

DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS, by Jonathan Power. *Longman Group Ltd*, London, 1971. 144 pp. 60p.

The task which Jonathan Power has undertaken in writing this book—to present the basic principles of development economics at a level which sixth-formers can manage—is one which could easily be dismissed as too ambitious and far-fetched. One can imagine such a book falling down appallingly in any one of a dozen ways, and to record that it is partly successful is to note a remarkable achievement.

Jonathan Power writes fluently and clearly and his intense involvement with the issues discussed will certainly be felt by the reader. There are good illustrations and diagrams, plenty of statistics, and (a feature which will appeal to sixth-form students of economics) applications of economic analysis of the school variety to the problems of development. The author is aware of diverse histories and present situations of different countries and he manages to put some of this across; for such a small book there is a lot of history, which is how it should be. The chapter entitled 'Models of Development' concerns itself, not with formal theoretical models of the development process, but with the historical experience and prospects of three Asian countries—China, India and Japan.

This then is a serious book and it makes the reader think. The idea of confronting school pupils with the problems of development is a challenging one, which will make teachers think too. And the book is well-written and skilfully produced, and without doubt the school pupils who read it will be excited and inspired by it, and some perhaps will go on to read more, and even those who do not will be encouraged by it to face the daily grind of their studies. Surely this book will be a success, but. . . .

Yes, there is a 'but', although it is not easy to find the right words to express it. This is a good introduction to 'development economics', the latterly fashionable area which has fast become an academic discipline in its own right. In particular it brings out, unintentionally, so much that is wrong with that academic discipline. But itself it does not often enough, and it would be absurd to expect it to, rise above the muddles, and the clichés, and the conventional wisdoms which masquerade as the economics of development. If one is discontented at the end, it reflects badly upon the whole subject, and we should not blame the author for the failings of the writers on whom he has

drawn. In the circumstances it really is remarkable that the book is as good as it is.

What are these faults in the whole area referred to so sweepingly? There are too many to treat here, but some stand out as of particular relevance to the present volume. There is the whole complex of what might call 'international agency attitudes'; here, for example, a love of parading impressive and nearly meaningless comparative statistics. We are told that the average resident of an underdeveloped country has an annual income of £28. If this is taken to mean that he has that standard of living which a resident of England would enjoy on £28 per annum, even with a free bit of land to squat on, then it is incredible—things are bad enough but not that bad. Or there is the recourse to trite formulae to solve difficult problems, as in Chapter 5, where the need for aid and the need for trade are related to so-called 'gaps'—the saving gap and the trade gap—as if these could be defined independently of each other, and as if the case for giving aid to a country depended upon any such thing.

Another unhappy feature of the subject has been its tendency to blow up casual, and some times very unsubtle, observation into grand theories. A prime example of this is the belief that many underdeveloped countries have massive labour surpluses in agriculture, in the sense that no agricultural output would be lost, or in the extreme form of this view some gained, if labour were to move from the land. It is a great pity that Jonathan Power should have given his support to this view, and by way of a neat employment of a standard school economics diagram at that. There is a notable lack of substantial empirical support for it. Earlier observations grossly neglected the important seasonal fluctuations in the demand for agricultural labour, especially demand at harvest time.

Development Economics does reflect a great deal our underdeveloped understanding of underdevelopment. In all probability this will not matter, for if Jonathan Power is successful in his enterprise of getting this subject taught and considered at the school level he will have achieved something far more important than writing a book which would be beyond criticism.

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