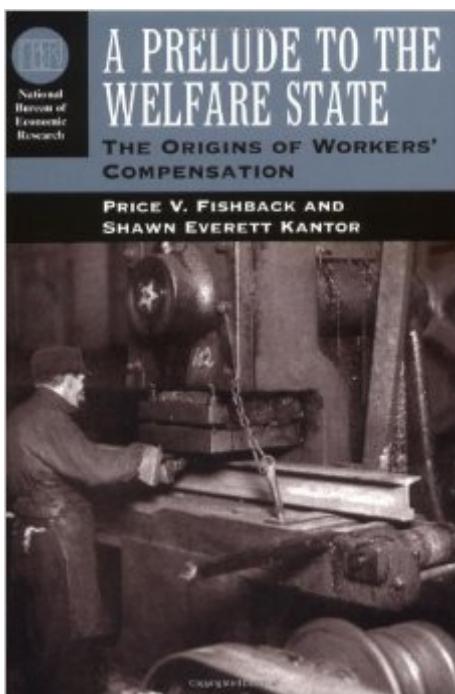


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# A Prelude To The Welfare State: The Origins Of Workers' Compensation (National Bureau Of Economic Research Series On Long-Term Factors In Economic Dev)



## **Synopsis**

Workers' compensation was arguably the first widespread social insurance program in the United States and the most successful form of labor legislation to emerge from the early Progressive Movement. Adopted in most states between 1910 and 1920, workers' compensation laws have been paving seen as the way for social security, Medicare, unemployment insurance, and eventually the broad network of social welfare programs we have today. In this highly original and persuasive work, Price V. Fishback and Shawn Everett Kantor challenge widespread historical perceptions, arguing that, rather than being an early progressive victory, workers' compensation succeeded because all relevant parties—labor and management, insurance companies, lawyers, and legislators—benefited from the legislation. Thorough, rigorous, and convincing, *A Prelude to the Welfare State: The Origins of Workers' Compensation* is a major reappraisal of the causes and consequences of a movement that ultimately transformed the nature of social insurance and the American workplace.

## **Book Information**

Series: National Bureau of Economic Research Series on Long-Term Factors in Economic Dev

Hardcover: 324 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press; 1 edition (May 1, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0226251632

ISBN-13: 978-0226251639

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (1 customer review)

Best Sellers Rank: #3,529,695 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #87 in Books > Business & Money > Insurance > Liability #399 in Books > Business & Money > Economics > Unemployment #663 in Books > Business & Money > Insurance > Business

## **Customer Reviews**

Excerpted from a book review by Robert Whaples in the *Independent Review* (Fall 2001) Given the colossal size of the federal government in the United States and its pervasive influence on our economic lives, it is surprising that the growth of government isn't the subject of most history books written about the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the list of good books on the subject is surprisingly short. Fortunately, Price Fishback and Shawn Kantor have written a book that can be

added to that short list. Indeed, their book, with its rigorous analysis of both markets and politics, is a model for others to follow. Fishback and Kantor's exhaustive research provides new insights into why almost all states adopted workers' compensation laws between 1910 and 1921, even though related reform proposals were stillborn. [They] examine the timing of adoption across states and conclude that "progressive" politicians played only a marginal role. The strength of employer and worker interest groups was crucial. The occurrence of a crisis in the old liability system was also extremely important. Probably the greatest shortcoming of this book is a failure to go back one more step to explain the origins of this crisis in greater detail. Whatever the reasons, the origin of the workers' compensation system, like the growth of government during much of the rest of the twentieth century, hinged crucially on a crisis. Ultimately, the, Fishback and Kantor's painstaking analysis gives a clear picture of the operation of the American market and political system in an era when the logic of the welfare state was still generally rejected and when other programs that eventually became part of the welfare state (old-age pensions, unemployment insurance and subsidies, and sickness insurance) were not politically viable.

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