

# 'THE CRITICAL MINIMUM EFFORT' THESIS : A CRITICAL APPRAISAL<sup>1</sup>

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## I

### Introduction : Growth-Retarding and Growth-Promoting Forces

Professor Harvey Leibenstein's name is familiar to economic-demographers. In an earlier book, titled "Theory of Economic-Demographic Development", Professor Leibenstein had tried to analyse the meaning and significance of the population obstacle through the methodology of modern aggregative theory. In this work, he developed the thesis that a 'minimum critical effort' was necessary in order to overcome the population obstacle. Efforts of a smaller magnitude would tend to be frustrated. The above idea has been generalised and carried to its logical conclusions in "Economic Backwardness and Economic Growth".<sup>2</sup> Professor Leibenstein has here sought to present a new and general approach towards the problem of economic development of underdeveloped countries. This work is characterised by an integration of the applications of the minimum critical level thesis to a number of inter-related magnitudes of vital significance in determining the tempo of growth. The approach is original in conception as well as in the methodology of treatment. The conclusions are as striking as the route traversed by Professor Leibenstein in arriving at them is fascinating. A number of magnitudes which economists would have dismissed as outside the pale of the analytical treatment have been persuasively handled in Professor Leibenstein's methodology. From this point of view, Professor Leibenstein has enlarged the conventional scope of treatment of development problems. The present work is, by and large, non-mathematical in character and depends largely upon the diagrammatic method for exposition. It will, naturally, be a boon to the normal economist pedagogue. Professor Leibenstein's work is certainly a *tour-de-force*.

2. Let us now glance at the central idea underlying Professor Leibenstein's work. Professor Leibenstein distinguishes between factors which retard

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<sup>2</sup> 'Economic Backwardness and Economic Growth', John Wiley and Sons, (Distributed by Asia Publishing House in India), 1957.