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ΑΡΘΡΑ
Articles

ΒΙΒΛΙΟΚΡΙΤΙΚΕΣ
Book Reviews

Εξαμνιστική Επιθεώρηση,
Άνοιξη 2016, τόμος 11ος, τεύχος 1

Maria Botsari and Theodoros Mitrakos,
Social Indicators and the Effectiveness of Social
Transfers in Greece over the Recent Crisis

Nikos Xypolitas,
The Entrapment of Migrant Workers in Servile Labour:
The Case of Live-in Domestic Workers from Ukraine in
Greece

Vasiliki Kantzara,
Education in Conditions of Crisis in Greece:
An Exploration (2000-2013)

Georgia Petraki,
Le travail interimaire en Grèce: Certains cas de travail
interimaire dans la fonction publique

Magara, H. and Sacchi S. (Eds), The Politics of Structural
Reforms. Social and Industrial Policy Change in Italy and
Japan, (A. Feronas), Anastasia-Sofia Alexiadou, "Social
Protection: Historical and Philosophical dimension" (Con.
Arvanitakis), Ανδρέας Φέρονας, Ο Εξυρωνιαγύς της
Κοινωνίας Πολιτικής. Θεωρητικό ηλείσιο, μεθόδολογικά
προβλήματα και η ελληνική εμπειρία (N. Κουραχάνης)



Anastasia Sofia Alexiadou Social Protection:
Historical and Philosophical dimension
Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2015

Constantine Arvanitakis

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Anastasia Sofia Alexiadou

Social Protection: Historical and Philosophical dimension

Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2015

This is an important contribution on the evolution of the institution of social protection, as it has evolved over centuries. Social protection includes important and vital components of modern states which through administration networks serve the people and the society at large. This institution includes Education, Social Security, Social Welfare, Health and Labor.

The author, a historian with a PhD in philosophy, has already contributed with previous books to the evolution of thinking of Greek physicians-philosophers and the historical and philosophical base of Social Security. In this book, which is an ambitious undertaking, refers to the development of forces which shaped the multifaceted structure of Social Protection in different historical periods and different countries from antiquity to present times. It is of great interest that the institution of Social Protection existed in ancient civilizations, Egyptian, Hebrew, Sumerian, Babylonian, Indian and Chinese. Specific emphasis is given to the evolution of Social Protection in Ancient Greece, focused on social reforms and legislation affected by Dracon, Solon, Kleisthenes and during the golden age of Athenian Democracy by Pericles. It is of note that the fundamental principles of Athenian Democracy, namely equality in law, meritocracy and civil rights, were the pillars of social reforms and rights of the citizens regarding social protection and education. Asclepius and Hippocrates contributed also to the social institutions regarding health and education. A brief reference is given to the social institutions on the Roman period followed by extensive historical review in Byzantine period and the influence of Christianity in social welfare and health, especially for the underprivileged sections of society, dealing with poverty and destitution. It is of interest Constantine the Great and Justinian supported reforms against poverty and promoted education and health care.

A brief reference is given to the period of Renaissance regarding the social right in labour, health and education. More emphasis is given to the period of Turkish rule in the Greek population and the evolution of carriers of Social Protection, the guilds, cooperatives and the church, as well as the Greek communities of Diaspora. It is of note that these developments were parallel to the establishment of schools and the educational institution during the 19th century, the newly founded Hellenic state, as well as the role of the first Governor Ioannis Kapodistrias, which albeit brief, was fundamental in social reforms.

In the 20th century social reforms, regarding health and labor were established, despite economic difficulties, political drawbacks and social unrest. In modern times the social rights and access to health through security funds were strengthened, as well as the social right to labor. The current legal framework of social security is given with ample documentation of the legislature regarding health laws and the evolution of social security regarding health, compensations and pensions. It must be emphasized that the author gives particular emphasis to the limitations and endanger of social rights in health and social security with the current economic crisis and the grave threat against the establishment of laws which provided social security, health and pensions, unemployment and deterioration of the whole structure of social protection. This is very pertinent recording which touches upon a serious matter of the times that Greek population is under the pressures and consequences of a deep and long recession.

The book includes in the final chapters an interesting reference to the philosophical influence of Medicine, education and social security and the contributions of great thinkers and philosophers, namely Adam Smith, Jean Jack Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, August Kont and Max Weber. This is the period of the themes concerning the development of social contract between the state and citizens, the protection of human rights, i.e. the right to health, education and social security.

Each section of the book contains an extended list of references and excellent documentation for the reader to seek further source of information according to his/her interests. In conclusion, this is a reference book, well written with fluent style, readable and useful for students, scientists, state institutions and administrators, responsible for Social Protection, particularly timely in our times that these institutions are under serious threat. The author has been successful in bringing forward and putting in print, the critical importance of a vital institution in modern states, that of Social Protection, which indeed needs to be protected at all costs.

Constantine Arvanitakis
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki