

9 June, 2000.

OBITUARIES

Simon Domberger

Economist
1949 - 2000

A leading Australian economist and a world-renowned scholar in the field of competitive tendering and contracting, Professor Simon Domberger has died in London after a long battle with cancer.

A foundation professor of Sydney University's Graduate School of Business, he made a significant contribution to the discipline of economics.

Domberger was the consummate academic — an articulate and inspiring teacher and a prolific researcher. His capacity for conciliation gave him the aura of a revered statesman, while his insightful and compassionate manner gave him the reputation of a great sage among students and colleagues alike.

The fact that he was fluent in five languages — Hebrew, German, Spanish, English and French — illustrates his international upbringing.

Born in Tel Aviv in 1949, Simon Igan Domberger spent some years in Argentina before

entering boarding school in Scotland. He arrived there with no English but excelled at school and moved to London to study economics at University College. From there, he moved to Warwick University to complete his MA and PhD in economics in 1978.

An early seminal publication in the *Journal of Political Economy*, which stemmed from his dissertation, analysed how firms set prices. It provided one of the first illustrations of a relationship between inflation and the change in the price of one commodity relative to another.

After several years lecturing at both Manchester and the London Business School, Domberger was enticed to move to Australia by the offer of a professorship at Sydney University's newly established Graduate School of Business.

With his cosmopolitan background and his urbane manner, Domberger frequented many of the cafes and restaurants in Newtown. He loved to sit and chat about philosophy and literature over a strong cappuccino or a

Turkish pizza. He was as comfortable in this environment as he was wandering the hallowed halls of the main quadrangle.

Domberger's career continued to flourish in Australia and he served as deputy director of the business school for two years and was heavily involved in university administration.

In his last years at London Business School, Domberger had started working on a research program in competitive tendering and contracting out which would continue for the next 15 years. In fact, he was still writing, commenting on and publishing articles up until the last month of his life, which is testament to his dedication and strength of character.

It was his research in contracting out which established Domberger's international scholastic reputation. He carefully enunciated the virtues of contracting for both private enterprise and governments and was among the first to empirically establish that contracting for services led to savings in the order of 20 per cent. This work was published in many



international journals such as *The Economic Journal* and culminated in the publication of *The Contracting Organisation*, which was published by Oxford University Press in 1998. His research on contracting out continued after the merger of Sydney University's business school with the Australian Graduate School of Management at the University of NSW.

Domberger was also highly successful in attracting research grant funding. He was the recipient of several Australian Research Council Grants, which was a result of his stature within the discipline and the fact that his research broke down many of the barriers between universities and the "real world".

The results of his research were

as relevant to management consultancies as they were to senior policymakers. Not surprisingly, Domberger provided frequent commentaries on economic matters — in television debates on outsourcing, in conferences on public sector management, in executive education at the Australian Graduate School of Management and in his frequent articles in *The Australian Financial Review*.

Domberger's intellectual legacy will continue through his extensive published research and his inspirational teaching of several generations of MBA students in England and Australia.

He would have been pleased to know that on the day he died, his research was being cited in an international conference in London as the definitive verification of the fact that it is competition and not ownership which drives economic performance.

He is survived by his wife Brenda and his children, Daniel and Shelley.

Paul Jensen