



The Modern British State: An Historical Introduction

Philip Harling

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This book is an unprecedented synthesis of the literature on state development that explains how and why the contours of the British state have changed over the last three centuries. Ranging in scope from the Glorious Revolution to New Labour, it provides a fluent and comprehensive introduction to the changing shape and role of the British state.

Philip Harling's main theme is the dramatic broadening of the state's functions and its cost over the last three centuries, and most noticeably over the last one. As late as 1870, most Britons assumed that the only tasks that should be entrusted to the central government were issues such as the defence of the realm, the maintenance of public order, and the provision of basic amenities such as street lighting. Today, they assume that these tasks ought to extend - and of course they do extend - to the provision of education, retirement benefits, unemployment insurance, health care, and a host of other services. Harling takes a number of historical factors into account in his assessment of the broadening trajectory of the state, such as the enormous expansion of the state's traditional war-making role over the eighteenth century, the uneven development of new regulatory duties in the nineteenth century, the impact of the two global wars of the twentieth century, the growth of the postwar welfare state, and the political reaction against it.

Engagingly written and persuasively argued, *The Modern British State* should serve as a core text for a wide variety of courses in modern British history, politics, public policy, and historical sociology.

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