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Review Of "Ends And Means Of Reducing Poverty" By R.J. Lampman

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Ends and Means of Reducing Poverty. by Robert J. Lampman

Review by: Robinson G. Hollister, Jr.

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since it deals almost exclusively with the problems of project planning. In the words of the authors: "The emphasis in this book is on how to develop a plan when the planner has the authority to implement it, providing he observes the normative values of the society in which he is functioning. Our approach describes a simplified, rational model and assumes minimum interactions with the environment and other components of the system in which it operates" (p. 196). Planning is equated with decision making; it is a vehicle for enhancing the functional rationality of the decisions which are reached. The process of planning is seen as involving no more than the formulation of alternative ways to achieve desired objectives and selection between those alternatives.

Because ends are dealt with as self-evident and as given, planning is treated as an instrumental endeavor; planning thus is to serve as a technical adjunct of administration. The various legislatively inspired mandates for health planning are discussed as is the organization of the planning function. The book then proceeds to an identification of a host of techniques, primarily drawn from other fields, which the health planner can draw upon in assessing the consequences of alternative courses of action. The techniques which are identified as the working tools of health planning are often summarized with desperate brevity; little is said in regard to the problems of their application, when they are likely to prove useful, or what dangers and limitations are likely to be encountered in their use.

The current reality of decision making in the health field needs to be understood if planning is to emerge as capable of reforming existing practice. There are few glimpses of that reality in this volume. Indicative of this bias is the fact that the only identification of goal disparity and interest conflict forthrightly acknowledged is that between "consumers" and "providers." Yet the few pages devoted to a discussion of the interaction of consumers and providers in the process of planning are likely to strike most readers as excessively superficial. Regrettably both consumers and providers are dealt with in monolithic terms as though each were expressive of only a single constellation of values.

This volume is useful in indicating what it is reasonable to expect of those who are certified

by the current flurry of university training programs as "health planners." It is modest in intent, highly readable given its origin in the classroom, and, there seems reason to believe, a judicious statement of the proper practice of health planning as it is currently visualized by academe. It will be necessary to turn to other quarters, however, to find help in resolving the crisis in health care and dealing with it as an organizational problem. If this volume accurately reflects the scope of health planning, then such planning is unlikely to alter the health delivery system in significant ways. Rather, the model presented here comes through as a prescription for exercises in irrelevance.

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Ends and means of reducing poverty. By ROBERT J. LAMPMAN. Institute for Research on Poverty Monograph Series. Chicago: Markham, 1971. Pp. xiii, 178. 2nd printing, \$3.95, paper.

Early in his *Ends and means of reducing income poverty* Robert Lampman notes: "Most egalitarians would agree with R. H. Tawney that 'the real evil is capricious inequality and irresponsible power'" (p. 30).

Lampman himself has devoted most of his energies as a scholar and commentator on public affairs to forcing—and facilitating—public awareness of the evils of capricious inequality and to promoting public policies to mitigate or eliminate it. His 1959 monograph on poverty for the Joint Economic Committee¹ was one of the seminal works leading to a decade of concern for the poor which found its fullest governmental blossoming in the War on Poverty. Coming at the end of that decade (publication date 1971) this small volume is a fitting summary and coda which deserves careful reading and reflection. *Ends and means* is a particularly healthy antidote to the strident rhetoric and myopic focus on contemporary poverty programs and politics which characterized

¹ *The Low Income Population and Economic Growth*, Study Paper No. 12, U.S. Congress, Joint Economic Committee, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1959.

most of the poverty literature of the 1960's.

Lampman's emphasis is on the broader context of poverty. Chapter 2 is devoted to a review of the background of social science thought on inequality. This is a most useful reminder of the longer term philosophic debates among political economists about the feasibility and desirability of reduced income inequality—debate which was curiously neglected during the War on Poverty years, the 1960's, and only revived in the recent flurry of controversy over John Rawls' work. This review of social science thought adds considerable dignity and historical depth to the analysis of contemporary poverty which follows.

After a short diversion in Chapter 3 providing one of those skillfully selected and compactly presented summaries of facts about the poor which Professor Lampman does better than anyone else I know of, the central and distinctive aspects of the book are presented. These are chapters devoted to analysis of how poverty from 1947 to 1967 was affected by changes in the composition of the population, shifts in residence, occupation, and industry, and revisions of the total tax and transfer system.

Beyond a host of enlightening details, these analytical chapters yield certain broad insights about the basic forces which have influenced the extent of poverty over the last two decades. First, most of the changes in the composition of the population worked *against* reduction in poverty since the relative size of groups more prone to poverty increased, *e.g.*, families with aged heads, heads not in the labor force, and non-white families. Second, shifts in residence, occupation, and industry worked strongly to reduce poverty as persons moved to residence or types of work with lower poverty incidence, *e.g.*, South to North, farm to non-farm. Third, the net effect of public taxes and transfers has shifted over the last two decades in favor of the poor; social welfare expenditures which are more highly concentrated among the poor—though they are by no means tightly limited to them—have increased substantially while the overall progressivity of the tax structure has not changed very much. In the discussion of the tax and transfer system Professor Lampman focuses on the effects of the system on those who would have been poor *pre-transfer*,

i.e., those whose income would fall below the poverty line if all transfer payments were subtracted. This procedure insures that we do not neglect the substantial numbers of families lifted out of poverty by programs often not thought of as anti-poverty efforts, such as Social Security.

These broad conclusions may not be terribly startling, but they are important reminders that while much political drama may surround the fate of Head Start, the Job Corps, or Model Cities, these broader trends have far greater impact on the aggregate extent of poverty—and perhaps on the lives of the individual poor families.

It is only in the last twenty percent of the book that Professor Lampman turns to a discussion of the strategies and programs which most people think of as constituting anti-poverty efforts. In this section of the book there is a strange reticence, an apparent unwillingness, to draw conclusions. Consider:

It is interesting to speculate about why we have not done more in adapting the system to the needs of the poor. . . . is it a fear and mistrust of the poor by the non-poor majority, or is it more the result of the ability of the poor minority to mount effective protest? Is it . . . the result of excessive emphasis upon individualism and localism in the face of racial and ethnic diversity? Have we bogged down in what Richard Titmuses called "the troubled area between equality and the needs of the poor for unequal treatment?" Are we hung forever on the present balance among principles in the income maintenance field and unwilling to relent somewhat in the emphasis upon assuring continuity of income, via the insurance principle of equity as opposed to assuring income adequacy? Have we run out of imagination concerning ways to extend the positive sanctions for dependency we now have to new categories. . . ? Or is the reason why we have not done more to adapt the system founded on the belief that all such plans are foredoomed unless, as a prior condition, the poor themselves are changed? (pp. 143-44).

The limited discussion in this section must be a disappointment and puzzle to many readers who would naturally expect that a man who had played such a central role in initiating the public policy processes that led to these programs would be prepared to run a tally, render

judgments, and separate wheat and chaff. I can only offer some perhaps ill-founded speculations as to the reasons for the little weight put on means in a book called *Ends and means of reducing poverty*.

First, it is indicative that Lampman entitles this final section "Means to Accelerate the Process of Reducing Poverty." This title and the limited discussion would be consistent with a view, implicitly stressed—as I have suggested above—in the central portions of the book, that the extent of poverty is less affected by narrow poor-related programs than by broader demographic, social, and economic forces.

Second, though he never says so explicitly, Lampman appears to believe that ending poverty is largely a matter of broad political will rather than finding some touchstone set of programs that will transform the poor, the institutions that deal with them, and the attitudes of the non-poor toward them. At the end of the book Lampman says:

Ending income poverty does not require and will not achieve a transformation of society. It is a modest goal. Income poverty is only part of the broader problem of poverty. And poverty . . . is a sub-topic of the general issue of inequality. We should proceed, not with utopian expectations, but with the belief that the achievement of this particular goal . . . will be a worthy achievement in the slow evolution of society (p. 167).

In this light, Lampman's tentative, slight treatment of both theories of causes of poverty and of effectiveness of War on Poverty programs might result from a desire not to detract from the central message that we could end income poverty (by a reasonable set of income transfer policies) if we but had sufficient political will to do so.

Third, less speculative, more concrete insight is provided by recent article by Lampman in *The Public Interest*.² Any reader of *Ends and means* should regard this article as a required postscript to the volume. Professor Lampman discusses more forthrightly here his misgivings about the evolution during the 1960's of the debate on poverty and antipov-erty programs. He feels that while the decade

² "What does it do for the poor—a new test for national policy," *The Public Interest*, Number 34, Winter 1974, pp. 66-82.

began with a definable, achievable goal of reducing or eliminating income poverty, after 1964 the standards were escalated and new rules applied. The new standards were those of cost-effectiveness (associated with the establishment of the planning, programming, budgeting system established in the Federal government). Whereas previously a poverty program was "effective" if it simply channeled more money or goods and services to the poor, new additional performance standards were added. For example, it was not enough to show poor children received more educational resources but also that, as a result, they learned more. Lampman says:

In this exercise, the poor served as proxies in contests to reform all government policies, contests in which the best became the enemy of the good. Appraisals of the budget against poverty become entangled with discoveries that the links between education spending and learning, and between medical care and outlays, are not too clear (p. 75).

He notes:

even the successes [of anti-poverty efforts] have been called failures by reference to newer and higher goals which have tended to emerge almost before the ink is dry on the old ones (p. 81).

These sorts of statements from the article seem to indicate that Lampman resented these shifts in standards and the very limited discussion of programs and his reluctance to assess their impact in his book may reflect his desire not to give weight to these new standards, which he perhaps regards as unwise and illegitimate when applied to poverty issues.

In addition, he feels the standards are escalated to include the broader topic of income inequality as part of the poverty problem. He appears to feel it is important to keep the reduction of income poverty (lifting people above a minimum standard of money income or equivalent goods and services) as a sub-category of more general inequality. "Comprehending the distribution of money income and its dynamics is a bewildering challenge," (p. 71) he says, and it is foolish to get the income poverty question too entangled with the more intractable issues of general inequality. "The goal of eliminating poverty is a modest addi-

tion to the array of apparently politically useful rationales for redistribution" (p. 73).

Though his resentment of the escalation to standards that emphasize the question of program effectiveness and the extent of income redistribution is made clear in his *Public Interest* article, he appears finally to accept these new standards and he begins in that article once again, as he did more than a decade ago, to define, clarify, and marshal the facts in order to face the issues for the seventies and to remind us to ask of policies "What does it do for the poor?" *Ends and means in reducing poverty* and the *Public Interest* article together give the background, the broader context, and the new agenda for what we may hope will soon become a renewed interest in reducing poverty in our society.

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Disease and economic development: The impact of parasitic diseases in St. Lucia. By BURTON A. WEISBROD; RALPH L. ANDREANO; ROBERT E. BALDWIN; ERWIN H. EPSTEIN AND ALLEN C. KELLY. With the assistance of THOMAS W. HELMINIAK. Madison, Wisc. and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973. Pp. xvii, 218. \$12.50.

According to the Preface, this study was produced in response to the need "for a study of the economic and social impact of the world's reputedly number one public health disease, schistosomiasis" (p. xv). The specific objectives set for themselves by the research team were to assess "the effects of the disease in one limited region (St. Lucia, West Indies)" and to develop "an analytical approach that would be a useful guide to researchers who might examine the impacts of other diseases in other regions" (p. xv).

The title of the book would be held in violation of a mislabeling law if such a law existed for economic works. But title aside, the very fact that a substantial organized effort was made by a group of four economists and one sociologist to investigate some aspects of the economic impact of an important disease on a less developed country is worthy of commendation. While the importance of disease as a factor in economic development was well ap-

preciated when the present rich countries were in the process of industrializing, it has been almost completely overlooked in modern economic development research and received only lip-service in fashionable development theory.

Second, the masterly survey of the literature on the economic and cultural impacts of disease presented in Chapter 2 of the book almost justifies the book by itself and justifies the *cliché* that "it will be a standard reference for years to come."

As is obvious, my bias is strongly towards favoring a study such as this one. Unfortunately, the study itself makes an enthusiastic review impossible. Let us look at the first objective—assessing the effects of the disease, schistosomiasis, on a limited region. The disease schistosomiasis, (also known as bilharzia, liver fluke, or snail fever) is widespread, and attempts to launch economic development in traditional areas often result in spreading the disease further. It affects some 150 to 200 million people in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. In China, the disease has been important enough to be the subject of a poem, *Farewell to the God of Plague*, by Chairman Mao Tse-Tung. (Among the lines in the poem are: "Weeds choked hundreds of villages, man wasted away; thousands of households dwindled, phantoms sang with glee.") In carrying out the study, the investigators did not restrict themselves to schistosomiasis since it turned out that the population studied typically had also at least one of four other parasites (hookworm, ascaris, strongyloides, trichuris).

From the total population of St. Lucia of about 100,000 in 1967, people living in two rural valleys were chosen for a demographic analysis based on answers to a questionnaire by people who were willing to give a stool specimen for examination; 4,668 persons or 60 percent of those asked (7,804) gave a stool specimen. This is perhaps 52 percent of the people living in these valleys.

To study the impact of parasitic diseases on agricultural labor productivity, data was collected on 466 workers employed on one banana plantation over an 18 month period. Since complete data were not obtained on all, the actual sample size used in the analyses shrank to 126 or less. A similar study of effects