

*How Margaret Thatcher inspired a worldwide search for welfare reforms*

## Welfare Systems around the World

In 2006 journalist James Bartholomew, who had recently published his bestselling book *The Welfare State We're In*, was introduced to Margaret Thatcher at a small lunch in England. He began to tell her about his book, which argued that the modern British welfare state had done more harm than good, and that Britain would have been better off had it never been created.

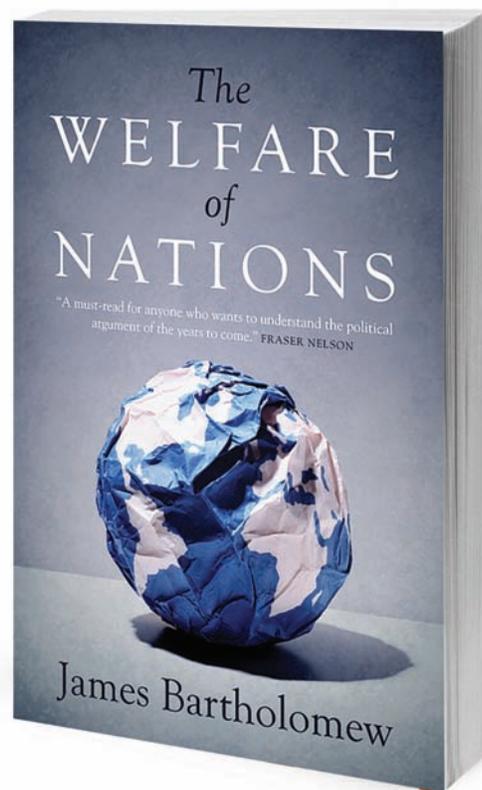
Lady Thatcher asked him what, in that case, should be done to fix it. Bartholomew offered up his standard book-tour answer: that he did not believe any modern democracy would accept the changes really necessary, and he didn't care to recommend anything second-best. "No, no, no! You can't say there is a problem and not come up with a solution!" Lady Thatcher retorted. "If you say the welfare state is no good, you must suggest an alternative!" Bartholomew tried to protest that conducting the necessary research would be too costly, and people would find it "boring." Here again, Baroness Thatcher was unimpressed: "If you can't think of a good way of communicating it, you must *find* a way of communicating it!"

Bartholomew's new book, *The Welfare of Nations*, published by the Cato Institute, is an attempt to answer Thatcher's challenge. To find her answers, Bartholomew took off on a globe-trotting mission to examine welfare models around the world. He records his journeys to 11 different countries, where he searches for the best health care, the best education, the best support services—while simultaneously exposing the countries with the worst unemployment, the worst health care and education. He also researches other countries, even reaching back into history to discuss welfare in ancient Greece and Rome. He asks questions like: Why is unemployment so low in Switzerland? Why is it so high in Spain? Why is government education so

bad in so many parts of the world?

Bartholomew's work is not merely a dry list of facts or statistics but a story, woven with tales of his travels, that bring to life the cruelty and failures of the welfare state as well as the success stories on which Bartholomew models his recommendations for reform. Bartholomew reminds the reader that most countries and their welfare states do not fit into the "clichés" we imagine from bare statistics—he uses on-the-ground reporting and insights to compile, chapter-by-chapter, recommendations for different elements of the welfare state, ultimately distilling them into a list of tips for improving the welfare state as a whole. And along the way, he finds even more evidence of how the existence of welfare states is actually changing world civilization.

In the end, Bartholomew remains skeptical of societies' willingness to undertake the radical changes necessary to achieve the ideal of an absolutely minimal welfare state. And he warns that, once a welfare state has been imposed, freedom may never be as



great as it once was—this, he writes, is the "unavoidable price" of imposing a welfare state in the first place. Yet it is at least possible to create a better welfare state, to reduce unemployment, improve housing, and strengthen families. ■

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