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Appreciation of Philip Payne

Philip Reid Payne, Professor of Nutrition, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (30 July 1928–9 January 2012)

Not many Professors of Nutrition have a first degree in Physics, and are initially employed to measure tritium (used in making hydrogen bombs); even fewer have significantly challenged international approaches to hunger and malnutrition, and almost none could begin a paper doing so with a quote from Thomas Love Peacock's *Crotchet Castle*: 'riches are not the object for a community to aim at. I say, the nation is best off, in relation to other nations, which has the greatest quantity of the common necessaries of life distributed among the greatest number of persons'[1]. Philip Payne, who died following a short illness, achieved all of these and much more: a visionary scientist with compassion and kindness, who nevertheless saw that food and nutritional problems could not be solved by science alone, and that increased food production was not a sufficient condition for solving malnutrition. He argued for the art of nutrition as well as its science: a process of advocacy for creating and strengthening institutions of government, and for allocating resources specifically for nutrition. He also pushed for nutritionists and agriculturalists to work creatively together, not so much to design nutrient-rich foods as to ensure agricultural livelihoods enabled adequate diets and thriving children, rather than impoverished communities. How much his vision is still urgently needed, as numbers who are hungry rise again, and the need for a sustainable and equitable food system is back on the agenda.

Philip Payne, a modest but extremely engaging and intelligent man, started work for Professor Benjamin Platt in his pioneering Nutrition Unit in the National Institute for Medical Research at Mill Hill in 1951. This early, interdisciplinary group laid the scientific basis for the nutritive values of whole diets, as traditionally eaten by rural people in different parts of the world, rather than focus on the nutrient values of separate food items as prepared in a laboratory. The results informed practical guidelines for recognisable recipes to meet the needs of vulnerable groups. Thus began a career devoted to addressing the problems of the 'real world', as opposed to the theoretical abstract version most of us would prefer. Within 20 years, Payne (with John Waterlow, who died in 2010) was advising the FAO/WHO committee on protein and energy requirements on a totally new approach to thinking about protein needs: that most malnutrition was caused by insufficient dietary energy, and that fortifying diets with protein was a waste of money and effort[2]. As Payne went on to argue, 'magic bullets' to deliver missing nutrients were at best irrelevant and at worst a distraction from what was really needed, which is to examine the social, political and environmental factors that generate malnutrition within families in different circumstances, in order to improve the assessment of priorities and evaluate the impact of development in different sectors on nutritional well being.

By the late 1960s, the Nutrition Unit had become a Department in the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, first under Platt and then Waterlow, and Payne established a Nutrition Policy Unit to carry out exactly those functions, with funding from the (then) Overseas Development Ministry (now DfID). For 12 years, this small unit worked for UN agencies and international organisations, collaborating with universities around the world, to develop innovative methodological approaches to analysing nutritional problems and evaluating intervention, and establishing strong links with agricultural institutions and research, in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Philippines and many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, central and South America. Payne always employed economists

(including Anne Thomson and Barbara Harriss-White) and anthropologists (such as Julius Holt) as well as nutritionists such as Erica Wheeler and me, and we worked with the planners in development, agriculture and health. All the field research also fed into the Department's MSc Human Nutrition programme, especially teaching on international food and nutrition policy; Philip would regularly arrive back from some UN assignment with a suitcase of papers, which he enthusiastically turned into yet another interactive exercise or role play, lasting several days, for delighted students and rather long-suffering younger colleagues. He loved nothing more than to engage with others whose minds were at formative stages, creating difficult situations to be faced and worked through, spending hours arguing, always on the basis of wide-ranging evidence, and often playing devil's advocate. He was the most generous of research supervisors, to the despair of his secretary, who was left waiting for drafts of letters and reports, of which there were many, given his continual working for UN organisations, the World Bank and the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington.

Payne never lost his love of mathematical and scientific thinking; he worked with Mary Griffiths and John Rivers (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine), Jeya Henry (Oxford Brookes and Singapore) and Alan Dugdale (Queensland) on energy and nutrient requirements and Michael Lipton (Institute of Development Studies, Sussex and World Bank) and Richard Longhurst (Institute of development Studies) on the relationship between energy needs, body size, social and physiological function and adaptive costs, unafraid to challenge the prevailing wisdom on reference standards for growth and attained size. He said that a first degree in Physics equipped one with an expectation that accepted ideas would be overturned on the basis of new thinking and evidence; embracing Kuhnian paradigm shifts, he was always looking to challenge what 'everybody knew'. But at heart, his humanity was fundamental: he saw malnutrition as a social problem, needing the best science and social science to understand and solve it, and imaginative funding to enable necessary research.

He met and married Sheila while working at Mill Hill; theirs was a very long and happy relationship, particularly in retirement in Herefordshire, where they grew vegetables and fabulous fruit, and Philip fell in with farmers and enquirers after intellectual challenge. He and Sheila were immensely proud of their three children, Susan, Helen and Laurence, and all grandchildren; Sheila predeceased him by a few years. He once remarked that his measure of effectiveness for his life's work was being in a meeting of UNICEF country level programme directors in New York, and realising that, of the twenty-two people in the room, he had taught sixteen of them in London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. People from all around the world will remember his generosity of spirit, sharp mind and impish sense of fun; all would thank him for the immense contribution he made both to their work and their lives.

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