

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR STEPHEN G. BUNKER

Stephen Bunker, professor of sociology and a well-known Latin Americanist, died July 19, 2005 after a long battle against cancer.

After earning his Ph.D. at Duke University in 1975, Stephen taught at the Universidad del Valle, Guatemala; the Universidade Federal do Pará, in Belem, Brazil; the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; and Johns Hopkins University, before coming to the Sociology Department at UW-Madison in 1988.

A prolific scholar, Stephen's contribution lies above all in his theoretical insistence that we pay attention to environmental constraints and to the role played by the physical characteristics of raw materials in shaping the world system. In addition to countless papers and edited volumes, he wrote four important books (two of which are currently in press).

In his first book, *Underdeveloping the Amazon* (University of Chicago Press, 1985), Stephen offered a powerful demonstration of how extractive processes shaped the relationship of one region to the rest of the world. Over a long historical period, as European powers extracted a series of natural products from the rainforest and river basin: first brazil nuts and spices, then rubber, most recently minerals. In his book, Stephen shows how these patterns gradually reorganized Amazonian society, impoverishing both its inhabitants and its environment. That those patterns persist into the present, as the modern Brazilian state and multinational companies continue to treat Amazonia as a site for potential extraction of minerals and labor, is perhaps at the core of his understanding of the relationship between nature, raw materials and political economy.

Stephen's second book, *Peasants Against the State* (University of Chicago Press, 1987), was based largely on research done in Uganda, for his dissertation. It had remained unpublished to protect the people described in it, but he went back to the material when the situation in Uganda improved. It won the distinguished book award from the Political Economy of the World System section of the American Sociological Association (ASA) in 1989. Despite the shift in geographic focus, this was a logical successor to his earlier work. If *Underdeveloping the Amazon* emphasizes the impoverishment of a region and its residents, *Peasants Against the State* describes the strategies deployed by Ugandan peasants to improve their situation, relative both to the Ugandan state and to the global coffee market. Like *Underdeveloping the Amazon*, *Peasants Against the State* pays close attention to the physical characteristics of the commodity, but also to the social organization of producers and to the organization of marketing, and how those both reflect and reinforce systemic global inequalities.

Two books completed in the past few months, as he battled cancer, are now in press. *Globalization and the Race for Resources*, co-authored with UW alumnus Paul Ciccantell, will appear this fall, published by Johns Hopkins Press. In some sense summarizing Stephen's arguments about the relationship between extraction and the construction of the world system, the book moves from the way Dutch shipping industries drew Amazonia into a larger world system to the impact of subsequent patterns of extraction from Amazonia, up through the twentieth century.

Stephen's other forthcoming book explores a related but distinct set of questions. *The Snake with Golden Braids: Society, Nature and Technology in Andean Irrigation*, explores patterns in Peruvian Andean irrigation schemes, engaging the relationship between local social relations and nature. Jane Collins,

professor of rural sociology, says of Stephen's forthcoming book, "This book is the fullest realization of Bunker's prior work. In a devoted, painstaking and deeply respectful way he explores the intimate interconnections between a challenging Andean environment and its inhabitants. Attending to topography, investigation of the remains of the waterworks, and the cosmology and stories of contemporary Huanoqueños, Bunker reconstructs the breathtaking technological achievement of the prehispanic people who irrigated the region. This is no story of humans taming the earth, but of how, in allowing us to solve the problems it poses, landscape shapes human strategies and consciousness." *The Snake with Golden Braids* is scheduled to appear this spring with Lexington Press.

All Stephen's books are marked by intimate knowledge of the people and regions he studied: Stephen's theoretical contributions are unusual for their link to closely-detailed fieldwork, and a deep intimacy with farflung contexts and unusual details. Stephen's familiarity with the intricacies of rubber extraction, the variation among coffee beans, or the engineering problems in bauxite mines, is part of what gives his theoretical work its weight: his careful attention to evidence, and his insistence that theory engage that evidence, is part of what makes his work so memorable.

Latin American, Caribbean and Iberian Studies (LACIS), the Sociology Department, and the Havens Center co-sponsored a conference in Stephen's honor in 2002, entitled "Nature, Raw Materials and Political Economy." A volume of the conference papers will be published this fall.

Stephen will be greatly missed in his department, in LACIS and in the university community at large. Our sympathies go to Stephen's wife, Dena Wortzel, of Hollandale, Wisconsin; his daughter, Gabriela Bunker Cordon, and his grandson Lucas, of Guatemala.

In lieu of flowers, please send donations to the Stephen G. Bunker Memorial Fund, Bank of Mora, Mora, New Mexico 87732. Donations will be used to fund environmental education initiatives for rural youth.

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