



Marian Radetzki 80 years

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Marian Radetzki's life and career span almost the whole gamut of resource economics and all corners of the world. During the past 60 years, he has never been afraid of taking controversial views, even if this has not always been his intention. He is an economist and a rationalist; uncover the facts, estimate the costs and the final conclusion presents itself logically.¹

¹ For a summary of Marian's career and scientific achievements, please visit his homepage at www.radetzki.biz

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This volume of Mineral Economics mirrors only parts of the wide range of topics Marian has dealt with. Most of his endeavours in mineral economics, whether they concern energy minerals or metals, are however reflected upon and discussed:

- Economics of mineral resources
- Emerging economies
- Copper and iron ore, two metals, which even in these times of speciality metals and rare earths remain of key strategic importance
- Energy minerals—from coal and oil to uranium

All contributors are long time colleagues and friends, like in any festschrift. In their articles, they are however critical, honest and non-biased scientists. The authors are based in Europe, the Americas, Asia and Australia and are among the sharpest resource economists of today.

Originally, the intention with this volume was to honour Marian Radetzki and survey the present frontline in some of the areas, where he has been most active. In other words, to give an update of important issues for mineral economists, using 2017 as a peephole. But gradually, another perspective and possibility to read the texts have dawned upon me. Among my Christmas presents, I got a book, which inspired me to reflect on the content of this issue of Mineral Economics. The book is a study of the history of Finland over 500 years.² The Finnish history is given not as a teleological narrative, “where history has a goal, it knows what it wants, and is heading for something predetermined”³ but history is treated as an enfolding drama, with a multitude of actors, winners and losers according to traditional ways of writing history, but all of them are active in forming the future, a future that was not given in the past and of course is not given today. History can truly be described with a phrase from police work

² Öppet fall, Finlands historia som möjligheter och alternativ, Nils Erik Villstrand and Petri Karonen editors, Skrifter utgivna av Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, nr 813, Helsingfors 2017, in Swedish. The following comments and thoughts are entirely my own and no shadow should fall on the Finnish historians because of my interpretation or perhaps misinterpretation of their ideas.

³ Op.cit. page 7.

as an “open case”. The Finnish study became a true eye-opener and influenced my re-reading and re-interpreting of the papers, when putting the final touches to this issue of Mineral Economics.

Although there were no instructions given to the authors, when they were invited, many have adopted an “open case” approach. The authors are looking at what has been happening, without trying to prove something, which might seem obvious today, given that the outcome of history up till today is now obvious. The title of many of the papers ends with a question mark. The word *counterfactual* is intentionally used in one article’s headline. Several papers describe the changing appreciation and interpretation of minerals, their societal use and perceived importance over time. In the spirit of Marian’s belief in factual analysis the “resource curse”, a hypothesis, which has been turned into almost a religious dogma, is scrutinised in one major review paper. Many articles in the issue could, in my view, be categorised as the results of thinking “outside the box” or at least trying to avoid preconceived ideas and silo thinking.

The reader of this volume of Mineral Economics is encouraged to try to look at the various papers with an open mind, to view them not only as tales of the past, but with the understanding that “today is the past of the future”. The problems presented could be interpreted as the study of what is possible, which are the alternatives open, what freedom of action is open to solve some of today’s most pressing issues of resource availability? What can be learnt from the past, both in terms of what has been tried and what has not? How can decisions be made, which secure the supply of mineral resources for future generations? How can the scientific debate focus on the important challenges facing mankind and not get distracted by non-issues? In these days of major environmental threats and socio-economic problems, it is necessary to keep all alternatives open and not exclude some possible future paths without careful analysis. This is particularly important when discussing issues such as the availability of minerals. Topical

in today’s discourse are questions like: Are metal resources running out; Is the “peak” of metal production approaching fast? Issues where the answer requires input from several areas of science, such as economics and other humanities, geology, metallurgy, chemistry and others. If the answer to these questions is given, without careful consideration of all relevant facts, as a “yes”, there is a high risk that pessimism, doom and gloom will grow and scarce societal resources will be channelled into projects, which in the future, with the benefit of hindsight, might most probably seem wasted. There is certainly no room for optimism for its own sake, but it is worth noticing that today’s depletion discussion is not new—it has been running for two hundred years at least. Decisions for the future should be made only after careful analysis, which includes also mankind’s history of successfully dealing with seemingly unsurmountable problems. Perhaps the most important lesson from the historic debates about future scarcities is that the future as perceived by past generations was equally difficult for them to understand and to make decisions about, as it is for us today to decide about what to do and how our actions will influence the future.

Marian has himself during his life amply demonstrated, on his own personal level, that our own thoughts and acts do influence the future.⁴ On a societal scale, it should also be possible, and important, to develop and describe future scenarios and then to actively chose a path into the unknown. History does not have a purpose or goal. The most interesting question is not “how did we get here but what can we make of it?”⁵ The path of the future is chosen and shaped by us today.

Marian is very down to earth about the future; on his webpage, he has created a section called “Ultimate activities” where he claims his last professional contributions to economics have already been published in 2017. I beg to differ. Marian has inspired all contributors to this issue to sharpen their arguments and polish their wordings, and hence, at least indirectly, he has continued to contribute also in 2018.

⁴ In his autobiography, *Sverige, Sverige! Fosterland?* (see also Nils Lundgren’s paper “A portrait of a close friend” in this issue of Mineral Economics.) *Dialogos Stockholm 2005*, Marian gives many examples of his strong will and capacity to enforce it.

⁵ Öppet Fall, op.cit. page 9.