

## The Norwegian national committee for evaluation of applications for promotion to the rank of professor of economics in 2006

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This is the report of the Norwegian national committee established to evaluate applicants for promotion to the rank of full professor in economics. The application deadline was Sept. 15, 2006. The undersigned committee was appointed by the board of the School of Social Sciences at the University of Bergen, on behalf of the Norwegian Council for Higher Education. The members of the committee have been: Professor Anders Björklund, Stockholm University, Professor Jan Tore Klovland, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration and Professor Gaute Torsvik, University of Bergen. Gaute Torsvik has administrated the work. We have evaluated five applicants:

Dr. Polit Torberg Falch  
Dr. oecon Hans K. Hvide  
Dr. polit Kai Leitemo  
Dr. ing Rune Skarstein  
Dr. polit Kjell Vaage

To become a professor in economics does not entail teaching or administrative experience above the skills that are required to hold a position as an associate professor (*førsteamanuensis*) in economics. Since all applicants already are associate professors in economics they demonstrate sufficient teaching and administrative skills to work as a professor in economics. Hence, our evaluation is based only on the scientific production of the applicants.

In our evaluation of the candidates, we rely on the guidelines developed by the 2003 committee, headed by Professor Kjell Erik Lommerud. In that report there is a careful and thoughtful discussion of the quantity and quality of scientific work required in order to be considered competent for a professorship in economics. It concludes that one should expect a production of at least 8 – 12 academic papers that are published - or publishable – in international peer-reviewed journals of good quality. Adjusting for co-authors one should expect the number of papers to lay around the lower of these numbers. Some of the work should be published (or publishable) in journals that rank among the top 30-40 economics journals. A certain level of broadness in themes and techniques is also required in order to qualify as a professor.

## RUNE SKARSTEIN

Rune Skarstein is born in 1940. He has a PhD degree (Dr Ing) from the The Norwegian Institute of Technology in Trondheim. His thesis dates from 1974 and is titled: 'Attempt at a critique of the neoclassical theory of value and capital'. Skarstein is employed as an associate professor at the Department of Economics of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim.

Skarstein has an extensive academic production record comprising books, journal articles, chapters in anthologies, books and festschrifts, commissioned reports and popular science articles. His main contributions fall within the areas of development economics, but he has also published on various topics within macroeconomic theory, growth theory as well as economic systems.

### Development economics

The list of enclosed works within this field includes one book, five journal articles and three book chapters:

- 1 *Development Theory - A guide to some unfashionable perspectives*, Oxford University Press, 1997.
- 2 Short-period macroeconomic aspects of foreign aid (with Amit Bhaduri), *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 1996
- 3 Effective demand and the terms of trade in a dual economy - A Kaldorian perspective (with Amit Bhaduri), *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 2003
- 4 Economic liberalization and smallholder productivity in Tanzania - From promised success to real failure, 1985-1998, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 2005.
- 5 Free trade: a dead end for underdeveloped economies, *Review of Political Economy*, forthcoming 2006/2007
- 6 Some notes on agricultural backwardness in Tanzania (with Kjell J. Havnevik), *Journal of Social Studies*, 1983.
- 7 Growth and crisis of the industrial sector, in J. Boesen et al (eds.): *Tanzania - Crisis and struggle for survival*, Uppsala, 1986.
- 8 On Kalecki's contribution to development economics, in Z. Sadowski and A. Szeworski (eds.): *Kalecki's Economics Today*, Routledge, 2004.
- 9 The dual role of the terms of trade: The Indian experience of agriculture-industry interaction, 1950-2001 (with Amit Bhaduri and Ashok Parikh), in K. L. Krishna (ed.): *A Volume in Honour of Professor K. N. Raj*, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

The contributions range from discussions of general issues in development economics (1, 2, 3, 5) and the history of economic thought (8) to applied papers on the economies of Tanzania and India (4, 6, 7, 9).

In articles (2) and (3) (co-authored with Amit Bhaduri) the central theme is *effective demand* within developing economies. In (2) it is argued that foreign aid needs to be accompanied by expansionary domestic demand policy to be effective; in (3) the problem of effective demand within a dual economy model is analyzed. This analysis seems to rest on a foundation that adjustment through price mechanisms is not feasible in such economies. Article 5 argues that protection of the industrial sector in developing economies is desirable and that free trade would

be harmful for such economies in general, rejecting the relevance of the neoclassical concept of comparative advantage. While much serious debate among economists on topics related to the infant industry argument has taken place over many years, most economists would probably regard the arguments put forward in this paper as controversial and rather unconvincing. A number of countries have experimented with import substitution over the past fifty years, but there seem to be few examples of success stories, particularly among African countries.

Several papers deal with the macroeconomic and industrial experiences of developing economies, notably Tanzania (4, 6, 7). These articles contain much useful empirical material on this economy, which is well presented, but the interpretation of developing features is often very categoric. In article 9 modern time series methodology is applied to data from India on industrial output, agricultural output and the terms of trade to examine the relationships between these variables. The authors conclude that demand effects are most important for the long-term movements in the terms of trade. It is problematic though, as the authors do realize, to draw any firm conclusions from such a stylized empirical model.

### Critique of neoclassical theory and economic systems

- 10 Sosialøkonomiens elendighet - Elementer til en marxistisk forklaring og kritikk av borgerlig økonomi (chapters 9 and 10), Pax Forlag, 1976.
- 11 Economic model-time and historical time, in Jan Bohlin et al. (eds.): *Samhällsvetenskap, ekonomi och historia - Festskrift til Lars Herlitz*, Göteborg, 1989.
- 12 The shaky supply side - On neoclassical 'anomalies' in macroeconomic theory, *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro Quarterly Review*, 1992.
- 13 Facts and policies of developed countries: Some social democratic experiences from Norway, *Metroeconomica*, 1982.
- 14 Økonomi på en annen måte - Makt og penger fra europeisk føydalisme til globalisert kapitalisme, Abstract Forlag, 2007

A main theme of the book (10) and the articles (11) and (12) is a discussion of objectionable features of neoclassical growth models and macroeconomic theory. In particular, issues relating to the well-known 'capital controversy' is a key theme in the fairly large work effort represented by (10). This topic once engendered much heated debate, but now it seems to be of most interest from the point of view of the history of economic thought. The articles (13) and (14) represent two selected examples of Skarstein's many popularized economic writings. None of the five works cited above can be said to represent any significant contributions to the core of economic science as it is defined at the present.

### Conclusion

Rune Skarstein has been a prolific writer in economics over the past thirty years. The volume of his academic production is large, but, unfortunately, there are few examples of articles published in international peer-reviewed journals of high quality. The only journal included in a comprehensive ranking list (Kalaitzidakis *et al* in the *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 2003) in which Skarstein has published his work (two articles written jointly with Amit Bhaduri) is *Cambridge*

*Journal of Economics*. This journal is ranked as number 77 among 159 journals. The bulk of his academic writings is thus published in journals with a limited readership or as books or book chapters. Publication in good journals with a reasonably high impact factor forms a crucial criterion in assessing competency for a professorship. Skarstein's academic contributions fail to meet this criterion. We therefore conclude unanimously that Runc Skarstein is not qualified for promotion to a position as professor in economics.

To the Faculty of social sciences,  
The University of Bergen

## Comment on the assessment of my application for promotion to professorship

My comment to the committee's work is, in essence, that it has applied a wrong mode of treatment ("feil saksbehandling"). There are two aspects of the wrong mode of treatment. First, I will argue that the committee's use of assessment criteria is not in accordance with "established international or national standards", as required in the government regulation. Second, the committee has not made an assessment "on the basis of documented scientific competence", which is also required by the government regulation.

### 1. The committee's assessment fails to use established assessment standards

The Norwegian government regulation states that, the criterion for professorship is "scientific level in accordance with established international or national standards" [§1-2 (1)], and that the assessment "shall take place on the basis of documented scientific or artistic competence" [§2-1 (5a)].

This regulation is very general. However, in my view, the committee's work is neither in accordance with the regulation nor with established procedures for rational and consistent mode of treatment.

In its general introduction, the committee states its own opinion on the required scientific level (cf. §1-2 above):

"In our evaluation of the candidates we rely on the guidelines developed by the 2003 committee, headed by professor Kjell Erik Lommerud. In that report there is a careful and thoughtful discussion of the quantity and quality of scientific work required in order to be considered competent for a professorship in economics. It concludes that one should expect a production of at least 8–12 academic papers that are published – or publishable – in international peer-reviewed journals of good quality. Adjusting for co-authors one should expect the number of papers to lay around the lower of these numbers. Some of the work should be published (or publishable) in journals that rank among the top 30-40 economics journals. A certain level of broadness in themes and techniques is also required in order to qualify as a professor."

This appears to imply making the requirements for competence as professor more rigorous. Many professors of economics in Norway would not have satisfied these requirements when they were considered competent for their professorships. As a consequence, the requirements are not consistent with the government regulation's §1-2, which refers to "*established*" standards.

To make things worse, in the committee's assessment of my competence, professor Lommerud's statement has been twisted: "The volume of his academic production is large,

but, unfortunately there are few examples of articles published in international peer-reviewed journals of high quality”. “Journals of good quality” has been turned into “journals of high quality”, and – obviously – books or chapters in books (which are also peer-reviewed) do not count at all. In my view, this clearly represents a wrong mode of treatment.

For assessing the “quality” of my work, the committee uses – without any reservation – a ranking of journals based on an article on the frequency of citations in economic journals, published by Kalaizidakis et al. in the *Journal of the European Economic Association* (JEEA), December 2003. The committee writes that, “The only journal included in the comprehensive ranking list ... in which Skarstein has published his work (two articles written jointly with Amit Bhaduri) is *Cambridge Journal of Economics* (CJE). This journal is ranked as number 77 among 159 journals.” Apparently, the intention of the editors of this special issue of JEEA was not that the ranking list should be used in the manner the committee has used it. The editors write (p. 1248)::

”This ranking ... would risk being interpreted as one endorsed by the European Economic Association. It was never the objective of this EEA project to produce a single unambiguous ranking. Rather, it is to be hoped that the papers presented here will encourage debate and stimulate further research, both on the methodology of rankings themselves and on wider issues such as the continuing gap between European and American economics departments.”

As we all know, big economic journals with many articles and many subscribers, which are often also the journals of economists’ associations, are more frequently cited than smaller journals. Moreover, many smaller journals are not mainstream, but represent heterodox challenges to mainstream economics. Here, as in many other cases, quantity is not necessarily a measure of quality. One of my submitted articles was published in the *BNL Quarterly Review*, which is not on the Kalaizidakis et al. ranking list. Several eminent economists, such as Angus Maddison, A.P. Thirlwall, Luigi Pasinetti and Joseph Steindl, have published some of their most important articles in that journal, which is of course rigorously peer-reviewed. How can anybody argue that *BNL Quarterly Review* is not of “high quality”? The same question is relevant with regard to the *Review of Political Economy*, *Metroeconomica* and *The Journal of Agrarian Change*, where I have also published articles.

It is in the nature of things that journals of mainstream economics are much more frequently cited than journals of heterodox economics. That is what the ranking list of Kalaizidakis et al. actually shows. Among heterodox journals, CJE is highest up on their list (no. 77), followed by *Journal of Post-Keynesian Economics* (no. 113) and *Journal of Evolutionary Economics* (no. 117). As we could expect, *Feminist Economics* does not appear among the 159 journals on the list. Such a ranking list can be made only on the presumption that there is only one paradigm or school within economics. That presumption is wrong. One consequence of a mechanical use of the list by Kalaizidakis et al., will be that no heterodox economist, irrespective of qualifications, can become a professor of economics in Norway. Such a selection practice is bound to lead to less scientific pluralism and less competition between contesting paradigms and schools within economics.

Let me add that also journals covering special fields, will – of course – be losers in this kind of ranking game. For example, *Ecological Economics* is ranked no. 83, *Energy Economics* is no. 138, and *Developing Economies* no. 100.

It should also be noted that the mainstream journals have become increasingly less open to heterodox articles in the last thirty years. That was one reason why *Cambridge Journal of Economics* was established (as an “alternative” to the *Economic Journal*) in England and journals such as *Journal of Post-Keynesian Economics* and *Review of Political Economy* (as “alternatives” to the *American Economic Review*) in the United States. The ranking list method implies a sort of dictatorship of the mainstream paradigm within economics.

I would not have raised this criticism if the committee had used the ranking list with reservations, as only one of several other indicators, in addition to assessing the contents of the work I had submitted.

## 2. No real assessment of my work

The committee does not make any real assessment of my submitted work. They make only a purely formal judgement based only on upon where the publications have appeared. There is no substantial evaluation of the scientific quality of the publications. The submitted books are not considered at all. In this manner, the committee clearly misuses bibliometric tools which were never intended to be used in this manner.

## 3. Summary

1. The committee departs from the national (probably also international) tradition with regard to the general requirements for professorship.
2. To make things even worse, the committee practices a seriously wrong mode of treatment by making the assessment criteria even more rigorous when assessing my competence.
3. The committee uses journal ranking and impact factor indicators in an unscientific manner.
4. Through its ranking of journals and its understanding of “the core of economic science”, the committee privileges mainstream economics and discriminates against heterodox economics.
5. The committee does not make any real assessment of my submitted publications, as required by the government regulation §2-1 (5a).

Trondheim, 22 October 2007  
Rune Skarstein

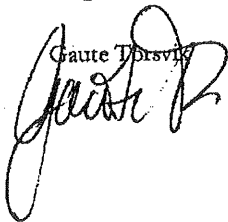
**Answer to Rune Skarstein's comment on our evaluation report.**

In our assessment of applicants for promotion to professorships in economics, we concluded that Rune Skarstein did not qualify. As a response to our report Skarstein has objected that we applied a wrong mode of treatment since we (i) did not evaluate his competence according to "established international or national standards" and (ii) did not make an assessment "on the basis of documented scientific competence". We disagree with these assertions.

Skarstein's first objection is that the standards we applied were more rigorous than established practice. As we pointed out in the introduction, we applied the same standards as the 2003 committee, headed by Professor Kjell Erik Lommerud. The qualification standards set by the 2005 committee, headed by Professor Nils-Henrik M. von der Fehr, were more demanding. In their introductory remarks they stated that to be qualified for a professorship in economics an applicant ought to have 12 papers published in "well regarded international peer-reviewed journals". As a working definition of this class of journals the committee included all journals that are comprised by the comprehensive list of journals published in *Journal of the European Economic Association (JEEA)*, December 2003. The 2005 committee also required that at least one paper should be published in a top rank journal. The standards we applied in our evaluation of applicants were somewhat more lenient than this, more in line with the 2003 committee.

Skarstein's second objection is that we did not assess his scientific contributions on an independent basis. This is not correct. There is of course an element of counting publications in highly ranked journals in an evaluation process. But we have also made an attempt to evaluate the scientific merits of the research that is submitted. According to our best judgement Skarstein has not published the required amount of research of sufficiently high quality to qualify for a professorship in economics. This is a unanimous judgement of the committee.

Bergen, 02.11.07

Gaute Torsvik  


Jan Tore Klovland

Anders Björklund