

SUMMARIES

Why is institution building difficult?

by Giovan Francesco Lanzara

Why is institution building difficult? why it often turns out to be self-destructive? and how does it take place in spite of its difficulties? Extending an analytical framework developed by James March (1991), this paper tries to tackle these questions by examining the dilemma between the exploration of alternative institutional arrangements and the exploitation of current ones. Institution building is viewed as a problem of adaptive intelligence and learning in the intertemporal allocation of resources. Some basic self-destructive processes and failure cycles associated with the exploration/exploitation dilemma are identified and discussed; implications are drawn for four distinct domains: competency and resource endowments, self-interest, identity, and trust. In the second part of the paper three basic modes of institution building are illustrated: focal points, increasing returns, and *bricolage*. These are shown to be modest but viable mechanisms for countervailing self-destructive dynamics and for building institutions.

Selectivity, universalism and the politics of welfare retrenchment in Germany and in the United States

by Jens Alber

The question of which factors shape the development of social programs in the phase of retrenchment has moved to the fore of scholarly debates on the welfare state. Conventional wisdom held that the degree to which schemes withstand curtailments varies with the degree of universalism or middle class integration. An influential attack on this conventional wisdom by Paul Pierson argued that selective programs were the winners of the retrenchment phase, and that the degree of middle class integration does not explain program-

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specific trajectories. Departing from a critical review of his argument, the paper re-examines Pierson's claims. It shows that an examination of the extent to which conservative governments have realized their proclaimed policy goals does not provide an answer to the question of to which extent various groups of welfare beneficiaries weather the storm of retrenchment policies. By holding the degree of middle class integration constant, and comparing the development of selective programs in the United States and in Germany, the empirical analysis produces two major findings. First of all, the beneficiaries of selective programs cannot be considered winners of the retrenchment phase; secondly, there is a marked country-specific variation in the development of selective programs, as German poor relief recipients stood their grounds much better than their American counterparts. Theorizing about the proper conceptualization of welfare state retrenchment, the paper argues that program-specific trajectories are largely a function of the financing structure of the scheme which shape the fiscal interests of state élites. To what extent these interests translate into effective retrenchment hinges upon the coalition chances of public policy makers with collective actors who represent cost-control interests on the one side and need satisfaction interests on the other.

The evolution of concertation in Italy and Germany

by Elisabetta Gualmini

This paper focuses on the patterns of institutional regulation of the labour market in Italy and in Germany.

It intends to demonstrate, as opposed to what is mainly suggested by the corporatist literature, that the regulation of the Italian labour market, also during the nineties, is based on concertation and exchange routines between the public actors and the social actors, whereas in Germany the institutional regulation of the labour market is the result of a clear division of labour between the political system and the industrial relations system. The historical reconstruction of labour market policies in the two countries from the seventies to the nineties allows the Author to interpretate the Italian pattern of regulation as a case of path dependency, that is of change through adaptation, and the German model, on the contrary, as a case of substitution of the policy paradigm, that is of institutional learning.

To this purpose, the first and the second generation of the studies on neo-corporatism are examined, in order, on the one side, to test the validity of their hypotheses as for the Italian and the German case, on the other to connect them to the recent new-institutional analyses, which are likely to represent a more promising theoretical perspective.

The legislative activity of Governments at sunset of the First Republic

by Chiara De Micheli

This article examines an aspect of the performances of Italian Governments in the last ten years of the so-called «First Republic» (1983-1994).

The aim is to observe «if» and «how» the government performance in the policy-making process varies as a consequence of the transformation of the party system. Since the 1980s the degree of polarization has decreased while the degree of fragmentation has increased. In particular, the author wants to verify the plausibility of the hypothesis according to which the high degree of fragmentation causes the continuation, notwithstanding the reduction of polarization, of an unsatisfactory government performance. Therefore, the author makes a quantitative analysis – number of laws approved, number of bills presented, the amount of votes by which the legislation was approved, number of amendments presented and approved, kind of legislative procedure used for approval – and a qualitative analysis – the kinds of laws promulgated – of the legislation in order to estimate the role played by the cabinet in the law-making process.

The results of this research show that in the IX, X and XI legislatures an unsatisfactory government performance has persisted, which appears to confirm the impact that fragmentation has on the policy-making process and its outcomes.