	28	20	25	15	12	(65)
<i>Employment</i>						
Full-time	11	25	26	21	17	(732)
Part-time	19	24	29	17	25	(199)
No formal employment	25	26	23	17	10	(668)
Unemployed	56	21	19	5	–	(43)

Note: See footnotes 45 and 51 for information about the measure for statutory intervention and footnotes 46 to 48 for information about the other variables.

Source: See Table III.

employment (age pensioners, people keeping house and so on) and even more likely than the unemployed to be less enthusiastic about the welfare state. Again, this applied especially to views about government intervention ($r = .20$) and to spending on unemployment benefits ($r = .20$).

In order to examine the relevance of various accounts of the popularity of the welfare state the dependent variable has been recoded into five categories of support for statutory intervention.⁵¹ Table IV shows that Labor supporters are almost three times more likely than those for conservative parties to be very strongly in favour of statutory intervention. With respect to occupational prestige,⁵² those in the highest group are about three times as likely as those in the lowest group to be very weakly in favour of statutory intervention. The relationships with subjective perceptions of social location are weaker. The differences between the lower class and the working class as well as the middle and upper classes are fairly striking (for instance, the latter are about four times less likely than the former to indicate strong support for statutory intervention, 12 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively). The differences between the (self-perceived) working

class and the middle and upper class are less striking. This appears to support the argument by Korpi that in regimes which offer only limited direct benefits to most of the population, there is a tendency for better-off workers and the middle class to coalesce against the lower sections of the working class. Yet, Esping-Andersen has conceded that even social democratic governments have, through their generous funding of universal services, contributed to such a division.⁵³ This phenomenon may therefore not be peculiar to liberal regimes. With respect to employment status, the differences between those located in formal paid work and other groups are quite marked. The unemployed are five times more likely than those in full-time formal employment to be very strong supporters of statutory intervention (56 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively).

However, the data do also show that significant proportions of those in the highest prestige occupations, of those who vote for conservative parties and of those who perceive themselves as upper or middle class are in favour of statutory intervention. Of those in the two highest occupational prestige groups, 29 per cent and 34 per cent are strongly or very strongly in favour of statutory intervention and a further 24 per cent and 28 per cent are moderate supporters. Similarly, 29 per cent of conservative voters are strong or very strong supporters of statutory intervention and a further 27 per cent are moderate supporters.

The next part of the statistical analysis uses multivariate models to test the relationship between support for the welfare state and measures for class politics, transfer classes and social location (Table V). The dependent variables include support for statutory intervention (see column 1, Table III), views about the relative importance

TABLE V: *Support for the welfare state*

	Statutory intervention	Relative importance of government and private provision	Support for more spending	Support for more spending versus tax cuts
Class				
(Occupational prestige)	.11 (.01)	.03 (.49)	.09 (.03)	.04 (.40)
Self-perceived class	.10 (.01)	.02 (.69)	.14 (.00)	.02 (.60)
Total household income	.09 (.02)	.13 (.01)	.14 (.00)	.05 (.19)
Employment status	.07 (.05)	.05 (.16)	.01 (.79)	.04 (.26)
Party identification	.23 (.00)	.24 (.00)	.19 (.00)	.21 (.00)
Left policy orientations	.23 (.00)	.13 (.00)	.15 (.00)	.12 (.00)
R Squared	.23	.13	.18	.08
Overall F.	33.12	16.74	24.60	10.14

Note: The coefficients are standardized. The figures in brackets refer to the level of significance.

Source: See Table III.

of government and private provision (see columns 2 to 4, Table III), opinions about government spending (see columns 5 to 8, Table III) and attitudes to the trade-off between taxes and spending (see columns 9 to 11, Table III).⁵⁴ Table V shows that the measures for social class (occupational prestige and self-perceived class) exert only a moderate direct influence on support for the welfare state. In some models the relationship is insignificant even at the .05 level. Similarly, the measures for differences between transfer classes and those in employment are only significant at the .05 level in the first equation. By contrast, the direct effect of party identification is significant and substantial in all the equations. Similarly, left-right policy orientations are substantial in the first equation and highly significant in all of them.

CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that arguments about a direct connection between social location and the type of welfare state regime may be of little value in analyzing the popularity of the welfare state. The relationship between support for the welfare state and variables like class background, political affiliation and self-perceived class is complex. Class politics should not be confused with class interests. The analysis has also shown that the relationship between transfer classes and support for the welfare state is generally fairly weak. Over some issues (like spending on unemployment benefits, support for statutory intervention and the trade-off between taxes and spending on social services) there is a significant bivariate relationship. However, this becomes far less significant once we control for other factors, notably party identification and policy orientations. As in many other areas of social analysis, arguments about rational self-interest do have significant explanatory power, though factors other than those which have dominated arguments about the social bases of support for the welfare state merit further investigation.

Insofar as writers on the significance of class politics and the welfare state are referring to political organizations that claim to represent the interests of particular social groups, there is strong support for their arguments from this analysis. Political organizations clearly play an important role in shaping ideas about the welfare state. However, to the extent that these writers associate organizations or institutional structures with individual preferences, they are persuasive in some respects but misleading in others. Cross-national opinion surveys about statutory intervention by government support some aspects of the classification of welfare states by writers like Esping-Andersen. However, the implied differences between welfare state regimes is not

reflected in support either for spending on or for statutory intervention in major services like health care, education and age pensions. With respect to education, people in liberal regimes appear to be more likely than those in other regimes, especially social democratic ones, to favour more expenditure. This may of course confirm the previously noted tendency for the middle class to seek maximum advantage from certain universal services. It may also be indicative of the popular reaction against the constraints imposed by governments on certain forms of public expenditure. The argument that in liberal regimes there is more consensus about welfare between better-off sections of the working class and the middle class than among the better-off working class and poorer sections of the working class is also supported by the data. However, this may also be the case in other regimes.

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NOTES

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1. H. Wilensky and C. Lebeaux, *Industrial Society and Social Welfare*, New York, Russell Sage, 1958; P. Flora and J. Alber, 'Modernization, democratization and the development of welfare states in Europe' in P. Flora and A. J. Heidenheimer (eds), *The Development of Welfare States in Europe and America*, London, Transaction Books, 1981.

2. G. Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990 refers to the work of J. O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1983 and N. Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, London, New Left Books, 1983.

3. G. Esping-Andersen and R. Friedland, 'Class Coalitions in the Making of West European Economies', *Political Power and Social Theory*, vol. 3, 1982, pp. 1-52; G. Esping-Andersen, and W.

Korpi, 'Social Policy as Class Politics in Post-War Capitalism: Scandinavia, Austria, and Germany' in J. H. Goldthorpe (ed.), *Order and Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984.

4. P. Baldwin, *The Politics of Social Solidarity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 114-5.

5. F. Castles, *The Working Class and Welfare*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1985.

6. B. R. Fry and R. F. Winters, 'The Politics of Redistribution', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 64, no. 2, 1970; G. J. Stigler, 'Director's Law of Public Income Redistribution', *Journal of Law and Economics*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1970; A. Gould, 'The Salaried Middle Class in the Corporatist Welfare State', *Policy and Politics*, vol. 9, no. 4, 1981, pp. 401-18; A. Gould, 'The Salaried Middle Class and the Welfare State in Sweden and Japan', *Policy and Politics*, vol. 10, no. 4, 1982, pp. 417-37; J. Le Grand, *The Strategy of Equality*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1982.

7. R. Goodin and J. Le Grand, 'Introduction' in R. Goodin and J. Le Grand *et al.*, *Not Only the Poor: The Middle Classes*

and the Welfare State, London, Allen and Unwin, 1987, p. 3.

8. J. Alber, 'Versorgungsklassen im Wohlfahrtsstaat', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1984, pp. 225–51.

9. M. R. Lepsius, 'Soziale Ungleichheit und Klassenstrukturen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland', in H. U. Wehler (ed.), *Klassen in der europäischen Sozialgeschichte*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1979.

10. H. Wilensky, *The Welfare State and Equality*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975; W. Korpi, *The Democratic Class Struggle*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 193; Esping-Andersen and Korpi, *op. cit.*, p. 184; Esping-Andersen, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

11. For a discussion on the (in)appropriateness of this characterization see E. Papadakis, 'Conjectures about Public Opinion and the Australian Welfare State', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1990a, pp. 209–34.

12. Korpi, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

13. Esping-Andersen, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

14. Esping-Andersen, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

15. A. Hadenius, *A Crisis of the Welfare State? Opinions about taxes and welfare expenditure in Sweden*, Minimedia, 1986.

16. Esping-Andersen, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 23 distinguishes between welfare-state regimes which have achieved varying degrees of 'de-commodification', in other words, the extent to which 'citizens can freely, and without potential loss of job, income, or general welfare, opt out of work when they themselves consider it necessary'. The rank order of welfare states in terms of de-commodification is given on p. 52, Table 2.2. In subsequent chapters Esping-Andersen uses a variety of different indices to identify universal and residual welfare state regimes. The rank-order of nations on these indices is different to the one arrived at through the index for de-commodification. The main distinction in this paper is between what Esping-Andersen repeatedly refers to as liberal regimes (notably Australia) and other types of regime.

17. Korpi, *op. cit.*, p. 201; Hadenius, *op. cit.*

18. See the discussion in Papadakis, 1990a, *op. cit.*, which suggests that there has not been a massive decline in the popularity of the Australian welfare state; and R. Smith and M. Wearing 'Do Australians Want the Welfare State?' *Politics*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1987, pp. 55–65.

19. B. Hindess, *Freedom, Equality and the Market*, London, Tavistock, 1987a; B. Hindess, *Politics and Class Analysis*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987b.

20. Hindess, 1987b *op. cit.*

21. Hindess argues strongly against this assumption and criticizes the use of the concept of actor to describe collectivities 'that have no means of formulating decisions and then to treat what happens as resulting from their decisions'. Hindess, 1987b, *op. cit.*, p. 111. Interestingly, writers who emphasize the significance of class politics also appear to recognize its limitations, or the importance of other factors in influencing the development of the welfare state. Esping-Andersen, 1990, *op. cit.*, refers to writers who stress the importance of either nationalism or Catholicism or conservatism or point out that the class-mobilization thesis is derived mainly from the Swedish experience. See F. Castles, *The Social Democratic Image of Society*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978; M. Schmidt, 'The role of parties in shaping macro-economic policies', in F. Castles (ed), *The Impact of Parties*, London, Sage, 1982; H. Wilensky, 'Leftism, Catholicism and democratic corporatism' in Flora and Heidenheimer *op. cit.*; M. Shalev, 'The social-democratic model and beyond', *Comparative Social Research*, vol. 6, 1984.

22. Castles, 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 8 and p. 88.

23. In Australia, for example, the strategy of wage security rather than social security pursued by the labour movement (in the early twentieth century) formed the basis for a compromise between organizations representing workers, manufacturers and small farmers, which involved protection of manufacturers and small farmers against international competition and the guarantee of 'fair and reasonable wages for the

workers', Castles *op. cit.*, p. 87. The point is that this historic compromise led to the 'bureaucratisation and institutionalisation of social choice'.

24. Esping-Andersen, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

25. E. Papadakis, 'Public Opinion, Public Policy and the Welfare State', *Political Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, 1992, pp. 21-37.

26. Esping-Andersen, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 32. Similar arguments have been applied to the British welfare state, see Papadakis, 1992, *op. cit.*

27. Baldwin, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

28. Esping-Andersen, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

29. Gould, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 418 and p. 433.

30. R. Goodin, and J. Le Grand, 'Not Only the Poor' in Goodin and Le Grand, *op. cit.*

31. R. Titmuss, *Essays on the 'Welfare State'*, London, Allen and Unwin, 2nd edition, 1963; Le Grand, *op. cit.*

32. In Australia, for example, they have become major recipients of services like invalid pensions, age pensions and widows Class B pensions. See R. Goodin and J. Le Grand, 'Creeping Universalism in the Australian Welfare State', in Goodin and Le Grand, *op. cit.*

33. J. Le Grand and D. Winter, 'The Middle Classes and the Defence of the British Welfare State', in Goodin and Le Grand *et al. op. cit.* One problem with this analysis is the classification of the middle classes. They comprise about 22 per cent of the population, or, as the authors point out, they broadly correspond to social classes 1 and 2 (professional and intermediate) as classified by the Registrar-General, or to socio-economic groups 1 and 2 (professionals, employers and managers) as classified by the British General Household Survey plus teachers and nurses from socio-economic groups 3 (intermediate and junior non-manual). However, this classification excludes 78 per cent of the population.

34. Goodin and Le Grand, 'Not Only the Poor' in Goodin and Le Grand, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

35. R. Titmuss, *Commitment to Welfare*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1968, p. 191.

36. See Goodin and Le Grand 'Not Only the Poor' in Goodin and Le Grand, *op. cit.*, p. 211, who refer to the study on blood donation by R. Titmuss, *The Gift Relationship*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1971.

37. These issues are raised by Papadakis, 1992, *op. cit.*; Goodin and Le Grand 'Not Only the Poor' in Goodin and Le Grand, *op. cit.*; and Hindess, 1987b, *op. cit.* p. 112-3, who argues: 'Interests are not fixed or given properties of individuals or groups, and they should not be regarded as structurally determined. The claim that class as a social force can be understood in terms of the representation of class interests must therefore collapse.'

38. Goodin and Le Grand 'Not Only the Poor' in Goodin and Le Grand, *op. cit.*

39. H. Wilemsky, *The New Corporatism. Centralization and the Welfare State*, Sage, Beverly Hills, 1976.

40. Alber, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

41. Alber, *op. cit.*, has argued that the academic plebeians are a vital component of new political protest organizations like the Greens in West Germany.

42. The survey was funded by the Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales and by the University of New England. Further information about the survey can be found in E. Papadakis, *Attitudes to State and Private Welfare. Analysis of Results from a National Survey*, Social Policy Research Centre Reports and Proceedings, No. 85, University of New South Wales, 1990b.

43. Attitudes will not necessarily be reflected in particular types of behaviour. In addition, the classification of attitudes should not be taken to imply a coherent structure or rationale among strategic actors. See B. Hindess, *Choice, Rationality, and Social Theory*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1988; and Papadakis, 1992, *op. cit.* Nonetheless, it would be unrealistic to argue for the complete absence of patterns in attitudes, especially in relation to issues that are close to everyday experiences. Individuals may change their views, yet at the aggregate level, there often emerge patterns which may reflect shifts in policy agendas, changes in economic circumstances and new efforts to mobilize social actors.

44. Some of the measurements correspond, to varying degrees, with those adopted by A. Lewis, 'Attitudes to Public Expenditure and their Relationship to Voting Preferences', *Political Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1980, pp. 284-92; P. Taylor-Gooby, 'The welfare state and individual freedom: attitudes to welfare spending and to the power of the state', *Political Studies*, vol. 31, 1983, no. 4, pp. 640-9; and P. Taylor-Gooby, 'Privatisation, Power and the Welfare State', *Sociology*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1986, pp. 228-46.

45. For the bivariate and multivariate analysis in Table III and Table V, this indicator was constructed by adding the response categories of the five separate indices on statutory intervention.

46. For the analysis in Table III, the indicator was constructed by using an SPSS-X compute command to differentiate between the categories of reply, namely, those indicating that the government sector was more important than the private sector, the private sector was more important than the government sector and the two sectors were equal.

47. The coding for social class was based on the definitions provided by the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO). See Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Standard Classification of Occupations*, Commonwealth of Australia, 1986. These are used to calculate occupational prestige rankings. See F. Jones, 'Occupational Prestige in Australia', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1989, pp. 187-99. A separate analysis of different occupational groups (as defined by ASCO) was carried out and yielded very similar results to the ones reported in this paper for occupational prestige rankings. The subjective measure of class was derived from the following question: 'If you were asked to use one of four names for your social class, which would you say you belong in: the lower class, the working class, the middle class or the upper class?'

48. In Tables III and V the measure for party identification contrasts the

opinions of supporters of the Labor Party with those of the Liberal and National parties. For left-right policy orientations see H. D. Klingemann, 'Measuring Political Conceptualization', in S. Barnes and M. Kaase (eds), *Political Action*, Beverly Hills, Sage, 1979. However, the measure used here is slightly different to the 10-point self-placement scale used by Klingemann.

49. A number of tests of the association between employment status and support for statutory intervention were carried out before arriving at this four-fold classification. The relationship was analyzed by contrasting the views of those in full-time employment with those of all the other categories; the views of those in full-time employment with those in part-time employment plus those in all other categories; the views of the unemployed with those in all other categories; the views of retired people with those in all categories. In all these tests the Pearson correlation coefficients (between employment status and support for statutory provision) were less significant than the test which distinguished between the four categories reported in sequence in the text. (This is the result reported in Table III).

50. A separate analysis was conducted of different occupational groups, as defined by the ASCO. This yielded very similar results to the ones for occupational prestige rankings reported in this paper.

51. This yielded scores of support for statutory intervention ranging from 4 through to 20. These were recoded as follows for Table IV: (5 to 6 = very strong; 7 to 8 = strong; 9 to 10 = moderate; 11 to 12 = weak; and 13 to 20 = very weak).

52. The sample was divided into approximately five quintiles.

53. Esping-Andersen, 1985, *op. cit.*

54. In each case the dependent variable was constructed by adding the response categories of the various indices for support for the welfare state or for private and public provision.