

## Richard Morris Titmuss

Richard Titmuss, who died on 6 April 1973, was more responsible than any other individual for the form which the study of social policy and administration has taken in Britain.

The *Journal of Social Policy* itself is one of the many legacies of his work. For many years he had foreseen that there would ultimately be a need for a journal but hesitated to encourage it until he felt sure that there would be a regular flow of contributions of a quality to merit publication. As the first chairman of the editorial board he personally read and commented on many of the articles before publication and played an active part in shaping the character and content of the journal.

In most countries in Europe and in many elsewhere, social policy is no more than an appendage of the study of law. In the United States there are few faculties exclusively devoted to social policy. Much of the valuable work which has been done has emerged from a disparate series of faculties – economics, sociology, public administration, politics, social work or public health. In Britain since the war social administration has spread rapidly throughout the universities. The recognition of the subject by the British academic fraternity owes more than anything else to the standing of Titmuss's work.

Titmuss taught us that the core of social policy was to be found in the analysis of social values – past and present. He also taught us that we should not attempt to theorize unless and until we had a solid and compassionate comprehension of all the relevant facts. Thus the marvel of Titmuss's own work was the extent to which he mastered whatever disciplines were needed to understand his chosen subject – whether it was the law, physiology or chemistry of blood transfusion, the economics and statistics of income distribution, or the role of the gift relationship as portrayed in anthropology and sociology. But the most important facts were not what any theory led us to expect about them but the impact of services and policies on individuals and families. What actually happened to consumers of services as they perceived it was the most important fact of all.

The works of Titmuss are not as voluminous as those of many others. This is partly because of the high academic standards which he imposed upon himself. It was also because he was involved so much in helping,

advising and supporting the administrators and policy-makers from all over the world who sought him out and to whom he gave so generously of his time. But most important of all was the time he devoted to teaching others – commenting on drafts, rewriting badly written sentences and tentatively suggesting alternative lines of thought which so often made the author, if he was sensitive enough to hear what was so tactfully said, want to tear up a manuscript and start again. Volume upon volume published in the social policy field since the war owes as much to Titmuss as to the author to whom it is formally attributed.

Titmuss never sought fame or honour. Nor did he attempt to impose his ideas on others. But his way of thinking has nevertheless dominated a generation of academics in his field and is already beginning to be absorbed into the way in which governments think about social issues.

Titmuss's hobby was gardening. He loved everything that flowered. No wonder he once described the Welfare State as an 'exotic hot-house climbing rose'. Wherever he went throughout the world he carried with him empty manilla envelopes into which he shook the seeds of any strange flower, shrub or herb which caught his attention. Within a year that plant would be growing in his greenhouse. Seeds held the mystery of life itself.

He continued to teach and write until the end. His last series of lectures will never be forgotten by any student who attended them. Crumpled by pain he journeyed to the LSE twice a week throughout the Lent Term to give as he had always given and to love as he had always loved. To be unable to give was for him to be unable to live. None who knew him will ever forget his example of how to live and how to perform the office of university teacher. He and his wife Kay showered kindness on us all.

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