

All Souls College
OXFORD.

29th October 1955.

Dear Frisch,

Thank you for your circular letter of the 20th October, which I have read with interest. So far as the first part of it is concerned I do not think that I have anything to comment except to say that I am pleased to hear that the new arrangements are going so well. So far as the second part of your letter, that dealing with surveys, is concerned, I have a point to make which may be worth while putting to you.

It seems to me that there is a distinction to be made between the kind of survey whose main function it is to keep people working within a particular province of econometrics in touch with one another, and a survey which is to describe the work which is being done within a province for the benefit of those outside. (Including in "those outside" both those who are working in other fields of econometrics and, let us say, teachers of economics who are generally interested without being specialists in a particular econometric field.) It seems to me that the surveys which "Econometrica" used to publish in early days sought to fulfil both these functions and at that time the two functions could be quite properly combined together. I have considerable doubts whether that is still the case. I think they are now different functions, both of them highly desirable but not birds that can easily be killed with one stone.

My impression would be that the kind of set-up which you propose, of a senior worker and a couple of assistants, is suitable in the case of the first function but I should have thought less suitable in the case of the second. For in the case of the second function it is more important to be interesting than to be complete; and it is more likely that a single author will awaken outside interest than that a team will do so. I think that in both cases you ought to invite people to do the surveys, and if you can persuade any of the Foundations to endow the work which would be needed for a survey of the first kind I think it would be admirable. I am only writing this letter because I hope that you will not forget the need for surveys of the second kind also.

/

I do not see how you are going to get the Foundations to finance them, but if "Econometrica" could find a way by which it could pay something to suitable people whom it commissioned to do surveys of this sort, it would be a very good thing.

I feel myself to have become so much of a spectator of what is going on in the econometric field that I have naturally a special interest in this second kind of survey, of which I should be a keen consumer. You may feel, I dare say, that this sort of thing has ceased to be the province of "Econometrica" and is better left to other journals. When I look at the list of members of the Econometric Society, I am not quite so sure. I think that you have a large number of members who would derive more benefit from surveys of this sort than they do from a good deal of what is published. Perhaps they are the less important among the members, but I think that their wants might occasionally receive a little attention and that is all for which I am pleading.

Yours sincerely,

John R. Hicks

Professor Ragnar Frisch,
University Institute of Economics,
OSLO, NORWAY.

OB
Electra kopri

17 March 1961

W/14

Professor John R. Hicks,
All Souls College,
Oxford,
England.

Dear Hicks,

Thank you for your letter of 28 February regarding a professorship in Oxford "with special reference to Econometrics and mathematical economics".

I have a definite feeling that this is an extremely important job which may produce great effects - for good or bad - on the intellectual climate not only in Oxford but in England and perhaps even more widely in the years to come. One should, therefore, by all means try to get a really qualified person.

The problem is very difficult. A man who has already reached a state of accomplishment which has proved his qualifications beyond doubt, will in practically all cases have a good position somewhere and it may be difficult to persuade him to change it.

I really see no solution except to take a chance on a very young man for whom there are definite indications that he will become an important and active personality.

Possibly you may see fit to offer such a man the professorship salary for, say, one year as a sort of "development fellowship" with the understanding that he should put all he has into an effort to acquaint himself with the atmosphere in Oxford, to find out what is really wanted of him and to produce during the fellowship period a significant evidence of his power and drive. The final decision to be made after this period of testing. If you would consider such a possibility, it might perhaps be mentioned in the advertisement.

I have three names to suggest as possible candidates. I list them in my priority order.

1. Mr. Tom Kronaig. He is a young - indeed very young - Swede who has taken his degree in economics in Lund (where he worked with Johan Åkerman) and who is now working with me in the Oslo University Institute of Economics. I have come to know him quite well. He has impressed me as an exceptionally powerful intellect with great drive, creative imagination, unusual alertness and great enthusiasm. He is a flexible and versatile sort of person who is able quickly to adapt himself to all sorts of new conditions. He speaks and writes a number of languages among which are English, French, German, Russian and Polish (and some Arabic). He is also a good mathematician with an understanding of mathematical programming techniques. His thesis on the application of programming techniques to problems of international trade is now to appear in print. (I think in two different languages). From the human viewpoint he is an extremely sympathetic person with high moral. If I were to decide, I would not hesitate for a moment to take a chance on him.
2. Mr. Leif Johansen. He is at present an associate professor of Economics in the University of Oslo. I have followed his development closely and would not hesitate to qualify him as the most outstanding young Norwegian economist of the new generation. He has headed in his North Holland Publishing Company book "A multisectoral study of economic growth" (1960) on a sectorial growth model as his thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in our University. You know, I believe, the high standard of this degree. I am on the Committee and I will certainly vote for its acceptance. He has also produced a number of special papers of very high caliber. I believe that you know him personally as I don't need to say much more about him. In a general way I would put him in approximately the same category as Mr. Kronaig.
3. Mr. Yore Thonstad. He is at present an assistant professor of Economics in the University of Oslo. He is the other young Norwegian economist whom I would rank as a top man. I have followed also his development very closely. He was for several years connected with the Institute here as a research associate. Last year it was my duty to pass on his qualifications in connection with his application for a post in our University and in this connection I had to read carefully all his works (many of which have appeared in mimeographed form as "Manuscripts" from our Institute). His production has impressed me very much. He is an exceptionally clear and powerful thinker and has at the same time a definitely practical grasp on economic problems. During my last stay in Cairo (as an adviser to the Egyptian government on economic planning methodology), I suggested that he be invited to Cairo to help in

this work. He came and made an excellent impression on the economists and statisticians there and they wanted him to come back for a longer period. I am glad to say that so far he has declined this offer.

■

I need not tell you that I personally as well as my senior colleagues here would consider it as a real disaster if any of these two Norwegians should leave us. We need them both very badly. But, of course, it is up to themselves to decide. I have therefore found it my duty to inform them about your inquiry.

If you want to contact any of the above three, they can be reached under the address: Institute of Economics, University of Oslo, Karl Johans gate 47, Oslo.

I could mention perhaps 5 or 6 other names, but none of them can, in my judgement, come in the same top category as those mentioned above.

I wish you all success in finding a really qualified person and do hope that you can find a solution without depriving us of either Laif Johansen or Tore Thorstad.

With best personal regards,

Sincerely yours

Ragnar Frisch

P.S. Thank you for sending me your extremely interesting paper on mathematical programming applied to economic problems. You may be interested to know that my multiplex method has stood the acid test of solving effectively and at low cost a number of big linear programming problems on the Norwegian Defence Organization electronic computer (where this method has been coded by Mr. Ole Johan Bahl) and that I have recently been able to develop the multiplex method into a technique of handling also programming problems with a quadratic preference function and quadratic bounds. I hope soon to be able to send you a full account of this.

Andersson

17th October 1936.

J. R. Hicks, Esq.,
Cambridge University,
CAMBRIDGE, England.

My dear Hicks,

In the new economic curriculum in our University we have put up as a text book Alec Macfie's Theories of the trade cycle. You probably know the book. It is a survey of business cycle theories which have appeared in English. I found the book rather well written, but should like to check my opinion with yours. What do you think about it? In particular, do you think it is suitable as a text book?

Cordially Yours,

Ragnar Frisch.