


Steven Dowrick 7 May 1953– 3 August 2013: tributes

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Introduction

We print below tributes to the late Steven Dowrick, one of Australia's most important economists, who died far too young in 2013. The tributes are by Karen Mumford, his former and first PhD student at the Australian National University (ANU); Barbara Spencer, his collaborator; Bruce Chapman, his long-time colleague at the ANU, and Maria Racionero, who had worked with Steve at the ANU since 2002. All four were proud to call themselves his friends.

I taught Steve in the MPhil at Cambridge in the early 1980s. Bob Rowthorn and I were in charge of Subject 3, the main macroeconomics course in the MPhil. Bob gave excellent comprehensive lectures, taking in the principal contributions of Dennis Robertson, Maynard Keynes and Michał Kalecki. He moulded their approaches and insights into structures applicable to issues of employment, accumulation, distribution and growth in modern advanced economies. In addition to the lectures (and complementary lectures by David Vines on open economy macroeconomics based on his Cambridge PhD dissertation supervised by James Meade), Bob and I ran weekly 'Bible study' classes on *The General Theory*. Each graduate student member of the class had to open the discussion of particular chapter(s) as we moved systematically through the great man's *magnum opus*. It has to be said that often the discussion became dominated – in fact, taken over – by exchanges between Bob and me on points of difference in interpretation!

Steve stood out in the class for his fine, penetrating intelligence, expressed unassumingly, and always with an eye to the bearings of our discussions on humane policies. Peter Kriesler reminded me that Steve's MPhil project was a Kaleckian-like analysis, both theoretical and empirical, of wages and employment. I also remember what a pleasant and likeable guy Steve was then. All these traits are witnessed to in the affectionate and insightful tributes that follow. While I saw Steve only rarely after his time at Cambridge, I count it a great privilege to have known him.

GC Harcourt
The University of New South Wales, Australia

Steve Dowrick was my PhD supervisor. I arrived at the ANU from Macquarie University in 1988 and I believe I was the first of the very many research students Steve supervised. Like most students, I turned up with bold ambitions and a confused mass of typically unconnected ideas. I was incredibly fortunate – Steve turned out to be a patient, wise and demanding supervisor. Steve showed me how important it is to be able to

unpack a paper – to understand every axiom in the model, every empirical result and to seek all the implied caveats. The paper from my thesis ‘Wage bargaining with endogenous profits, overtime working and heterogeneous labor’ that we published together in the *Review of Economics and Statistics* is easily the best paper I have published. Steve was a fantastic role-model, who didn’t let irrelevancies get in the way of the big picture. If afternoon meetings ran overtime, Steve would apologise for having to leave, explaining that he needed to go and pick up his children. The Economics Division in the Research School of Social Sciences was a safe haven for minorities, and Steve was a main player in maintaining standards. I have more than once heard him tell colleagues from other departments that ‘we value our female colleagues and don’t make jokes at their expense’. He carried these standards into his role as Head of Department at the Faculty of Economics and Commerce (ANU) in 1996; he was fundamental in changing the ethos in that department and was accordingly presented with a Gender Champion Award in 2013.

Steve’s research students branched out around the world to find successful employment in government, academia and the private sector, supervising, mentoring and managing younger generations themselves. His supervision didn’t stop at graduation, he was always willing to comment on papers, suggest outlets, write references and generally provide advice. Not all of us have gone on to have stellar careers, at least one of us died before Steve did, but we all learned how important it is to listen, to think and at times to be prepared to speak up in support of others. We are all indebted to Steve and we all sorely miss him.

Karen A Mumford
University of York, UK

I feel very fortunate to have known Steve. He contributed a lot to my life both personally and professionally. I got to know Steve when Jim Brander (my husband) and I spent 6 months on sabbatical at the ANU in 1990. It was a magical time for me, which was much enhanced by Steve. Jim and I were both delighted to be able to work with Steve on separate papers in two very different areas. At that time, Steve already had significant research contributions, including two major lines of research: first, economic growth, particularly issues of convergence, and second, implications of union-oligopoly bargaining. Jim’s paper with Steve, ‘The role of fertility and population in economic growth’, *Journal of Population Growth*, 1994, added to the first line of research, whereas my paper with Steve, ‘Union attitudes to labor-saving innovation: when are unions Luddites?’ *Journal of Labour Economics*, 1994, involved the second. I had previously worked on union-oligopoly bargaining in an international trade context, so I was extremely pleased to be able to take advantage of Steve’s expertise in labour economics and industrial relations to examine implications of technological change in a union bargaining context. Since that time, I have made a short visit to the ANU almost every year. The chance to see Steve again was an extra special treat on these visits.

Steve Dowrick was someone who made the life of everyone around him better. He combined a strong commitment to making the world a better place – contributing to

economic policy and to broad social initiatives – with great personal kindness and charm. He enjoyed life and took pleasure in the enjoyment of others. He was an outstanding scholar as well as a wonderful colleague, co-author, mentor and advisor to students. Despite his outstanding personal gifts – both intellectual and personal – and his many accomplishments, he was remarkably modest and unassuming. To the extent that he even recognised his own merits, to him, they only meant a greater responsibility to contribute to the wellbeing of others. Many people profess such an approach, but few achieve it. Steve is one of the very few who did. He was a wonderful person who lives on in the memories of the many people whose lives he touched.

Barbara Spencer

University of British Columbia, Canada

Steve Dowrick, one of Australia's finest economics professors, died in August 2013. If intellectual contribution was the only criterion for success, Steve would have been at the top of the Australian economics pyramid, with a handful of revered colleagues. But his contribution to humankind, the quality of his personal and professional relationships, goes far beyond his intellectual influence.

Born in Dublin, Steve attended a Quaker school in York, with an emphasis on practical social action that reinforced his commitment to collective integrity. He was offered a scholarship at Cambridge University, but before beginning, he undertook a year's volunteer work at Blackfriar's Settlement, Southwark, in London, driving a van for a project named Workshop for the Disabled. After beginning a study of physics at Cambridge, he took on a job as a community development officer in a poor dockside suburb of Newport, Wales, where he worked for 6 years, supporting and/or representing disadvantaged residents and organising local action groups aimed at many forms of inequity. This work gave him deep insights into ordinary lives and the stress the poor encounter in pressures from the bureaucracy and the powerful.

In 1982, Steve returned to Cambridge, this time to study economics. In 1983, he met Deborah Mitchell, an Australian student, and they married in York in 1984. After he completed his PhD at the University of Warwick, they moved to Canberra. Steve held several positions at the ANU Research School of Social Sciences from 1988, and in 1996, he became professor of economics and head of department at the faculty of economics and commerce.

As a teacher, he was superb and egalitarian. His research focused largely on areas aligned with his values of equity and concern with the disadvantaged. His wide-ranging contributions included studies of the determinants of economic growth differences between countries, fertility and income and the origins and nature of technological change. With John Quiggin, Steve developed a multilateral welfare index to shed light on global income inequality.

His sense of humour appealed to all ages: slapstick for toddlers, quips for eye-rolling teenagers and dry, cerebral wit for colleagues. And he didn't leave this playfulness behind, even in the dark days of his increasingly poor condition. In his last few months, nursing staff would check his alertness, with the usual question, 'Who is the Prime

Minister?’ When asked this on the eve of the resurrection of Kevin Rudd as PM, he responded, ‘It’s Julia Gillard, but ask me again tomorrow and I will probably have a different answer. It will still be correct’.

Over his last few years, his closest friends had the privilege of witnessing Deborah Mitchell’s complete devotion to, and care for, her lifetime partner.

Steve Dowrick was a very special person, without vanity, self-aggrandisement or egotism, and with a unique blend of intelligence, kindness and commitment to equality and family. We in the Australian economics community, and far beyond, are so lucky to have known him.

Bruce Chapman and Maria Racionero
The Australian National University, Australia

Acknowledgements

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