

Basil Yamey: A Recollection

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I have not forgotten the first time I met Basil Yamey, even though it is now over 50 years ago, in March 1968. It was my first visit to LSE and I was to be interviewed to be an Assistant Lecturer in Economics. Basil was the Chair of the Interview Board. I cannot remember many of the questions asked, they could not have been on my research because at that stage I had not done any, having only graduated the previous summer. (There were in those days no job market papers or seminars expected of applicants.) I remember only being asked whether I would be able or willing to teach Public Finance. I'm sure I said yes, though I was never actually asked to do this.

Basil was at that time Head (then known as Convenor) of the Economics Department. The structural reorganisation of LSE into Departments was quite recent Basil being only the second person to hold

through the recruitment of three superstars of that generation: Gorman (from, respectively, Chicago, Cambridge and LSE) and his commitment to academic excellence, international reputation and for academics it meant 'publish or perish'.

Convenors had then (as Department Heads have now) and the three years were amongst the most momentous in the history of the Department. Robbins had been appointed Professor of Economic Statistics in 1960. A figure until the 1960s. While Robbins's pre-eminence in the Department questioned his enormous contributions to public life and his leadership led to a relative neglect of academic matters including the Department a bit moribund but reinvigoration is often painful, painful and in the wrong place. In 1969 five junior lecturers were up for promotion.

Basil was able to manage this process of adjustment and to insist on such traditional virtues as fairness, consistency and support to the individual as part of the LSE community. He valued personally even if their work fell short of the standards sometimes characterised as a 'reign of terror' it could not be 'terrorists'.

These years were also difficult ones for the School, with a revolution amongst the students, supported by academics some of whom were in the Department. Again Basil's commitment to fairness and consistency. The Department was able to operate reasonably effectively. I remember me about a particular student. I said this student had been on the occasion. Basil's response – 'I'm not going to punish him but use good tactics but based on his principled respect for others'.

After the trauma of these early years when everyone was in the politics, life returned to more normal academic activities. I did not do academic that meant teaching and research. I did not do the qualities of collegiality and courtesy which he brought to the Department not least during my time as Departmental Convenor.