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Editorial

In memory of Chris Freeman
Founding Editor of *Research Policy*, 1971–2003

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it." (Marx, 1845)

This issue of *Research Policy* (RP) is dedicated to the memory of Professor Christopher Freeman, who founded the journal 40 years ago. In the months immediately following his death on 16 August 2010, aged 88, there were discussions among the RP Editors and others about the most appropriate way to mark his passing. By that time, obituaries in five British newspapers (The Times, The Financial Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian and The Independent) had already paid tribute to the many facets and stages of his life.[1] We were also aware that further tributes of this type were planned in other academic journals.[2] It was therefore decided that *Research Policy* would instead publish a substantial article reviewing and setting in context his various roles in contributing to the emerging field of innovation studies. Jan Fagerberg kindly offered to take the lead in compiling this tribute (Fagerberg et al., in this issue).

This was no mean task to take on. Arguably Chris Freeman did as much as anyone to create the research field of innovation studies, and he will be remembered by innovation scholars and others around the world for his outstanding contributions to developing our understanding of the innovation process.[3] For Freeman, however, the purpose of research was not just to understand the world but to change it. In particular, he was passionate in his belief that technology and innovation could make the world a better place, and that the 'dismal science' of economics could be transformed into 'the economics of hope' (Freeman, 1992). In pursuing these aims, he opened up major new areas of research in evolutionary economics, the institutional analysis of technological change, and the industrial economics of innovation.

Science, technology and innovation are now universally recognised as vital to economic and social development. Back in the 1950s, however, they were but a footnote in economics textbooks. Virtually all economists save Joseph Schumpeter regarded technology as an 'exogenous' factor that played a peripheral role in markets and growth. Building on the economic research of Schumpeter and drawing upon a range of other social sciences, Chris Freeman and his colleagues demonstrated the importance of research and development (R&D) and of innovation to economic development, and began to develop our understanding of the interactions between science, technology, innovation and economic growth. His personal contributions in these areas were subsequently reflected in the award of five honorary doctorates as well as the Bernal Prize and the Schumpeter Prize.

The paper by Fagerberg et al. (in this issue) attempts to identify and synthesise these intellectual contributions to the emerging field of innovation studies. Yet for a new field of research to emerge, one needs more than important intellectual advances with respect to concepts, methodologies, data, forms of analysis and, in due course perhaps, models and theories; one also needs to develop a number of institutions. These include specialist research groups dedicated to the emerging field, postgraduate training programmes for new students, networks of interested researchers (some informal, others more formal), new journals, and conferences and other places where those attracted to work in the field can come together. As highlighted in the following paper, Freeman played a unique role as a builder of these kinds of institution in the emergence and development of innovation studies (or science policy research, as it was often termed in the early decades).

Thus, Freeman was both an intellectual pioneer and an institutional entrepreneur. The several thousand researchers now working in the field of innovation studies will be forever in his debt. Yet Chris Freeman will be remembered first and foremost as an individual. This was demonstrated by the great warmth expressed in a flood of personal reminiscences following his death last year.[4] The paper by Jan Fagerberg and colleagues tries to convey something

[1] Links to these can be found at http://www.freemanchris.org/ (accessed on 11.05.2011).

[2] As later published, these included tributes by Giovanni Dosi in *Science and Public Policy* (Dosi, 2010), by Luc Soete and Bart Verspagen in the *African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development* (Soete and Verspagen, 2010), and by Mammo Muchie in *Innovation and Development* (Muchie, 2011).

[3] Perhaps appropriately for someone who gave so much emphasis to the development and use of empirical evidence in this field, this assertion about Chris Freeman is now supported by bibliometric analysis. A forthcoming paper in this journal (Fagerberg et al., forthcoming) places Freeman among the three or so most influential figures in the development of the field.

[4] Many of these reminiscences can be found at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/spru/about/chris (accessed on 11.05.2011). In addition Luc Soete and Bart Verspagen have published personal memoirs about Chris on the UNU-MERIT website – see http://www.merit.unu.edu/archive/docs/hl/201009_201008_ChrisFreeman_final.pdf

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of the flavour of Chris Freeman the individual. Yet it necessarily touches on only selected aspects – in particular his aims, values and norms, and how these, along with those of other pioneers, played a crucial part in shaping the culture of innovation studies in which researchers now operate. Because some younger readers of *Research Policy* may be less familiar with the wider picture of Chris Freeman the individual, we provide a few more glimpses here.

Born in Sheffield in 1921, Chris Freeman's Yorkshire roots were reflected in his life-long support for Sheffield Wednesday Football Club and Yorkshire Cricket Club as well as his love of nature, especially birds. Growing up in the depression of the 1930s and influenced by the economic and social circumstances of the time, he joined the Communist Party, although he subsequently left it following the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. After attending the progressive Abbotsholme School in Staffordshire, he won a place at the London School of Economics, which was evacuated to Cambridge shortly after the onset of war. There, he attended lectures by Keynes and Laski among others. During the War, he served in the army, enjoying a posting to Balmoral to protect the royal family before joining an anti-tank unit in Normandy. He later completed his studies at the LSE, worked briefly for the Post Office, and then joined the London Export Group, helping to find markets in the UK for Soviet and Chinese products.

In 1959 he was recruited by the National Institute of Social and Economic Research in London to work on a series of projects studying innovation in different industrial sectors. This research continued and expanded when he moved to the University of Sussex in 1966 as the founding Director of the Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU). Now, after a research career spanning fifty years, he is remembered as a determined and rigorous scholar, as a deep thinker with an eye for detail, as an individual of principle and integrity, and as someone with the utmost humanity and compassion.

Many people also recall him as an incredibly inspiring lecturer, of a type now sadly almost extinct in an age of soporific Powerpoint presentations. Without notes, he was able to speak fluently and to enthral his audience (as a video of his 2001 lecture for the Vega Science Trust amply attests[5]). When asked by a student how he became such a good lecturer, he explained that his first public talk had been to soldiers about landmines, where he clearly had to do his utmost to keep his audience interested! He had another remarkable skill – that of synthesis; at conferences, he would often sit quietly until near then end, when he would succinctly synthesise and clarify the main points to emerge from previous presentations and discussion. At this, everyone around would immediately begin taking notes.

Perhaps the most widely appreciated of his personal qualities as a scholar was that he was one of the most intellectually generous researchers, always trying to pass the credit for a new insight or some other contribution to someone else, preferably someone junior. As a striking example, he persistently tried over many years to pass to his Danish colleague, Bengt-Åke Lundvall, the credit for coming up with the notion of the 'national system of innovation', one of the most important concepts to emerge in the field of innovation studies over the last 25 years.[6] But this was just the public tip of a very large iceberg of similar generosity to a host of colleagues and students. Consequently, not only was Freeman one of the most admired of social scientists in the second half of the 20th Century, he was also one of the best liked.

A tribute from Jan Fagerberg aptly sums up his influence on others:

> *Ever since I had my first encounter with him nearly thirty years ago, meeting him always left me with more energy and optimism with respect to what I and my collaborators could accomplish. In later years, when he couldn't travel any more and we did not see each other so often, even thinking about him had much of the same effect. I have asked myself why this was the case. The simplest answer, I think, was that he cared.*

For the many people who had the good fortune to know him in person, that influence will surely endure for many years to come.

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(accessed on 11.05.2011), and Luc Soete also elaborated on his own personal recollections of *Chris Freeman: the Person* in Soete (2010).

[5] This can be viewed at http://vega.org.uk/video/programme/86 (accessed on 11.05.2011).

[6] In what must be one of the most striking examples of academic competition to disown intellectual priority, Lundvall firmly resisted Freeman's persistence – probably in the end wearing Chris down and winning this particular (and perhaps unique?) instance of academic 'dis-competition' – see Lundvall (2004).