

## BOOK REVIEWS

Book Reviews Editor: M.F. Bradley.

**Public Expenditure** by David Heald, Martin Robertson, Oxford, England, 1983, pp. 376, Sterling £6.95 (paperback), £19.50 (hardback).

This book sets out to combat the United Kingdom's current monetarist/free-market economic perspective, a not undaunting task in view of the almost ideological adherence to post-Friedman principles by the Thatcher government. The Keynesian social democratic state is seen by the author as "under attack", with its crisis being the "loss of faith in its continuing efficacy as a political accommodation of both universal suffrage and organised labour with a market-oriented economy". Mr. Heald jumps to its defence, repelling "enemies on both left and right". What follows is a highly entertaining and extremely well-written and researched *tour de force* through the surrounding arguments. For the Marxists the problem is the contradictions of capitalism: the solution is to smash capitalism . . . For the radical right, the problem is democracy: the solution is to insulate capitalism from democracy . . .

For the Irish reader the book makes interesting reading, notwithstanding the fact that it is first and foremost a book written about and for the United Kingdom. To a certain extent one therefore feels somewhat on the sidelines as Mr. Heald first aligns himself with the broad tradition represented by Anthony Crosland and then plunges into a welter of statistics concerning the meaning of public expenditure. He convincingly demolishes Roy Jenkin's 1976 pronouncement that the frontier of social democracy lay at the 60% public expenditure/GDP ratio, by demonstrating the ambiguities behind that ratio. There then follows a stimulating account of monetarism and the reasons for the UK's decisive switch to it from Keynesian theory.

There are three separate chapters on each of the topics: freedom, efficiency, equality, public accountability, managing and controlling, collective bargaining, and decentralisation. It is sufficient for this review to note that they are theoretically well-founded and stimulating and of great relevance to any Irish administrator or public representative attempting to come to terms with the *raison d'être* of our own public expenditure.

The Irish reader will experience envy at the evident sophistication of the debate on public expenditure in the UK, while simultaneously feeling somewhat relieved that our political system spares our economists the academic traumas that so evidently arise when there are severe ideological differences. Increasingly towards the end of the book, particularly when Mr. Heald casts aside his cloak and begins blade-to-blade combat ("the key dilemma facing an intellectual tradition under attack was knowing where to hold the line, delineating what could safely be conceded and what must be defended as important"), one becomes uneasy about the historic relevance of the argument *per se*.

Mr. Heald is correct when he accuses those in public life of trivialising the real complexity. Perhaps he falls short in not accusing the economists on both sides of his divide of a similar failing. Can *either* Monetarism or Keynesianism cope with world-scale developments such as the energy crisis, the revolution in microchip technology, or the advent of multinational business? Mr. Heald concentrates his battle with the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute on many excellently assembled, but relatively fine, points of theory. Perhaps, however, he might have been better engaged in throwing them some fundamental questions like whether Adam Smith's market of small grocery stores has long vanished into

the oblivion of Galbraith's recent theories of world organisation, comprised of the OPEC's, the international labour movement, the multinational industries, and trade blocs such as the EEC. The book by Mr. Heald is nonetheless extremely informative, refreshing and stimulating. It is also a very brave attempt to swim against a tide which is almost totalitarian in its intensity. It is highly recommended to anyone concerned with Irish public administration.

*University College Dublin*

JAMES A. CROWLEY

**Promise and Performance — Irish Environmental Policies Analysed.** Edited by John Blackwell and Frank J. Convery. Resources and Environmental Policy Centre, Dublin 14. 1983. Price IR£7.95.

'You never miss the water until the well runs dry.' This old proverb expresses the theme of many of the essays in this publication, which describes our vanishing environmental resources and discusses what might be done about them. The book is a collection of papers read at a conference held in Dublin in April 1983. Thirty-three papers cover topics on water, air and other natural resources — both traded and non-traded; on energy, urban systems, the 'user-pays' principle, and political and institutional aspects. In a supplementary essay, Frank Convery, co-editor, attempts to synthesise the numerous papers on so many diverse topics. This was a necessary and valuable adjunct to the conference papers. The book also has a useful glossary of technical terms.

The picture given of the state of the environment, and of its peril, is an alarming one. Despite the considerable contribution of environmental resources to our well-being and the irreversible nature of many decisions to use the stock-resources of the environment, there is a great deal of complacency with the present prodigal approach towards the use of such 'free' resources. It is refreshing to get away from the regularly uncritical view of agriculture as an industry for the production of more (unwanted) output, regardless of any but farmers' actual costs. Several papers in this book highlight the serious detrimental effects now arising from the greater degrees of specialisation and intensification of farming, which can cause unresolved problems of waste-management, malodorous emissions and chemical pollution. Many would agree with the suggestion of Convery that Irish agriculture should develop a name for the production of natural, wholesome food. This view is perhaps of more immediate relevance in the post milk-levy situation, and given the increasing health-consciousness of the people of Europe.

Air and water quality conditions in Ireland are documented. M.L. Bailey states that the recent deterioration in air quality, especially in Dublin, could lead to difficulties in complying with the EEC Air Quality Directive. Much progress remains to be achieved in water-quality management (Fenlon). It is useful to have the information on these two resources together in the same publication.

It was opportune to be reminded again that archaeological remains are a valuable but rapidly deteriorating and diminishing resource (Cooney). The importance of other natural resources such as peat, forestry and wildlife, is given due consideration. The hard-hitting article by John Temple Lang on the Wildlife Act highlights the danger of a uni-dimensional approach towards a task, such as arterial drainage, which has major 'spillover' effects on the environment, not apparently taken into account at the decision-making stage.

The section on Urban Systems deals with urban development, planning, private property rights, inner city conservation, and the design of new housing estates.

This section reflects the difficulty of making urban planning responsive to the wishes of all those affected. The latter two parts of the book deal with the policy-making milieu, and consider the theme of the user being required to pay for 'free' environmental resources. This is an approach often favoured by economists, but, surprisingly, has not yet won wholehearted acceptance from our revenue-starved central and local governments. Much could be learned from the German experience with effluent charges (Wicke).

The last three papers from the conference, by Roche, Litton and Mullally, are on the political and institutional aspects of the environment. They explain how government, civil service, and interest groups interact in the policy-making process, and help us to understand how the public policy response to a problem, and its implementations, are often less than satisfactory.

This book is a major bench-mark in the study of environmental and natural resources in Ireland. It will be invaluable as a reference book for students and other interested parties. It also puts the spotlight on problem areas which require urgent public policy decisions.

*Department of Economics, University College Cork*

DONALD NUNAN

**Doing Your Own Research** by Eileen Kane, Turoe Press, 1983, Dublin. pp. 220, no price given.

Dr. Eileen Kane's newly published book *Doing Your Own Research* is divided into four parts; I — What do you want to know? II — How do you find it? III — Preparing the results and IV — Counting the costs. The author in her preface states that "This is a book for people with little or no experience of social research. It will take you through all the stages of a descriptive research project, step-by-step, from developing the basic idea to collecting the material and producing the final paper". The book certainly goes through the stages involved and the factors to be considered in a descriptive research project — research statement, outline and design, research techniques, participant observation, interviews, questionnaires (the latter is dealt with by Ann Lavan), sampling, written sources, recording and organising the information including a section by Lelia Doolan on sound recording, photography, film and video, analysing the results in which Richard Scaglione discusses, with examples, the contribution of statistics to social research and, finally, writing the research paper. Under the fourth heading, "Counting the costs", brief consideration is given to the funding of research and a scant three and a half pages is devoted to ethical considerations. So while the book is not lacking in the scope of its coverage there are, I feel, some serious omissions in terms of the detail accorded to some of the topics.

My first overall comment is that it would have been more appropriate to have had a thoughtful discussion on 'ethical considerations' in the execution and use of research — responsibility to those studied, responsibility to science, responsibility to sponsors — at the outset of the book particularly taking into account the market at which this book is aimed. I agree that 'knowing how to get information is a source of power in modern society' (back cover). However, while the author wants to enable individuals and community groups with little or no previous experience to do their own research in a professional and satisfying way I believe that too much value may at times be placed on information for the sake of information. Questions which need to be continually posed are; Of what quality is the information? What purpose will it serve? And who might benefit from it? Such questions should always

be thrashed out before any information gathering expedition is attempted. Furthermore, an awareness of such questions will invariably result in consumers becoming more discerning and selective with regard to the information they are continuously bombarded with in today's "information society".

Related to this theme are my comments on the author's treatment of how one should actually carry out the research. Rather than taking specific examples from each of the chapters I will focus on three areas which, to my mind, are lacking in the rigour and detail they deserve to be accorded in any serious attempt to assist the reader in their understanding alone, not to mention their practical application. Quite correctly Dr. Kane tells us that the most difficult hurdle to overcome in doing research is not in learning the techniques or doing the actual work, but lies in figuring out what the researcher wants to know. This involves making out a research statement. Once this has been done the next step in the research process is to develop the statement into a research outline. At this point one is in a position to decide which techniques and/or information sources are appropriate for getting the required information and the Research Design is thus complete.

Dr. Kane presents this section on RD by taking the reader through a particular example to conclude with a sample RD. However, she presents the procedure involved in far too simplistic a manner. Although she cautions the reader that it "is difficult at first" she reassures us that "even people who have found the process almost impossible at the beginning have, after a few tries, produced excellent outlines of their own and used them as the bases for very good pieces of research" (page 29). Nowhere does Dr. Kane direct our attention to the need for a tight conceptualisation of the research problem, nor does she discuss the implications of using loosely defined concepts on the validity and reliability of the subsequent research findings. With data collection and analysis being such a costly exercise it is unacceptable that money is wasted because some researchers (oftentimes these are not professional researchers but administrators etc.) fail to establish and delineate research questions central to their particular study.

A little understood and much abused term in research is that of sampling. In this manual, purporting to be on doing one's own research, the author spends a total of seven pages explaining types of sampling and sample size. In regard to the former it is not clear how she differentiates between a 'random sample' and a 'simple random sample'. No discussion is provided of the problems which result from bad sampling and little effort is made by the author to defuse the myth that more is not always better in social surveys. In the final paragraph of this chapter Dr. Kane states that "sampling is not a hit and miss procedure" and concedes that it may be necessary to get specialist advice. The worrying implication here is it may be assumed that the overall research task, excluding sampling, involves hits and misses which cannot be avoided or even reduced to a minimum through professional advice.

I now turn my attention to the chapter on "written sources". This is poor in its exposition of the value to be gleaned from documentary sources and very little space is given to specifically Irish reference material. While a list of many available standard sources is provided — bibliographies, reference books, censuses — the author does not make any comment on the difficulties encountered in the use of some of this material, for example in terms of the categorisations used and the non-comparability of some of the sources longitudinally. It is also regrettable that the author does not elaborate on the whole range of material available, both Irish and international, which could well be manipulated in order to allow its incorporation in many social studies. The UN Demographic Yearbook is one source which immediately suggests itself. Greater use of such data sources should be encouraged among 'lay persons' and indeed this could be effected with little difficulty.

Overall then the greatest weakness of this book is due to the author setting out to do too much — to cover all that is necessary to enable a person without any

training to execute a piece of research himself. It is impossible to adequately present an entire course in descriptive research methodology in just over 200 pages. The reader thus can only achieve at best a partial understanding of the factors involved in research and, at worst, a distorted image of the research task. My greatest difficulty with this book, therefore, is its intended reader. I would be much more at ease if it was aimed towards students and used in conjunction with other introductory research methodology texts, as for the most part, it is clear and easy to read but needs to be supplemented with lectures and practical training. As a concluding comment it is fitting perhaps to end by quoting, with due respect, what the author herself says on page 98. "Be careful in your selection of written sources. The simple act of getting a book into print does not make the author an expert".

*The Economic and Social Research Institute*

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