

mentioned at all as far as I can tell. To the outsider a book entitled *Irish Social Policy* could at least acknowledge the existence of a different regime north of the border or perhaps have been differently titled. Nevertheless, this book is a mighty achievement and an invaluable contribution.

Donald Hirsch and Laura Valadez-Martinez

The Living Wage Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2017.

221 pp. £50.00 (hbk), £15.00 (pbk). ISBN 9781911116455 (hbk), 978191111646 (pbk)

Reviewed by: Mary Murphy, *Maynooth University, Republic of Ireland*

Designed as a short primer to introduce students to core concepts, theories and ideas used by both economists and political economists to explain the workings of the economy, this book 'does what is says on the tin'. 136 pages are divided into five sections, including the bibliography and a relatively short index. Beginning with the meaning, origins and development of a living wage, it then examines the concept in contemporary practice. The book moves on to a more technical discussion reviewing the impact of higher wage floors on labour markets and how income policy interacts with in-work benefits and wider social policy before summarising issues and policy choices for a sustainable living wage in the 21st century.

Some attractive features include boxes with key concepts and key quotes, as well as boxes summarising key learning points, case studies or discussion summaries. The numerous graphs are useful, but could be more clearly defined and, in one case, include no data (p. 82). The pace is steady, balanced and appropriate for an undergraduate audience. The authors take on the challenge of producing a volume that is acceptable to undergraduate and master's courses from both mainstream economics and political economy perspectives. While overall a good nuanced balance is struck, at times there is too much credence given to neo-classical arguments – with phrases like 'the law of economics' and 'true market price of labour' giving too much reverence to the 'science' of economics. Most of the examples are English-speaking countries with an over focus on UK and USA and especially UK. This is understandable but perhaps these countries could have been better contextualised in welfare regime literature.

The section outlining the historical development of ideas of minimum wages and living wages and the various contemporary political actors who have advanced the living wage is compelling with various campaigns, alliances and social movements outlined. More might be said of the tensions for trade unions that fear acceptance of 'living wages' might undermine the practice of collective bargaining and the principle of 'equal pay for equal work'. More might be said too of employers' political engagement with living wage

campaigns including the manipulation of living wage demands to promote in-work benefits as a form of corporate welfare.

An important theme in the book, in the context of increased marketisation of public services, is the role of living wages in supply chains, both domestic and international. The book focuses on how living wages offer greater opportunities for better paid jobs in those services sectors subcontracted to the public sector (p. 99), highlighting not only the benefits to those workers but also the how this might in turn impact on quality of those subcontracted services through, for example, less staff turnover. Hirsch and Valadez-Martinez also engage thoroughly with the complex interaction between pay and in-work benefits, highlighting the significant degree to which these differ across countries, and illustrating how living wage increases are clawed back in the UK system but retained by the worker in the US system.

A related issue is the interaction between living wage campaigns and the realities of underemployment and involuntary low hours work as the sometimes-greater causes of in-work poverty, posing the question of 'minimum hours'. Conditionality is raised in the context of discussing an unconditional basic income (p. 99) as a possible policy response to increased automation. The reality that in-work conditionality is more likely in the context of make-work-pay policies also needs to be discussed. Such practices seek to guarantee that an extra hour's work will translate into extra income but also oblige the worker, regardless of care or other obligations, to take up such extra hours, an emerging scenario in the context of UK-based Universal Credit.

At various points *The Living Wage* discusses issues relating to equality, acknowledging some are more likely to be in low-paid employment, and raising issues relating to age, gender and to a lesser extent migrants. Some points are underdeveloped from an equality perspective, in-work benefits, for example, can produce work disincentives for female secondary earners; other policy options can lock in unequal care patterns. More can be done here to pull these disparate discussions together and discuss them using an intersectional perspective. All that said, the book's brevity is its strength as a teaching text, but it also means it can only touch on key issues, leaving the interested reader hungry for more. Indeed, an extended version might sate that appetite.

Riita Högbäck

Global Families, Inequality and Transnational Adoption: The De-Kinning of First Mothers London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 282 pp. £66.99 (hbk). ISBN 9781137524744

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This volume is based on a qualitative research study undertaken by the author of the workings of transnational adoption (TA) and a particular focus on the experience of (Högbäck's preferred term) 'first mothers'.