



Iowa Research Online
The University of Iowa's Institutional Repository

College of Law Publications

12-1-1989

The Wide World of "Welfare": Review of "Social Security Policies in Industrial Countries: A Comparative Analysis" by Margaret S. Gordon

Marc Linder

© 1989 Marc Linder

1 *La Verdad: Newsletter of Texas Rural Legal Aid, Inc.* 3 (1989), 1 page.

Hosted by Iowa Research Online. For more information please contact: lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

La Verdad: Newsletter of
Texas Rural Legal Aid, Inc.
Vol. 1, No. 3 (Dec. 1989)

TRLA BOOK REVIEW

Mondo Linder:
**THE WIDE
WORLD OF
"WELFARE"**



Margaret S. Gordon. *Social Security Policies in Industrial Countries: A Comparative Analysis*. Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Pp. xvi + 377. \$49.50.

To legal services advocates specializing in public "benefits," the question may from time to time have occurred: 'Now, how do other

countries handle this problem?' For the internationally and comparatively curious practitioner, Gordon offers a broad overview of social security programs in Western and Eastern Europe, Japan, Canada, and the United States. In separate chapters devoted to old-age pensions, invalidity and industrial injuries programs, health benefits, unemployment compensation, family allowances, and public assistance, the author provides a brief historical introduction and some descriptive detail on the various types of approach under which she classifies twenty-eight countries. In particular, she provides much information on the social security systems in Britain, Canada, West Germany, and Scandinavia. It is one of the book's virtues that the author does not view the world from an American perspective, although she provides sufficient material to demonstrate how backward the U.S. programs are. Thus, for example, whereas the U.S. Congress failed to enact the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1989, which would have mandated an *unpaid* ten-week parental leave under very restrictive conditions, most European countries provide maternity benefits for longer periods amounting to 50 per cent to 100 per cent of earnings. The U.S. is also the only industrial country lacking a national health insurance system or a family allowance system.

Despite this generous internationalist perspective, the book is marred by a failure to analyze the deeper political-economic roots of the developmental trends it documents. The author is, moreover, both bibliographically and substantively unaware of some of the more important works that offer precisely such analyses--for example, John Myles, *Old Age in the Welfare State: The Political Economy of the Welfare State* (1984). The wide sweep of Gordon's view also results in superficial description, which in part rests on her reliance on secondary or even tertiary sources--and popularized ones at that. Finally, Gordon also indulges in the irritating habit of citing personal interviews as authority for facts that could have been supported by references to written sources.

- Marc Linder, Weslaco