

Book Reviews:

Paolo Borioni, Cesare Damiano, Tiziano Treu, Il modello sociale scandinavo—Tra diritti e flessibilità (Roma: Nuova Iniziativa Editoriale, 2006), 128pp

by *Antonio Calcagno*

Il modello sociale scandinavo seeks to bring Italy and Scandinavia (in particular Denmark and Sweden) into dialogue with one another around the deep connection between social policy and economic growth. Though the authors note there are deep differences between the two worlds, there is still much that Italy can learn from the Scandinavian approach to social and economic well-being, especially when examining the latter's notion of the welfare state. This text, however, is more than an analysis of different approaches to management and distribution of social and economic resources; it is also a deeply political text as witnessed by the introduction of Francesco Rutelli, leader of the Ulivo in Italy. He sees in the Italo-Scandinavian *rapprochement* outlined in the book genuine political possibilities designed to make Italy more inclusive, democratic and economically prosperous.

The authors provide a systematic and careful analysis of Scandinavian social policy, maintaining that a stronger social net that results in feelings of personal political and social security is key to a strong economic performance. The genius of the Scandinavian welfare state, which from the 30's onward took decades to build, consists in the fact that it can guarantee a sense of care and well-being (from "cradle to grave") for its citizens, which in turn builds and fosters a belief and trust in the state. This feeling and knowledge of being looked after as best as the government can in any circumstance results in a flexibility of its citizens to adapt to changing economic circumstances and world markets. This position stands in opposition to the Liberal or Neo-Liberal position, where emphasis is placed on the generation of capital in order to guarantee well-being and a strong social net. For example, Sweden was able to accommodate massive changes brought about by globalisation in the 90's because of the priority of the well-being of its citizens. The Swedes adapted and are doing well, despite massive reforms and certain cuts to the system implemented by past centrist-right governments of the 90's. The economic crisis in Italy, especially due to competition from Asian markets, consists in the fact that the once vibrant multiplicity of small- and mid-size companies can no longer compete against multinational chains that employ cheaper labour resources in Asia. Goods can be produced more cheaply, quickly and abundantly, even when supplies are shipped and

goods are shipped back to Italian and Western markets. The problem for Italy and other countries like France and Germany is that their social net and the social well-being of their respective citizens is based on available funds generated from economic growth. When smaller companies can no longer compete, one's social well-being suffers from a lack of resources and institutional support.

To this end and drawing from their study of Scandinavian social and economic policy, the authors propose serious reforms in order to create a more solid and democratic social net analogous to that found in Sweden and Denmark. Among the numerous suggestions one finds reforming workers' rights and privileges when it comes to accessing certain social benefits in cases of unemployment, maternity, paternity, etc. Also, there is a push to give to companies extended periods of credit and funding in order to adapt to changing global economic pressures.

Though most of the suggestions seems logical and desirable, one must take into account that the huge differences between Italy and Scandinavia are such that it would be impossible, especially given history, regional differences, cultural and political differences as well as the sheer difference in population numbers, to transplant certain Swedish or Danish policies into Italy without seriously undermining certain Italian regional and political differences. To conclude, and despite my foregoing critique, the book is meant to provoke one to think and seriously challenge the presupposition that economic prosperity is key for social well-being. In reversing this formula, much is given to think about.

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