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Marco Giugni

Unemployment is no doubt among the major challenges that both policymakers and the society at large face in Europe today. Rates of unemployment went up considerably after the economic crisis of the mid-1970s and even more so during the 1990s. Furthermore, European citizens today consider unemployment as one of the most important problems, if not the most important overall. This, of course, poses a number of serious problems, both at the economic and at the social level, which require adequate responses, above all policy and political responses.

Policy responses have been given both at the national and the European level. For example, the European Union has a long tradition of attempting to combat unemployment and social exclusion through the European Social Fund, but recognizes that new initiatives are necessary to tackle the issue. Indeed the national governments of the European Union considered the unemployment-related parts of the Amsterdam Treaty so important that they decided to implement them ahead of schedule without waiting for ratification. In particular, the European Employment Strategy indicates the high saliency of issues relating to unemployment on the political agendas of both the member states and the European Union itself. This is also leading to a new impetus on a common European social policy which is complemented by widening the policy repertoire of instruments and actors involved.

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1 I thank Michel Berclaz for his careful reading of a previous draft. Thanks also to Jean Faniel, Bengt Furåker, Andrew Richards and Frédéric Royall for their comments and suggestions.

2 In the February 2007 Eurbarometers, for example, unemployment was ranked first among the most important problems, with 36 per cent of the respondents having mentioned it.

3 In some cases, policy responses are also given at the sub-national level. Most notably, this is likely to occur in federal states. In Switzerland, for example, cantonal units to fight unemployment and help the reintegration of job-seekers into the labour market were created in the 1990s.
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for example in that the regulatory action of European institutions is supplemented
by a social dialogue between capital and labour and a higher participation of
social non-governmental organizations and citizens’ groups which represent
the marginalized and are active in social services. Moreover, new governance
instruments (such as the Method of Open Coordination) are promoted particularly
in the field of employment policies in order to develop a structured approach that
is flexible enough to allow for distinct answers to the unemployment problem at
the member states level and that follows a highly integrative philosophy intended
to involve all public and private stakeholders who have interest in and influence
on the solution to the problem.

Similarly, national governments have tried to counter rising unemployment
rates by intervening actively both in the regulation of the labour market and in the
provision of social benefits. Responses at the national level, however, vary from
one country to the other. Such variation is due to a variety of reasons, but the main
reason is the different traditions of the welfare state. I will return in more detail to
this aspect below.

All these efforts have two main objectives: (1) fostering employment and
reducing the number of unemployed in the various members states; and (2) limiting and possibly avoiding the negative consequences of unemployment in
terms of poverty, precariousness, social exclusion and lack of social cohesion.
Yet, in spite of much discourse about exclusion and the need for a more cohesive
society, most efforts have pointed to the reduction of unemployment, perhaps
based on the assumption that the most dramatic consequences of unemployment
are located at the economic rather than the social level.

Scholarly work has largely reflected this state of affairs. Much previous research
has focused on two aspects. On one side, scholars have dealt with the socioeconomic
conditions that give rise to changes in the labour market, such as technological
transformations and changes in the structure of the working population. On the
other side, they have looked at the policies that national governments have adopted
to fight unemployment. Most notably, a great deal of work by both sociologists and
political scientists has looked at the effects of welfare states and social policies (see
Arts and Gelissen 2002, Green-Pedersen and Haverland 2002, and Pierson 2000a
for reviews). Although this body of research offers important insights into the
structural factors that give rise to unemployment and the nature and consequences
of policies used to address them, it remains silent on two increasingly important
counts. First, it tells us nothing about the role of actors other than state actors and
hence largely overlooks the responses by civil society actors (trade unions, NGOs,
and social movement organizations, and so forth). Indeed, the extant literature has
tended to neglect the role of all political actors, focusing on either socioeconomic
or institutional factors. However, while the works looking at state policies to fight
unemployment consider in some way the role of political parties, as policies are
largely a result of party politics, civil society actors have very rarely entered the
picture. Second, the mainstream literature has paid little attention to the impact of
the condition of being unemployed. To be sure, valuable pieces of research dealing

with the individual consequences of unemployment can indeed be found, starting from the classical study of Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel (1933). However, the scholarly literature has long been silent on this aspect and has so far remained relatively detached from an understanding of the feelings, attitudes and behaviours of jobless people. Only recently have social scientists begun to inquire seriously into the consequences of unemployment at the individual level, perhaps spurred by the growing literature on social exclusion (see Paugam 1996 for a review). I will briefly address this aspect below.

Thus, in addition to studying the conditions (economic, social, political) leading to higher unemployment rates, much of what is at stake here is about the responses to unemployment: by the state, the civil society and the individual unemployed. Leaving aside individual responses aimed at coping with the condition of the unemployed, which are of a different nature and would deserve a separate discussion, this book focuses on state and civil society responses or, to put it in terms of the kinds of actions privileged by each type of actor, policy responses and collective action. Although they hardly exhaust the range of possible reactions, three main types of responses can be envisaged. The first and more traditional policy response consists of redistributing collective resources for the benefit of those who have lost their paid job or cannot find one. This is done through the welfare state. The extent and modalities of this kind of response vary very much across countries following differences in the characteristics of the welfare state. Yet, policy responses to unemployment have recently begun to shift from welfare to workfare, that is, from a perspective that aims to compensate for the lack of job to a perspective aimed at improving the ‘employability’ of job-seekers and their sense of responsibility. This second type of policy response sets certain conditions both for being eligible to social benefits and for deserving to be (re)inserted into the labour market. Finally, a third type of response comes from the civil society, in particular in the form of collective action. This is the by far the most neglected aspect. Yet, trade unions, for example, in spite of often having a somewhat ambivalent relationship with the unemployed (Faniel 2006a, Linders and Kalander 2007, Richards 2000), have always put the situation of the labour market high on their political agenda. More recently, non-profit charity organizations pro-unemployed groups have begun to play an increasingly central role in dealing with the problem of unemployment, both in terms of social aid and in terms of improving the ‘employability’ of individual unemployed and therefore their chances of reinsertion into the labour market. In what follows, I will briefly address these three main types of responses, which will be discussed at more length by the various contributions to this volume. I refer to them, respectively, as the politics of the welfare state, the politics of conditionality and the politics of collective action. The first two represent the two main policy responses adopted by the state, while the latter is the privileged means used by civil society actors. Accordingly, the volume divides into two parts: one devoted to policy responses, the other dealing with collective action. In the last section of this Introduction, I will spend a few words on what I see as one of the major absences in the existing literature: the unemployed themselves.
The Politics of the Welfare State

The politics of the welfare state has traditionally represented and still largely represents the most straightforward response to growing unemployment. To put it more precisely, the challenge of unemployment in Europe has traditionally been faced through a (re)distribution of collective resources via the welfare state. This is not the place to discuss in detail and not even in a cursory way the huge literature on the welfare state (see Arts and Gelissen 2002, Green-Pedersen and Haverland 2002, and Pierson 2000a for reviews), not least because this body of literature has more often dealt with welfare in general and, when it has focused on a specific aspect, these were pension and health systems rather than unemployment. My aim is much more modest: to put into some broader perspective the three chapters that address this type of response in Part I of this volume.

Oversimplifying a much more comprehensive and articulated literature, two main lines of inquiry can be distinguished with respect to welfare states. In the first one, scholars have been interested in explaining the growth of the modern welfare state and the factors leading to its expansion. Here explanations have varied according to the type of factor stressed (Green-Pedersen and Haverland 2002): structural theorists have linked the growth of the welfare state to structural changes in society, such as modernization and democratization; power resources theorists, who have represented the most prominent body of research in this field in the 1980s (Pierson 2000a), have stressed the power resources of the working class vis-à-vis other classes, following a classed-based approach (Esping-Andersen 1985, Korpi 1980, 1983, Esping-Andersen and Korpi 1984). In both cases, the expansion of the welfare state, and therefore the level of social protection of the unemployed, is seen as depending on broader societal forces and processes (van Kersbergen 2002).

While studies of the expansion of the welfare state were flourishing especially during the historical phase during which European welfare states were expanding, starting from the 1990s the focus has moved towards the issue of retrenchment and how it can be explained. The crisis of the welfare state at the end of the second millennium has certainly contributed to this shift in the focus. Spurred by the neo-institutionalist perspective that has ‘brought the state back’ in political science (Steinmo, Thelen and Longstreth 2002, see Hacker 2005 with regard to the welfare state) and, in the field of social policy, most notably by some landmark studies such as those by Pierson (1994, 1996) and Skocpol (1992), an increasing number of authors have begun to pay more attention to political and institutional factors.

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4 This is at least the social-democratic way to deal with unemployment, which is usually attributed to the political forces of the Left. Against this solution, the political Right has rather stressed the need for less stringent labour-market regulations as well as a policy more oriented to stimulating the growth of the labour market rather than one based on state intervention ‘after the fact’. Since here I am dealing with state responses to unemployment, I will focus on the former perspective.
in the explanation of welfare state retrenchment. By analysing the role of political 1 2 institutions (such as, for example, the existence of institutional veto points), party 2 3 competition and political discourse, most studies have been able to stress among 3 4 other processes of path-dependency that have made it difficult to dismantle 4 5 the welfare state (Green-Pedersen and Haverland 2002, see in particular Pierson 5 6 1994, 1996, 2001).

In a second line of inquiry, students of social policy and the welfare state 7 have looked at cross-national variations (e.g. Bonoli 1997, Cochrane 1993, 8 Esping-Andersen 1990, Ferrera 1993, Gallie and Paugam 2000, Merrien 1996, 9 Taylor-Gooby 1991). Indeed, this research avenue, which is not detached from 10 the previous one, has represented the main focus of scholars. As Pierson (2000a: 11 791) has emphasized, ‘[u]nderstanding the causes and consequences of welfare 12 state variation has become a major preoccupation of research on the comparative 13 politics of affluent societies’. Accordingly, ‘[m]uch of the existing literature on 14 comparative social policy has been concerned with the classification of welfare 15 states and the identification of ideal-types of welfare provisions’ (Bonoli 1997: 16 351). Once again, this was most of time done with regard to the welfare state in 17 general and not for specific sectors such as pensions, health and unemployment. 18

Perhaps the most well-known among the numerous typologies of welfare states 19 is the one proposed by Esping-Andersen (1990) in his path-breaking study. In an 20 effort to go beyond traditional classifications based exclusively on the level of 21 expenditure (Cutright 1965, Wilensky 1975), this author proposes typology based 22 on the level of decommodification provided by the different welfare states, not only 23 depending on the amount of social provisions, but also on the ways in which they 24 are delivered. Decommodification is defined as ‘the degree to which individuals 25 or families can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of 26 market participation’ (Esping-Andersen 1990: 37). Briefly put, this is the amount 27 of resources available to workers. He thus distinguishes between three ‘welfare 28 state regimes’: the liberal or residual regime, the Bismarckian or insurance-based 29 regime, and the universalist or social-democratic regime.

Esping-Andersen’s classification can be seen as an elaboration of a common 30 distinction found in the literature on welfare states between the Bismarckian and 31 the Beveridgean model of social policy, a distinction that is especially common in 32 the French-speaking literature (see e.g. Castel 1995, Rosanvallon 1995). These two 33 models differ on a number of basic characteristics (Bonoli 1997): the Bismarckian 34 model, which is based on social insurance, aims at income maintenance, the benefits 35 it provides are earning-related based, eligibility depends on the contribution record, 36 it covers employees and is financed through contributions; the Beveridgean model, 37 which is characterized by universal provision, aims at prevention of poverty, the 38 benefits it provides are flat-rate base, eligibility depends on residence or need, it 39 covers the entire population and is financed through taxation. 5

5 It should be noted, however, that this understanding of the Beveridgean model 40 contrasts with the original view by Beveridge himself that financing should be based on
Other scholars have proposed classifications of welfare states which are more or less directly inspired by this basic distinction. For example, Ferrera (1993) distinguish between (pure or mixed) occupational and (pure or mixed) universalist welfare states, according to the criterion of coverage of social protection schemes. Bonoli (1997) has made an attempt to classify welfare states according to both the quantity of welfare they provide and to where they stand on the Beveridgean/Bismarckian dimension. These two criteria yield four ideal-types: Beveridgean/high-spending welfare states, Beveridgean/low-spending welfare states, Bismarckian/high-spending welfare states and Bismarckian/low-spending welfare states. Finally (this, of course, is not an exhaustive list) and more specifically focused on unemployment, Gallie and Paugam (2000) distinguish between four ‘unemployment-providence regimes’ on the basis of three factors that may influence the experience of unemployment: the degree of coverage, the level of financial compensation and the importance of active measures for employment. The four resulting types are: the sub-protecting regime, which provides the unemployed with a protection below the subsistence level; the liberal/minimal regime, which offers a higher level of protection, but does not cover all the unemployed and in which the level of compensation is weak; the employment-centred regime, which offers a much higher level of protection, but in which the coverage remains incomplete because of the eligibility principles for compensation; and the universalist regime, which is characterized by the breadth of the coverage, a much higher compensation level and more developed active measures. Thus, state responses to unemployment are likely to vary according to the type of welfare state or welfare state regime one is dealing with. The first two chapters in Part I of this volume should be read against this background. They all embrace a comparative perspective, as they all aim to show how European countries vary in certain aspects of the politics of the welfare state.

The chapter by Bengt Furåker looks at how the state in advanced capitalist countries handles unemployment. The author focuses on three main types of state intervention which are at the centre of policy discussions: employment protection legislation, passive labour market policy (both in terms of unemployment compensation and pension programmes allowing early retirement for labour market reasons), and active labour market policies (see below). These three policy types affect labour markets in different ways. Yet it is called into question as to whether they actually accomplish what they are set up for; it is sometimes argued that they have negative effects on unemployment and employment. The author discusses this issue as part of the general discussion on whether the modern welfare state is, or can be, successful in its efforts to come to grips with social and economic problems. One of his main conclusions is that, in spite of various counterproductive effects, state-provided social protection regarding unemployment normally does not have very detrimental consequences for the labour market. contributions rather than taxation and his aversion to means-testing (Bonoli 1997).
1 The problems and risks that the state has to face are not the same today as they were at the end of the period of economic growth in the mid-1970s. In particular, unemployment is increasingly becoming structural rather than cyclical. The chapter by Giuliano Bonoli addresses the ways in which welfare states deal with the new risks relating to the labour market in the postindustrial era. Labour market risk structures have changed quite dramatically since the early postwar years. Long-term unemployment, low-wage employment and the associated problem of the working poor, and clashes between work and family life constitute today the most widespread social risks. They were not well covered by the welfare states that were built during the postwar years. Today, however, some welfare states, in the Nordic countries, seem much more effective in dealing with these new risks. The author argues that this is a result of different policy decisions taken in response to de-industrialization and the loss of manufacturing employment since the 1970s.

16 The Politics of Conditionality

While institutional approaches to unemployment remain to be anchored in different traditions of welfare, the politics of the welfare state are today seemingly being supplanted, or at least challenged, by a new way of dealing with unemployment: the politics of conditionality. European welfare states have gone through a period of crisis and restructuring after the golden age of the postwar years and, more specifically, since the 1990s. One of the outcomes of this still ongoing phase of crisis and restructuring is the transformation of the traditional social policy based on the provision of social benefits and aid to those in need (regardless of the underlying distributional logic according to one or the other of the three main models outlined earlier). In the field of unemployment, this has mainly taken the form of the shift from passive to active policies.

Passive policies reflect the traditional view of the welfare state whereby the state intervenes through various forms of compensations, be they occupational-based or universalist in scope. In brief, social security and cash benefits are the main vehicles for the protection of those who have lost their job or cannot find one, that is, who are excluded from the labour market. This brings us back to the discussion of welfare states made earlier. Active policies lie on a different principle: that of maximizing the chances that people have to find a paid job and to be (re)inserted into the labour market. This is done through a variety of measures such as public employment services, training and vocational programmes, subsidies to firms, and so forth. In spite of their laudable objectives, active policies have been a matter of strong criticisms (especially from the Left) and their beneficial effects are highly debatable. Yet, today they are increasingly accepted as the only viable means

6 I borrow this term from Peter Dwyer’s chapter in this volume. We may also call it the politics of activation, as do Maeder and Nadai in their contribution.
of fighting unemployment, as witnessed by the position of the Left in nearly all European countries in favour of such measures.\footnote{7} Favouring economic, political and social changes and spurred by a neo-liberal thinking that has put the traditional welfare state under fire, this new view of dealing with unemployment profoundly modifies the relationship between citizens (in particular, unemployed) and the state. Perhaps the major one is embedded in the notion of the ‘responsible citizen’. One of the main justifications put forward by proponents of the ‘new welfare state’ is that the traditional view of welfare, based on social aid, produced ‘assisted’ citizens, thus de-motivating them to look for a job. Furthermore, it implies high financial costs that a modern state can no longer afford. The new approach, in contrast, is not only less demanding in terms of state resources, but would have the advantage of making the individual responsible for their own situation and less dependent on the state.

In official discourse, active policies are often depicted as aiming to improve citizens’ ‘employability’. This notion has been used in particular in the context of the European Employment Strategy, through which the European Commission aimed to fight unemployment and social exclusion, but it is also at the centre of the New Labour’s policy on unemployment in the UK.\footnote{8} Again, however, this apparently neutral notion hides ideological underpinnings and is not without ambivalence. Thus, some have pointed out that, while it claims to be motivated by socio-political considerations (the struggle against the exclusion of a particularly vulnerable group of the population), the European Employment Strategy is closely related to a neo-liberal agenda of European economic policy, oriented towards a ‘new spirit of capitalism’ following the guiding principles of employability and flexibility, and applies the instruments of benchmarking and best practice first developed by economic management as instruments of political evaluation and regulation (Schultheiss 2004). This would produce the paradoxical situation whereby social exclusion and precariousness are combated with neo-liberal policy and management instruments, hence contributing to ‘de-politicizing the political’.

In spite of a general trend towards the politics of conditionality across Europe, both the form and the content of conditionality and activation vary from one country to another. The other two chapters that form Part I of this volume examine their application and consequences in two countries that have embraced the main...
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1 principle of the new approach to unemployment and social security in general: Switzerland and the UK. The comparison is interesting as these two countries belong to different models of welfare state in the various typologies I mentioned earlier. While Switzerland, in spite of displaying strong liberal traits in some sectors, such as for example healthcare, is considered to be a continental and insurance-based welfare state, the UK is squarely within the liberal and residual model. Yet both countries have made active policies one of the pillars of welfare state reform during the 1990s, although with a different political and public echo. While in Switzerland, reflecting the consensus tradition of the country, the new approach has taken mainly a ‘technocratic’ stance and has been implemented with relatively little debate in what are called ‘active labour market policies,’ in the UK it has had a broader echo and a has evoked deeper ideological issues around the notion of the so-called ‘Third Way’ (Giddens 1994, 1998).

Both chapters are critical of this shift towards the politics of conditionality and pinpoint their negative effects. The chapter by Peter Dwyer and Nick Ellison examines the shift from the ‘welfare society’, in which the state exempted certain ‘inactive’ individuals from participation in the paid labour market by entitling them to a minimum of welfare rights, to the ‘active society’, in which increasingly individuals can only access social rights if they are willing to become workers in the paid labour market, as has occurred in the UK. The principle ‘no rights without responsibilities’ is a central tenet of New Labour’s ‘Third Way’ reform of the welfare state. This chapter outlines the extent to which this principle now underpins unemployment policy in the UK. Policy in relation to three groups, unemployed people, lone parents and disabled people, is outlined and the impact of recent and proposed initiatives on the welfare rights of individual citizens outside of the paid labour market is discussed. The author argues that, as policies based on conditional entitlement become a central aspect of welfare reform, the notion of a right to welfare is systematically undermined.

Similarly, Christoph Maeder and Eva Nadai argue that activating labour market policies have become the general mode of regulating unemployment in Switzerland. Their ethnographic study in three activating programmes reveals that the ideal model of the unemployed, which nourishes these policies, is opposed to the life-world realities of the jobless. The unemployed in these programmes are confronted with a never-ending request to improve, with ambivalent logics of hidden agendas, and often with little real help for their tasks of developing their employability and finding a job. Furthermore, unemployment usually goes along with other forms of social vulnerability and/or exclusion. These aspects are widely ignored by the activating policies. In the daily routines of such programmes the staff therefore has to deal with this ignorance and to try to find a ‘work around’. If activating labour market policies are meant to be more than punishment for not being capable of finding a job, these programmes need major adaptations and improvements.
The Politics of Collective Action

Policy responses to unemployment vary across nations and European countries display important differences as to the degree of intervention of the public sector in social security matters, specifically with respect to unemployment and labour market programmes. It is therefore important to look at how policymakers in various European nations are responding to the challenges raised by unemployment and how those responses are affected by the claims and demands made in the national political arenas and public space by various social and political actors such as parties, unions, social movements and so forth. This also means taking more seriously into account the impact that organized groups of citizens can have on policy decisions in the field of unemployment and the exclusion from the labour market within each nation.

The literature on collective action and, more specifically, on social movements has burgeoned during the past few decades. Again, this is not the place to summarize this body of literature. My goal is rather to show the importance of the politics of collective action for the study of the politics of unemployment. Explanations of social movements and collective action have long stressed the direct impact of deteriorating ‘objective conditions’ and the grievances arising from it, on one side, and protest behaviour, on the other. The latter would arise, almost automatically, from the former. This kind of explanation, known variously as grievances, breakdown or collective behaviour theories (see Useem 1998 and Buechler 2004 for reviews), prevailed up to the late 1960s and early 1970s. Following this approach, growing rates of unemployment would create discontent and strain within society, which in turn would provoke a reaction in the form of collective action or behaviour.

These kinds of explanations lost much of their popularity after the 1970s, when resource mobilization and political process theories came to the fore. Social movements are no longer seen as a reaction, often irrational, to a situation of strain, but are rational collective actors engaging in political claim-making outside the institutional channels. As a result, their mobilization and success depend on the resources and mobilizing structures they are able to build as well as on the political opportunities available to them at a given moment in time. The concept of political opportunity structures, which captures those aspects of the political-institutional environment providing signals to the political and social actors that can encourage them to mobilize their internal resources to form social movements (Tarrow 1996, see Kriesi 2004 and Meyer 2004 for reviews), is central in this perspective.

9 The interested reader can refer to a recent edited collection that provides comprehensive overviews of different aspects of the social movement literature (Snow, Soule and Kriesi 2004). An excellent introduction to the topic can be found in della Porta and Diani (2005).

10 Based on a review of existing works, McAdam (1996: 27) has identified four main features of political opportunity structures: (1) the relative openness or closure of
This perspective, which stresses power relations both within and outside the institutional arenas, drives our attention towards the political role, rather than the simple reaction to changing conditions, of certain groups and organizations in the responses that civil society gives to growing unemployment. It is in this way that we should read the five chapters that form Part II of this volume. They deal with three collective actors that have important interests involved in the politics of unemployment: trade unions, pro-unemployed organizations and of course the unemployed themselves. All these three collective actors provide their own responses to the problem of unemployment.

Trade unions are a particularly interesting collective actor in this respect. The relationship between unions and the unemployed is an ambivalent one (Faniel 2006a, Linders and Kalander 2007, Richards 2000). On one hand, being a vulnerable group facing sometimes insurmountable mobilization obstacles, the politically oriented unemployed often rely on the unions for organizational resources. On the other hand, unions generally prefer to defend the rights and interested of their main constituency, namely workers and employees, rather than those of jobless people. Thus, the relationship between unions and the unemployed is not without tensions.

The problematic relationship between trade unions and unemployed workers is at the centre of the chapter by Andrew Richards. He examines the response of trade unions to unemployment and their potential role as mobilizers of the unemployed. Specifically, he examines union behaviour towards the unemployed in Britain in two periods of high unemployment, the 1920s/30s and the 1980s. While in the earlier period, a national movement of the unemployed emerged, in the latter period it did not. The author argues that, while unemployment is a threat to trade unionism (due for example to a loss of bargaining power and membership), in historical terms this threat does not appear to have determined the behaviour of unions towards the unemployed one way or the other. According to his analysis, union behaviour in the 1920s/30s towards the unemployed was ambiguous, if not outright hostile. Therefore, the movement of the unemployed mobilized in the 1920s and 1930s despite union opposition, rather than because of union support. He shows how the resources of the unemployed in the interwar period were sufficiently powerful to underpin the emergence of a powerful movement which helped shape subsequent economic and social policy. In contrast, the resources enjoyed by the unemployed in the 1980s were not sufficient to underpin the emergence of an independent movement, as in the interwar period, although unemployment was high enough to be perceived as a very significant threat to union interests and ensured that the fate of the jobless was an object of union concern. His analysis leads him to a reflection on the unions’ priorities with respect to the unemployed in the 1990s, a period marked by much lower unemployment.

The institutionalized political system; (2) the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity; (3) the presence or absence of elite allies; and (4) the state’s capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam 1996: 27).
The unions–unemployed relationships is also discussed by Jean Faniel in his contribution. For historical reasons, Belgian trade unions play an important part in the indemnification of the unemployed. Eighty-five per cent of the Belgian jobless are unionized and receive their benefit via their unions. However, labour movements are organizations made by and for workers with jobs. Their core constituency influences union agenda setting much more than the unemployed do. Although union officials generally seem to take care of the jobless, they merely consider them as objects rather than actors enabled to mobilize. This reinforces the other obstacles the unemployed usually face in order to protest. Anyway, the Belgian unemployed have mobilized on several occasions since the mid-1970s rapid growth in unemployment. The author analyses those protests, as well as the way unions supported them, or rather tried to avoid them. He describes the organization of the unemployed, inside and sometimes outside the unions, as well as the results of the protests.

Trade unions are not the only collective actors from the civil society who mobilize in the unemployment political field, be it in favour of or against the interests of the unemployed. Another important set of actors are pro-unemployed organizations. They both intervene in political debates and play an important role as service providers. The chapter by Frédéric Royall is about the roles, status and motivations of people who are associated with Irish organizations in aid of the unemployed. He argues that, by acceding to a state-driven view of community development, organizations in aid of the unemployed have unwittingly allowed a two-tiered situation to arise. At one level lies an increasingly professional staff that provides services for – or act on behalf of – the unemployed. At another level are part-time staff and the unemployed themselves. Part-time staff are involved in organizations by virtue of their participation in various state-sponsored programmes. The unemployed, however, are increasingly associated with the organizations not as active participants but rather as service recipients.

While the first three chapters of Part II deal with responses by specific civil society actors (trade unions and pro-unemployed organizations) within single countries (Britain, Belgium and Ireland), the remaining two broaden the picture by looking at claim-making by various types of actors in a comparative perspective covering several countries.

In such a cross-national perspective, Michel Bercelaz, Katharina Füglister and Marco Giugni propose a theoretical framework for the study of collective action in the field of unemployment politics based on the idea that the form and content of political claim-making on issues relating to unemployment are influenced in important ways by the prevailing conceptions of the welfare state and the consequent institutional approaches to unemployment. They argue that the prevailing view of the welfare state specific to a given country impinges in significant ways upon what they call the ‘contentious politics of unemployment’, that is, the public debates and collective mobilizations pertaining to unemployment. Specifically, dominant conceptions of the welfare state define a political opportunity structure that enlarges or restricts the options for action by collective actors that intervene in
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1 this field. This approach is germane with recent developments in scholarship of the welfare state that stress the role of normative discourse (e.g. Cox 2001, Schmidt 2002), which I consider as particularly promising.

Finally, the picture would remain far too narrow if we did not take into account, even in a very cursory fashion, the European dimension, especially in the light of the developments that have occurred in the past decade at the EU level which I hinted at earlier. In this vein, the chapter by Christian Lahusen uses original data on claim-making in the field of unemployment politics, drawn from the same research project that inspired the theoretical reflection of the preceding chapter, to assess assumptions relating to a possible Europeanization of national debates, using the debates around the European Employment Strategy as a case in hand. The results suggest that the Europeanization thesis has to be assessed in a differentiated way. On one hand, national differences still seem to exist with regard to public agendas and there is no ‘vertical’ denationalization of public debates, as mass-mediated debates within the member states do not open themselves to European actors and do not frame problems and solutions in a ‘European’ way. On the other hand, if one looks at the content of public debates, there seems to be a diffusion of problem definitions, regulatory approaches and policy ideas which points to a ‘horizontal’ denationalization across national borders.

A Forgotten Actor: The Unemployed

The unemployed, which represent the group that is more directly concerned with the problem of unemployment, have largely been overlooked in the scholarly literature. To be sure, sociologists in particular have paid much attention to them. Following the path opened by of the classical work of Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel (1933) and spurred by the recent increase in interest in studying patterns of social exclusion, some have looked, at the micro-level of analysis, at the individual trajectories that lead to unemployment and the personal experience of such status (e.g. Gallie 2004, Gallie, Marsh and Vogler 1994, Schnapper 1981), often with a focus on long-term unemployment (e.g. Demazière 1992, 1995a, Demazière, Helleboid and Mondoloni 1994, Gallie and Benoît-Guilbot 1994), or at the psychological effects of unemployment (e.g. Gallie and Russell 1998, Jahoda 1982, Kelvin and Jarret 1985, Ouweneel 2002, Whelan, Hannon and Creighton 1991, Warr 1987). Some of these studies make use of systematic methods of data collection (such as standardized surveys) in order to provide comparative evidence that makes it possible to examine cross-national variations and link them, for example, to differences in welfare arrangements or cultural patterns (e.g. Gallie 1999, Gallie and Paugam 2000, Gallie et al. 1998). They are important to the extent that they allow for making a linkage between macro-sociological and institutional

11 The literature on social exclusion is especially developed in the French-speaking context (see Paugam 1996 for a review).
The Politics of Unemployment in Europe

factors, on the one hand, and their impact on the micro-sociological and individual
feelings, attitudes and behaviours on the other. More specifically, they make a link
between the characteristics of the welfare state and the individual-level effects of
unemployment.

This body of literature has deepened our knowledge of the processes and
mechanisms through which social exclusion is produced and reproduced,
especially in the field of unemployment. These works, however, present two major
and interrelated shortcomings: an individualistic bias and a lack of attention to
agency. On one hand, they focus on the consequences that unemployment has on
the personal life of those who are struck by it, most of the time through individual
coping strategies, and neglect the ways in which the unemployed try to struggle
collectively and politically against their situation. On the other hand, they tend to
see the individual unemployed person as a passive recipient rather than an actor
capable of taking initiative and reacting to their own situation.

To be sure, there are good reasons why scholars and common sense alike have been inclined to relegate the unemployed to the role of passive actors. At least when it comes to organizing to defend politically their collective interests (that is, through collective action and political mobilization), the unemployed do not have a good record, as compared with other social movements. Why is this so? We can mention a number of partly interrelated reasons, which would certainly deserve a longer discussion (see Giugni 2008). First of all, jobless people may suffer from a lack of interest in politics and therefore in engaging in political mobilization, as they would be more worried about their economic situation and struggle to get a job rather than becoming involved in some kind of political activity. It can indeed be shown that the unemployed display lower scores of political interest and, more generally, of other political attitudes (for example, trust, satisfaction with democracy, feeling of political efficacy) and participation than people who have a job. Second, besides the lack of political interest, the low level of mobilization of the unemployed may be due to the lack of an ‘objective’ condition that gives rise to grievances about the situation of the labour market. Especially, in countries in which unemployment rates are relatively low, the number of jobless people would not create a ‘critical mass’ large enough for a social movement to form. Yet, as work on social movements and collective action has shown, the objective conditions relating to the situation of being unemployed can hardly lead to protest behaviour unless unemployment is socially and politically constructed as a ‘problem’ (see Benford and Snow 2000 and Snow 2004 for reviews). In this sense, unemployment is also a social construct, a way of saying, classifying and categorizing things (Demazière 1995b, Pierru 2005, Salais, Baverez and Reynaud 1986, Topalov 1994). Third, therefore, the lack of political engagement on the part of the unemployed may also stem from the difficulty of motivating people for action, identifying causes and consequences (prognostic frames) of a given problem, defining unemployment as an unjust condition, blaming the political authorities or someone else for this condition, and so forth. Fourthly, the unemployed may remain politically apathetic because of a lack of a strong
collective identity to be engaged in the struggle for better conditions. Indeed, as suggested by work stressing the role of identity for social movement mobilization (see Polletta and Jasper 2001 for a review), the presence of a collective identity is crucial to forming a social movement and to granting a certain continuity over time, even when the political context is not very favourable to mobilizing. Fifth, the political apathy of unemployed may result from a lack of internal resources (both in terms of the organizational infrastructure supporting mobilization and the networks of interpersonal relations that facilitate the formation of collective identities as well as the creation of shared understandings of their situation), which has been shown to be a necessary condition for political mobilization by resource mobilization theory (see Edwards and McCarthy 2004 for a review). Finally, when it comes to explaining the emergence or latency of social protest, numerous works on social movements in recent years have stressed the role of political opportunity structures (see Kriesi 2004 and McAdam 2006 for reviews). In this perspective, the absence of favourable political opportunities (for example, the presence of allies within the institutional arenas) may prevent the unemployed expressing their grievances publicly.

In spite of these potential obstacles, the unemployed do engage in political activities and mount sometimes even successful instances of collective action, which are often local, but sometimes have a national and even transnational scope. Accordingly, a number of significant works, done in particular by students of social movements, have paid attention to the political mobilization of the unemployed and its conditions (e.g. Bagguley 1991, 1992, Baumgarten, Chabanet and Lahusen 2008, Berclaz, Füglister and Giugni 2004, Chabanet 2002, 2008, Chabanet and Faniel forthcoming, Cinalli and Füglister 2008, della Porta 2008, Demazière and Pignoni 1998, Duvanel 2002, Faniel 2004, Ferrara 1997, Fillieule 1993, Galland and Louis 1981, Locke 2007, Maurer 2001, Maurer and Pierru 2001, Piven and Cloward 1979, 1993, Richards 2002, Royall 1997, 2002, Valocchi 1990, 1993). In general, these studies have stressed two particular features of their activism. On the one hand, it has been observed that marginalized groups hardly engage in structured forms of political action. For the reasons I listed earlier, the unemployed have difficulties organizing and mobilizing. On the other hand, when 41 activist A notable example of a supranational mobilization unemployed is represented by the European marches against unemployment, job insecurity and social exclusion in 1997 (Chabanet 2002, see also Royall 2002). This transnational network went beyond the specific mobilization in 1997, as it was created before that event and, above all, has mobilized in subsequent events as well. A striking example of effective mobilization by the unemployed occurred in 1996, when a local Swiss unemployed organization launched a referendum against a change in the unemployment law that was detrimental for the rights of unemployed (Duvanel 2002). Owing to a series of favorable circumstances, this organization succeeded not only in gathering the required signatures for the question to be submitted to popular vote, but the referendum was accepted by voters in 1997, probably also thanks to fact that unions and the Socialist party led the campaign.
these groups do mobilize, they do so in spontaneous and unorganized ways rather than in more conventional and structured forms of political activism. Thus, their political participation seems to oscillate between apathy and radicalism. These insights have emerged from various studies of the protests that characterized the period of the Great Depression in the United States and UK in the 1920s and 1930s (Bagguley 1991, Piven and Cloward 1979, Richards 2002). However, this pattern hardly reflects the situation we face today in Europe, as the mobilization of the unemployed has been much stronger in Europe since the early 1990s. Furthermore, organized unemployed have been able to display a more structured activism, attesting to the fact that the integration of marginalized groups into a political committed and responsible civil society can indeed succeed (Demazière and Pignoni 1998, Faniel 2004).

In spite of these works and of a recently renewed interest in this topic, we still know little about the political participation and mobilization of the unemployed, and we know even less about the impact of different state and civil society responses on their situation. To be sure, this book will not fill this gap. However, by at least starting a reflection about the role of the welfare state (via the redistribution of collective resources), of new ways to face unemployment (for example, by means of active policies) and of the reaction by non-institutional actors (such as trade unions and pro-unemployed organizations), we will make a step towards a more comprehensive understanding of the politics of unemployment in Europe.

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13 See for example various papers presented at conferences and workshop over the past few years on the subject matter: a section on ‘Social Movements, Contentious Politics, and Social Exclusion’ at the second ECPR Conference (Marburg, Germany, 18–21 September 2003); a conference on ‘Public Employment Action and Unemployed Movements’ (Lyon, France, 19–20 November 2004); the closing conference of the UNEMPOL project (Geneva, Switzerland, 1–2 April 2005); a workshop on ‘The Mobilization of the Unemployed in Europe’ (Maison Française d’Oxford, Oxford, UK, 10–11 June 2005); and a conference on ‘From the Blanketeers to the Present: Understanding Protests of the Unemployed’ (German Historical Institute London, Bloomsbury, UK, 16–17 February 2007).