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Analysis of the State of Social Well-Being from the Keynesian Perspective: Its Development, Rise and Retrenchment

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Abstract: The welfare state seeks to ensure economic balance and protection of individual and social rights for its citizens, without leaving the theoretical framework of capitalism. The objective of this article is to analyze the welfare state through the Keynesian model, including its development, rise and retrenchment (1930-1980). A regulatory state in the economy was proposed as a solution to the crisis of 1929 and the post-WWII reconstruction of nations. Between the 1970s and 1980s, the welfare state weakened because of another global economic crisis and other factors such as the emergence of neoliberalism. Methodologically this is a qualitative-descriptive study, based on bibliographic research, and guided by the question: what were the factors that contributed to the state to retreat from its assistance policy, mainly between the 1970s and 1980s? The results show that the economic cycle that occurred in this timeframe made possible the protagonism of neoliberalism, but not the annihilation of the welfare state. Neoliberal measures have overshadowed social interests, seen as "public expenditure of social protectionism", and have weakened the regulation of citizenship rights and welfare services. The practice of state intervention in the economy to ensure balance in market activities, guaranteeing consumption, and thus full employment, was weakened by the neoliberal model, but not annulled. The welfare state, the version anchored in Keynesian theory, lost its hegemony after a period of the great economic ascension of the capitalism cycle between 1930 and 1980. Social problems and demands continued and were not solved by neoliberal policies with their free market policies, privatization and tax reduction.

Keywords: Welfare State, Keynesian, Economic Crisis, Public Administration, New Public Management

1. Introduction

The welfare state was established and strengthened as a model of political and economic organization after the 1930s. Its aim was economic recovery through State intervention in the economy, with investment in the industrial sector to create jobs and expand citizens' social rights in a post-war world scenario and in an economic crisis arising from the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange in 1929, which consequently affected the peripheral countries.

After its first results, this political model of the welfare state was embraced by European countries such as the United Kingdom, by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, after the Second World War. In this context, the role of the state as a regulator in economic affairs set a precedent for the consolidation of social rights through public policies that became a constitutional duty. According to Wilensky, "the essence of the welfare state lies in the protection offered by the government in the form of minimum standards of income [...] assured to all citizens as a public right, not as charity" [1]. It can be assumed that a welfare state encompasses the political, economic, social and cultural interests of its citizens.

Practical examples of the implementation of social rights were the policies implemented by Roosevelt, then President of the United States, known as the "New Deal" (a political-economic program implemented by President Roosevelt in the United States after the 1929 crisis, to bring economic stabilization to the country), and the achievements of the Vargas Era in Brazil, as the Consolidation of Labor Laws in 1943. The welfare state encompasses guaranteeing protection for citizens' social rights and ensuring that the economy flows, overseen by state intervention so that economic and social imbalances are minimised.

The interventionist state policy came to confront the customary free market or the "invisible hand" stream, championed by the economic liberalism theorist Adam Smith. The idea that the market self-regulates itself and that the state should intervene as little as possible in economic affairs came into collapse after the crash of the American stock market in 1929.

However, how come that at a certain moment the state does not intervene and at another moment it does? To properly answer this question, it is fundamental to know that economic crises are part of capitalism and that the state is the actor that must administer and possess mechanisms that enable economic balance. According to Robert Castel, the welfare state is "the guarantor of a generalized social protection, the maintenance of the great balances, the conduction of the economy and the search for a compromise among the different partners involved in the growth process" [2].

The welfare state does not exclude capitalism, but makes the state guarantor, within the capitalism model, a centralized welfare policy structure. In this way, the conjuncture mentioned in a post-crisis and post-war world demanded a new form of state action for economic, political and social reconstruction, to promote integration in these areas.

Based on this assumption, the objective of this paper consists in analyzing the politics of the welfare state through the Keynesian model, as well as its development, rise and weakening, comprised in the period from 1930 to 1980. As a subsidiary objective, we seek to understand the cycles of capitalism and its role within a state policy. And as a working hypothesis, it is considered that the welfare state seeks to ensure economic balance and protection of individual and social rights of its citizens, within the capitalism model. Given the time frame of our analysis – from 1930 to the end of the 1980s -, our research question is established as follows: What were the factors which contributed to the state's withdrawal from its welfare policy, especially between the 1970s and 1980s?

Through the identification of these factors, the research justification consists in highlighting the objective of the welfare state model and raising the main features of its trajectory during the 20th century. The proposal is not to highlight its performance in any particular country which has adopted the welfare state but to bring an analysis of this model and its economic and social security proposal for the citizens.

John Maynard Keynes is the most relevant author to support and frame our analysis. Methodologically this is qualitative research, and as to its objective, it is a descriptive investigation, since it is a detailed study of its object, which is the welfare state. The technical procedure is the bibliographical one for being a literature review on Keynesianism and the politics of the welfare state, and the technique for collecting data is through indirect documentation based on articles, books and official records on the theme. Such procedures and techniques made it possible to reach the proposed objectives and answer the guiding question of this research.

2. The Emergence of Keynesianism

The welfare state appeared in a fragile context in the trajectory of the 20th century, in the post-war period. According to Gosta Esping-Andersen, the welfare state represented a pillar for the reconstruction of the countries affected by the crisis and the war based on three dimensions: economical, moral and political.

> The advanced welfare state, which became one of the hallmarks of the “Golden Age” of post-war prosperity, implied more than a mere upgrading of existing social policies in the developed industrial world. In the broadest of terms, it represented an effort to bring about economic, moral and political reconstruction. Economically, it departed from the orthodoxies of the pure market nexus and required the extension of income and employment security as a right of citizenship. Morally, it sought to defend the ideas of social justice, solidarity and universalism. Politically, the welfare state formed part of a project of nation-building, affirming liberal democracy against the twin perils of fascism and bolshevism. [3]

Considering the author's encompassing argument, the welfare state brought a new worldwide configuration and a proposal of a type of government. The welfare state represented above all a pact between society (mainly between businessmen, political parties, unions and workers) and government at the economic, moral and political levels. Trade unions, workers and political parties renounced the pursuit of socialism, and businessmen agreed to cede part of their profits via taxation and better working conditions. The government has administered this pact and implemented social welfare policies.

The theoretical basis for understanding the welfare state lies in Keynesianism. Coming from the British economist John Maynard Keynes, whose main work, "The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money" [4], on one hand, is a criticism of the market self-regulation, the method by which the free market leads to the economic balance supported by the economic liberalism theorists, and on the other hand, an answer to the capitalism crisis without taking side towards the extreme ideals of Marxism.

It is important to note that Keynes was not the first economist who proposed the idea of the state intervening in the economic area. There were other strands and theoretical thinkers that pushed this proposal, such as the Stockholm School (a school of thought of economic theory, idealized by Swedish scholars), as well as the German economist Georg

Friedrich List [5], who advocated state protectionism in favour of national industry for its growth and valorization. However, it was Keynes who quantified and demonstrated with the so-called "anti-cyclical policies" the need for the state to intervene in the economic area. According to Keynes, the definition of the business cycle consists in:

> However, to be adequate, our explanation must include another characteristic of the so-called business cycle; namely, the phenomenon of crisis - the fact that the replacement of an ascending phase by a descending one usually occurs suddenly and violently, whereas, as a rule, in the transition from a descending to an ascending phase there is not such a sudden turning point [4].

The first argument to consider in Keynes' proposal is to know that he was not opposed to the free market, but that there should be an equilibrium between supply and demand, nor was he a supporter of total state domination, as the Marxist proposal. In this sense, Keynesianism is presented as a doctrine of capitalism.

In simple argument, Keynes' explanation for the economic problem of not making "the wheel of the economy turn" was the excessive economic inequality. For this not to happen, it is necessary the investment of the public power in this "big wheel", such as invigorating the consumers' demand [6]. The investment in infrastructure and formulation of fiscal policies were also part of Keynes' proposal for economic balance.

From a Macroeconomic market perspective, Keynes points out some factors such as consumption and investment as being central to responding to economic crises, because through them jobs are generated: "Keynesian formulations stated, correctly, that the demand to be generated by workers' income with full employment would be the antidote for economies in recession" [7]. In this manner, if there is an investment, the economy warms up, people have jobs, and consequently, they increase consumption. Thus, employment is directly proportional to the sum of consumption and investment.

Another premise sustained by Keynes, as a criticism of classical-liberal thought, is saving. For economic liberalism, saving is a virtue. However, for Keynes, saving means retaining resources that could be invested for the proportion of more employment and thus more consumption, moving the economy, avoiding unemployment and averting market crisis:

> Income = value of production = consumption + investment. Savings = income - consumption. Therefore, savings = investment. [...].
>
> The amounts of aggregate income and aggregate savings are results of the free choice of individuals as to consume or not consume, and as to invest or not invest. But none of these amounts can assume an independent value resulting from a separate set of decisions alien to those concerning consumption and investment. According to this principle, the concept of consumption propensity will take the place of the propensity or disposition to save. [4]

The State, in Keynesian theory, becomes the key actor because through public resources it is possible to bring investment to the industrial sector that will generate employment and thus consumption. In this way, the State will be able to organize a policy of tax collection that provides better quality services for the welfare of citizens.

The regulation of the State in the economy is necessary so that the formulation of fiscal policy reaches the companies' profits and, thus, they pay more taxes, decentralizing the concentration of income and reducing inequality. According to Keynes, "The State should exert a guiding influence on the propensity to consume, partly employing the taxation system, partly by fixing the interest rate and eventually by other means" [4]. For the author, inequalities will diminish if there is a balance in the market, with the incentive of investments, credit, and reduction of interests.

To synthesize Keynes' proposal, it is necessary to understand that the consolidation of the State as an intervening agent in the economy through fiscal and monetary policies, according to Keynesian theory, would avoid possible cyclical crises that destabilize the economy of several countries. And in cases of crisis, the State emerges as a stabilizer and maintainer of effective demand.

3. The Rise of the Welfare State

This section presents some historical facts that contributed to the rise of the welfare state from the 1930s on. As previously discussed, this model of economic provisions and valorization of basic public services to its citizens, carried in its practice the Keynesian ideals that influenced several States in their political, economic and social reconstruction in the international scope. In the end, we address the factors that contributed to the retrenchment of the welfare state.

Next, are addressed, such as the oil crisis and the rise of Neoliberalism as a socioeconomic model that considers the State's decision-making power minimal in economic and private affairs, to achieve greater market freedom.

Basically, the rise of the welfare state came about through the crisis of economic liberalism in the 1930s. However, the first "fruits" of this new interventionist state policy were only visible at the end of that decade. As previously mentioned, the welfare state is a state that provides benefits to its citizens, seeking to minimize social imbalance and equal rights for all. It was in this context that public policies emerged.

There is no unanimous definition of what public policies are, but there are several authors who have collaborated to explain this issue. The literature on the subject is extensive and the citations are based on studies by various researchers. Public policies are “instruments of agglutination of interests around common goals, which come to structure a collectivity of interests and function as an instrument of planning, rationalization and popular participation” [8]. Other authors define public policies as state actions through planning and programs to meet the demands of a given society [9]. Also, a government plan to support civil society and non-governmental entities to solve a problem of public interest [10].

Through this mode of government action, the welfare state made possible its performance with public policies in social attention, guaranteeing rights and service to citizens. According to T. H. Marshall, social citizenship, which is the granting of social rights, constitutes the core idea of welfare states [11]. For Esping-Andersen, within Marshall´s logic, “all citizens are endowed with similar rights, irrespective of class or market position” [12].

It was in the second half of the 20th century that social interests gained greater visibility and were consolidated in Europe, with global extension, mainly due to the strong performance of trade union movements and the growth of industrial activity. Industrialisation was a relevant factor in the spread of social policies since public investment in the industry led to more jobs and therefore more consumption. Fordism can be cited as a strong contributor to the rise of the welfare state: “Ford maintains the essentials of Taylorism and perfects the method by introducing the assembly line and a new way of managing the workforce, with emphasis on the incentives given to workers through increased wage levels [13].

Numerous countries converged on the interests of economic and technological development to promote employment. Given this social division of labour, new demands for social programs were growing, such as housing, education and health. The dynamics of these new demands, which previously were under the responsibility of charity institutions, such as the Church and the community, became a state's responsibility, to ensure a decent standard of living for its citizens: "the welfare state expresses the idea of replacing the uncertainty of religious providence by the certainty of state providence" [14].

There were also some institutions and factors that fostered the international spreading of the welfare state, namely the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), resulting from the Bretton Woods Conference, with measures of economic stability for the European countries and the USA; the Marshall Plan; the Cold War, led by the USA, based on its geopolitical strategy of influencing other countries to counter the advance of socialism, which also provided financial incentive policies for Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan, the Asian Tigers; neocolonialism - dependence on industrialized products and the stimulus for consumption. These historical facts corroborated the leverage of the welfare state in international projection [15].

4. Causes of the Retrenchment of the Welfare State

Some factors are related to the crisis of the welfare state, mainly in the 1970s. Next, the main factors and their characteristics are highlighted, correlating them to the historical context of the welfare state. To better understand the reasons that influenced the weakening of the ideals of the welfare state in this period, it is necessary to review the main conjunctural facts of the time which influenced the macroeconomic unbalance at a global level. From that, several countries would have to reformulate their economic, political and social orders to address the crisis.

Firstly, there was a change in the international market order due to the economic rise of countries like Japan and Germany, which directly affected American supremacy in international competition Another important fact was the United States' engagement in the Cold War, causing high expenditures [16]. The result of these facts in the late 1960s was the American budget deficits and instability in the trade balance. The instability in the American economy was similar to a domino effect, due to its hegemony and influence on the international market and developing countries.

In this scenario of uncertainty and economic instability, the then President of the United States Richard Nixon adopted some measures to try to stabilize the American economy in the international market. One of these measures was to disengage the dollar-gold standard for a floating exchange rate, thus deactivating the measures decided in the Bretton Woods agreements. To make things worse,

> At that time, the Deutsche Mark was emerging as a hard currency, increasingly used in European trade. In 1970 and 1971, the flow of dollars abroad multiplied, generating greater instability and, in August 1971, US reserves fell below the psychologically critical level of $10 billion. At this moment, Nixon announced a series of measures, among them the suspension of the convertibility of the dollar into gold [16].

The 1973 oil crisis contributed to serious economic instability at the international level. It is known that the Middle East is the region with the highest concentration of oil and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), a cartel organisation, holds the monopoly on this natural resource. Due to geopolitical reasons involving the United States, Israel and the countries of the Middle East, the price of a barrel of oil was increased by OPEC due to the decrease in its production, which reached a 400% increase in value, and the fact that the organization required the payment of all its exports in dollars [16].

This measure established by OPEC directly affected the economy of countries such as the United States and several European nations, and consequently reflected throughout the world economy. "The performance of low growth with inflationary acceleration and financial imbalances of the United States generated a conflict between economic goods and social goods" [7]. In this way, the imposed recession highlighted the economic reality of these countries. And emerged proposals such as "lean public spending" to avoid national debt, the need to reduce tax barriers, privatization and increased international flows were proposals brought by Neoliberalism.

The neoliberal political-economic model was strengthened in this period to confront the ideals of the welfare state and gained popularity due to the macroeconomic crisis, concomitant with social and political changes. According to neoliberal theory, the oil crisis unveiled the national indebtedness of several states around the world that supported Keynesian policy with high tax revenues to meet spending on social expenditure, which in the long run triggered an overburdened state. The public spending of the state also triggered a major inflationary crisis that consequently reduced people's purchasing power and reduced consumption. Therefore, “the signs of the "Golden Age" wore off when labour productivity in several countries declined, when the dollar-gold-based monetary system collapsed, when the US deficit became feverish, and when oil barrel prices rose stratospherically in 1973” [7].

Neoliberalism theorists expressed several criticisms of the social state and sponsored proposals such as that the state should ensure only the basic rights to its citizens, besides opening to the international markets, privatization, free competition, flexibility of labour relations with the repulse of trade union movements, public administration based on private business principles, among others. Thus, the core idea was to implement a minimal State.

For neoliberals, the long and deep recession between 1969-1973 resulted from the excessive power of trade unions and the labour movements, the increased provision in social spending/investment by the state and eroding of the bases of accumulation [17].

In this context of crisis, some conservative world leaders opposed the practice of the welfare state and guided their ideals to neoliberalism. Names like Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Ronald Reagan, President of the United States, and Augusto Pinochet, military dictator of Chile, assumed neoliberalism as an economic policy in their countries in the late 1970s [7].

From the theoretical point of view, according to [6], Milton Friedman, a respected American economist, is the reference to neoliberal ideals. His best-known work is "Capitalism and Freedom", which addresses issues such as economic freedom, the role that the state should have in society and the market economy as a means of wealth and prosperity for a nation:

> The existence of a free market does not of course eliminate the need for a government. On the contrary, a government is essential both for determining the 'rules of the game' and as an arbiter to interpret and enforce the established rules. What the market does is to reduce appreciably the number of questions that must be decided by political means - and hence to minimize the extent to which government has to participate directly in the game [18].

Thus, Milton Friedman justifies state action for the maintenance of law and order, individual rights and basic social issues. Proposals such as no state regulation in the economy, individual freedom and market self-regulation were characteristics of his economic policy ideal: any intervention in the free play of the market, the instance where freedom reigns, is necessarily coercive [6].

These characteristics were evident in the neoliberal policies, which throughout the 1970s and 1980s, were established as an economic model for several nations, principally for its model of an open economy, free competition and globalization. Thus, from 1970 policies of neoliberal orientation begin to gain strengths, whose purpose was to combat the policies of social protection, Keynesianism and policies of collective solidarity [17].

Social changes are also a contribution to the increase in public spending. The women in the labour market and the increase of the population in the post-war decades caused increased spending on education, such as opening daycare centres and schools to meet this demand. Another social fact was the increase in the elderly population, which demanded the state's attention [17], generating a fall in the participation of the active population in the market, and influencing economic fragility.

It is noteworthy that Brazil also suffered the influence of neoliberal measures, especially after 1985 with the end of the Military Dictatorship and the rise of the Brazilian democratic government. The various privatizations of state-owned companies and the opening of commercial integration changed the dynamics from a state with protectionist measures to a neoliberal state. The counter-social measures established by the 1988 Federal Constitution, considered a milestone of this political transition period, were not fully achieved:

> In the period of transition from an authoritarian government to democracy, left-wing political parties and popular movements believed that the time had come for the Brazilian State to pay off the immense social debt in the face of the deep social inequalities and extreme poverty reigning in the country. However, such yearnings did not develop, even under the aegis of the 1988 Federal Constitution, which provides for numerous social rights and the protection of the social order [19].

Despite the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988 covering numerous measures of protection and social rights, and a late desire to implement a welfare state, the interests arising from neoliberalism were increasingly evident in Brazil.

All these factors added up to a rupture in the course of state policies as a regulator of economic affairs. The ideals of Keynesianism were confronted and replaced by neoliberal practices, together with the change in the international scenario between the 1970s and 1980s.

5. Conclusion

The set of economic and social measures to promote economic balance through full employment and, thus, provide the decrease of social inequalities and the increase of general welfare of citizens proposed by Keynesian theory, and applied through the political-economic model of the welfare state, suffered great negative impact with the financial crisis of the 1970s.

After elaborating on the factors that influenced the weakening of welfare policies of the Keynesian style between the 1970s and 1980s, it was possible to verify that the measures implemented by neo-liberalism prevailed in the economic and political structure of a multitude of nations that were financially weakened by the crisis, besides having been influenced by several international economical institutions and by developed countries of great world influence, such as the United States and England.

The research hypothesis was corroborated, because, through the historical and bibliographical content exposed throughout this paper, the welfare state, within the capitalism model, seeks to ensure economic balance and protection for individuals and social rights for its citizens.

Neoliberal measures have overshadowed social interests, seen as "public expenditure of social protectionism", and have weakened the regulation of citizenship rights and welfare services. The practice of state intervention in the economy to ensure balance in market activities, guaranteeing consumption, and thus full employment, was weakened by the neoliberal model, but not annulled.

In short, the welfare state, the version anchored in Keynesian theory, lost its hegemony after a period of the great economic ascension of the capitalism cycle between 1930 and 1980. Social problems and demands continued and were not solved by neoliberal policies with their free market policies, privatization and tax reduction.

From these facts, this research recognizes the need to extend investigations on the states that adhered to and maintained the welfare state policy to verify its economic results and the social rights of citizens.

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