Tinbergen, Jan (1903 – 1994)

Definition: Tinbergen, Jan from The Columbia Encyclopedia

(yän tînˈbèrn), 1903–94, Dutch economist, co-winner with Ragnar Frisch of the first Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences (1969). A graduate of Leiden Univ. (1929), he worked (1929–45) with the Dutch government's Central Bureau of Statistics, and was briefly an adviser to the League of Nations (1936–38). He also served (1945–55) as director of the Dutch central planning bureau. He was a professor (1933–73) at the Netherlands School of Economics in Rotterdam. His publications include Economic Policy: Principles and Design (1956), Shaping the World Economy (1963), and Development Planning (1967).

Summary Article: Tinbergen, Jan

From The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide

Dutch economist. Tinbergen's work was focused on econometrics (the mathematical-statistical expression of economic theory), with studies of the US and British economies appearing in Statistical Testing of Business Cycle Theories (1939) and Business Cycles in the United Kingdom, 1870–1914 (1951) respectively. He shared the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1969 with Norwegian economist Ragnar Frisch.

Tinbergen threw himself into econometric research and soon found himself building econometric models of the entire economy. His first attempt to build such a model, containing 24 equations to describe the Dutch economy, was not published until 1936, ten years after it was first conceived. Next was a two-volume work, Statistical Testing of Business Cycle Theories (1939), the first of which focused entirely on investment activity and the second on the macroeconomic modelling of business cycles in the USA. English economist John Maynard Keynes wrote a scathing review of the first volume in The Economic Journal, which drew a polite reply from Tinbergen complaining that Keynes had totally misunderstood his econometric methods. Even the more down-to-earth second volume was greeted with general scepticism. Model-building of this type had to wait until the 1950s before it was to become truly respectable. Tinbergen, however, was not discouraged from his aims and went on to duplicate his earlier US model for the UK economy in Business Cycles in the United Kingdom, 1870–1914 (1951).

When World War II ended in 1945, Tinbergen was appointed director of the newly established Netherlands Central Planning Bureau, and turned his attention to the problem of policy-making. In 1955 he left the Central Planning Bureau to become a full-time professor of development planning at the Netherlands School of Economics, after which he concentrated his activities on the problems of the developing world. He became an adviser to many developing countries, a consultant to various UN agencies, a chair of the UN Committee for Development Planning from 1966 to 1975, and travelled and lectured tirelessly around the world to persuade others of the need for an ambitious international development policy designed to close the gap between poor and rich nations. In 1973 he became professor of international cooperation at the University of Leiden, retiring in 1975 with the publication of Income Distribution: Analysis and Policy (1975).

After attending secondary school in The Hague, Tinbergen studied physics at the University of Leiden from 1922 to 1926, receiving his doctorate in 1929 with a thesis on extremum problems (regarding the maxima and minima of functions) in physics and economics. He then joined a new unit for business cycle...
research in the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, where he remained until 1945, apart from a two-year
interlude in which he worked for the League of Nations in Geneva. He also became a part-time lecturer
in statistics at the University of Amsterdam in 1931, becoming part-time professor at the Netherlands
School of Economics (now Erasmus University) in Rotterdam in 1933.

There are Tinbergen Institutes in both Amsterdam and Rotterdam, postgraduate research centres at
which Dutch students and visiting scholars engage in economic study and research. Their foundation is
just one of the ways in which Dutch economists have paid tribute to Tinbergen's international
reputation.

His works include On the Theory of Economic Policy (1954), Economic Policy: Principles and Design
(1956), The Design of Development (1958), Econometric Models of Education (1965; with H C Bos),
Development Planning (1967), and Reshaping the International Order (1976).

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