



2008

## *Social Security in Ireland, 1939-1952: The Limits to Solidarity.* Sophia Carey.

James Midgley  
*University of California, Berkeley*

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



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Midgley, James (2008) "*Social Security in Ireland, 1939-1952: The Limits to Solidarity.* Sophia Carey," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 4 , Article 19.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol35/iss4/19>

This Book Note is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [maira.bundza@wmich.edu](mailto:maira.bundza@wmich.edu).



Sophia Carey, *Social Security in Ireland, 1939-1952: The Limits to Solidarity*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007. \$34.95 papercover.

In the middle decades of the 20th century, many Western governments increased their budgetary allocations to social programs and significantly expanded their previously limited social service provisions. Although this expansion began in the late 19th century, many social policy scholars believe that it was in the post-World War II years that government responsibility for social welfare reached its fulfillment. They also believe that many Western countries could now be justifiably described as "welfare states."

The emergence of the welfare states also facilitated a good deal of academic speculation concerning the reasons for the unprecedented expansion of government involvement in social welfare. During the latter half of the century, a large number of explanatory accounts which offered interesting interpretations of the dynamics of social policy were published. Scholarly inquiry into the dynamics of welfare states has continued apace, and new studies that offer increasingly nuanced interpretations of the expansion of state welfare continue to appear.

Sophia Carey's book on the emergence of social security in Ireland makes an interesting contribution to this body of knowledge. The book's primary purpose is to examine the factors that shaped the emergence of the Irish welfare state between 1939 and 1952, and to link this historiographical account to theoretical interpretations of welfare state dynamics. The book begins with a useful overview of these interpretations, which include the familiar industrialization-convergence thesis, the role of party politics and trade union activities, state-centered explanations, and institutional perspectives. It then links these different interpretations to a detailed account of emergence of social policy in the Irish Republic. It focuses in particular on the factors that contributed to the passage of the 1952 Social Welfare Act, which is the primary statutory instrument governing the country's income protection system. Although the author finds that some of these theories are relevant to understanding the emergence of income protection in Ireland, she

also shows that they fail to explain the complexities of the Irish situation. Indeed, the Irish experience reveals that factors such as colonialism, agrarian interests and the influence of the Catholic Church contributed to the development of Irish social policy to an extent that existing explanations fail to appreciate. Of particular interest is the colonial legacy and especially the role of the Beveridge report in shaping the Irish social insurance system. Although this issue has previously been addressed by scholars working on social policy in the Global South, it is much neglected in mainstream social policy theorizing on the expansion of statutory social welfare in the Western nations.

The book offers a scholarly and detailed account of the emergence of social policy that will, of course, be helpful to anyone interested in the country's social welfare system. But it also contributes in an interesting way to the body of theory that has evolved over the years to explain the development of welfare states. Although it elucidates this body of theory, a wider question is whether it is in fact possible to reduce complex economic, political, cultural and social phenomena to relatively simple, theoretical interpretations. The author's conclusion that the Irish welfare state is idiosyncratic and does not fit standard explanations also raises the issue of whether the now widely used "welfare state" construct is helpful in categorizing countries with such different historical experiences and diverse patterns of provision. Many other interesting questions emerge from this informative study of the history of social insurance in Ireland, affirming yet again the value of comparative analysis in social policy. The book makes an important contribution to the field and should be widely consulted.

*James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley*

Pamela Stone, *Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007. \$45.00 hardcover, \$16.95 papercover.

Decades of research has examined the obstacles facing women in the workforce. Challenges such as entering the male-dominated professions and the glass ceiling encompass much of the early literature. Recent research has shifted from focusing