

CENTREFOLD

Associate Professor Mervyn Rosser



Mervyn Rosser has now retired after nearly thirty years' service in the University of Auckland. He was appointed in 1962 to the Mathematics Department with responsibilities in the School of Engineering. A year later he and I became foundation members of the newly established Department of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics, now renamed the Department of Engineering Science. As lecturer, senior lecturer and, since 1975, Associate Professor, he has played a vital role in all aspects of the work of the department, especially in the setting up and development of the degree course in Engineering Science.

I first met Mervyn in 1944 when he was a first-year student, and was soon aware of his calibre. In 1948, he graduated M.Sc. with First Class Honours in Mathematics. This was followed by studies in music and in 1952 he graduated Mus.B., which very few have managed to combine with an M.Sc. After a year at Training College in 1948, he taught at Avondale College and Pukekohe High School. During this time he was awarded a Rotary Foundation Fellowship and spent the 1954–5 academic year at Brown University, Rhode Island, USA. In 1959 he returned to his old school, Mt. Albert Grammar, as Head of Mathematics and then, to my great delight, followed this by a return to his alma mater in 1962.

Mervyn claims that the main thrust of his work has been paedagogical. Certainly as a schoolmaster he was widely considered to be a top-ranking teacher. In the University he has enjoyed a similar acclaim. After all, a teacher who can give a lucid and tidy exposition and at the same time transmit his enthusiasm for his subject evokes the interest and respect not only of the more talented of his pupils, but also of those of somewhat lesser aptitude.

But Mervyn is by no means merely a teacher. During the late 50's and early 60's there appeared in several disciplines—engineering, commerce and military logistics among them—the first intimations of the subject now called Operations Research. Mervyn was quick to appreciate the importance of this. In 1968 he helped to mount a course in Operations Research of interest to students in all branches of engineering, to mathematicians and others,

one of the earliest of its kind in New Zealand. From these beginnings, Operations Research has grown under his guidance to be an important ingredient of the Engineering Science degree. It is interesting to record that among those who took these early courses can be counted a chief economist of a bank, a professor of Operations Research and a Minister of the Crown. Mervyn's own researches and those of his students on queueing problems and their simulation, particularly at traffic intersections, have been significant.

Mervyn's talents have not been limited to academe. He has been active in the affairs of the Operations Research Society of New Zealand. For many years he was Chairman of the Auckland Branch and was New Zealand President from 1980 to 1983; he has recently had the distinction of being made an Honorary Life Member of the Society. He has also served on the governing body of Manukau Polytechnic, for the last four years as deputy chairman. And he has maintained his interest in music. For many years he has been the enterprising choirmaster of the Mt. Albert Methodist Church presenting, in addition to regular sabbath fare, occasional performances of rather more ambitious works, for example, by Vaughan Williams, Britten, Faure and Vivaldi.

Some ten years ago, in a valedictory article on me, he wrote, "He will certainly continue to enjoy the admiration and affection of his colleagues, of his students and of his friends, and especially of those of us who have been honoured to be in all three categories". This is undoubtedly true for Mervyn. While I cannot claim to have been one of his students he has nonetheless taught me much, particularly the true meaning of loyalty, for loyalty has always been Mervyn Rosser's hallmark—loyalty to his colleagues, loyalty to his students and loyalty to his academic discipline.

Cecil Segedin