

**Robert M. Stern, Professor Emeritus of Economics and Public Policy, University of Michigan:**

I had the privilege of studying under Professor Nurkse in the PhD program in economics at Columbia University. I took his course on International Economics as well as his course on International Capital Movements in 1955–56. It was on the basis of these two courses that I decided to specialize in international economics. It is no exaggeration to say that Nurkse was a marvelous teacher. His lectures were models of clarity and rigor, and he was always open to questions both in class and during his office hours.

After completing my PhD oral exams in 1956, I was faced with the need to choose a dissertation topic. At the time, I was interested in international commodity problems and sought Nurkse's assistance in developing a dissertation proposal. I remember vividly how we discussed different topics and his suggestion that I might write on issues of US agricultural surplus disposal and trade policies. He guided me along in our periodic meetings, and he was of great help in reading and commenting on my research. It is to his credit that I was able subsequently to publish five papers based on my dissertation.

I continued to work on international commodity problems after completing my PhD, focusing especially on measuring the price responsiveness of primary commodity producers in a variety of settings, including rice and jute in India, Egyptian cotton, West African cocoa, and Malayan natural rubber. Thereafter, I concentrated on empirical research in international trade, beginning with a study of the Ricardian model of comparative advantage, using American and British data on trade and wages and productivity that built upon material covered in Nurkse's course. My research interests over the past decades have spanned both international trade and international finance, which is something that I can attribute to Nurkse's influence since his own research and publications similarly spanned both aspects of international economics.

On a more personal note, I had occasion in late 1958 to assist Nurkse in Geneva in compiling historical data on international capital flows in connection with the preparation of his *Wicksell Lectures* that he delivered in Stockholm in April 1959, shortly before his untimely death. At the time, I was a Fulbright scholar studying econometrics in Rotterdam with Henri Theil. When Nurkse asked if I could come to Geneva for a couple of weeks to work with him, I welcomed the opportunity. During my stay in Geneva, we met each day to discuss my data collection and how it would fit into the preparation of his lectures. I look back on this experience with nostalgia and warmth as one of the high points of my academic career.

After Nurkse died, Professor James Tobin of Yale University, who was on leave in Geneva and was a close friend of Nurkse, called me in Rotterdam and asked if I would be able to come to Geneva to help Mrs Nurkse organize his papers. This was a sad occasion, needless to say, and I was glad to be of assistance to Mrs Nurkse in a time of need. It turned out later that I was able to work with Gottfried Haberler of Harvard University and a close friend and associate of Nurkse going back to his time in Vienna and in the League of Nations Secretariat, in assembling Nurkse's collected papers and publishing them in 1961 as a Harvard Economic Study entitled *Equilibrium and Growth in the World Economy: Economic Essays by Ragnar Nurkse*.

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The untimely death of Ragnar Nurkse was a shock for everyone, a sudden end to his short but very successful scholarly career. Obituaries were published in the *New York Times* (7 May), *The Times* (13 May), *Vaba Eesti Sõna/Free Estonian Word* (New York, 28 May) and other papers and journals.

In 'Prof. Ragnar Nurkse. An Able Economist', Margaret Hemming (1959) wrote:

Nurkse was unusually gifted, no less as a musician than as an economist. In his early years he studied music at the Conservatoire of Music at Tallinn and later in Edinburgh under Professor Donald Tovey: he was himself a very fine pianist. An unusually modest and retiring man on public occasions, he had, nevertheless, an extraordinary gift for making and retaining friends. Through the unusual chance of birth and the vicissitudes of postwar history, Ragnar Nurkse lived and felt at home in very many countries and languages. He could speak at ease in Estonian, Russian, Swedish, English, German, and French. He was a true citizen of the world.

'Prof. Dr. Ragnar Nurkse. In memoriam' (*Vaba Eesti Sõna/Free Estonian Word* 1959):

Professor Nurkse was not just highly rated by his students but also an economist of outstanding international renown. It is evident that there has to be an underlying reason for such domestic and international fame – a reason sweeping along crowds of students, a reason differentiating one researcher from another. In brief, we can say that the reasons include in-depth knowledge of international economic theory and practice, original ideas, clear and authentic vision of problems, bold and constructive prognosis, logical presentation skills, and last but not least – his attractive personality.