Charles Tilly
(May 20, 1929 – April 29, 2008)

I first met Charles Tilly 29 years ago, when I was 27. I had applied for a position at the University of Toronto, and Lorna Marsden, then Chair, told me that for my job talk I would be giving a presentation at a conference sponsored by the Department. I asked who else was presenting in my session. "Just one other person," Lorna said: "Charles Tilly." I don't recall whether I managed to say good-bye before I lost my grip on the phone.

Barry Wellman was in charge of the conference, and he scheduled my presentation before Tilly's. Once Tilly started talking, I understood just how merciful Barry's decision was. Tilly eased the audience into his topic with an intriguing narrative, invoked crystalline metaphors to illustrate points of theoretical controversy, brought masses of original data to bear on the issues he raised, and left us in a state of high intellectual excitation. It was a virtuoso performance, and he played the entire entertainment by heart.

Born near Chicago, Tilly received his PhD from Harvard in 1958. His output over the next half century equaled that of five highly productive scholars; his name appears on 50 books and between 600 and 700 journal articles, book chapters, review essays, comments, and prefaces. He taught at the University of Delaware (1956–62), Harvard University (1963–66), the University of Toronto (1965–69), the University of Michigan (1969–84), the New School for Social Research (1984–96), and Columbia University (1996–2008). He also held numerous short-term appointments in the United States, Canada (at Sir George Williams University, now Concordia University, in 1967), France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway.

Tilly received numerous international prizes and honourary degrees. His *The Contentious French* shared the C. Wright Mills Award of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (1987) and won the Award for Distinguished Scholarly Publication of the American Sociological Association (1989). *European Revolutions* received the Premio Europeo Amalfi (1995). *Popular Contention in Great Britain* was awarded the Distinguished Scholarly Award of the Section on Collective Behavior and Social Movements of the American Sociological Association (1996). *Durable Inequality* won the Book Award of the Eastern Sociological

Association (1999) and the Award for Distinguished Scholarly Publication of the American Sociological Association (2000). *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650–2000* shared the Best Book Award of the Democratization Section of the American Political Science Association (2005).

Tilly was chiefly interested in the relationship between large-scale social change and contentious politics in Europe since 1500. The field that he tilled bore three harvests. First, he showed how the state became the dominant form of polity in the modern world. Military innovation made warfare so expensive, he argued, that only populous, well-capitalized entities (and their clients) could survive — and only if they adopted various institutional innovations associated with the modern state. Second, he demonstrated that contentious politics unfolds not because of the dispositions of antagonists but because large-scale social change alters the social organization of groups, the social relations among them, and their access to resources, causing them to compete, often violently. Third, he argued that sociological research yields its richest rewards by focusing on relational mechanisms that operate in a variety of social contexts. From this point of view, society is not a set of recurrent, self-contained, and self-directed structures and processes but a series of middle-range mechanisms (delimited classes of events that change relations among units of analysis), processes (frequently recurring mechanisms), and episodes (bounded streams of social life that are socially constructed by participants and observers).

Tilly's writings form an enduring intellectual legacy, but his role as teacher was no less important. He trained hundreds of talented students, and at any given moment, scores of colleagues from around the world sought his advice. Almost until the end, and despite his ill health and the debilitating treatment for his lymphoma, he offered detailed and pointed suggestions on how his correspondents could improve their work — often with 24-hour turnaround.

My last letter arrived too late, and came back to me by return mail yesterday. "Dear Chuck," it read. "Ever since I read *The Vendée* as a graduate student in 1974, I have considered you the greatest living sociologist. Your impact is such that you will be considered the greatest living sociologist long after you are gone; we will all continue to be inspired by your ideas and your example."

University of Toronto Robert J Brym