

Introduction Remarks for the 2012 Leontief Prize

Neva Goodwin

I would like to start by mentioning several former recipients of this award. First, we join many others in deep sadness at the death of Alice Amsden, whose work on the role of the state in newly industrializing countries was recognized by this award in 2002. More happily – we congratulate Jose Antonio Ocampo for being one of three nominees, and a serious contender, for the next leader of the World Bank. Also, I was delighted to discover that Michael Lipton and I were both students of 2001 Leontief awardee Paul Streeten. And it is a pleasure to note that last year's recipient, Marty Weitzman has joined us for today's presentations.

We are grateful to several co-sponsors of this event: we have already heard from Patrick Webb representing the Friedman School of Nutrition. Our thanks also to the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy – Dean Bosworth, we are glad that you are able to be with us. Also, we very much appreciate the co-sponsorship of Tufts Institute for the Environment.

The topics that our speakers will address today are issues on which GDAE is actively working, most recently in Tim Wise's report, "Resolving the Food Crisis: Assessing Global Policy Reforms Since 2007."

The Leontief Prize, in memory of Wassily Leontief, is designed to recognize outstanding contributions to economic theory that address contemporary realities, and support just and sustainable societies. The field of agricultural economics in general is one that tends to address contemporary realities and support just and sustainable societies – and it is obvious that this field is needed more now than ever, for a number of reasons: Global warming – or global weirding – has brought the idea of sustainability into prominence, as we tip ever more perilously into uncharted, unsustainable territory. The recent financial crises have brought back into the limelight the importance of economic justice, while the accompanying food crises have reminded us that the first job of any economy should be to provide sufficient, nutritious food to everyone.

We have here the two great agricultural economists of the last half century. More than a year ago, when we at GDAE began to think about centering this year's prize around agriculture, it was obvious that Peter Timmer and Michael Lipton were the leaders. Because they have led their field for so long, we also thought it would be good to look for the young leaders in the field, and reached out to many friends – including Peter – to ask who they would name in this category. There was no one who came near them. This is somewhat sad, in that there is something close to a missing generation. We hope that there are signs of renewed interest in it; sustainability and justice both require healthy agricultural institution, globally and locally. For today, we feel very good about having been able to bring here the very best in the field.

I will give separate introductions to each of our speakers, but first I wanted to note one thing that struck me as I was recently rereading – with great pleasure – some of their work. That is, how intelligently and usefully each of them employs the techniques available to economists, to massage data and learn from it. This is economics at its best.

I will also mention two unique characteristics of today's awardees: Michael Lipton is probably our only awardee to have been a President of the British Chess Problem Society, having composed over 400 chess problems. Peter Timmer is almost certainly our only awardee who has had a book published by the American Enterprise Institute.

My introduction to Peter Timmer will be rather personal, for a couple of reasons. One reason is that Peter's modesty is such that it is almost impossible to find any biographical data on him on the Internet. This lack of hard data tempts me to fall back on noting that Peter was my favorite teacher at a time when I was just about to give up on economics, as a field that had anything to do with the real world. I am not alone in this; I believe there are a number of other people in this room who remember Peter as their favorite teacher.

When I went on to write textbooks that are designed to show how the economy relates to the social, historical, and ecological contexts in which it exists, the first box, in the first chapter – page 6 in the current edition of *Microeconomics in Context* – quotes a “now eminent economist” who tells his class about a lesson he learned on his first job. (Actually that wasn't Peter's first job – he had worked in commodity trading in New York before entering a PhD program in economics.) To continue that story – the young economist was advising the Indonesian government on its choice between two rice-milling techniques. He selected the one that appeared to better achieve the economic goal of efficiency. Unfortunately he discovered that that technology created only jobs that were not considered culturally suitable for women. This affected the allocation of household incomes in a way that was harmful for children's nutrition and education. Users of our textbook learn the lessons that generations of Peter's students have learned: The importance of asking deeply what are the goals, of not simply accepting assumptions about economic efficiency, and of considering the full context of economic activity.

One of the remarkable things about Peter Timmer's work is how he has woven a deep understanding of agriculture – especially rice – into a broad understanding of historical trends and theoretical realities. In fact, he actually prefers to be considered an economic historian – a preference that may be related to the fact that he is responsible for much of the economic history of Indonesia over many decades. In 1992, he received the Bintang Jasa Utama (Highest Merit Star) from the Republic of Indonesia for his contributions to food security. I mentioned that he had a book published by the American Enterprise Institute. That was probably because they did not read carefully enough the title of his 1986 book, *Getting Prices Right: The Scope and Limits of Agricultural Price Policy*. Peter, as you will doubtless hear in his talk, has great respect for the power and scope of markets and prices; he also recognizes very well their limits. His other Bestselling Books, as you can discover on Amazon, when you give up looking for him elsewhere on the web, include the great standard text from 1983, *Food Policy Analysis*, and his most recent book, published in 2009, *A World Without Agriculture: The Structural Transformation in*

Historical Perspective – a book that uses history as a framework for understanding the political economy of agricultural policy.

Peter always has many projects going on at the same time. In addition to his research and writing, at present one third of his time – that is probably about 8 hours a day – is devoted to advising the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation on agricultural development issues. I hope he will achieve as much good there as he has done in advising governments in Indonesia, Vietnam, and a number of other Asian countries.

We are delighted and honored to have him with us today.

Throughout Michael Lipton’s career he has addressed issues that are noteworthy for two characteristics: they are of immense importance, and they are not the popular topics of the time – receiving much less attention than they deserve. His work has often brought – over time – the needed attention to issues such as the tension between development theory and rural well-being, shedding a bright light on how poverty is affected by urban-rural and state-market linkages; farm technology and science; nutrition economics; land reform; aid; and demographics. The theme that has bound all of these together has been his creative concern for how to alleviate rural poverty – which is, after all, most of the poverty in the world.

In addition to over 150 journal articles, a partial list of Michael’s books includes *Why People Stay Poor*, published in 1977, which made the term “Urban Bias” a powerful rallying point for a new, pro-poor, pro-rural approach to development.

Subsequent books included *New Seeds and Poor People*, *Successes in Anti-poverty*, and, most recently, *Land Reform in Developing Countries: Property Rights and Property Wrongs*, about which a reviewer has said “It is the first comprehensive and up to date review of land reform issues in the developing countries in many years. In my opinion, it is one of the most important books ever written about agriculture in the developing countries.” The reviewer in *Development and Change*, goes on to describe the book as “a major exercise in the pricking of intellectual bubbles, the debunking of myths, and the correcting of often innocent misperceptions of the events of the last half century.”

Most of Michael’s career has been at Sussex University, starting as one of seven teacher-researchers in the university’s first year of operation, 1961-2. Since 1994 he has been Professor of Development Economics at the Sussex Poverty Research Unit, which he founded. His many other distinguished services have included Program Director of the Food Consumption and Nutrition Program at IFPRI – the International Food Policy Research Institute – and Senior Policy Adviser at the World Bank, where he was involved in the Task Force established to study the impact of the World Bank’s activities on poor people. He has been elected to Fellowships of All Souls College, Oxford, MIT, the British Academy and the Stellenbosch Institute of Advanced Studies.

For 25 years Michael was a Fellow of the Institute of Development Studies, a leading global charity for international development research, teaching and communications. There he founded

and directed the Village Studies Programme, which collated over 3000 primary surveys. He has just finished directing an EU study of the impact of land and asset distribution on fertility, migration and environment in drylands, with fieldwork in Botswana, South Africa, and Rajasthan (India). The book he is currently writing is *Malthus and Africa*, on the population-agriculture interface.

I have had the great pleasure of getting to know Michael over the last few days, and have been entranced by his depth of knowledge, and his curiosity. This is someone with a passion to understand the world, and to make it a better place. He has achieved much in these areas.