

Social issues and public policy topics politics essay



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Social issues and public policy topics were, traditionally, managed by states through a central regulatory agenda consisting of bureaucracies and governmental domestic legislation. However, this setting-standards approach has presented some deficiencies which, from 1980s on, led to a research towards the development of new policy rationale. Among those who underlined and examined the shift away from the state as the sole actor in political and economical decisions is Martin Janiche in his book "State Failure, The Impotence of politics in Industrial Society".

The given book reflects the highly discussed topic of the relationship between state and market. In specific, it deals with the failure of politics, as far as decision making is concerned, "to take and implement decisions that run counter to the prevailing trend"(M. Janiche, 1990: x). During the 1980s the policies of industrialized states shifted towards a non-governmental regulation of the economy. State centered management of economy was gradually replaced by the privatization of the production of public goods and services as well as the deregulation of price controls and entry restrictions. Thus, international bodies and international organizations as well as private actors assumed a different, far more influent role in the new modes of decision making.

This gradual mutation led to state failure and to a kind of a need to redefine state's responsibilities towards more direction and organization policies rather than preventive measures.(). Janicke refers to state failure providing useful explanation of the term through a lucid formation of a theory which links to market failure (32). Afterwards, he focuses on public health sector, the protection of the environment and the transport and energy policy in

order to provide more concrete examples of the domains that the state fails to prove effectiveness. His argumentation proceeds with state failure as state indebtedness and its causes since 1970 (78). A critical question presented in this chapter is whether or not "the welfare state costs too much" (Ch. 7). Then, the author devotes two chapters of his book in order to identify two processes that cause state failure. That is the 'superindustrialism' as a phenomenon of capitalism appeared after the post-war boom and the 'tank syndrome' which as a term (to be analyzed below) refers to states and politics losing their ability to regulate. He also makes remarks about the state failure within a scientific socialism framework, that is state failure from a socialist perspective derived from the Soviet-type communist countries of Eastern Europe. Last but not least, the author chose to conclude his work referring to political science as methodological analysis. This final chapter actually mirrors his choice for a realistic analysis of "problem-oriented political science" referring at the same time to key concepts particularly used throughout the book such as, agents, the concept of power, interests as motives for decision, the correlation between crises and development and the concept of strategy as calculated decisions.

We shall now proceed in some key concepts presented by the author in the book that practically reflect the essence of Janicke's work. The principal notion that consists a key element in understanding the author's points is the "power accumulation process". This notion is directly linked to crises generation. The impotence of politics in times of crisis has as an outcome the insecurity of power and, thus, dismantling power potentially can have a positive outcome (131). The author distinguishes 5 ways of dismantling

power; By decentralization, by countervailing power from above, from below, from outside and from within (131). If any fruitful result could occur then it would happen within the power from within framework, in more simple words citizens are those who can intervene against the state failure and the market pressure. In this sense, the book provides some revolutionary implications that can lead to political reform movements in a universal scale. However, this suggestion rests upon the reader to elaborate, confirm or reject.

The use of the term power is omnipresent as it is directly or indirectly connected to governments, politics and states. However, power also has to do with other sectors such as bureaucracy, industry, the media and the industrial organization. As the roots of the problem are located in the industrial structure it would be a vacuum not to refer to the role of the state in the industrial system. Indeed, the author devotes a whole chapter (the first one) in order to give a definition of the industrial system and the state as well as to examine the power relations that lie in both of them.

Both terms of economic and political state failure provide a practical beginning of the text as the reader has the opportunity to familiarize with terms that will be widely used. Economic state failure equals the failure of the state to supply " a country with public goods that are too highly priced and too low in quality" (1). Political state failure means " a chronic inability to take decisions widely agreed to be necessary" (1). The problem actually starts when politicians fail to fulfill their duty and to serve the cause for which they were elected in the first place. So, state failure derives, in a primal level, from within the same structure of a state and its representatives.

However, the problem is far more complex for the author to rest only upon that. He goes further with his argumentation including industrialization and bureaucratization as processes of power accumulation that, in a distorted way, evolved from being indices of social progress to generating a list of problems that affect the social well being and the advancement of society. Bureaucracy and industry are correlated as the first one is pervading in politics and the second one in economy. The bureaucratization problem has to do with the sizes of administrations and the controllability of state machineries. The important question posed here is to what extent are bureaucracies capable to correspond efficiently to problems. Clearly, the beaurocratic centralization has failed to provide for viable social solutions and that is why the author suggests a drift towards more decentralized solutions for problems.

Trying to provide a functional, multi-leveled, definition of the state, Janiche distinguishes four functions; the regulatory, the legitimation, the infrastructure and the nuisance abatement function. The regulatory function is connected to the economic agents and the increasing demand for regulation by the state which, if not achieved, will lead to the "unpredictability of the economic activity" (8). The legitimation function concerns the decision-makers and their responsibility to make accurate decisions and avoid the failure of bureaucracy. Both the infrastructure and the nuisance abatement function have to do with two of the most fundamental economic functions of the state linked to economic growth (9).

After having determined the fundamental functions of the state the author demonstrates their non-applicability via the state failure theory. In a

nutshell, the state failure theory emphasizes in state's reduced regulation capacity. According to Janicke, states have a small capacity for political intervention and they are functionally ineffective and economically inefficient in settling domestic problems. The theory of state failure is closely related to the theory of market failure as the first came as a response of the latter (31). A very thorough argumentation proves the interconnection and the interaction of those two theories. Indeed, the state failure theory was a response to the market failure theory which was based on the incapacity of market to satisfy certain types of demands that state, on the other hand, would be the most appropriate to correspond (for example the demands for law and education). Therefore, when the state needs to intervene and correct market failure but fails in doing so, we have a clear image of how the theory works.

Janicke makes a considerable remark about bureaucracy. He argues that the "proliferating bureaucracy" is only a side-effect of the non-effectiveness of a state and not the cause. One of the causes lies, as mentioned above, in market economy. This is the first paradox in the theory of state failure. Overall there are five paradoxes. In the second one he claims that even though state fails in many tasks it still remains an economic actor since it manages to receive incomes-though short-term- in problematic areas of industrial society (35). The third paradox that state failure generates is the claim that the more money spent on fixing problems caused by the industrial sector the less the interest in taking preventing action before the problem emerges (35). The fourth one is connected to the previous paradox. That is, the less preventive action by the state equals more expensive activity for resolving the problem,

so the need for more taxes is increased. The last paradox is the " antithesis between quantity and quality in the state". Huge budgets don't necessarily mean political power. Even though the reasoning is logically acceptable, some examples would have made his theory more accurate. He only provides an example of the last paradox using the case of criminality and state expenses in Western Germany from 1965 to 1985 (35).

Janiche makes a useful comparative public policy contribution by applying the previous ideas in the areas of public health, environmental protection, transport, energy and economic policies and tax expenditures. In view of the fact that the basic incapability of the society to follow a " humane" industrial development is not a technical difficulty but a problem of power, the author suggests the elimination of the monopoly of power of industrial production through the reinforcement of powers of other groups and institutions that could potentially have balance effects . Among actions in favour of counterbalancing powers is the expansion of political responsibility to institutions that better represent more generalized interests, not just producers, and " decentralization to local units of government within a more effective central or federal coordination. Janicke considers citizens capable of exploiting economic and environmental crises as opportunities to build these countervailing powers in society (134).

The author mentions two major " processes working in different directions" that result in state failure. The first one is superindustrialism and the second is the " tank syndrome". Superindustrialism is a phenomenon of the post war boom. The excessive level of industrialization increased the demand for state regulation. On the other hand, the tank syndrome has to do with a late

reaction of the hierarchized state centres that because of their rigid power structures failed to respond to crises arisen on time and efficiently (111).

This book review will be concluded after mentioning two points; the application of state failure theory in scientific socialism and the political science as a realistic analysis.

Janicke throughout his book has used a western framework to locate his argumentation. He particularly used examples of Western Germany (and Japan as well) to illustrate state failure. In the penultimate chapter he changes the reasearh framework by introducing the " communist variant". Eastern Europe consists an extreme example of the consequences brought by industrialism but the author is fully aware of this case. He underlines the difference between the western and eastern states cases arguing that in the latter bureaucracy was before industry and sometimes it was bureaucracy that generated industry (129).

Last but not least, the author makes his methodological choice clear. After referring to the difficulties that political science faces because of the " abstractness of its subject matter" (137) and the distinction between the realistic and the idealistic approach, he brings upon the subject of realistic analysis. He used this method to locate the problem of politics in industrial society. He took a wide and comparative approach in order to examine the regulatory governmental failure. However, some key points still remain confusing for the reader. It would be very interesting if the author could provide some answers on the actual way crises can be utilized politically in order for rigid centralized power to be surmounted. He could also use some

extra empirical data that could enforce his theories and leave the reader totally convinced.

The major contribution of the book reviewed above "State Failure, The Impotence of politics in Industrial Society" in the state theories field lies in its proposed solution. The solution to the economic standstill lies upon the redefinition of power relationships rather than a technical approach. This book can have a critical value for those interested in a variety of fields, from comparative public policy to comparative political economy and environmental policy.