

Obituary

Mick Moran

1946–2018

Government & Opposition editorial board member

Donne's insight was to recognize that any man's death diminishes us, but Mick Moran was far from any man and our loss reflects that. Indeed, as one of us has said, we are devastated.

His was a highly distinguished academic record: BA 1967; PhD 1974; as the W.J.M. Mackenzie Professor of Government at the University of Manchester until his retirement in 2011 the holder of one of the most prestigious chairs in his field; Dean of the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies at Manchester 1995–8; editor of *Political Studies* 1993–9 and co-editor of *Government and Opposition* 2000–6; author of scholarly monographs, student textbooks and learned articles, many seminal.

But the bare facts tell only part of the story. Born in 1946 in Smethwick, Birmingham, the son of a cleaner and a factory worker, in his childhood Mick knew real poverty. He wore his experiences of those years lightly but they surely helped deepen his natural humanity and wisdom. He grew up in Cappagh outside Kilrush, County Clare, in the mouth of the Shannon, with summers on the family smallholding at nearby Scatterry Island. There had been a monastic settlement on Scatterry for 1,500 years and Kilrush itself had suffered in the famine years and then endured one of the worst of Ireland's evictions. At Kilrush Mick attended the Irish Christian Brothers School, where the regime was hard. Later, the family having returned to Smethwick in 1959, he went to the Cardinal Newman Secondary Modern School, afterwards speaking warmly of it but leaving with just two O-levels. To this point his schooling had hardly provided him with much in the way of a decent academic start but several things now changed his prospects decisively. First was

Smethwick Public Library in its mid-nineteenth-century Thomason building. Here he was first smitten with the love of learning. Second was a headmaster, a key figure in Mick's life, who could recognize latent talent and who secured for him a place in the sixth form at St Philip's Grammar, so allowing him to achieve some good A-levels. And third was the creation in the mid-1960s of the new universities, and in particular of the University of Lancaster. Lancaster received its Royal Charter and accepted its first students, of which Mick was one, in 1964 – it was particularly to his advantage that Lancaster made a point of taking non-traditional applicants. The university was initially situated at St Leonard's Gate in the centre of Lancaster but began its move to Bailrigg during Mick's years. At Lancaster his prospects were changed in another way too, by meeting and in 1967 marrying Winifred, thereafter – with their two sons – the rock around which the rest of his life was built.

Mick's subsequent MA and PhD at the equally new Essex University obtained for him a lectureship at the then Manchester Polytechnic, and in due course he converted this into a senior lectureship. Just down the road, the University of Manchester's Government Department had been built by Bill Mackenzie through shrewd talent-spotting and, although Bill had left in the mid-1960s, the tradition persisted. Mick was spotted and in 1979 joined the department. He had now found the ideal platform to get the best out of himself. In due course he had the Mackenzie chair.

His later career saw him involved in two big developments. First, at Manchester he found himself one of a group of three academics responsible for handling the major transition of the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies into the greatly changed and enlarged new university of 2004, his responsibility in the huge reorganization being especially for the teaching side. A first-year government course taken by 1,000 students is a heavy responsibility and Mick's was a leading role in ensuring they received instruction only from trained, mentored and monitored teachers.

Second, at *Government and Opposition* he made a major contribution to the transformation of the journal from a successful fruit of its cosmopolitan LSE origins and Pall Mall associations into the highly professional political science product it has now become. The journal could not have thrived, and might not even have survived, without such a transformation. (To mark it his favourite hostelry at Monsal Head in his beloved Peak District should perhaps carry a plaque for the many informal editorial meetings he convened there – though

the business being done, and Mick being Mick, wider conversation – especially about Mozart and opera – invariably ensued.)

The Manchester and *Government and Opposition* changes substantially reconfigured the context of Mick's career, but he also undertook a major reorientation in his own professional interests. He had a particular capacity for recognizing shifts in the key dimensions of British politics and, reflecting this, gradually redirected his academic orientation from the political science where he had first made his name to the study of wider political economy, a personal movement reflected in his continuing in retirement to hold a part-time post with the Alliance Manchester Business School.

The esteem in which Mick was held in both the university and his profession derived from the modest man that he was, and from his obvious integrity, every bit as much as from his academic standing. He invariably treated people with respect and consideration, and with his wry and gentle humour never took things too seriously, and certainly not himself. He also recognized that scholarly endeavour, though highly demanding, was not hard work in quite the same sense as was digging a road or working on a building site (the latter something which he himself had done in his university vacations). He explained precisely in one of his own books why it was that he had turned to the study of politics: 'Understanding politics, if we want to make the world a better place for our fellow human beings, is more urgent even than understanding medicine, biology or physics.'

In the end there is no better way of properly appreciating a person than through the words of those who have worked closely with them. Here are some of the many such words which Mick's death has prompted:

'great but quiet self-confidence in who he was, total control of his ego'

'informal and completely unstuffy'

'every meeting with him was a pleasure'

'working alongside him was above all great fun'

'how astonishingly sharp and incisive he was despite his disarmingly unthreatening demeanour'

'not many of us received a standing ovation at the end of the first-year course, but Mick did'

'as nice a man as you could meet'

'a special and lovable man and yet so unspoiled'

Michael Moran, an academic's academic, had the fullest possible life of lecturing, writing, editing and administering. But there remained more he meant to do. Let the last word then be Ovid's: *Quum moriar, medium solvar et inter opus*. When I die, may I be taken in the midst of work.

Professor Sir Roger Williams