International social policy research has expanded rapidly over the last two decades. In addition to documenting and analysing the social policies of the Western nations, much more is now known about the welfare systems of other countries and particularly the developing countries of the Global South. However, as is widely recognized, many gaps remain. One major gap is the neglect of the role of European imperialism in shaping the social policies in those territories that were formerly subjected to imperial rule. Although this may be viewed as an esoteric topic, social policy in the developing world cannot be understood without examining the way welfare policies and programmes introduced during the imperial era have continued to influence current policy making. Unfortunately, contemporary international social policy scholarship has seriously neglected this issue. This book seeks to fill this gap by examining the way the social policies of the countries that were formerly a part of the British Empire were shaped by the British imperial legacy. The failure to properly analyse the effects of colonialism and imperialism on welfare systems has impeded a full understanding of international social policy issues, particularly in the developing countries. By addressing this neglected topic, the book examines diverse aspects of colonialism and social welfare and makes a significant contribution to current international social policy debates. Although primarily concerned with the British imperial legacy, its premise applies to European imperialism in general and has relevance for analysing social policies in many parts of the world today.

The book is based on a symposium held at the London School of Economics in March 2010 to examine the way social welfare policies and programmes evolved in a number of countries that were formerly ruled by Britain and, in particular, to ask to what extent their current welfare systems have been affected by the imperial legacy. We are grateful to the symposium participants who presented papers on different Commonwealth countries and different aspects of this issue and who so efficiently prepared their papers for publication in this book. They responded positively to the idea that colonialism and welfare was a topic of significance and presented material of great interest and value.

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Finally, we should mention all those who experienced colonialism. It seems inappropriate to thank these many millions, since for most colonialism was not something they ever wished for. But the least we can do is remember them – which is in large part the purpose of this book.

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