



Michael Ward at the 30th IARIW General Conference, Portoroz, Slovenia, August 2008

MICHAEL WARD (1939–2008): IN MEMORIAM

A few years ago I was sitting on a beach in Vietnam when a gust blew away a page of my Herald Tribune. I chased after it and was glad I did so because there on the centre page was an article by Michael Ward. He was proposing a development tax to be paid by the richer countries to finance development in poorer ones. What struck me was how typical it was of Michael to turn up in a remote part of the world, often unexpectedly but always with good intentions and sound ideas.

Michael, a long time member and past chairman (2000–2002) of the IARIW, died of a heart attack in October 2008 at his home in Cambridge. He was 69 and leaves his wife Rosemary, a son and two daughters and six grandchildren. His death was a great loss to his many friends and colleagues throughout the world. It was also a great shock because right up to the end Michael was his usual busy self. He was Chair of the Program Committee for the Special IARIW Conference in Kathmandu; he was a session organizer for the 2009 ISI meeting in Durban; he was finalizing details of a lecture tour in China and was working with the Indian statistical office on a project to improve their price statistics. And those were just the projects he told me about.

Michael went to school at St Clement Dane's in London. In 1958, he went on to Exeter University where he took a BA in Statistics and Economics and later took his MA at Cambridge. He started work in 1961 in Salisbury (now Harare) in what was then the Statistical Office of the Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland. He later worked in the statistical office of Lesotho and in the Fiji Islands where he was Head of the Government Statistical Service. The practical experience gained in these postings informed Michael's later work in developing social and economic indicators. Always imaginative in devising new statistical indicators and new ways of collecting them, he was nevertheless mindful of the real constraints that statistical offices face in the developing world.

During this time, Michael maintained his link with Cambridge and was a Fellow—later Dean—of Selwyn College and a Senior Researcher in the Department of Applied Economics. From 1972 Michael worked for UNESCO as a regional statistical advisor in Southern Africa—an assignment that took him to Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe—but in 1975 he returned to academia as Director of the Statistical Program at the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University. Both at Cambridge and Sussex Michael worked with some of the foremost development economists of the time, including Richard Jolly, Graham Pyatt, Dudley Seers and Richard Stone. These were people who, as Michael observed in his book *Quantifying the World*,¹ “abhorred any suggestion that facts be fit to theory and spent their lives building theory around observed facts and creating frameworks that more usefully depicted how the real world worked”.

¹Ward, M. (2004) *Quantifying the World. UN Ideas and Statistics*, Indiana University Press, was written by Michael Ward as part of the *United Nations Intellectual History Project Series* edited by Louis Emmerij, Richard Jolly and Thomas G. Weiss.

Michael's links with OECD's began in the early 1970s. He participated in workshops on statistics in developing countries at the OECD Development Centre. In 1975, between the UNESCO assignments and the post at Sussex University, he worked for a few months as consultant for OECD on the measurement of capital. In 1982, Michael joined the OECD full-time and made the first OECD-Eurostat Purchasing Power Parity calculations for 1980. At this time Eurostat was already calculating PPPs for its member states and wanted to link these with the larger Non-EU members of the OECD. Peter Hill, who was then head of the OECD Statistics Division, had no budget for any PPP work but was keen to involve the OECD again in international price and volume comparisons which had lain dormant at the OECD since the pioneering work of Martin Gilbert and Irving Kravis in the early 1960s. With some creative accounting, Peter was able to recruit Michael who succeeded in producing retrospective PPP estimates for the United States, Canada, Japan and Norway and linking them with the Eurostat estimates. This was no mean task as it required countries to laboriously sift through their historical price statistics to locate matching products. Here Michael's powers of persuasion—always highly developed—were required as much as his technical expertise. Alan Heston recalls “good memories of Michael including [working in] the bowels of BLS getting the US prices for 1980”. Without Michael's determination, ingenuity and sheer hard work OECD's PPP program would certainly have been delayed and may never have got off the ground.

Angus Maddison has summarized Michael's two achievements at the OECD in these words. “The first of these was *The Measurement of Capital*² and the second was *Purchasing Power Parities and Real Expenditures in the OECD*.³ These provided an intellectual buttress for two important decisions of the OECD. The first helped provide momentum to estimates which were fundamental to making growth accounts to explain the driving forces of economic growth. The second was a meticulously professional examination of problems in getting accurate cross-country comparisons of the levels of economic performance in OECD countries. This was very timely as OECD had just resurrected the publication of such estimates after a lengthy period of neglect. Michael was a major international authority on accurate measurement of national accounts which have been very important in improving economic policy in both the developed and the developing world.”

In 1985 Michael took up his last full-time post as Principal Economist at the World Bank where he stayed until his retirement in 2000. Up to 1995, Michael's main focus was Asia and the Pacific and in addition to advisory missions to many countries in the region, he served for two years as Director of Rehabilitation and Economic Advisor in the UN Peacekeeping Mission to Cambodia. He recognized that a national statistical office gives a country a sense of identity and rebuilding the Cambodian statistical office after its near annihilation by the Khmer Rouge was one of his important achievements.

In 1995 Michael was made head of the Bank's Statistical Advisory Services and in this capacity he worked with Brian Hammond of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee in drawing up a set of international development targets

²Ward, M. (1976) *The Measurement of Capital*, Paris: OECD.

³Ward, M. (1985) *Purchasing Power Parities and Real Expenditures in the OECD*, Paris: OECD.

which later became the *Millennium Development Goals*. These address a range of economic, social, demographic and environmental concerns and Michael's forty years of experience in statistical and economic policy work throughout the world made him a key player in identifying relevant and, above all, doable statistical indicators.

Michael's retirement was a mere formality and from 2000 until his death in 2008 his expertise and advice were constantly sought by international agencies including the United Nations, the Asian Development Bank and the Association of South East Asian Nations as well as by national statistical offices including those of China and India. The 2004 publication *Quantifying the World*, part of the UN's Intellectual History Project, was one of his major achievements in this period. It reviewed the achievements and failures of the United Nations statistical services over the previous sixty years. Written in Michael's inimitable style it combines intellectual rigor with engaging portraits of some of the major players and with well-directed barbs at his *bêtes noires* such as the Washington Consensus⁴ and the sometimes lethargic Statistical Commission of the United Nations.

Michael joined the IARIW in 1973 and was Chairperson from 2000 to 2002. He was active at General Conferences as session organizer, chairperson, contributor and discussant becoming, in this last role, something of a discussant of last resort. He could always be relied on to provoke an intelligent discussion of papers that few others could understand. Looking at his contribution to recent Conferences shows how well he covered the full range of the Association's interests. With Carol Carson he co-chaired a session on the new SNA, he presented papers on *Government Statistics: Information or Pro Forma Data?*, *Making Cross-Country Comparisons of Income Distributions*, and *Measure for Measure: Price Indexes for Well-being* and he discussed papers in sessions on factor productivity and technological change, the measurement of non-market services, and the measurement and interpretation of poverty. Michael took the lead in organizing the special conference in China in 2007 and the special conference in Kathmandu scheduled for 2009.

While his intellectual contribution to the Association was great, his warm and generous personality was equally treasured. Leila Pathirane remembers how "Michael had the gift for easily establishing contacts and building friendships with people from various countries and backgrounds. As the attentive and faithful friend he was, he tried to keep contacts with his friends, despite his frequent travel, via letters, postcards and e-mail". Closely written and light-hearted postcards from remote parts of the world were one of Michael's specialties. Peter van de Ven and Tim Smeeding both stressed "his openness, his friendliness, and the ease of approaching him and discussing with him any time, and especially for young people". Many members saw him as their mentor. Writing from Tunisia, Luc Mbong Mbong described Michael as "our big brother in National Accounts. For

⁴Michael writes "The Washington Consensus was originally conceived as the common denominator of policy of the Washington institutions providing international assistance to Latin America, but later it assumed the more apt sobriquet of 'market fundamentalism'". Michael's objections were first that it was dismissive of the government's role in economic development and second that it was a one-size-fits-all approach whereas his own experience had convinced him that economic development is a nuts and bolts business with each country needing country-specific policy guidance in reaching its development objectives.

the National Accounts Family, we've lost a nice and good friend. We have lost a talented guide". And from India Ramesh Kolli described a recent visit by Michael: "We discussed many things about national accounts and prices during the course of an evening tea which he gracefully hosted at his hotel. His lectures were as usual crisp and focused and there was considerable positive feedback from the participants. Michael was also instrumental in helping Indian national accounts to reach international standards, which I regularly acknowledged in all international forums".

In his letter of condolence Peter Hill puts it very simply: "He was a good friend and colleague, courteous, generous, cheerful and kind". Those are the qualities that so many will remember him for and are the reason why he will be so missed at future meetings of the Association.

DEREK BLADES*,
November 2008.

*An early draft was circulated to many of Michael Ward's close friends and their suggestions and comments have helped shape this *In Memoriam*.