

Privatization or the Transformation of the State?

The Case of the "Wisconsin Plan" in Israel

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Welfare state reform involves a multitude of new actors. This political phenomenon requires an adequate research perspective to analyze the complex relations forged between bureaucratic power and private organizations. The article argues that a privatization approach, often invoked in the study of contemporary changes in social service systems, does not serve this end. A productive analytic perspective should advance beyond a crude dichotomy of the public-statutory and private realms, and focus theoretically as well as methodologically on the state without presuming its withdrawal from society. Such a perspective may recognize the reconfiguration of state power via private agents. The article offers the governance approach as a comprehensive alternative, and utilizes the case of Israel's Welfare-to-Work program ("Wisconsin Plan") in order to demonstrate its merits. In this case, governing by private actors enabled a dominant state actor to circumvent bureaucratic opposition and establish a Neoliberal project.

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