

Obituary: Professor Alec Rodger, 1907-1982

Many Australian psychologists will be sorry to learn that Alec Rodger died in London on 15 February 1982 at the age of 74. He was Reader in Psychology at Birkbeck College in the University of London from 1948 to 1960, and then Professor of Occupational Psychology until he retired in 1975 and was made Professor Emeritus.

Alec Rodger had a profound influence on British psychology for some forty years. After reading psychology at Cambridge, he joined the National Institute of Industrial Psychology in London and soon became Head of its Vocational Guidance Department. During World War Two he worked in the War Office and then in the Admiralty, and he made tremendous efforts to demonstrate to the Mandarins of Whitehall that psychologists can play an important part in the work of Government Departments. In the end he became the first member of the Civil Service Psychologist Class, he rose to Senior Principal Psychologist in the Admiralty, and, after leaving, his continuing advice to the Civil Service Commission led to an increasing number and diversity of positions for psychologists.

At Birkbeck College, Alec Rodger developed undergraduate and then postgraduate courses in occupational psychology, and he continued to seize and to create every opportunity he could for his staff and his students. For much of his time he also worked strenuously for The British Psychological Society. He was Honorary General Secretary for a very long period, and President in 1957-58 when his patience and trustworthiness helped to heal some serious wounds. To make sure that he had enough to do, he also edited *Occupational Psychology* from 1946 to 1968, and what began as a publication of mainly local interest became a journal of international stature.

Although he never managed to visit Australia, Alec Rodger had an important indirect influence upon psychology here. A good many of his students have worked in this country and, perhaps as a result, our own occupational psychology has some distinctly Birkbeckian characteristics. It tends to be pragmatic rather than theoretical, generalist rather than specialist, and more appreciated in industry and government than in academia. There have been arguments here, as in Britain, about the advantages and disadvantages of this sort of applied psychology: but while jobs are so difficult to find there is much to be said for producing psychologists, of whatever variety, who are all-rounders and capable of contributing effectively in a wide range of situations. There is also much to be said for helping younger psychologists, as Alec Rodger did so superbly, to conduct their work in such a way that it is "scientifically sound, administratively convenient, and politically defensible".

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