



DAVID WORSWICK

*Ramsey & Muspratt*

# George David Norman Worswick 1916–2001

DAVID WORSWICK was born on 18 August 1916, in Chiswick, London. He came from an academic background in as much as his father, who had graduated in mathematics from Liverpool University, was a lecturer in the subject at Regent Polytechnic College (of which he subsequently became Director of Education), whilst his mother had studied History and English at Manchester University. David attended school at St Paul's and, although an unexpected straightening of circumstances following the death of his father cut short a longer stay there, he was nevertheless able to make his way via an Open Scholarship to New College, Oxford; with additional Scholarship support he was able to finance his studies in mathematics there, which he began in 1934. He graduated with First Class Honours in 1937. Funding was available to enable him to extend his study over a further year and he chose to use this opportunity to work for the Diploma in Economics and Political Science. Henry Phelps Brown was an influential teacher. Like others of his generation part of his motivation to take up the study of social science was a concern for the experience of unemployment in the 1930s; this motivation—and the lessons that he learnt from study of the period—was to remain with him throughout his life. In 1982 he contributed a paper, 'Unemployment in Inter-war Britain' (jointly written with Paul Ormerod) to the *Journal of Political Economy* (vol. 90, no. 2, April) in which he criticised the view that the unemployment of the 1930s was driven by changes in real wages.

## The Oxford Institute

After graduating he took on some temporary jobs whilst awaiting the chance to qualify for entry into the Civil Service. However, the war intervened. He was rejected for active military service, but shortly thereafter was approached by Roy Harrod to take a job in the Oxford University Institute of Statistics (much later renamed the Oxford University Institute of Economics and Statistics), initially to assist Ian Bowen. The Oxford Institute proved an exciting place to be at this time, as it had become home to a number of refugees from the Nazi persecutions in continental Europe; prominent among this gifted band was Michal Kalecki whose work, if with Marxist overtones, was in many ways a parallel to that of Keynes and whose policy insights seem to have left a mark on David's own outlook. A major part of the Institute's work in this period was devoted to an analysis of the working of the war economy (and David published a number of papers in this area in the *Bulletin* which the Institute was allowed to publish in this period, in spite of the general shortage of materials and restrictions on the use of paper). But the economists there took time out to analyse the implications of the Keynesian revolution for economic policy in the post-war world. This was undoubtedly exciting and challenging work, starting with so to speak, a 'tabula rasa' and the task of working out what it would mean in practical policy terms—in all the relevant policy areas—to follow through on the commitment to full employment that Keynes's *General Theory* was seen as making possible. The resultant book—*The Economics of Full Employment*—provided a statement of remarkable clarity and verve, which had no immediate real rivals for its combination of analytical insight and practical application; though the famous Beveridge report was published very shortly afterwards it had a narrower focus and less analytical insight. David's contribution to the Oxford volume was a paper entitled 'Stability and Flexibility of Full Employment'. In it he set out the need to control the price level in a full employment economy via wages policy. This also was a theme to which he was to adhere strongly through his later life. His participation in the construction of the system of thought that is described in the Oxford volume marked David out as unmistakably a Keynesian economist. If there are three main tenets associated with such a description, they are perhaps that: unemployment is a function primarily of deficient demand; that the first best solution to the problem of inflation is to be found in acceptance of an incomes policy; and that economic policy is mainly about the management of demand,

requiring efficient short term forecasting. David adhered to these tenets throughout his working life, though he eventually gave way on the second of them, admitting that feasibility was a problem. This identification with a Keynesian macroeconomics did not mean, either during his period at the Oxford Institute nor later, that he neglected entirely the micro-economic side of the subject: indeed, quite early in his career, his short essay in the *Oxford Bulletin* for February 1944, 'Points, Prices and Consumers' Choice', was probably the first formal published demonstration of a solution to the consumer's optimisation problem when points rationing as well as income are constraints.

### Magdalen College

When the war came to a close, a pent-up demand for university level teaching was realised, and David was able to move first to a lectureship and then rapidly afterwards to a Fellowship in Magdalen College, which he took up from December 1945. Whilst David's talents ensured that he came to be known for more than his excellence as a teacher it can certainly be said that he shone in the particular tutorial teaching environment that his Fellowship at Magdalen ensured. He was fortunate to teach much of the time in the company of some other brilliant teachers—notably, Ken Tite in politics and Harry Weldon in philosophy, but he contributed as much as they and the combination was nothing less than a triumph. Not a few economists at other universities sent their sons to Magdalen College so that they would come under David's tutelage. His style was to let the student find out for himself how a particular hypothesis 'worked'—the joy of seeing the discovery in the student's face was one of the things that David savoured, and the method worked to bring confidence to the student in his capacity to analyse and solve a problem. It also ensured a better grasp of what was learnt than rote learning could ever do. This period of David's career lasted for just on twenty years. During it he of course did many other things (some to be detailed below) in the public service, in college administration, and in publication and research, but the core was the dedication to and achievement of a brilliant pedagogy. A highlight was a sabbatical in MIT in 1962–3, which made a notable impact on David. David might have continued to follow a wholly academic career in the teaching vein (albeit with a big change from small to large-class teaching) had he accepted an offer of a chair at Manchester University, but instead, in 1965, he made a substantial change of career

by accepting the Directorship of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

### The National Institute

This switch to research management proved to entail, both at the very beginning and then during the whole of the last half of David's tenure of the Directorship of the Institute, a difficult and recurrent, struggle for financial support. When David first arrived, the Institute's traditional financial funding formula of one-third Foundations (Rockefeller and Ford), one-third government grants and one-third business was already coming under stress as the last of the Ford funding was being used up and the Rockefeller foundation had signalled a change of emphasis in its funding towards programmes that could increase food security in poor countries. The Treasury, meanwhile, had decided to provide substantial support for the Institute (which was to continue until 1980); in order not to be put in a position in which it might be suspected of contaminating the Institute's forecasts, these funds were directed towards other programmes than the forecasting and analysis work of the Institute. In 1965 David was invited to become a founder member of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), under the Chairmanship of Michael Young. David was scrupulous in explaining, before accepting the invitation to serve, that the Institute would be making a substantial application to SSRC for funding. This was recognised and indeed the SSRC's funding of the Institute over the period of the next ten years, much of it in the helpful form of 'programme grant' and 'development grant'—funding, not tied to particular project execution but rather available to cover the costs of project development—was sufficiently generous to set the Institute's finances on a firm basis. This may not have come without a cost however, for in the next phase the most powerful pressure developed to reduce the Institute's funding; other applicants for SSRC funding could find the security and size of the NIESR's allocation a source of aggravation. Eventually, this pressure took the form of a positive proposal for a 'British Brookings', a proposal which was both an implicit criticism of NIESR policy and at the same time—if adopted—would have bled the Institute's finances to death. As if to confirm the latter apprehension in his mind, David found that he was one week being asked to accept a cut of £200,000 for the Institute, and the next week reading an announcement that an exactly similar amount was to be set aside for a 'British Brookings'. David

was always reasonable but never soft. He could defend his corner fiercely and did so on this occasion. In an atmosphere of considerable tension he had the decision reversed. A by-product was that the NIESR joined forces with the other two Institutes that were threatened by this development (Chatham House and Political and Economic Planning (PEP), later renamed the Policy Studies Institute (PSI)) to arrange a series of conferences, with eventual book publications to deal with various topics of the day—pretty much as might have been the case for a British Brookings. The storm—even if the worst was immediately avoided—was perhaps a sign of the times; not long after this matter had been settled Mrs Thatcher's first Administration took office and the Treasury funding was run down. The SSRC was renamed the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council), and support for the Institute's macroeconomic programme was to come to an end (though other support was actually increased). The fight for financial survival was not the best setting in which to get on with a programme of economic research, but fortunately a lot had been started in the initial period of assured funding and the momentum carried forward. David made sure that younger members of staff were insulated, as far as possible, from the controversy. As a research manager David succeeded in combining a considerable personal involvement (for example, he always chaired the meetings of the group carrying out the forecasting and analysis of the UK economy and took a prominent share in the drafting of the final publication), with wise delegation and a studious avoidance of unnecessary interference. His academic instincts and mathematical background were major resources. In consequence a great deal of first class research was generated. Whilst a full account of this can be found in Kit Jones's paper 'Fifty Years of Economic Research' (*National Institute Economic Review*, May 1988), some of the major points should be rehearsed here also.

One of the major—and in retrospect, most sensible—decisions which David encouraged the Institute's Executive Committee to make, early in his Directorship, was to devote not more than one half of its resources to the regular quarterly forecast of the British economy and the accompanying analysis. This allowed for an expansion in other lines of activity. Typically this would take the form of a project involving some input from academics outside the Institute, resulting in some occasional papers and a book; the project itself would normally be managed by a member of the Institute's staff, and there would be, typically, a number of less senior researchers attached to the project and working full-time at the Institute. In the first of a number of projects of this type David persuaded Arthur

Brown from Leeds University to head a team of young researchers at the Institute to work on regional issues: this resulted in *The Framework of Regional Economics in the United Kingdom*. His attention then turned to a project concerned with the process of technological diffusion, a research area that was comparatively new at the time. George Ray, at the Institute, was in charge of this project, an important element in which was an international comparative one, so that the project came to involve cooperation with research institutes in five other countries as well. This was a project the originality of which attracted David's positive involvement more than most. Besides a number of papers, the culmination of the work was the publication in 1974 in the names of Ray and Nasbeth of *The Diffusion of New Industrial Processes*. After that came the updating of Alfred Maizels' earlier work in the form of a book, by Bachelor, Major and Morgan *Industrialization and the Basis for Trade* (1980). Christopher Dow's influential study for the National Institute of the practice of demand management in the UK—*The Management of the British Economy 1945–60*—was substantially extended and updated as a result of a project led by Frank Blackaby, which produced *British Economic Policy 1960–1974*. (A further updating appeared later in a study by Andrew Britton called *Macroeconomic Policy in Britain, 1974–1987*.) Sig Prais and Peter Hart (the latter based in the University of Reading) meanwhile produced a lot of work on industrial concentration, large firms, and mergers. This eventually won for the National Institute from the ESRC the title of 'designated research centre' for Sig Prais's continuing work.

At the same time the Institute launched a series of conferences designed to explore leading issues in economic policy. Funding was eventually found to commission authors to provide papers, and these were subsequently published, along with formal discussants' comments and a report of the general discussion; whilst this was begun in the early 1970s (with *Incomes Policy* in 1972), it became a regular activity in the later part of the decade and into the 1980s. Thus there was *Demand Management* (1978), *Deindustrialization* (1979) and *Britain's Trade and Exchange Rate Policy* (1979). In its later stages the activity was shared with Chatham House and PEP (PSI). This was the 'Brookings style' work to which reference was made earlier. Some fifteen books were published under this joint sponsorship before 1987 under the heading of *Studies in Public Policy*. David in fact visited the Brookings Institution and sat in on a preparatory panel meeting for one of the issues of the *Brookings Papers in Economic Activity*, which provided a model for the conference and book activity.

## Oxford again

In 1982, David and his wife returned to Oxford, following David's retirement from the Directorship of the Institute. Perhaps curiously, he did not take up any of the offers of teaching that were made (in the case of the sole exception he described the requirement as devastatingly demanding—as he noted afterwards 'I marvelled at the confidence with which I had been prepared to teach a wide range of subjects a mere twenty years earlier'). There were plenty of other demands on his time, though. One was to write a critique of the IMF's *World Economic Outlook* for UNCTAD which was to be presented to the G24. Another was to be President of the Royal Economic Society. Most excitingly, this involved the organisation of a conference to recognise the centenary of the birth of Keynes. The conference, which was held in King's College Cambridge was hugely well attended by prominent economists from all over the world in an atmosphere which was charged with excitement—some part of it no doubt due to an awareness of the attacks that were being made on Keynesian macroeconomics. David co-edited the book of the conference with Jim Trevithick. Then he was offered a project at the National Institute itself and took charge of work on the problem of unemployment (which still stood at 3 million when the project was initiated in 1985): a large amount of work was generated—and a book, *Unemployment—a Problem of Policy* emerged in 1991.

Meanwhile he took charge of a conference on Education and Economic Performance for the National Institute and revisited the unemployment experience of the 1930s for a paper presented to the Bank of England's Academic Panel. In 1992 he participated in a conference organised to mark the eightieth birthday of Sir Alec Cairncross, held in Glasgow. The conference revisited the 'Golden Age' of the 1950s and 1960s: David contributed a paper on the question 'How was it possible to run economies at such high pressure without accelerating wage inflation?' Reportedly David was more pleased with this conference than with any other he had ever attended; one of the items he relished was the joint participation in the conference of both Roy Jenkins and Jim Callaghan, two of the most important protagonists of 'In Place of Strife'.

David's identification with Keynesian economics in an era of substantial questioning of this approach brought him a number of commissions, to explain the current level of unemployment, to reassert the primacy of demand in the explanation of inter-war unemployment and to clarify the



scope for macroeconomic policy. He gave a lecture in the University of Glasgow on the theme: 'Has mass unemployment come to stay?'

### Other involvements

If in his retirement David had more time to devote to his personal research and to service for the profession and the subject in the wider sense, as well as for government; these had always been with him in greater or lesser quantity. One way or the other he worked a great deal for the government, and for his university and he also managed to publish quite a lot. David had great clarity of mind and a lot of plain common sense as well economic intuition and he could write well in the literary sense (though definitely not in the literal one: his handwriting was below the class of doctors' prescriptions!). He could listen to others and whilst of strong opinions on some subjects himself he did not allow this to impair his dealings with others. These qualities recommended him to numerous others who needed a job done, especially one with economic content.

Early in his time at Magdalen he sat on a number of committees and working parties—a tripartite working party on the lace industry was the first of these in 1946, involving much time in Nottingham, and this was followed somewhat later by membership of a committee on purchase tax and another on tax-paid stocks (in 1951 and 1952 respectively). He was also an expert witness for the Registrar of Restrictive Trade Practices, though most of his cases were withdrawn before coming to court and the only one in which he was involved as a 'live' witness in the court room was lost. The University of Oxford took advantage of his talents in a number of ways: first as Chairman of the Board of the Faculty of Social Studies from 1948, then as an examiner for the PPE degree in 1949–51 and as Senior Tutor for the College from 1955 on. In addition he pre-invented what subsequently came to be known as the 'Norrington tables': these list by college the results obtained by Oxford students in their finals, were published in the *Oxford Magazine* and were always much referred to. He discontinued their compilation in 1963, just before going to the National Institute: subsequently a similar compilation was produced on the instance of Sir Arthur Norrington, by whose name the presentation was consequently known. David in addition prepared tables listing the scholarship awards obtained by men in Oxford and Cambridge colleges (this was mostly published in the *Times Educational Supplement*); this was pos-

sibly one reason why he was drafted onto a committee to review admissions in the light of the creation of the UCCA system. Also during these years he undertook a mission for UNCTAD to Turkey, which for various reasons beyond David's control proved a failure, though he was able shortly afterwards to spend some time at the UNECE in Geneva, which he found congenial. With Phyllis Deane from Cambridge he also attempted to build a Ph.D. programme for Argentinian economists—the programme stopped short, though, with some classes imparted by British academics in Argentina and failed to move to the second stage where the students would have come to the UK to complete a dissertation. A major achievement of David's at this time was to organise and edit, with Peter Ady, the publication of the first regular textbook to cover the applied economics of British economic policy, a volume in which some twenty economists, mostly from Oxford, were involved. The success of the first volume, named *The British Economy, 1945–50*, led to a second version, *The British Economy in the 1950s*, before there became available a number of rival texts and many other sources of information on the subject.

At the National Institute David found his time for external activities somewhat more limited, but he was a founding member of the Social Science Council for five years, and was president of Section F of the British Association in 1972. He also served on the government's Committee on Policy Optimization in 1978 and previously (1967) had served on a committee for the Building Societies' Association, to investigate their reserves and liquidity. For quite some time (1982–90) he served on City University's Council.

## Honours

In a life of dedication to economics and the analysis of economic policy, it was not surprising that David came by several honours. In 1975 he received a D.Sc. from City University and was elected a Fellow of the Academy in 1979—and from 1986/7 to 1988/9 he served as Chairman of its Section 9. In 1981 he was awarded the CBE.

## Other things in life

If David lived a full life in a professional sense, he complemented it with a lively and fulfilling domestic life. He married Sylvia Walsh in 1940 and

had three children—Eleanor, Rosalind, and Richard. Their Oxford house was a home from home for many a student. David never owned a car, preferring to ride a bike or walk (a firm fixture in the family calendar was a walking holiday in the Lake District every year); he played a vigorous game of squash and could also play tennis. From the age of about thirty he suffered from severe hearing deficiency ('otosclerosis'), which could be alleviated by the use of a hearing aid. The latter, some swore, could also be used as a tactical weapon as it was inclined to burst into a whistle and splutter phase just when someone was repeating something particularly inane or pompous and had an immediately disconcerting effect. However this may be, David did confess to using the power to turn the aid off occasionally; more to the point, he never complained about his problem. Together with his wife David shared a broadly 'left' view of life, with a long membership of the Labour Party, and in the early days an active one. He had a gentle sense of humour, an enjoyment of the simple things in life ('Match of the Day' was a case in point) and a sense of self-deprecation that highlighted his lack of pomposity. He represented, not only the intellectual commitment of a generation of British economists, but also just about all the best features of a man in public life in Britain in his time. David Worswick died on 18 May 2001.

MICHAEL ARTIS

*Fellow of the Academy*