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M. Crotty, N.J. Diamant, M. Edele, The Politics of Veteran Benefits in the Twentieth Century. A Comparative History

Cornell University Press, 2020, 240 pages

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- 1 Substantial academic literature has shown that wartime service and veterans' outcomes can vary widely over time and space. However, in their aspirational book, Martin Crotty, Neil J. Diamant, and Mark Edele aim to go beyond the specificities and identify general patterns in the postwar experience of demobilized soldiers. More precisely, they seek to understand where and under what circumstances veterans reached an elevated status in postwar societies. The authors synthesize the existing literature on the topic and analyze the political aspects of the veteran experience. With this aim in mind, they adopt a global comparative approach and study the outcomes of veterans in eight different countries after the two global conflicts of the 20th century: China, Taiwan, Japan, USSR, USA, Great Britain, Australia, Germany. As the literature on these areas shows, veterans' outcomes depend strongly on the willingness of government to tackle their problems but also on the support of fellow citizens when it comes to making the case for their benefits. This is why the authors consider both the relationship between veterans and the state – their *vertical status*, and the relationship between veterans and their fellow citizens – their *horizontal status*. From a theoretical point of view, Crotty, Diamant, and Edele have an interdisciplinary approach at a crossroads between history and political sociology. If their analysis is mainly based on primary and secondary historical sources, they also use concepts developed in

collective action theories. Their analysis is articulated around three notions: path dependency – the way in which certain decisions can influence future actions, framing – referring to the way social movements elaborate public claims –, and political opportunity structure – referring to the opportunities created within a specific political system that can influence the outcome of a social movement.

- 2 In the first chapter, the authors start from a rather intuitive hypothesis: victorious veterans are more likely to gain support from their government. In a victorious country, politicians would be more inclined to grant veterans a special status and recognize their war effort as a sacrifice for victory and the acknowledgment of this sacrifice would make it easier for society to agree to pay for veterans' benefits. The cases of Australia after World War I and the United States after World War II support this hypothesis. In these victorious countries, veterans enjoyed rather generous benefits and were respected by society. But these examples are few. Chapter 2 explores the cases of the United States and the United Kingdom after World War I, the United Kingdom after World War II, Soviet veterans after both world wars, and China, where victorious veterans were left on the sidelines for many years and enjoyed very limited popular support. Victory it seems, is not the decisive variable for veterans' outcome. As explored in chapter 3 with the cases of Germany, Japan, and Taiwan, losers sometimes managed to secure important benefits despite severe defeats. The authors come to the conclusion that there is no correlation between victory or defeat and the good treatment of veterans and their high status. The first three chapters also invalidate another intuitive hypothesis, that dictatorships are less likely to reward veterans given that they are less accountable to citizens. Indeed, British and US veterans from World War I prove the opposite. Veterans in these countries were victorious in a democratic country, but their government had little regard for them. Veterans' outcome is not tied to the type of political system they return to. Thus, chapter four and five explore alternative variables to explain why veterans in some cases received elevated status in post war societies. In all positive cases, the authors see the emergence of what they call an entitlement group, that is "a collection of people with a shared belief that they are distinctively deserving members of the community, independent of the extent to which these sentiments are reciprocated within their social and political environment" (Crotty, Diamant, Edele, p162). This group is formed around the idea that veterans deserve special treatment when they return home. In order to become efficient advocacy groups in postwar societies they must demonstrate a certain capacity to organize. The cases analyzed by the authors prove that a positive outcome was not possible without the existence of a well-organized veterans' organization able to formulate and make the case for clear demands. One last important element that influences the political decisions is the set of opportunities offered by a given political context, or in other words, the political opportunity structure. Veterans' success depends on their ability to shape this political opportunity structure.
- 3 The authors themselves acknowledge that their book only tackles the tip of the iceberg: it is only, if one may say so, dedicated to veterans who fought for national armies during global conflicts. However, they lay the foundation for what they expect to be a new discipline: comparative veteran studies. First, they invite future research to analyze other veterans' groups in other types of conflict: paramilitary forces or veterans who fought for states that no longer exist to name only a few suggestions. Second, academics should explore the international aspect of veteran politics and more

precisely the way national veteran movements can have an impact on veteran movements in other countries. Lastly, particular attention should be paid to the possible connection between veteran movements and other social movements such as ethnic or gender minorities. This book certainly gives inspiring leads for anyone working on veterans.

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Geographical index: Soviet Union, China, Taiwan, Japan, USA, Great Britain, Australia, Germany

Keywords: Veterans, Wars, Benefits, Legal Status

Subjects: History

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