In memory of Gilles Dostaler

Gilles Dostaler, Keynes scholar, bon vivant, professor of economic science at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and member of research centres at the Universities of Paris-1, Paris-8, and Toulouse, passed away on 26 February 2011. Sustained by his partner Marielle Cauchy, Gilles remained active in research and in life to the very end of his battle with cancer: in the last week before his death, we exchanged e-mails about a CEA (Canadian Economics Association) session we were organizing to mark the 75th anniversary of the publication of Keynes’s General Theory. An internationally-renowned economist and historian of economic thought, Gilles Dostaler published ten books, a dozen edited books, more than 30 journal articles, more than 30 papers in edited volumes, and 16 published interviews (three of them in Japanese newspapers), and was on the editorial boards of seven journals – and was as much at home waist-deep in a salmon stream in Gaspé as in a library.

After teaching mathematics at Collège Jean-de-Brebeuf and graduating from McGill University (MA in economics, 1972) and the Université de Paris-8 (PhD in economics, 1975), Gilles joined the faculty of UQAM in 1975, initially in sociology and then from 1979 in economics (associate professor 1982, full professor 1991). As a student at McGill, Gilles had been one of the organizers of the ‘McGill français’ demonstrations that led to the creation of UQAM. Writing a dissertation on Marxian value theory, his first books were Marx, la valeur, et l’économie politique (Paris: Anthropos, 1978) and Valeur et prix: histoire d’un débat (Paris: Maspero, Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, Montréal: Presses de l’Université du Québec, 1978; revised and expanded edition Paris: L’Harmattan, 2010; Spanish translation, 1980). Subsequently the focus of Gilles’s scholarship was the ideas of John Maynard Keynes. He stressed the continuing relevance of Keynes’s insights and analysis to the understanding of economic crisis and stabilization, notably in his last books, Keynes par-delà l’économie (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 2009) and Keynes y el desempleo (Madrid: Abada, 2011). As an historian of ideas, Gilles explored the role of the Bloomsbury Group in the origins of Keynes’s social, political, and aesthetic ideas, the relation of Keynes’s thought to that of Freud, and comparing and contrasting Keynes’s vision.

Gilles Dostaler’s scholarship reached a world-wide audience, published on five continents and in nine languages. His invaluable reference work with Michel Beaud, La pensée économique depuis Keynes (Paris: Seuil, 1993), was not only published in English as Economic Thought since Keynes (Edward Elgar, 1995, revised paperback Routledge, 1997) but also appeared in Arabic, Portuguese, Romanian, and Vietnamese translations. Gilles’s magnum opus was Keynes et ses combats (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005, expanded edition 2009), translated as Keynes and his Battles (Edward Elgar, 2007, paperback 2009) and also translated into Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish. His Le libéralisme de Hayek (Paris: La Découverte, 2001) was translated into Italian and Vietnamese. His book with Bernard Maris, Capitalisme et pulsion de mort (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009), drawing on Keynes’s concept of a morbid desire for liquidity and on Freud’s ideas to understand the world financial crisis, will appear in Italian and Portuguese editions.

Robert W. Dimand

Robert Dimand is also a contributor to this volume. He wrote this obituary for publication in the Canadian Economics Association Newsletter, in August 2011.