

David Lockwood 1929-2014

How is society possible? What is the basis of social order? What are the mechanisms of social change? These have always been the big questions for sociologists and Professor David Lockwood devoted his career to wrestling with them. He saw societies as systems distinguished both by their peculiar need to hang together and their occasional liability to fall apart, hence the title of his magisterial book – *Solidarity and Schism*. Hence, also, his view that, rather like the drunkard, societies just stagger along. How they manage to do so without actually falling over was for him the real challenge to sociological explanation.

Because it is uniquely expressive of these alternations of consensus and disorder, David saw the study of social stratification as sociology's unique concern, since the unequal distributions of goods and power in society offer an ever present potential for conflict. The legitimation of privilege and the regulation of wants are thus central to both society and to sociology.

David Lockwood's research was grounded in an analysis of the tensions between the claims of citizenship and the power of the market. Citizenship rights – such as the right to vote, the right to join trades unions, the right to health care and social security – are rights of equality won through political struggle. They are about all people being treated equally, about what is 'social' in 'society'. The market, on the other hand, is about inequality. It individualises us; it is about self-reliance not reliance on society. Or in the words of Lady Thatcher, 'there is no such thing as society, only families and individuals'. This balance between the claims of citizenship and the power of the market is at the very heart of modern democratic politics. David Lockwood provided us with novel and original ways of looking at these issues and their consequences for social cohesion.

Thus David Lockwood was that rare phenomenon – a theorist with a passionate interest in the real world of both today and of the past and one who paid meticulous attention to fine detail. As his wife once observed, he was an intellectual terrier. And to his colleagues, he could also be something of an intellectual terror, especially when he decided in conversation to be provocative. At such times he would make sweeping statements of both breathtaking generality and doubtful accuracy which he would then defend with a skill that would have made him a living at the Bar. It was a jest he played on others, part of the fun of intellectual life, but one with a serious purpose: to stand problems on their head and see whether new perspectives emerged. Of course, testing the intellectual mettle of colleagues was fun for him, too.

Some would say that all you needed to know about David was that he was a Yorkshireman. He was born to a working class family in Holmfirth, near Huddersfield. Of course, Holmfirth has since become famous as the setting for the long-running BBC television series *Last of the Summer Wine*. It is tempting, perhaps, to try and situate David (who after all must have been about the same age as Clegg and Compo) against that background. But whereas Holmfirth is now a smart commuter village cum TV theme park, at the time he was growing up in the 1930s it was a mill town in the middle of a depression. Although he won a scholarship to the local grammar school, at the end of the war family circumstances forced him to leave school and to take a job in a local mill. He might easily have been lost to us as a

scholar but for the fact of National Service. After serving in the Army Intelligence Corps between 1947 and 1949, he qualified for an army scholarship that took him to the London School of Economics. In 1952 he graduated with First Class Honours and proceeded to undertake a PhD. Within a year he was appointed to a lectureship.

He was one of a remarkably talented group of sociology graduate students at the LSE, all of whom were to make their mark in the discipline. According to their distinguished biographer, David Lockwood was the most impressive of them all. This was confirmed by the quality of his PhD thesis, a study of the social position and class-consciousness of male clerks, and subsequently published in 1958 as *The Blackcoated Worker*. In this book we find one of his abiding concerns, the need to understand the importance of the social status of an occupation, how people see themselves and are evaluated by others, as well as understanding more objective aspects of an occupation's position such as pay and conditions. This approach spawned a whole new sociological industry, applying his theory and methods to the study of a host of different occupations from coalminers and shipbuilders to farm workers and farmers and culminating in a major conference in 1972. The importance and continuing relevance of *The Blackcoated Worker* may be gauged from the fact that it was republished by Oxford University Press in 1989, with a substantial new postscript that offered new ideas and reflected on the changing nature of clerical work.

In 1958 he left the LSE on his appointment to a fellowship at St John's College, Cambridge and a University Lectureship in the Economics Faculty. Why economics, you may ask? The simple reason was that Cambridge did not then offer degrees in sociology, but only the odd optional sociology course within the economics degree. It was to be another ten years before Cambridge University decided, after a fierce and acrimonious debate, that sociology was a fit and proper degree subject for its students to pursue. There can be little doubt that the argument in sociology's favour was swayed by the importance, quality and undoubted scholarship of the work of David Lockwood and his colleagues at Cambridge. This culminated with one of the best-known studies ever undertaken by British sociologists, *The Affluent Worker*. As its name implies, this study examined the lives and aspirations of the new working class of post-war Britain.

The Affluent Worker was published in 1968, the year David came to Essex as Professor of Sociology. He served the University at various times as Pro Vice-Chancellor, as Dean of Social Sciences and as Head of the Sociology Department and on retirement became an Emeritus Professor. In 1995, the Sociology Department honoured him with a conference to mark his retirement. So many of the UK's most distinguished sociologists attended that it was said that if the earth had swallowed up the conference venue, most of British sociology's past, if not its future, would have gone into the abyss. In 1996, the *British Journal of Sociology* dedicated a special issue to him. However, his retirement was purely formal – he continued to be an active and influential scholar as a Visiting Professor in ISER and was involved in the development of a new government social classification, the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification.

Nor is it any surprise that the quality of Professor Lockwood's scholarship brought him many honours. In 1976 he was elected to a Fellowship of the British Academy

and in 1990 to a Fellowship of the Academia Europea. In 1998, he was awarded a CBE for his contributions to sociology and he had honorary degrees from Cambridge as well as Essex.

So, a working class, Yorkshire background, born into the depression of the 1930s, growing up during the Second World War and one of the first beneficiaries of the Welfare State created by the post-war Labour Government – all these were factors in shaping his politics and his scholarship and especially his keen awareness of the importance of citizenship in offering opportunity and security and of the powers ranged against it. But there are two other important observations I should make about David because they also tell us something of his pedigree.

First, he was married for almost sixty years to another distinguished academic, the social historian Leonore Davidoff. Their happy relationship was a vital ingredient of David's success. My second observation concerns David's love of good company and his ability to communicate with people from all walks of life. Those who knew him only as an acquaintance may have found him somewhat reserved. They may even have seen him as a typical taciturn Yorkshireman. In fact, he was a very sociable person with a rare ability to engage people on their own level, whatever that may be, and to put them at their ease. But he was also endearingly diffident and shy so that he was only truly gregarious with his family and closest friends. With them he was relaxed, lively, engaged, witty, affectionate and capable of great kindness.

David Lockwood served both the discipline of sociology and the University of Essex with great distinction. Unlike many social scientists today, the latest intellectual fads and fashions did not sway him, nor did he treat sociology as an amateur form of philosophy. Being a modest person, it was no surprise that he was gently sceptical about what sociology can achieve; but, being committed to his subject, he was extremely enthusiastic about its potential to teach us about the world in which we live.

We who were his colleagues are proud of his achievements and grateful to him for his service and for his friendship.

David Rose
Emeritus Professor of Sociology, ISER