

Alan Berg

'It could be plausibly argued that changes of diet are more important than changes of dynasty or even of religion.'

[George Orwell, Road to Wigan Pier, 1937]

This was the first sentence of Alan Berg's ground-breaking 1973 book *'The Nutrition Factor'* which was the first book I read after starting my MSc in nutrition in the early 1980s. Alan has long been adept at writing the killer line that stops you in your tracks, makes you pay attention. They're scattered throughout this book which was – as you'll see by reading the table of contents – way ahead of its time. Fifty years after it was written it remains in my top five all-time influential books (along with epics by Amartya Sen, Thomas Kuhn, Susan George, and Robert Chambers).

In the late 80s I was lucky to have the opportunity to work at the SCN in Geneva. My first job was to prepare a background paper on nutrition-relevant policy for a workshop aimed at carving out a consensus among UN agencies on priorities and approaches across the UN system. The pages of *'The Nutrition Factor'* and Alan's next book: *'Malnutrition: What Can be Done?'* (1987) were well-worn by the time I had a first draft.

A month later, I was sitting next to Alan on the top floor of PAHO, with Abraham Horwitz and other nutrition luminaries, completely out of my depth, steeling myself for a polite rejection of the draft. Instead, Alan was extraordinarily gracious and supportive while remaining incisive in his analysis. This paper ended up as ['Nutrition-Relevant Actions'](#) and was the start of a kind of long-distance mentoring by Alan. I am sure I was one of scores of young nutritionists who benefited in this way – he has always been so generous with his time....so long as you show real commitment to public health nutrition.

I spent several years in India when, again, Alan's work was a strong influence (see his Chapter 11). I joined him on World Bank missions on the additional ICDS programmes that were being rolled out in the late 90s, drawing on lessons from TINP that he had showcased.

At the World Bank, Alan had started a newsletter *'New and Noteworthy in Nutrition'* (NNN) which was a pithy, irreverent, and highly informative read on nutrition matters worldwide. NNN helped connect people by sharing ideas and initiatives. There was no place for institutional PR or design wizardry -- it was black and white, words on paper. In 2001, he asked me to take it over (this first [one](#) has an intro by Alan). IFPRI also agreed to host the Martin Forman Memorial Lecture which continues to this day – another of the many initiatives championed by Alan.

A decade ago, Jim Levinson interviewed Alan for the [SCN News](#) – it's a fascinating read, packed with wisdom, insight and humour.

So much more needs to be done, but the monumental body of work that Alan was involved in -- along with the countless other studies, programmes and policies he influenced -- has been pivotal in placing nutrition at the heart of development and justice, across the world.

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