

Laudation for Robin Boadway

It is a great honor for me to introduce Professor Robin Boadway. As this year's Distinguished CES Fellow he will be delivering the 2009 Munich Lectures in Economics. It is also a difficult task as I am a last minute substitute for Agnar Sandmo who could not come. As you all know, besides being a great scholar, Agnar is also an outstanding "laudationer".

Robin Boadway is not just one of the most influential public economists of our time; he is also a superb scholar, an outstanding teacher and an all around remarkable person. I feel personally privileged and delighted to deliver this laudation.

Robin Boadway holds the David Chadwick Smith Chair in Economics at Queens's University where he obtained his doctoral degree and where he has been teaching since 1973. It is hard to think of a better track record in terms of faithfulness. Faithfulness is a key word in Robin's personality. Faithful to his ideas, to his doctoral students, past and current, to his wider community in Ontario and Canada, and to his friends.

Most of us are happy if we can excel in any one aspect of our lives. Robin has managed to attain excellence as a scholar for sure but also as a human being.

Before I describe some of Robin's scholarly contributions let me talk about the man even though the two cannot be really separated. Robin is a man of conviction. Over his entire career he has consistently and faithfully stuck to the same set of convictions regarding his academic profession, his conception of public finance and his philosophy of the world. A man of conviction who is nevertheless always willing to question these ideas and take seriously alternatives. Robin never thinks that he has arrived at some final truth but he is always pushing the frontiers with an open mind.

I have had the opportunity to attend a couple of Queen's Public Economics Workshops, a very impressive annual event that looks like

a pilgrimage that gathers friends, colleagues, former students who share Robin's passion for a certain type of public finance, that of Richard Musgrave, Peter Diamond and Joe Stiglitz to mention three emblematic figures. In this workshop it is still possible to assume a benevolent government or a redistributive objective without being welcome by a salvo of aggressive or condescending remarks.

Let me come to Robin's contributions. Their significance has been recognized by his fellow economists as reflected in the large number of citations that his publications have achieved. Most of his publications are theoretical. Some are highly applied. Some are targeted to an academic audience. Others seek to influence the policy debate. All of them however are permeated by a strong drive to foster our understanding of how the working of our society can be improved. Robin's interests and contributions span almost all research areas in public finance. He has been studying both the spending and the revenue side of the public sector, the personal and the corporate sector, the federal and the regional levels of government. There is no relevant sector of public finance that has not been dealt with by Robin.

Yet underneath the seeming diversity of topics and approaches, one can identify two features that are central to Robin's research throughout his career: the concern for rigor and the search of relevancy even in the most abstract theory. The best example of this is the topic of his Munich Lectures, **From Optimal Tax Theory to Tax Policy: Retrospective and Prospective Views**. I have had the privilege to work with Robin on optimal income taxation; I can say that even when we focus on what can seem like esoteric points, Robin's obsession is their implications for tax policy.

Let me recall a recent experience. A few months ago Robin¹ sent me a draft of his review of a recent and excellent book by Louis Kaplow,

¹ *Efficiency and Redistribution: An Evaluative Review of Louis Kaplow's The Theory of Taxation and Public Economics*, forthcoming in the Journal of Economic Literature.

The Theory of Taxation and Public Economics, published by Princeton University Press 2008. I knew the content of the book, as I had been one of the earlier referees for the publisher. Robin's piece is a real masterwork. He did not just explain the content of the main chapter with a more or less critical assessment. He literally went back to the epistemological roots of Kaplow's work: his views of altruism, responsibility, intergenerational equity, ... After having read Robin's review, my understanding and appreciation of Kaplow's book was totally changed.

Dear Robin, let me conclude this laudation by congratulating you for this important and highly deserved award and by thanking you for being such a source of inspiration and such an example of academic citizenship to me and to an entire generation of public economists.

Pierre Pestieau
Liège, 10/11/09.