

## REVIEWS OF

### **The Economist's Tale – A Consultant encounters hunger and the World Bank**

***Peter Griffiths***

(Zed Books) ISBN 184277 185x

The logo for The Economist, featuring the words "The Economist" in white serif font on a red rectangular background.

“compelling . . . revealing . . . committed . . .  
. Sparkling .  
. .he fights intrigue and physical danger to triumph in  
the end. . .  
he brilliantly elucidates .”

#### ***“El Economista Furioso”***

*El Mondo, Madrid*

“The economist had a choice: to speak against the actions of his employer, the World Bank, and prevent a Famine in Sierra Leone – or be silent and save his career. Peter Griffiths tells what he did”

**The Observer** [followed by a full page story of how Peter Griffiths got a Government to do a U-turn on a major policy]

***“The Economist’s Tale brings economics alive. It should be compulsory reading for anybody studying economics, management, marketing, or business.”***

**David Needham**, author of *Business Studies* and other best selling business books.  
Nottingham Trent University

***‘It was absolutely unputtdownable. As thrilling as any thriller. I couldn't stop; I wanted to know what was going to happen; whether or not he would manage to avert a famine. I've never read an account of the life of a economic consultant which came anywhere near it, in the vividness of the observation or the pace of the action.’***

**Clive Dewey** Emeritus Reader in Economic History University of Leicester

#### **★★★★★ Anybody Who Cares Should Read This,**

“An excellent, excellent book in several ways. Anybody who cares - about society - conservative, moderate, or liberal should read this. All economists, political scientists, politicians, and students of these fields should read this book carefully. The Economist's Tale is a true morality play. It looks at the way economics plays out in real-life . . . The author is not against market forces - but as economic theory has recognized in the last few decades - markets work (or don't work) with many attendant frictions and imperfections. Unfortunately, in the tale told within this book, people die because of these frictions.

The Economist's Tale is interesting and riveting as a read. It is also a quick read. . . . It appears nobody else has rated this book yet - which tends to indicate that few people have read it - a sad state of affairs." **Andrew Saporoschenko (Orange, CA United States)** Chapman University - The George L. Argyros School of Business & Economics

“. . . full of salacious detail, worldly weakness, cunning, duplicity, hypocrisy and immorality . . . All human weakness and corruption is here. This is the tale of just one battle between economists.

This is a delightful read, a real page turner as the pressure builds and an antidote to the popular belief that for a book on economics to be taken seriously it must be difficult.

The book can be read on many levels: as a gripping narrative, as a parable for our times, as a fascinating insight into what a professional economist does when dispatched to a third world country, as a behind the scenes view of the interplay of politics, greed and the World Bank's obsession with one economic solution. It makes economics personal. As such, it is an ideal read for the sixth form economist or sociologist and an essential text for courses on development and globalisation. Every school should have a copy. Persuade your school or college librarian now."

**Sue Turner**, *Journal of Economics and Business Education*

"As a World Bank employee for 16 years I observed some of the same bureaucratic obtuseness you describe. But you describe it so precisely and with such careful analysis of the Sierra Leone situation, I am amazed. Congratulations on a great book."

**William Easterly** Formerly Principal Economist at the World Bank, Now Professor of Economics at NYU, Senior Fellow, Center for Global Development and Institute for International Economics

"Those who have served in aid agencies in developing countries will be very familiar with Griffiths' account of the interaction with government officials and other aid workers, discussion within the expatriate community, and corruption in high places. . . . He concludes that workers in the 'aid industry' have to bow to pressures from clients, consultancy firms, donor organizations and the whole aid system if they are to continue to work in aid, and that unless the aid industry tackles this problem, 'it will achieve as little in the future as it has in the past'. Griffiths' book will no doubt be controversial but there is more than a little reality in what his experience reveals."

**D.J. Shaw** "Food for Thought: Malnutrition and Obesity", *Development Policy Review*, 22 (3): 343-355. (D.J. Shaw was formerly Economic Adviser and Chief, Policy Affairs Service, UN World Food Programme, and consultant to the Commonwealth Secretariat, FAO and the World Bank.)

"Peter Griffiths tells a similar tale of policy advice given in a vacuum with no contextual knowledge of the circumstances that will govern its immediate outcome. . . . Griffiths managed, at the cost of any further chance of employment in West Africa, to alert

the government and subvert the Bank's intentions sufficiently to avert the worst of the potential disaster.”

**Richard Lipsey** *SOME PLUSSES AND MINUSES OF GLOBALIZATION*

The story itself is chilling and important, providing the reader with an understanding of how economic policy advice can go disastrously wrong if one doesn't have a strong knowledge of local conditions. . . Like Klitgaard and Easterly, Griffiths is an insider, and he can therefore offer insights that others cannot.

*Brad Andrew* Review of Political Economy

“I have been reading ‘*The Economist’s Tale*’. I won’t say with enormous enjoyment (that’s hardly appropriate to its substance) but with very great admiration and gratitude. I had recently read Stiglitz’s ‘*Globalization and its Discontents*’ But the narrative style of your tale gets much of its point home far more powerfully to the untrained reader. It brings home the issues much more effectively and memorably than more rhetorical writing about corruption or IMF policy”

*Maurice Wiles*, former Regius Professor of Theology, Oxford.

“This book is unique in the literatures on development: a first-hand, grass-roots account of an experienced aid worker struggling to defend a developing country's people against the corruption of its leaders and the ideological ineptitude of World Bank / IMF policy directives. The author places the specific events of Sierra Leone in the broad context of contemporary development programs, ideology, and methods, the varieties of leadership and corruption in the "third world," and the capabilities and limitations of outside aid personnel. . . . an immediacy and human quality rare in this literature.”

*Mark Tauger* Professor of History West Virginia University

“I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed your book. I have recommended it to all my friends and I am assigning it to my students at Columbia University this Fall. I teach a class in international business/economic journalism and I think your book exactly sums up the dilemma that journalists face when trying to gather information and assess competing claims. Having worked as a journalist overseas I have written a lot about the World Bank, and IMF. I found your book incredibly compelling and interesting Best wishes,”

**Anya Schiffrin** [www.journalismtraining.net](http://www.journalismtraining.net) [journalismtraining@hotmail.com](mailto:journalismtraining@hotmail.com)

This is a good book. It combines informed economic reasoning with insight into the reality of African countries. . . I will add it to the reading list of my Masters module on Development Policy Analysis, as a clear and readable case study of why economic policy so often fails to deliver.”

**Oliver Morrissey**; Journal of International Development

“Peter Griffiths has provided . . . an intriguing and insightful blend of fact and fiction. . . a compelling day-by-day set of diary entries . . . and it tells of people and policies (not the models, data, and equations suggested by the word ‘Economist’).

This is a first-rate account. Its strength is that it translates often unreal world economics and abstraction into layman's terms. The reader shouldn't be put off by the title, *The Economist's Tale*, for its contents are important and deal with concrete reality."

**Barry Riddell.** *Review of African Political Economy No. 103:205-208*

"Peter Griffiths has produced a veritable tour de force that exposes how the World Bank, committed to liberalizing agricultural markets in Sierra Leone, imposed a (secret) agreement which prevented the government from importing food and granting subsidies. . . . The reader is offered useful insights into how economists work in the field when confronted with a lack of, anecdotal claims which need to be corroborated or rejected local institutional rivalries and the strongly expressed desires *vis-a-vis* the contents of the final consultancy report-of key stakeholders juxtaposed with anecdotes about life, politics and doing business in a developing economy.

In short it is a compelling read . . . readers will not be disappointed."

**Andy Thorpe** *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*

"Are we brave enough to admit, as one international agricultural consultant did, that 'it is individuals who cause poverty, underdevelopment and famine, by their actions, by their failure to act, and by their failure to speak up (Griffiths).'"

**Alejandro Bendaña** *Development 47, 22-26.*

"highly readable account . . . It presents economics theory in practice . . . It is passionately written and backed up by knowledge and experience."

**New Agriculturist.**

"A vivid and courageously honest exposé of the real world of international aid and consultancy . . . A devastating critique . . . Compulsive reading and a remarkable case study . . ."

**Conflict, Development and Peace network**

"I must have told 50 people about your book if I told one!

The book should be required reading for anyone working with, especially selling to, the Bank or IMF, International Civil Servants in general and politicians."

*William Robertson* *BDQ International Ltd, London, San Francisco* International consultant to executives, multinationals and partnering organisations.

"it makes compelling reading and I strongly feel that Peter's book is a must for all students of Economics. Yes, ... it is that good."

Colin Ong, Managing Director MR = MC Consulting Company, Singapore

([www.mrmc.com.sg](http://www.mrmc.com.sg))

"The Economist's Tale in places reads like a thriller novel with a hero in a frantic race against time to stop a killer, and with a plot woven by tales of corruption, greed and dishonesty. But this is not a work of fiction."

**Big Green Book**

“Peter has the knack of being able to inject life and colour into his writing. . . With vivid observation and a pace of action that is maintained by its diary format, Griffith is compulsory reading for anybody studying economics, management, marketing or business.”

**The Weekly Telegraph**

“I’ve mentioned Peter Griffiths and his book “An Economist’s Tale” before, and I’m going to mention it again in future, because it’s important. . .

It’s a fantastic read, and by reading it you will get two valuable pieces of information; you’ll understand what economic consultants (those people whose jobs are advertised in the front bits of the Economist) actually do for a living, and you’ll understand the exact why and wherefore of what it is that people are complaining about when they protest against the Bretton Woods institutions and the Washington Consensus. Griffiths isn’t an “anti” in the normal sense; he makes clear at a number of points in the book that he’s actually in favour of free market reforms as the long term solution to a lot of development problems. . . . if you can understand a Grisham novel you can understand this. It’s pacy, it’s exciting and it all really happened.”

*Daniel Davies*

**“Go read it. Read it now. It is one of the most important books you will ever read.**

**My father worked in aid and overseas for years - including for the FAO, who do indeed often act exactly as stupidly and self-interestedly as that article suggests. I spent a good chunk of my childhood in third world countries and I listened to aid workers throughout my childhood.**

**What is recounted is simply the way things work - except that he managed to pull it out.**

**Most of the time, they don't pull it out. Most of the time you get canned for saying things you aren't supposed to say. Most of the time if you oppose the development shibboleth of the day - whether it's free markets, petroloans or dams - you're out.**

**And people will die.”**

**Ian Welsh in Crooked Timber**

I just discover your book that I like very much and speaks very much to me. It reminds me some of my experiences as a consultant for the UN in Africa, I intend to give your book to my students as a reference book next semester. They will learn more than in academics texts about development and the new global order!

*Francois Xavier Merrien, Professor of Political and Social Sciences, The University of Lausanne*

“The book is a detailed case study of what Griffiths did when he was working for the government of Sierra Leone during a period when the World Bank suddenly got the free market religion. It’s a fantastic read.

So read it.”

jamie kenny | [Permalink](#)

★★★★★ **Insighful and sad account,**

“A good book, known by few, written by an even less well known author, to which I am grateful. . .It is a mystery how this book can be so little known. It is well written, and above all deep... If you are looking for a deeper account of the potential evil of economic policy and the World Bank, this book is highly recommended.

**Il Vecchio Gufo** (USA)

“I just finished reading your book (on Daniel Davies' recommendation) and wanted to thank you -- I found it a little masterpiece, I don't know when I last read a nonfiction work that combined such a keen eye and fluent tongue with such a wealth of useful information.”

**Jeremy Osner** CIBC World Markets NY

★★★★★ **Changed my understanding of third world poverty,**

“This is an absolutely riveting book. I heard of it through a brief mention at Brad DeLong's website, and ordered it because of the comments by the previous reviewers. I can only agree with their comments -- this book should be required reading for anyone interested in globalization, poverty, and the real world constraints that often prevent idealistic anti-poverty efforts from succeeding. I can't recommend it highly enough.”

*Amazon reviewer*

Griffiths' book should be read. The Westerners are finally talking. We should listen, because this is one way of gaining the understanding that it is not ALL our fault.

Rosemary Ekosso

[http://www.ekosso.com/2006/07/review\\_the\\_econ.html](http://www.ekosso.com/2006/07/review_the_econ.html)

It's an excellent book. . . Recommended to anyone who's interested in development economics, Africa, politics, food, globalization, the World Bank, racism, colonialism, and any of the other ways that people end up treating people the way they do.

**William Whyte** (Somerville, MA)

This book should be compulsory reading for anyone who teaches or who studies economics, business etc..., specifically for those who are interested in how markets actually function and the reasons why they quite frequently produce less than 'optimal' results.

Also should be read by everyone in the 'Aid' industry and by all who have an interest in Africa/the Third World.

**Charles Bruggmann**

*I couldn't put it down.* It was absolutely fascinating, and horrifying, and closely observed, and really well written, and all sorts of good things. And as an extra bonus, it gives you a vivid sense of the incredible problems facing any attempt to foster economic development in miserably poor countries.

**Obsidian Wings** <http://obsidianwings.blogs.com>

An excellent, excellent book in several ways. Anybody who cares - about society - conservative, moderate, or liberal should read this. All economists, political scientists, politicians, and students of these fields should read this book carefully. *The Economist's Tale* is a true morality play. It looks at the way economics plays out in real-life using the framework of food policy in Sierra Leone. The author is not against market forces - but as economic theory has recognized in the last few decades - markets work (or don't work) with many attendant frictions and imperfections. Unfortunately, in the tale told within this book, people die because of these frictions.

**Andrew Saporoschenko** (Orange, CA United States)

My recommendations all concern the question of how poor countries can be made better off. . . You can follow this up with some gripping on-the-ground accounts of the misadventures of foreigners in poor countries, like . . . Peter Griffiths's story of Sierra Leone in *The Economist's Tale* (Zed Books).

**Francis Fukuyama** (Guardian books of the year recommendations)

This book describes in a simple and rigorous way the behaviors and analysis criterias of some leaders of the World Bank, of the FAO, of government leaders and wealthy people from the countries of the South, not to forget the expatriates (specifically international contractors and public servants of multilateral organizations), a behavior which is assessed without concessions. The author testifies that what he narrates has really happened before his eyes.

One does not need to be an economist to understand this book. The present story is set in Sierra Leone but anyone involved in development issues regarding the South, will readily tell you that this could have happened anywhere else in the Third world.

**Éric Toussaint in CADTM**

**[www.cadtm.org/article.php3?id\\_article=2424](http://www.cadtm.org/article.php3?id_article=2424)**

★★★★★ **A must-read,**

The Economist's Tale is a gripping story of corruption, dogmatism and a barely-averted famine in Sierra Leone'

Recommended to anyone who's interested in development economics, africa, politics, food, globalization, the World Bank, racism, colonialism, and any of the other ways that people end up treating people the way they do. And it has a happy ending! **William Whyte (Somerville, MA)**

“The complexity and non-transparency of the rice trade in this corner of West Africa, especially during the epoch of deregulation, is described in brilliant sobering detail by Griffiths (2003)”

**David Sogge**, *“Papering over the gaps: Dutch policy and post independence fragility in Angola, Guinea Bissau and Mocambique.”*