

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

from the

BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF DISSENTING ECONOMISTS

(Edward Elgar, 1999)

with an update through December 2014

I was born in 1940 in the United States to immigrant Viennese-Jewish and Danish-Lutheran parents. I was raised in the environs of Boston, Massachusetts, and studied at Harvard University (where I earned a B.A. in Economics in 1961) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (where I earned a Ph.D. in Economics in 1966).

Although I concentrated initially on mathematics and physics, my interests as an undergraduate student soon shifted to the social sciences in general, and to Third World economic development in particular. Following my graduation from Harvard in 1961, I took advantage of an opportunity to spend a year at the Indian Statistical Institute (in Calcutta) as a teacher of economics to undergraduate students from all over India. During this year I acquainted myself directly with problems of Indian economic development and developed a particular interest in techniques of economic planning.

Returning from India to begin my graduate studies at M.I.T., I sought to master the analytical tools of the discipline of economics as taught by such prominent mainstream North American economists as Paul Samuelson and Robert Solow. Not yet a dissenter in any fundamental respect, my primary objective was to learn how to apply quantitative economic methods to problems of Third World economic development. After spending another year in India in 1964-65, this time on a doctoral research fellowship at the New Delhi branch of the Indian Statistical Institute, I completed my Ph.D. dissertation on "A Programming Model for Import Substitution in India" in 1966.

More interested at first in working in the "real world" than in academia, I was intending to accept an offer to join the staff of the United States Agency for International Development in New Delhi as a research economist. Just before this assignment was about to begin, however, I decided to turn down the offer -- in order to disassociate myself from the U.S. Government, which had by then escalated its involvement in Vietnam into a full-fledged war against the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front and their North Vietnamese allies. As it turned out, I was nonetheless able to work in India for the next two years; after my rejection of the USAID job, I was offered a two-year visiting professorship at the New Delhi branch of the Indian Statistical Institute. From 1966 to 1968 I worked at the Institute, teaching in its graduate economics program and carrying out research on problems of Indian national economic planning and on the operation of the irrigation and power system associated with the massive North Indian Bhakra-Nangal dam.

It was during this two-year stay in India that I began to nurture serious doubts about the relevance of mainstream economics to the issues with which he was most concerned. Committed to the vision of a "socialistic pattern of society" that Jawaharlal Nehru had articulated for independent India, and believing in the constructive role that a technically skilled economist could play in the achieving of that vision, I became increasingly disillusioned by the way in which the best of economic ideas and advice could be frustrated and rendered irrelevant by the structure of real power and influence in a society. This led me to look for a more broad-ranging political-economic approach to understanding problems of economic development, as an alternative to the relatively narrow training I had received in mainstream economics. For the first time I began to acquaint myself with the work of Karl Marx and such contemporary dissident economists as Michal Kalecki, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, as well as numerous Indian nationalist and Marxist social scientists.

Returning to the United States in 1968 to take up an appointment as assistant professor at Harvard University, I found that my evolving views on politics and economics were completely in harmony with those of a growing number of young North American economists associated with the "New Left" movement of the time. Joining my friend and colleague Samuel Bowles, as well as numerous dissenting Harvard economics graduate students, I participated in an informal seminar in "radical political economy," whose primary purpose was to develop a new undergraduate course in the social sciences that would provide a radical alternative to the standard fare of economics courses. The seminar participants offered this course (collectively) for the first time in 1969, under the title "The Capitalist Economy: Conflict and Power."

In Fall 1968 I joined a group of like-minded young economists -- most of them from Harvard, M.I.T. and the University of Michigan -- in founding the Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE). URPE was designed to provide an institutional foundation for the development of a dissident form of economics in North America -- one which would challenge, from a broadly-defined Marxian perspective, the contemporary orthodoxy in the discipline of economics as well as the capitalist political and economic environment in which it was situated. URPE was one of many dissident organizations formed to challenge mainstream academic disciplines in North America during the height of the New Left movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s; but it is one of the few to have survived and maintained to the present day its peak membership (ca. 2000), regular semi-annual meetings, and the publication of a quarterly journal (the Review of Radical Political Economics).

During the 4 years I spent as an assistant professor of economics at Harvard University (1968-72), most of my research and writing reflected a broadly-defined Marxian political-economic approach to the analysis of imperialism and underdevelopment in the Third World. In an early article ("Capitalism, Underdevelopment and the Future of the Poor Countries," in Economics and World Order, ed. J. Bhagwati, MacMillan, 1972, reprinted also in the Review of Radical Political Economics, Vol. 4, 1972), I sought to develop a new and broader dependency-theory framework for analyzing Third World economic development. I analyzed here the way in which capitalist economic institutions tend to bias the pattern of economic development in Third World societies in ways that lead at best to a dependent, inequalitarian and undemocratic form of economic growth. I then applied the same kind of analysis to the case of independent India in a subsequent article ("Dependence and Imperialism in India," Review of Radical Political

Economics, Vol. 5, 1973). I also carried out and published econometric research on alternative "two-gap" constraints on economic growth, and on the impact of foreign capital inflows on domestic saving, in Third World nations. My article on the latter issue ("The Impact of Foreign Capital Inflow on Domestic Savings in Underdeveloped Countries," The Journal of International Economics, Vol. 2, February 1972) showed that foreign capital inflows tended to depress domestic saving rates.

Having participated for several years in the collective teaching of the new course, "The Capitalist Economy: Conflict and Power," I collaborated with two of my colleagues -- Richard Edwards and Michael Reich -- in preparing a book to present the main issues raised in the course (R. C. Edwards, M. Reich, and T.E. Weisskopf, The Capitalist System: A Radical Analysis of American Society, Prentice-Hall, 1972). This volume includes contributed articles by the three author-editors, as well as reprinted articles by many other radical political economists. Widely used for undergraduate teaching of political economy in the United States, it has twice been extensively revised and republished (Edwards, Reich & Weisskopf, op. cit., 2nd edition 1978, 3rd edition 1986).

In 1972 I was offered a tenured position as associate professor of economics at the University of Michigan, partly as a consequence of student demands that a radical political economist be hired to teach in the graduate economics program at Michigan. Accepting the appointment, I proceeded to establish (with my colleague, Daniel Fusfeld) a graduate field of specialization in the area of political economy. Since 1972 I have remained at the University of Michigan, where I am now a full professor dividing my time between the Economics Department and the Social Science Program of the Residential College -- an innovative undergraduate liberal arts college within the University of Michigan. In July 1995 I accepted a five-year appointment as Director of the Residential College.

During my initial years at Michigan I continued to carry out research and publish papers dealing with development and underdevelopment in the Third World, focusing inter alia on contrasting patterns of development in India and the People's Republic of China. But as the U.S. economy, and indeed the world capitalist economy, began to experience increasing symptoms of crisis in the 1970s, my teaching and research interests shifted to the macroeconomic problems of the advanced capitalist economies. In particular, I began to seek ways to develop and apply Marxian crisis theory to the contemporary macroeconomic problems of the U.S. economy -- e.g., rising unemployment and inflation, falling profitability and productivity growth.

My early work in this area sought to distinguish between three different variants of Marxian crisis theory -- the orthodox theory of "the tendency of the rate of profit to fall" (due to a rising organic composition of capital), the theory of underconsumption (or, more generally, realization failure), and the theory of the depletion of the reserve army of labor (leading to a "wage squeeze on profits") -- each of which is a possible source of declining profitability and consequent economic crisis. Having developed an overall framework for addressing these theoretical distinctions in an earlier article, I applied the framework to the empirical analysis of profitability trends in the post-World-War-II U.S. economy ("Marxian Crisis Theory and the Rate of Profit in the Postwar U.S. Economy," Cambridge Journal of Economics, Vol. 3, 1979). In the latter article I found that the third of the three variants of Marxian crisis theory was the

most relevant in explaining both long-run (secular) and short-run (cyclical) profitability declines and crisis tendencies in the postwar United States.

In the early 1980s, as the world economic crisis reached its nadir, I began a long-term research collaboration with Samuel Bowles and David Gordon, with the aim of applying contemporary radical political economics to the study of the continuing economic crisis in the United States -- and developing a democratic and egalitarian alternative economic strategy to overcome the crisis. This collaborative research resulted in a book (S. Bowles, D.M. Gordon, and T.E. Weisskopf, Beyond the Waste Land: A Democratic Alternative to Economic Decline, Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1983), subsequently published also in British, French, Japanese and Spanish editions, as well as numerous more technical articles on key elements of the analytical underpinning of the book (e.g., Weisskopf, Bowles & Gordon, "Hearts and Minds: A Social Model of U.S. Productivity Growth," Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, 1983, and Bowles, Gordon & Weisskopf, "Power and Profits: The Social Structure of Accumulation and the Profitability of the Postwar U.S. Economy," Review of Radical Political Economics, Vol. 18, 1986).

In our joint work, Bowles, Gordon and I place the postwar experience of boom and crisis in the U.S. economy into the broader historical context of "long swings," differentiated from one another by differing "social structures of accumulation" (SSAs). Each SSA is characterized by a set of social/political/economic institutions that govern relations between the capitalist class and other relevant classes and economic actors; and each SSA is characterized first by the success of these institutions in assuring an environment favorable to capitalist profitability and accumulation (in the initial boom period), and then by internal contradictions leading to the erosion of the same institutions (in the subsequent crisis period). According to this analysis, the post-World-War-II SSA in the United States was successful in promoting capitalist prosperity through the late 1960s, but then gave way to a series of contradictions that generated the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s -- from which the U.S. economy has yet to recover in any fundamental way.

Subsequently I undertook to extend and apply some aspects of my joint work with Bowles and Gordon in an internationally comparative context, analyzing, for example, how different kinds of social and political relations between capital and labor affect workplace behavior and labor productivity in different advanced capitalist economies. I found that the "worker discipline effect," whereby high unemployment raises productivity, is far more evident in countries (such as the United States) in which capital-labor relations tend to be highly antagonistic than in countries (such as Sweden) in which capital-labor relations have been more cooperative (see "The Effect of Unemployment on Productivity: An International Comparative Analysis," International Review of Applied Economics, Vol. 1, 1987). In joint work with Francis Green, I made a similar finding with respect to inter-industry differences in the worker discipline effect in "secondary industries" -- with relatively low unionization, low wages and little job security, and thus presumably more antagonistic capital-labor relations -- as distinct from "primary industries" -- with the opposite characteristics (see F. Green and T.E. Weisskopf, "The Worker Discipline Effect: A Disaggregative Analysis," The Review of Economics and Statistics, Vol. 72, 1990).

In 1990 I worked with Bowles and Gordon on an up-dated and much revised version of our earlier book (S. Bowles, D.M. Gordon, and T.E. Weisskopf, After the Waste Land: A Democratic Economy for the Year 2000, M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1991). This second joint book went beyond the earlier one in addressing the contradictions and deleterious impact of "Reaganomics" on the U.S. economy in the 1980s, and in conceptualizing the potential economic as well as political benefits of a more democratic and egalitarian economy.

During the past decade, stimulated by the ongoing social, political and economic transitions of the erstwhile "actually existing socialist societies" of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, I have once again shifted the primary focus of my teaching and research interests -- this time to the former "Second World." On the one hand, I have undertaken theoretical explorations of market socialism and worker self-management (e.g., "A Democratic-Enterprise-Based Market Socialism," in Market Socialism: The Current Debate, ed. P. Bardhan and J. Roemer, Oxford University Press, 1993). I have also carried out empirical studies of changing property relations in contemporary Russia (e.g., A. Bim, D. Jones and T.E. Weisskopf, "Hybrid Forms of Enterprise Organization in the Former USSR and the Russian Federation," Comparative Economic Studies, Vol. 35, 1993); and I have written critical articles about the process of economic transition and reform in Russia (e.g., "Economics Without History: The Effort To Westernize The East," in Borderlands of Economics: Essays in Honor of Daniel R. Fusfeld, ed. N. Aslanbeigui and Y.B. Choi, Routledge, 1997). Finally, I have recently been working with Neva Goodwin and several other North American and Russian collaborators on a project to develop alternative textbooks in economics for use in Russian universities -- dissenting again from the mainstream!

UP-DATE OF MY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

(December 2014)

My collaborative work with Neva Goodwin and other North American and Russian collaborators resulted in the publication of three editions of an alternative textbook in microeconomics, the first in Russian (N.R. Goodwin, F. Ackerman, O.I. Ananyin and T.E. Weisskopf, Microeconomics in Context, The Russian State University of the Humanities Press, 2002) and the other two in English (N.R. Goodwin, F. Ackerman, J.A. Nelson and T.E. Weisskopf, Microeconomics in Context, 1st edition: Houghton-Mifflin, 2005; 2nd edition: M.E. Sharpe, 2009).

Since the year 2000 I have been working on the subject of affirmative action in the comparative context of the United States and India, with particular attention to admissions to higher educational institutions. I became very interested in this topic while serving as Director of the Residential College at the University of Michigan (1996-2005), at a time when two lawsuits against the affirmative action admissions policies of the University focused national debate over affirmative action on the Michigan campus. From my earlier experience in India I was well aware of the fact that India had been practicing a form of affirmative action for a considerably longer time than the United States; but I had never previously studied issues of race, caste and ethnicity in the Indian context. During my year of sabbatical leave in 2001-02 I

took the opportunity to visit India again and to gather information on India's "reservation policies" on behalf of "backward classes;" and I read widely in the burgeoning literature on affirmative action in each country. This research culminated in my book, Affirmative Action in the United States and India: A Comparative Perspective, Routledge, 2004.

In subsequent years I continued my work on affirmative action, participating in conferences and publishing articles both in India and in the United States. I participated also in debates on the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative – a ballot proposition designed to end affirmative action in public institutions in the State of Michigan, which was (regrettably) approved by Michigan voters in November 2006. I spent the academic year 2006-07 directing the Academic Program in Aix-en-Provence, France, where I supervised some 65 French-speaking American students (from the Universities of Michigan, Wisconsin and Indiana) who were studying at the University of Aix-Marseille; I also taught a course on "The French Social Model in an Era of Globalization."

After returning to the University of Michigan in 2007, I taught for another 3 years and then retired in June, 2010. I continue to read, write and give talks – often related to the world-wide economic crisis that began in 2008. In the fall of 2011 I was honored with a festschrift conference organized by Robert Pollin and Jeannette Wicks-Lim at the Political Economy Research Institute of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The papers contributed to the conference have been published in Capitalism on Trial: Explorations in the Tradition of Thomas E. Weisskopf, ed. J. Wicks-Lim and R. Pollin, Edward Elgar, 2013. My latest published papers include "Why Worry about Inequality in the Booming Indian Economy?", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 46, 2011, "What Kinds of Economic Inequality Really Matter?"; Indian Economic Review, Vol. 48, 2013, and (with Ashwini Deshpande) "Does Affirmative Action Reduce Productivity? A Case Study of the Indian Railways," World Development, Vol. 64, December 2014. In January 2014 I delivered the 2014 David M. Gordon Memorial Lecture at the URPE/ASSA annual meetings in Philadelphia; the written version was published in the Review of Radical Political Economics, Vol. 46, Fall 2014.