

Obituary

Michael Roger Stenson

MICHAEL STENSON, Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Auckland, died too young in Rangoon hospital on 29 November 1977. He was 39 years old.

Mike grew up in Auckland, attended Mt Albert Grammar School, and took his B.A. and M.A. degrees at Auckland. After a few years of secondary school teaching, he won a Commonwealth Scholarship to the University of Malaya where he completed a Ph.D. in Malayan history. He came back to the University of Auckland in 1968 as a lecturer in South East Asian History, and taught there until his death.

Mike's revised doctoral thesis, entitled *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948* was published by Oxford University Press in 1970. This book, together with several scholarly articles which followed, won him an international reputation in his field. He had completed the manuscript of a second book on Malaysian history before leaving on his last visit to Asia.

Mike was a popular teacher who preferred small classes and informal methods. His interests and activities, however, ranged far beyond teaching and research in Asian history. He was deeply interested and widely read in environmental questions, the economics of development and underdevelopment, and international relations. He believed that the study of history could and should be related directly to the great social and political issues of our time, and there were few of these he was not concerned about.

The range of activities at the University of Auckland and in the city at large which Mike managed to combine with a fruitful academic and happy family life was quite extraordinary. He was involved in local body politics. He fought innumerable campaigns on behalf of his local community in Parnell. He was an inveterate writer of pungent letters to the editor. He was a pillar of the Lecturers' Association and the guardian angel of colleagues threatened with unjust treatment of any kind.

Mike was never really satisfied by his involvement in all these battles and crusades despite his many victories. He wanted answers to the big questions, remedies for the great injustices. In his last years he was coming to think that some form of Marxism might provide a framework for his thought and his activity. But he was too much of an individualist, too intellectually honest to have ever become an unquestioning devotee of any party line. In his last weeks he visited China, and his letters home indicated that he was no more enchanted by the official orthodoxy of the eastern than the western variety.

In fact Mike's radicalism owed more to simple virtues and old-fashioned values than ideology of any kind. He was a plain, unpretentious man who

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rode to work on an ancient lady's bicycle and preferred clothes that were resolutely nondescript. He was the most faithful of husbands, a warm father, a generous and loyal friend, a patently sincere humanitarian. Being determined and committed in all that he did, he could be blunt and even abrasive when he considered an issue of principle was at stake. But no opponent ever doubted his honesty and sincerity, and many were charmed by the genial good humour which he generally managed to maintain throughout the roughest struggles.

There is little with which Mike Stenson's family, friends and innumerable associates can console themselves except perhaps the reflection that he was a man who led a good life.

JIM HOLT

University of Auckland

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