

PRESENTATION OF AN INSTITUTE GOLD MEDAL TO PROFESSOR BERNARD BENJAMIN

[The Institute of Actuaries, 27 October 1975]

The President (Mr G. V. Bayley): The last time a Gold Medal was awarded at the Institute was in 1968 when the then President, Dr Bernard Benjamin, presented one to Frank Redington. He can have no possible excuse, therefore, for failing to be aware of its significance now! Benjamin's short address on that occasion still echoes in the minds of those of us who were fortunate to be present, and I hope that he too will remember some of the gracious things he said then.

The Gold Medal is presented in honour of actuarial work of pre-eminent importance. I have to try to convey to the meeting something of the magnitude of what Professor Benjamin has accomplished. My researches may well be incomplete, but I have counted authorship or joint authorship of 6 books, 7 papers in *J.I.A.*, 9 papers in *J.R.S.S.* and his Presidential Addresses to the Institute and the Royal Statistical Society. By domestic standards that itself is prodigious, but there is a lot more. There is a list of nearly 100 contributions in the pages of the *Lancet*, the *British Medical Journal*, and the publications of many other bodies. Those papers include medical, statistical and demographic studies, computer usage and operational research; the mind boggles at the range and compass of his thought and pen.

Why has he written so much? I put the question to one of our senior members, and he had no doubt about the reason---the very high regard for him in a wide variety of disciplines that has led to requests to contribute to all manner of problems and discussions, ranging from fertility to mortality, theoretical to applied statistics, sport to medicine, from town planning to advertising. It adds up to an unprecedented record of one particular actuary's capacity to contribute something of value in a wide variety of endeavours and to earn a truly international reputation.

In meetings and debate his contributions are just as impressive, his mind always alert to the judgments of those who have made a thorough study, quick to distinguish the superficial, and delivered with an adroitness that never offends. In short, a truly professional person.

During his career Benjamin became successively Chief Statistician in the General Register Office, Director of Statistics in the Ministry of Health, Director of Research and Intelligence of the Greater London Council and Director of Studies for Statistics at the Civil Service College. Apart from his Presidency of this Institute, of the Royal Statistical Society, and of the International Association of Municipal Statisticians, he has also been Secretary-General of the International Union for Scientific Study of Population, Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Second World Population Conference in Belgrade, a

Vice-President of the International Statistical Institute and Chairman of the Standing Committee of Statistics Users. He was appointed Honorary Consultant in Medical Statistics to the Army, and he has even found time to be Chairman of our Students' Society.

After all that, there is something peculiarly symbolic about Bernard Benjamin's latest and, indeed, major contribution to the profession—as Professor of Actuarial Science at the City University, London. It is the first chair of actuarial science at an English university and is a fitting culmination to a career studded with achievement and distinction. The rapidly mounting lists for places on his course at City University tell their own story.

I have been too close to him in recent years to form a detached impression of his qualities. I do know what a powerful friend and counsellor he has been to his four succeeding Presidents; their admiration for and indebtedness to him are unanimous.

By now, I shall at least have convinced members of the impossibility of doing justice to one of the giants of our profession. The only way to do so is the way Council has determined, namely to award the rare distinction of a Gold Medal. To convey it makes this moment, without doubt, the happiest I have personally enjoyed during my Presidency.

Professor B. Benjamin: When the President first told me of the award I did not know what to say. After listening to him this evening I am even less aware of what to say except to confess to a mixture of pride and humility. It is an occasion which I will always remember, although I am not much given to living on memories: I regard myself as a beginner rather than as an ender.

I thank the Institute for having asked my wife and daughters to be present. It gives me a chance to say a public 'Thank you' to my wife for making so much possible. The Medal should be hers, by rights, but even in Women's Year these rights are not observed.

When the President told me of the award the first thought that struck me was: 'What on earth is the other surviving recipient going to think?', because although devaluation of currency is very common, this might be going rather far. I need not have worried, however; within a few hours of the public announcement I received a typically charming note from Frank Redington suggesting that we should embark together on a double act entitled 'The Golden Oldies'.

I regret that there is no official representation from the City University, owing to a clash of events. When I first made contact with the City University I did not think a great deal of it, but I have learnt rather to like it. It is developing into a very good university, and I appreciate the most generous support I have been given over the last two years. The School of Actuarial Studies at the City University could not have been established without teamwork, and I want particularly to thank Stephen Haberman, my first lecturer, for his unstinted help. Everyone can imagine how much pleasure it gives me that Stephen Haberman is also to receive an award (the Burn Prize) this evening. Jim Pegler,

my successor, has thrown himself with great zeal into the development of the School, from which I am sure there will be in the future a stream of very fine actuaries.

I thank the Institute for the great honour they do me. From the profession I have had ineffable pleasure, far in excess of any contribution I have made. Such pleasure does not come from asking; it comes without asking. I believe it comes from utter commitment: such commitment is my way of life, and it has been without any effort. My constant surprise and delight is to find that the rest of the profession is so generous to me.