

18. ENTRY INTO THE ACADEMY: VINCENT BLADEN, TORONTO, 1959-62

After 23 years in the Canadian public service I had a phone call from Dean Vincent Bladen, with an offer from the University of Toronto that was to open a fresh life for me. It appeared that the new job would have no fixed hours, the duties nothing but study, writing and teaching, that is to say acquiring and teaching the best of existing knowledge and discovering new knowledge. To me as a civil servant that seemed like fun rather than work; it was what I did out of hours and during week-ends in the civil service.

True the pay was no better than the public service, but would be more than compensated by the pleasant associations with others similarly engaged. And all of us together would make a harmonious community in which it would be sheer heaven to dwell.

All that was just what I wanted, and I accepted while Dean Bladen held the line. The first person I told was my faithful secretary Jean Duffus, who was regretful but not surprised.

As mentioned earlier, I joined the Dominion Bureau of Statistics (DBS) in Ottawa as a clerk in the 1936 census, and over the course of 23 years climbed the public service ladder in not untypical fashion, reaching the post of Senior Research Statistician. During that time I worked in several of the DBS divisions, and had an opportunity to see its methods evolve from the routine collection of data using home-grown paper-and-pencil methods for supposed "complete enumeration" to more sophisticated procedures of household sampling, quality control, computer processing, assembly of the Gross National Product. Most important of these for a statistician was probability selection of samples that permitted estimates of error. . In the development of several of these I had a part. Thus there were some advances made in my 23 years, but the biggest advances were to be made after I left.

In my new job in Toronto I had great colleagues: S. Delbert Clark, Oswald Hall, Jean Burnet, Leo Zakuta, Jim Giffen, as well as excellent students, students from whom I could learn. I remember that after a lecture one of the students came up and asked if I had looked at a new journal called *Daedalus*. I had not heard of it. It had just been established by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and ably edited by Stephen Graubard. Since that commendation from a nameless undergraduate at the U. of T. some 40 years ago I have been a constant subscriber to *Daedalus*. Just one of many directions in which a student has led his professor--me.

I also had colleagues outside of the Sociology group--Brough Macpherson and Gordon Skilling in political science, Tom Easterbrook and Burton Keirstead in economics, Dan DeLury and Donald Fraser in statistics. There was no substantial graduate school, and hence no opportunity to teach a subject as specialized as population, but I did give a well-attended course in general sociology, especially on the work of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber.

But what about the harmonious community of scholars? I suppose we had as much of that at Toronto as anywhere, but it was certainly not perfect. One of the odd features of life is that we really don't want perfect harmony--everyone agreeing with everyone else on every subject. If we all thought the same way, we would have nothing to discuss. Recognition of important problems can only arise in discussion among people who do not agree with one another. Differences stimulate thought, colleagues strike sparks off colleagues. While that is everywhere recognized, yet I have had more than one colleague who failed to separate disagreement and debate from personal feelings towards the person with whom one disagrees. They think "Professor ABC disagrees with me because he doesn't like me; well I don't like him."

Even more obviously we don't want complete disharmony, with no one listening to others, no one ever agreeing with others, no one using the work of others and continuing that work forward. Total narcissism, egoism, is to be avoided equally with total harmony. And not every institution can arrange the amount of narcissism that drives the person to create without also driving them to isolation from colleagues. .

The nice balance required here that would provide lives of scholarship and creativity is not always attained.

In moving over to a university after 23 years as a public servant I had several lucky breaks, unforeseen events working in my favor, especially changes of a demographic nature, age categories that became abnormally large and others that shrank. In 1959 the pending increase of students as the post-war baby boom came to college age was presumably what the U. of T. authorities had in mind in hiring me to begin with.

Winters in the Argentine when schools in Canada were closed for the summer, Buenos Aires, 1960

I had no sooner joined the University of Toronto than I was offered a seasonal appointment at the University of Buenos Aires. This was not yet as a demographer, but as a sociologist. Buenos Aires, conveniently lying south of the Equator, has its winters when we have our summers. So I was able to take my summer holidays teaching in B.A. in 1960. There among other people I met Fausto Toranzos, an older man, somewhat old-fashioned and greatly admired by his ex-students. In his entourage was Carlos Garcia-Tudero, young, bright and knowledgeable; with him and his wife Malicha, Beatrice and I formed close links. He saw my trusting nature and offered to be something of a guide, which he was indeed,

I remember others in the circle--Portnoy, Lopez, and their wives.

Many an evening we agreed to meet Carlos and other friends at a restaurant, Corrientes Onze, at 10:00 p.m. In case you think that is late for dinner, it was only the nominal time for congregating in a community where punctuality is no virtue. If everything went on what might loosely be called "schedule" we would start eating at midnight. Was it worth the waiting? It sure was, the food was superb, and the talk brilliant. We tried to get back to our hotel in the Calle Junin by two o'clock.

Argentina has had a stormy history. Juan Peron was elected by a large majority in 1951 on a populist platform, and in 1955 was upset by a coup, and driven into exile in Franco Spain. A democratically elected liberal government under Dr. Arturo H. Illia came into power shortly after our time, .If I remember right our friend Carlos was Minister of Finance in the Illia government.

On one of these occasions Beatrice was delayed, as she later explained to us, by somehow getting mixed up in a meeting that was broken up by the police. Argentina was undergoing difficult times--Peron, a fascist, though one of the gentler fascists, was gone but there was a revival of Peronism under Eva Peron. The police used tear gas to disperse the crowd protesting her, and Beatrice got some of it. Later things got worse and many of our colleagues fled to quieter Latin American countries, but that was after we had left.

Carlos shared a similar upbringing to Beatrice--both grew up in a home bakery. That of Carlos was a little brighter, a little more scrubbed, but the commonalities were many, including a baker arriving about 4:00 a.m. so the bread would be coming out of the oven about 8:00 a.m.

I stayed in communication with Carlos for years afterwards, not all of them good years for an outspoken liberal in the Argentine. But more recently we have lost touch, and I have not been able to find a phone number or address. Information connecting us again will be received with sincere thanks.

On one occasion I attended a lecture by a distinguished foreigner (I forget both the person and the subject) and seated beside me was a well-dressed, well groomed, man, past middle age. We got talking and it was not hard to see that he was very, very rich. In the Argentine that meant owning square miles of grassland. Grass means cattle, and cattle mean beef, the core of Argentine wealth. Cattle on the plains grassy plains require men on horseback to tend them, and a rich cowboy culture seems to have been common to North and to South America.

One American who has settled there and now has written a successful novel in her adopted language of Spanish, is fascinated by the "experience and sensation of national identity and belonging." In our shorter stay that is what we also felt.

Teaching in Chile, Santiago, 1963

Carmen Miro was the Director of a school offering instruction in population for Latin America functionaries and she invited me down to lecture on population during the summer of 1963. I am ashamed to admit that I remember nothing of that school or of my lectures or what I was doing during the three months I was there.