



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 17
Issue 4 December

Article 11

December 1990

Response by Ralph Segalman to Isidore Walliman's review of The Swiss Way of Welfare which appeared in Volume XV, Number 2 (June, 1988)

Ralph Segalman
California State University, Northridge

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Segalman, Ralph (1990) "Response by Ralph Segalman to Isidore Walliman's review of The Swiss Way of Welfare which appeared in Volume XV, Number 2 (June, 1988)," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 4 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol17/iss4/11>

This Research Note is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



Response by Ralph Segalman to
Isidore Walliman's review of *The Swiss Way of Welfare*
which appeared in Volume XV, Number 2 (June, 1988).

I find the Walliman review deeply faulted in many ways.

1. Walliman challenges the conclusions I have come to regarding Swiss welfare methods and the Swiss Social Insurance system. He questions my not having consulted a number of references on the subject, most of which were published after 1985, when my book was written (it was published in January, 1986). To ask me why I didn't consult these works is equivalent to charging me to interview my great-grandchildren who are yet to be born.

2. The second fallacy Walliman builds is to challenge my claim that the Swiss welfare system is superior. He believes that the Swiss system is functional and superior only because there are a number of strengths in the society, the family, the neighborhood and community, schools, etc. and indicates that any welfare system in such a setting would be good. But Walliman misses the point entirely. For a welfare system to be effective, the society must ensure that the other social institutions are all functional and habilitative or rehabilitative.

3. A third argument used by Walliman is to claim that any welfare system could be effective if it exports its unemployment. Here he, like other liberal critics of the Swiss system, claim that problem populations are exported by the Swiss. This is a severe calumny. All nations are selective in their immigration policies, and all countries allow immigration on a conditional basis following which the "gastarbeiters" usually return to their native lands. In the US we allow thousands of farm workers (the bracero program) to enter for the harvest season and then they return. Great Britain allows various specialists to come on work contracts. And all the countries have problem borders with thousands of illegal workers entering. The only difference is that Switzerland is more effective in controlling its conditional and illegal entries. Also, the Swiss are more effective in preventing visas and conditional contracts to be issued at times when Swiss residents are unemployed. At such times the jobs go to them and there is no unemployment. When the Swiss residents are all employed, only then are entries permitted.

To compare the situation with the United States might be useful. If we could actually control our Mexican border, then there would be a severe shortage of unskilled labor. In order to fill the jobs, many people now on public assistance would be attracted to these unfilled jobs, and the wages would rise. Many employers would train the welfare clientele if this was necessary. Many young minority men, currently unemployed, would be hired and trained by employers. Then our welfare agencies would become effective because the manifest purpose of these agencies would be to help people become self-sufficient. Would you say that this would be equivalent to "exporting unemployment"?

Incidentally, to show how effective the Swiss welfare system is, you need only note that one fourth of all people enrolled are not Swiss natives. They are either people on conditional contracts, or immigrants with residency permits, or visitors to families of immigrants. The Swiss institutions effectively teach foreign children who have an astoundingly low drop-out rate. The local communities have had great success in serving these immigrants, and the only people who seem to be unhappy with the situation are the few "gastarbeiters" who fail to perform their contracts and who do not get renewals from their employers or who are refused renewals on the basis of illegal activity. Employers are answerable to the cantonal government in their appointment actions, and there is an appeal process for aggrieved immigrants in most situations.

4. Walliman challenges my conclusions on a number of other matters relating to the Swiss welfare agencies and the social insurance system. In each instance he slantingly refers to some other authority but neglects to show how that authority arrives at a position different from mine. For me to answer such an indictment without having the argument he refers to is equivalent to having to defend oneself before a star chamber.

5. In my opinion, the *Swiss Way of Welfare* presents too great a threat to the proponents of the welfare state. Just as there is a vested interest in any ideological stance, so there is a desire among many of the social policy scholars in Switzerland and elsewhere to replace the democratically operated, locally controlled Swiss system with the massive, centralized behemoth

found elsewhere in the western world. The criticisms against the effective Swiss system tell us more about the desires of the critics than it does about how well the system works.

Ralph Segalman, Professor Emeritus of
Sociology, California State University,
Northridge.

