Social Security in Britain

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Stephen McKay and Karen Rowlingson

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For Alexandra

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Preface

This book explores the structure of social security. It concentrates on Britain but seeks to apply a comparative perspective and a knowledge of other systems to provide a less parochial viewpoint. The importance of this subject is simply illustrated. In Britain, total government spending on social security is close to £100 billion, more than the spending on health and education put together. Some three-quarters of households receive one or more social security benefits.

This book is designed both as a textbook for undergraduate and post-graduate courses, and for the more general reader interested in matters relating to social security. It grew out of our general dissatisfaction with the books currently available in this field. Existing material seeking to explain social security in Britain (such as Alcock, 1987; Hill, 1990; Spicker, 1993), while good in many respects, was either becoming rather dated or tended to link social security so closely with the alleviation of poverty that many of its wider objectives and functions went overlooked. The subject of poverty is already well covered by existing books (for example Roll, 1992; Alcock, 1993), and we do not attempt any detailed discussion here. Existing books also seemed to make little use of graphic material in helping to bring this area to life, and while comparative research is increasingly common, it was less frequently integrated with texts on social security in general.

This book aims to provide a comprehensive explanation of all aspects of the social security system in Britain. It begins by providing a guide to the context of social security in terms of the aims of the system, comparative perspectives and historical perspectives. It then gives details about the current system: an overview of the structure; the different types of benefit; how the system is administered; and how the system affects behaviour in terms of working, saving and forming particular family types. A final substantive chapter discusses the challenges facing the current system and how the system might change to meet those demands, including developing New Labour policies.

STEPHEN MCKAY
KAREN ROWLINGSON

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That we were in a position to write this book is testimony to the advice and guidance of many of those we have worked with over the years. Our final thanks are to Macmillan for agreeing to publish this book, particularly to Catherine Gray for her support and efficiency while it was being written.

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