

In Memoriam – William D. Irvine, written by Alban Bargain, May 17, 2021

Bill (as he was known by his friends and students) often jokingly said that he had only worked "one job in his entire life", i.e., as history professor at York (including many years at Glendon College). He did, however, tell me of his experience working in a kibbutz in early 1970s Israel. He also had an inkling at least of what manual work entailed, coming from Trail, a small mining town in the interior of British Columbia. From there, he went on to get his BA (Honours) at UBC, after which he pursued his doctorate at Princeton University, where he studied under the supervision of Arno Mayer.

After obtaining his PhD, Bill was hired at Glendon College to teach American history, though he had been trained as a Europeanist. Soon, however, he began teaching courses in modern European history and global history. Sometime in the 1990s, Bill moved to Keele campus, where he taught many courses with the department of social and political thought and, subsequently, history, until his retirement in the spring of 2011.

Bill Irvine was also a well-respected scholar. In addition to many articles, he published three books, all of which were influential in the field of French history on both sides of the Atlantic. His first book, *French Conservatism in Crisis*, an adaptation of his PhD dissertation, is still cited in works on the Republican Federation (a now defunct French conservative party) and, more generally, interwar France. His second monograph, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered*, is, in my view, his magnum opus. It revisits a decisive, controversial moment in French history and made a few waves in France by going against the narrative on the career and goals of general Georges Boulanger, whose popularity as Minister of War could have enabled him to stage a successful coup in late-1880s France. Bill's final work, *Between Justice and Politics: The Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*, also caused a bit of a stir among some French scholars. I remember Bill delighting in one unfairly contemptuous review written by a bitter scholar. He thoroughly enjoyed the ludic aspects of the historian's craft, and often initiated a debate with the following disclaimer/epigraph: "Irvine's the name, history's the game."

To me, Bill was not just a fantastic thesis supervisor and a first-class scholar, but also an incredibly kind, selfless man. He also had a great sense of humour. We would still see each other long after my defence (in 2012) and had a few good laughs (usually at the expense of his cats [Max and Milly]) while drinking beer in his backyard or his living room. Bill was also a great lecturer, and I still remember the chuckles every time he rolled the "R" in "Rrrrrussia" and a hall packed with 500 students bursting out laughing when he referred to Khrushchev's face as one "only a mother could love". I've also heard accounts of Bill engaging in office chair races down York Hall's hallway (after hours, that goes without saying). A witness recalled him getting in gear and propelling the chair at full speed with his long "spider legs".

If you want to send messages of condolence to his family, please email Geoff Read at gread4@huron.uwo.ca.