Preface

This is a story about one of the most controversial of technologies, commercial nuclear power, and its collapse as an industrial enterprise in the United States. It is also a story about capitalism and democracy, their often contradictory institutional arrangements, and the effects those arrangements have on political and economic planning. A variety of scholars have argued that capitalism and democracy may, at least occasionally, be incompatible and that this incompatibility may undermine their smooth functioning. In this book I explore that proposition in detail, using the nuclear energy sector as a case in point.

The institutional forms of capitalism and democracy in the nuclear power sector, and typical throughout much of the U.S. economy, I shall argue, establish contradictory decision-making logics that have prevented makers of both public and private policy from devising the plans necessary to sustain the commercial viability of a complex, expensive, and potentially very dangerous technology. Had other institutional arrangements been present, as they were in some West European countries, the possibilities for planning and for the sector's future would have been different. The argument presented here contributes to debates about the relative merits of the free market, industrial planning, and the state's appropriate role in managing economic activity—debates that stretch back at least to the writings of Karl Marx and Adam Smith but that continue to command the attention of scholars, policy makers, activists, and members of the business community concerned with a wide array of current political and economic problems.
Preface

This book addresses questions about the nature of the state and political power in advanced capitalist democracies, questions that have preoccupied many social scientists, particularly since the advent of neo-Marxist political theory during the 1960s and 1970s. Is the state merely a set of institutions at the service of powerful elites, classes, and interest groups in society? Is it an autonomous and independent force in its own right? Or is it something in between, something only relatively autonomous from external political, economic, and other constraints? My thinking on such questions differs from much of the conventional wisdom of mainstream political sociology and political science. I advocate a synthesis of important elements from both institutionalist (some might call it neo-Weberian) and neo-Marxist theories of political economy and the state, theories represented by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol's *Bringing the State Back In* and Robert Alford and Roger Friedland's *Powers of Theory*, respectively.

Not only does this book confront a controversial empirical subject, in short, it also addresses controversial theoretical issues that carry implications far beyond the specifics of commercial nuclear power. As a result, some readers may accuse me of siding with the nuclear corporations throughout the analysis, whereas others will complain that I have bent over backward to favor the antinuclear viewpoint. Some may interpret this book as advocacy for a technocratic, antidemocratic form of political planning, others will see a concern for preserving democracy in the policy process. I stress, however, that I have tried to present an objective analysis, one that avoids the sensationalism characteristic of many other books about nuclear power. This book does not present horror stories about the technology's dangers or visions of endless supplies of energy that will spur the nation to new heights of economic greatness. I have refrained from making recommendations about whether or not we should try to revive the nuclear sector and, if we should, how best to proceed. I have tried only to point out the advantages and disadvantages of various forms of industrial planning for this sector, rather than advocate one form as being in some sense the best. These are issues readers must ultimately resolve for themselves.

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