

François Bourguignon

Why are there so many poor in this world? What policies work to alleviate poverty? These are the sort of questions that François Bourguignon has devoted much of his professional life to answering.

Having answers to such questions matters well beyond the academic world. It matters in the Ministry of Finance of a developing country where the national budget is formulated, and around the cabinet table where plans are debated. It matters in the crowded barrios of the large cities where many of the poor live with little access to education or health care. And, it matters in the remote agricultural lands where crops are under constant threat of drought or pestilence. It matters also in the posh suburbs where the elite cower behind high walls topped with electric fences, fearing for the safety of their family and property.

François Bourguignon currently works on these issues from his post as Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank in Washington, the latest in a long line of distinguished economists who have held that post. His interest in poverty and income distribution questions is clearly imprinted on the agenda of the Bank. Last year's World Development Report, prepared under his direction, looked at Equity and Development. The Report convincingly marshalled the evidence that equity is complementary to the pursuit of long-term prosperity. This year's Report, released last month, expands on that theme with particular focus on the priorities for government action to expand opportunities, enhance capabilities, and provide second chances for the youth in developing countries.

François Bourguignon's interest in questions of poverty and development did not suddenly appear with his appointment to his current post in 2003. He had already established himself as an intellectual leader in the field, as evidenced by the assignment as co-editor of the *Handbook of Income Distribution*, his election as Fellow of the Econometric Society, and the silver medal awarded by the National Centre for Scientific

Research in his native France. A long list of highly cited works attests to the respect of his peers.

His interest in the poor, and the high probability of a stellar career, were both evident to those of us who knew Bourguignon as a graduate student at Western in the 1970s. He arrived here as a product of turbulent France of the late 1960s. His passion for equity was already clear. But he recognised that to change outcomes, passion had to be supported by rigorous analysis and sifting of the evidence. He performed brilliantly in his course work and PhD Comprehensive exams, and then produced the best Economics PhD thesis in 1975, winning the T. Merritt Brown Thesis Prize.

François Bourguignon knows that to make a difference in this world, one must work effectively with people. He has employed both his Gallic charm and intellectual rigor in advocating the interests of the poor, in an environment where those interests are all too often forgotten.

Mr. Chancellor, on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor and in the name of the Senate, I ask you to confer the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, upon François Bourguignon, son of France, alumnus of Western, and advocate for the interests of the poor in the global village.

J. Clark Leith

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