

**LSE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET**

**Title Page**

**Ref. No.:** THS021

**Wav file Refs:**

**Collection title:** Tales from Houghton Street: an LSE oral history

**Interviewee's surname:** Layard

**Title:** Professor Emeritus Lord

**Interviewee's forenames:** Richard

**Sex:** M

**LSE connection:** 1965-67 MSc Econ. 1964-present Higher Education Research Unit, Centre for Labour Economics, Centre for Economic Performance. 1999 Emeritus Professor

**Date of birth:** 15/3/1934

**Date(s) of recording, Compact Flash used, tracks (from – to):** 31/7/2015

**Location of interview:** LSE

**Name of interviewer:** Clara Cook

**Type of recorder:** Tascam DR-40

**Total no. of tracks:** 1

**Recording Format:** Wav 24bit 44.1khz

**Mono or stereo:** Mono

**Total Duration:** 00:38:55

**Additional material:**

**Copyright/Clearance:**

**Interviewer's comments:**

## **THS021 Richard Layard**

Track 1 [38:55] [Session one: 31 July 2015] Richard Layard [RL], born 1934. [00:31] First came to LSE as a part time graduate student in sociology. Had a history degree from Cambridge. Teaching history in a comprehensive school and wanted to broaden his education. Enrolled for an MSc in sociology. [00:55] Taught by Donald MacRae, David Glass. [01:05] Went to classes in survey methods given by Claus Moser. [01:11] At that time the Robbins Committee on higher education was being set up and Claus was appointed as statistical advisor. Either he or Anne Bohm asked RL to be the research officer. Without realising it, this was the point he abandoned a career in secondary school teaching and went into academia. Worked for the committee for three years and produced five or six volumes of research. [02:00] Claus and Robbins decided to create a research unit on higher education at LSE, of which Claus would be director and RL deputy director. [02:11] Didn't finish his MSc in Sociology but did an Msc in Economics while working with Claus and doing work on educational development in India. [03:27] A couple of years later joined the Economics department as a lecturer. Enjoyed teaching enormously and did more teaching than research. [03:52] Original higher education centre broadened and Claus left LSE. RL was now in charge of the centre. In 1990 it became the Centre for Economic Performance, although centre had existed since 1964. [04:31] In 2003 RL handed the centre over to John Van Reenen. [04:38] RL has always had a base in a research centre. In the early period did a lot of teaching and co-wrote a text book with Alan Walters. [04:55] Research really took off when unemployment went up in 1979. Worked with colleagues Stephen Nickell and Richard Jackman for ten years on unemployment and the centre became the world's leading one for unemployment. Chris Pissarides was also there. Held a weekly seminar and five international conferences in the 1980s. [06:19] Produced the Layard-Nickell model for thinking about unemployment which became a standard way for European economists to think about unemployment. [07:30] This became known as the welfare to work approach. They were very influenced by Scandinavia. The 1980s was one of the best periods for the centre. [08:03] Transition from communism to capitalism in central Europe. Spent a lot of time in Russia. Produced a monthly publication and press conference where RL spoke about what was going on in Russia and what the implications of different policies would be. Very interesting but did not lead to an ongoing research programme. [09:00] Wanted to address the limited assumptions economists had about what makes people happy. Wrote an article in an economic journal in 1980 about it but there wasn't much empirical knowledge then. More work was done in the '90s and that has been the focus of RL's work since. [10:30] RL has found LSE a wonderful environment. Thinks it is important for institutions to be happy. [12:09] Decided to write a book on happiness. Talks about the process of writing the book. Delivered a Lionel Robbins memorial lecture. Book was published in 2005. In 20 languages. Part of a worldwide wellbeing movement, judging state of society by how happy people are. Surprising for people to have an economist saying these things. [14:20] Set up a Wellbeing Programme within the CEP. Used birth cohort studies. [15:25] Mental health was a neglected area so proposed a new programme to the government to include it in the national health service. Accepted in 2007. [16:53] Now trying to promote a better approach to global warming, with the Global Apollo Programme.

Objective to make renewable energy cheaper than coal based energy within ten years. Working with scientists and with Nick Stern. [18:12] Believes change needs to be made from outside academia. In the mid-1980s formed the Employment Institute. [19:37] Formed Action for Happiness. [19:44] Can do these things from within the School but a formal external base is needed. [19:59] None of RL's work would have been possible without the School. Amazing that you are allowed to follow your thoughts about what needs to be done to change the world without needing to change job. Likes to think this is what the Webbs and Shaws thought the school would be about. LSE is a model for how rationality can be used to understand and to change the world. [21:44] Why students come to LSE? Some to go on to well paid jobs in the City. Story of when he went to an alumni dinner in New York and met John Williams, a former student who is now President of the Federal Reserve Board in San Francisco, who remembered being told by RL he should choose his MSc options based on what would help him improve the world. [24:28] One extraordinary thing about the School is the number of interesting people who come to speak. Location in Theatreland also attractive. [25:00] Talks about work as a convenor and in CEP. Did not get involved with LSE administration or politics. From the 1980s CEP was based with STICERD above the Library in the Lionel Robbins Building. [26:22] Talks about LSE's position from a professional point of view. Access to Whitehall, the City and Law courts. [27:43] Future of research education at LSE. At the moment there is not a straightforward career path for interdisciplinary research. American universities are better. [30:17] Describes collaborative working with colleagues and way of working in his Centre. [31:50] Ways of conducting research has changed, use of computers. Breakthrough when could go to University of London computer room in the mid-1970s. Access to information is instant, however doesn't mean work is better as people still need to think and structure questions. [35:22] Always someone at LSE who will be able to answer questions about any aspect of society. [35:50] Discusses attracting and recruiting staff to and working at the Centre. [37:30] The School has been remarkable in embracing people from a whole range of political perspectives.