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Book Notes

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BOOK NOTES

United Nation Development Program. *Human Development Report 1992*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. \$16.95 papercover.

This is the third in a series of annual publications from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) dealing with social development issues. Like UNDP's earlier reports, the 1992 *Human Development Report* examines the concept of social or 'human' development as it is called, provides useful statistical data pertaining to social welfare, and focuses on a specific issue relevant to social development. In this report, the issue is poverty and the global economy. The relationship between poverty and global economic development is explored, and an attempt is made to link thinking about the world economy with a concern for poverty and social well-being. The report is essential reading for anyone concerned with social development, particularly in the context of Third World development.

Ruth Ylvisaker Winger. *The Impact of Tax Legislation on Corporate Income Security Planning for Retirees*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1992. \$66 hardcover.

As the populations of economically developed countries such as the United States age, more attention is being given to the question of income maintenance during retirement. Although social security provides a safety net, it must be augmented by private and occupational pension programs. Drawing extensively on the writings of Richard Titmuss, Winger explores the relationship between what Titmuss called occupational and fiscal welfare. The pension plans of nine well known business enterprises in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area are examined in the light of the way the tax system facilitates their operation. The study concludes that corporate retirement plans enhance governmental social security provisions and if properly regulated, can make a significant contribution to protecting retirees. However, the present system suffers from numerous gaps and weaknesses which Congress needs to address. The author calls for a more careful assessment of federal retirement

policy and for the introduction of policy modifications that will maximize social welfare for all retired workers.

C. Emory Burton. *The Poverty Debate: Politics and the Poor in America*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992. \$47.95 hardcover.

Burton's useful book offers a comprehensive account of sociological perspectives on poverty in the United States. It examines research findings as well as major theoretical positions on the poverty problem. The book discusses the incidence and distribution of poverty, explanations of the causes of poverty and policy prescriptions for its alleviation. The author takes a firm ideological stand against those who believe that poverty is caused by individual attitudes or behaviors. Theories of poverty that attribute causation to indolence, insobriety and a lack of ambition do not, he argues, offer plausible insights into the complex social and economic causes of poverty. His review of sociological perspectives on poverty focuses on the culture of poverty and the underclass question and provides a helpful summary of the field. The concluding chapter on policy options is primarily concerned with income maintenance and social service programs. Although the book does not provide any original theoretical insights, its attempt to summarize a complex field will be useful to students and researchers alike.

Amartya Sen. *Inequality Examined*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992. \$29.95 hardcover.

This discursive account of the issues of inequality, poverty and social justice by the distinguished Harvard economist and philosopher, Amartya Sen, attempts a re-conceptualization of existing approaches in the field. Sen argues that despite the apparent rejection of equality in many ethical and philosophical discourses on the subject, all approaches recognize the centrality of equality in social life. This paradox can be explained by the fact that the key issue in the debate is not *whether* there should be equality but rather *what* criteria should be used to establish normative determinants for equality. The greatest error and source of contention lies in the argument that all human beings

are equal when in fact they differ enormously. The recognition of these differences together with a commitment to enhancing freedom to achieve objectives offers the only realistic and just way of proceeding. It is the recognition of different human capabilities and the freedom to achieve these capabilities that forms the basis for a socially just society.

Henry J. Bruton. *The Political Economy of Poverty, Equity and Growth: Sri Lanka and Malaysia*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1992. \$39.95 hardcover.

Since it first sponsored research into the relationship between economic growth and income inequality in the 1970s, the World Bank has commissioned various country case studies to examine this issue. Bruton's extremely thorough comparative study of Sri Lanka and Malaysia offers useful insights into both the conceptual and empirical bases of contemporary research into poverty, inequality and growth. Bruton argues that the experiences of these two countries, which share many common features, cast doubt on the usefulness of conventional conceptual approaches which emphasize the need for rapid economic growth and the reduction of disparities between high and low income groups. In both societies, the value of growth is subordinated to the preservation of traditional institutions and there is less emphasis on re-distribution between rich and poor than between different ethnic groups. While he does not regard Sri Lanka's widely reported (and criticized) egalitarian policies as a model for other Third World countries, his empirical research demonstrates that these policies have made a significant contribution to the social well-being of the population. He is skeptical of Malaysia's commitment to create an export driven capitalist economy and cautions that the new enthusiasm for the free-market may enhance social deprivation and inequality.

Bruce E. Moon. *The Political Economy of Basic Needs*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1992. \$45.00 hardcover; \$14.95 papercover.

Moon's book makes an important contribution to understanding the basic needs approach to development which

advocates planned government intervention to promote the attainment of minimum health, nutritional, educational and shelter needs in poor countries. It reports on the results of an ambitious statistical evaluation of basic needs performance among 120 countries as measured by the Physical Quality of Life Index, a composite indicator of education, literacy and life expectancy. The study traces differences in basic needs performance and correlates these with a plethora of factors. The analysis results in the construction of a sophisticated statistical model which effectively predicts basic needs performance.

Moon's research reveals that basic needs attainment is a complex process in which numerous factors play a variable and intricate role. There is no single, simple path to meeting basic needs in which either a free market or state dominated approach produces the desired result. While the state has a pivotal role to play, it is constrained by political, economic and social realities. Similarly, high rates of economic growth do not automatically correlate with high levels of basic needs attainment. Rather, satisfactory basic needs performance is attributable to a complex mix of factors in which the degree of modernization of the economy and the magnitude of state activism in both economic and social affairs are particularly significant. The major lesson of Moon's impressive research is that a commitment to meeting basic needs is not antithetical to economic development. Welfare and economic goals are, he concludes, highly compatible and should be the basis of development policy everywhere.

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