
Hakim and Solimano have produced a reasonably balanced insider’s account of the history of food supplementation programs in Chile. I say reasonably balanced because it is patently obvious where their sympathies lie, especially regarding the Allende government. But it is to the credit of the authors that their point is made through a massive marshalling of the facts, not polemics, and that weaknesses in their case are acknowledged rather than glossed over.

Hakim and Solimano develop the thesis that even though Chile espoused national policy programs of food supplementation more than fifty years ago, malnutrition among Chilean children still persists in distressingly high frequency. Through exhaustive scrutiny of statistics relating to the most important and most successful program of the Chilean National Health Service, the National Milk Program, the authors reveal an impressive national commitment of scarce resources. The authors make a strong case for the enlightened nature of Chile’s concern for the health of its children.

Why then, have results fallen so far short of their mark? Hakim and Solimano are convinced that economics is at the root of the problem. Moreover, they document the differential benefits of National Health Service programs experienced by segments of this society who translate political leverage into a disproportionate share of the nation’s limited resources. Thus, white-collar and industrial unions exert significant influence on the administration of the social security system, which in turn makes a number of health-related facilities more freely available to them than to less organized but more needy groups such as the unemployed and the rural populace.

While there is considerable force in the author’s arguments, there is some question whether even the most fundamental redistribution of resources would resolve Chile’s nutritional deficits. The fact remains, as the authors point out, that Chile is not self-sufficient. The demise of the Allende government was as much attributable to its balance of payments deficits as to any other factor. While Hakim and Solimano could not be fairly accused of ignoring this fundamental problem, they relegate it to the background while dealing with the socioeconomic implication of their study. Perhaps this is essential in limiting the length of their treatise. However, it would be most instructive to hear more on this topic from these well-informed and perceptive observers of Chile’s long struggle with malnutrition.

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Among the major political events of the period of the Popular Unity government in Chile were the degree and rapidity of worker assertion in productive enterprise and the enthusiasm with which workers embraced the principles and practice of economic participation. Espinosa and Zimbalist’s book is not, however,