

Robert L. Raimon

September 29, 1923 — August 31, 1995

Robert L. Raimon is remembered by his colleagues and the students he taught at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations as a labor economist whose policy interests and surpassing intellect combined to provoke both thought and argument. Students who took his courses regarded them as quite demanding, yet he received high marks from them for his stimulation of independent thought, the lucidity of his exposition, and his refined sense of humor. One student, who later became a professor of economics himself, regarded Bob as “... a wonderful teacher, both caring and fair.” Another has the following memory:

His classes, as I remember them, had a deceptively simple format. They would typically begin with Bob talking about a current issue in the news that related to the labor market. . . . Somehow, once Bob had formulated the issue, the remainder of the next hour would pass rapidly, painlessly and, in some cases even joyfully, as the class debated among themselves and with Bob’s alternative views about the effectiveness of public policies. . . . Only after the session was over was it apparent that the discussion had been used to teach principles of economics in general and labor economics in particular. . . . Anyone who has ever tried to teach will recognize the remarkable accomplishment of making students active participants in the learning process rather than recipients of revealed truth.

Like many of his generation, Bob’s undergraduate education, which began at Brooklyn College in 1941, was interrupted by World War II. He suffered a near-fatal neck wound during combat in the Pacific, but was able to finish his Bachelor of Science degree at Columbia by 1947. He immediately enrolled as a graduate student in the recently-opened School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell, and he never left. His Ph.D. degree was awarded in 1951, the year of his engagement as an Assistant Professor by the School, and he immediately assumed primary responsibility for teaching required courses in labor economics, economic security, and corporate finance. He also taught several intermediate and advanced courses and seminars, and was often called upon to conduct courses in the School’s off-campus programs (an activity he valued as a source of “real world” case materials for his on-campus courses).

During the 1950s and 1960s, when the field of labor economics was moving from an institutional focus to a more theoretical one—and from case studies to more general tests of hypotheses—Bob’s works were among those that provided a “bridge.” His analyses of wage data and wage dispersion, for example, combined a theorist’s rigor with the institutionalist’s attention to real-world detail—a combination that was then quite rare but has recently become prominent. Similarly, he also wrote on such other now-fashionable topics as labor-management cooperation, international competition, and migration flows. Not surprisingly, his skills as an applied economist

were in demand by the private and public sectors, and he produced reports on railroad ratemaking, a shorter workweek in automobile manufacturing, plant location decisions, and the future of oil prices.

Sadly, Bob's formal career was ended by an automobile accident in 1969 that left him paralyzed below the waist. Unable to maintain both his required regimen of exercise and his high standards of teaching, research, and service to the University, Bob reluctantly chose to retire in 1974. After his appointment as Professor Emeritus, he served the School until 1989 as a member of the editorial board of the *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*.

Despite his premature retirement, Bob continued to be an epitome of the intellectual. He read both widely and deeply, was tireless in his quest for information, eager for debate, and dogged in his demand for logical argument on the part of himself and anyone brave (or foolish) enough to take an opposing view. He knew good research—and a good research topic—when he saw it, and he remained invaluable as a critic and as a source of ideas to his colleagues until his death.

For those who knew him, Bob will be remembered most poignantly for his strength: most assuredly for the strength of his intellect, but perhaps more dominantly for the strength of character that permitted him to cope with extreme adversity, the strength of idealism that fueled his interest in public policy, and the strength of love and concern for his children, Daniel, Eve, Martha, David and Jon Charles.

Ronald Ehrenberg, John Windmuller, Robert Smith