

Migrations and boundary work:  
Harvard, radical economists and the Committee on  
Political Discrimination

Tiago Mata  
tmata@iseg.utl.pt

Workshop on the History of Economics as History of Science

June 1, 2007

Preliminary Draft: Please do not cite or circulate without the author's permission.

## Contents

|   |  |    |
|---|--|----|
| 1 | Radical Economics and its definition         | 3  |
| 2 | Radical teaching and protest at Harvard      | 5  |
| 3 | A paradigm to overlap economics and politics | 9  |
| 4 | A paradigm denied                            | 15 |
| 5 | Political discrimination                     | 24 |
| 6 | Boundaries and migrations                    | 35 |

## 1 Radical Economics and its definition

The social histories of the sixties trace the origins of American student activism to an organization founded in 1960 at Ann Arbor, University of Michigan - the Students for Democratic Society (SDS) (Isserman & Kazin 2004; Morgan 1991). The history of radical economics began eight years later, in September 1968 at the Ann Arbor campus, with the founding by a dozen graduate students, of the Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE) (Lee 2004).

The invention of “radical economics” was a labor of the older cohort of SDSers intent on carrying their activist identities into a professional career. In the mid-1960s, some of the founders of SDS became disaffected from the younger leadership of the student movement, some even denouncing its violent tactics, and its appeals to the irrational (Gitlin 1987). The so-called “old-guard” of SDS, who were then becoming professionals and academics, wanted to remain politically active in their new circumstances. With this goal in mind, they had created in 1967 The New University Conference (NUC), which counted among its members with some of the URPE founders.<sup>1</sup> The New University Conference program was to create: local chapters to be organized around the country as a site for “mutual support and self-criticism concerning teaching and intellectual activity”; and radical caucuses within professional disciplines and associations (Sale 1974, pp. 412-3). URPE was created as the radical caucus for economics.

URPE’s original prospectus of 1968 was critical of the economics profession. It was a call to direct economics into what radicals termed politically relevant research. It was neither a critique of economic theory nor of its heuristics. It sought to rewrite the

---

<sup>1</sup>The organization was split over the issue if it should act as a counterweight or a sister organization of SDS. As the radical caucus in the professions formed, NUC lost dynamism and was finally dissolved in 1974 (Personal Communication John McDermott, 12 September 2005).

questions posed by economists, asking: “How frequent are articles which deal with the economics of racism, poverty in the American economy, international imperialism, or the real economics of defense?” It is striking that radicals were willing to adopt the tools of conventional economics. They clarified that: “This is not to say that we deny the value of some of the tools and concepts of modern economics” (Secretariat 1969, p. 173). There was no shared intellectual commitment to function as a glue for the radical Union. The radicals identity was the culture of the sixties (Mata & Lee res). “Radical economics” was thus circa 1969, still to be demarcated and defined.

In sections 2 and 3 of this paper I will reconstruct how radicals came to define an economic body of work as a challenge to conventional economics. In the process, radicals redrew the boundaries of economic science. Following the work of Thomas F. Gieryn,<sup>2</sup> I propose to look at economic science as a *space* (Gieryn 1995, p. 405) The methodological move entails approaching scientific controversies through a topographic metaphor. Scientists defining science are interpreted as drawing cultural maps. Earthly and cultural maps share similar functions, as forms of representation:

Boundaries differentiate this thing from that; borders create spaces with occupants homogeneous and generalized in some respect (though they may vary in other ways). Arrangements of spaces define logical relations among sets of things: nested, overlapping, adjacent, separated. (...) Most important, just as maps of earthly patches get drawn to keep travellers from

---

<sup>2</sup>In Gieryn’s first discussion of the subject, he identified boundary work as a “rhetorical style” native to the ideology of science. His primary goal was to compare strain theories of ideology developed from Talcott Parsons’s seminal work and interest theories associated with Karl Marx (Gieryn 1983, p. 782). Gieryn’ second thoughts on the subject (Gieryn 1995) abandoned discussion of boundary work as a rhetorical style to survey it as a theme in the work of sociologists of professions, social world theorists and historians of cultural classifications. In his 1999 book, *Cultural Boundaries of Science - Credibility on the Line*, Gieryn developed a methodology for the study of scientific controversies exemplified in case studies of boundary work, it is from the vantage point of the later writings that I discuss the subject.

getting lost, so maps of other worlds – culture, for example – are drawn or talked to help us find our way around. (Gieryn 1999, p. 7)

The task of the analyst is to interpret controversies as cartographic disputes over how best to represent culture.<sup>3</sup>

The main feature of radicals' controversy with the mainstream was over the location of politics: Was economics political? Should economics be political? In what ways? Two opposing views on this issue gained clarity in the late 1960s, as I will show in sections 3 and 4. I will conclude this essay referring to the resolution of this controversy. I will focus on the investigations of the American Economic Association's Committee on Political Discrimination to examine the profession's understanding of politics. I will argue in section 5 that radicals were moved to the margins of the profession.

## 2 Radical teaching and protest at Harvard

The Union for Radical Political Economics was founded (and in its early years run from) the University of Michigan. However, it soon gained a much broader membership.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly, the URPE group that was most publicly visible and most directly engaged with the profession's mainstream was based at Harvard University. The principal activity of this group as a radical course. Starting in the spring of 1969 "Social Sciences 125 – The Capitalist System: Conflict and Power" was offered on Harvard's

---

<sup>3</sup>Despite evoking a topographical metaphor Gieryn never attempts to draw a visual map of the controversies he studies, neither have later authors working with this methodology. I have also shied from using illustrations. To depict these maps visually requires deciding on shapes, textures and many more relationships between the maps' contents than are available in the record of controversies. An illustration would have to be accompanied by a cumbersome justification of the many decisions needed for its construction, and of little added insight.

<sup>4</sup>Within three months of its creation URPE had over 300 paying members and a mailing list with over 800 names (Bluestone 1969, p. 5).

General Education program.<sup>5</sup> The course was run by twelve graduate students and young economics faculty (Arthur MacEwan officially as the course proprietor, Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Thomas Weisskopf) sharing both the lecturing and the section meetings.<sup>6</sup> The course was the first focal point to design a radical body of economic theory. A book of original and reprinted texts from Soc 125 was the immediate result of this effort (Edwards et al. 1971).<sup>7</sup> The course also served to draw more students into URPE membership.<sup>8</sup>

While Harvard radicals were engaged in experimenting with teaching and a new economics syllabus, crisis fell upon the Harvard Yard. In April 1969 students seized the University Hall to protest against University encroachment upon poorer neighborhoods. The students were ultimately expelled by police action. The events were traumatic for an otherwise quiet campus. *Time* magazine carried it to its front page and commented: “It was a shock - to faculty, students and administration alike - that for a time the ”Harvard way” had failed. No matter how soon the present crisis is resolved, the

---

<sup>5</sup>There were reports of other courses at Michigan and New School in NY (urp 1970b and School 1971). The Harvard economics course followed earlier experiments with radical courses at Harvard. In the fall of 1968, students had designed the course Social Relations 148 “Social Change in America,” and in the spring of 1969, Social Relations 149 “Radical Perspectives on Social Change.” Some faculty strongly opposed the courses, “Soc Rel 148-9 is a disgrace to scholarship”, as one professor told the *New York Times* (Nossiter 1969).

<sup>6</sup>The junior faculty radicals had demanded that the course receive economics credits. While they received some support from the tenured faculty, the majority opposed their proposal (interview with Arthur MacEwan, 2003).

<sup>7</sup>Beyond their curricular content, radical courses were also a stage for new pedagogies. The desire for social transformation was brought to bear on the relationships between teacher and students. Radicals noted that: “It is necessary for our own liberation as well as for the student’s welfare to break down authoritarian relations in the classroom.” (Edwards & MacEwan 1970, p. 361) Grading was seen as serving the interests of the *status quo*: “Grades provide employers and graduate schools with a costless means of ranking students for their own purposes”. (ibid., p. 362) As an alternative to grades the Harvard Soc 125 staff would write evaluations of students’ work and meet with them to discuss their progress. The radicals’ focus on education led them to a study of its economics, notably Bowles & Gintis 1976.

<sup>8</sup>According to an informant’s recollection there were about 150 students taking the course, with around twelve MIT undergraduate and graduate students, although not all from economics (Interview with Laurie Nisonoff, 2003).

great temple of learning on the Charles will never be quite the same.” The radicals in the economics department were at the forefront of the protest, one of them having an elected role in the Harvard SDS chapter. Departmental meetings were troubled by some professors’ support of the students and others’ support of the administration.<sup>9</sup>

A divide was deepening between the young radical academics and the profession’s elders. It was enhanced by changes in the faculty’s attitudes toward student protest circa 1968-69, and by radicals enthusiasm towards the growing unrest. The campus unrest transformed faculty sympathy to disgust (Caute 1988, p. 334), while convincing radicals of the possibility of change to academia and larger society. Feeling the support of the campuses in uproar, the URPE radicals began to think about confronting their profession, notably at the AEA annual meetings.

Radicals argued that the AEA should be challenged for its silence over the war,<sup>10</sup> the profession’s racism and sexism, and the elitist way the job market was organized. In the fall of 1969, URPE’s *Newsletter* carried an item entitled “Confronting the AEA.” It began provocatively: “Should URPE demand ten million dollars in reparations from the AEA for the brainwashing its members have received at the hands of the profession?” (urp 1969a, p.1) URPE planned to hold parallel sessions to the AEA meetings and added: “All members of URPE should come to New York prepared to pose searching questions to the official speakers and discussants; a real counter-presence depends upon the actions of all. Come to the URPE suite throughout the convention to keep informed of what is happening.” (ibid., p. 2)

---

<sup>9</sup>Interview with Herbert Gintis, 2003. For a retelling of the crisis see Eichel et al. 1970.

<sup>10</sup>At the 1967 AEA business meeting unidentified members proposed that the Association poll its members concerning the Vietnam war and take a position on it. The Executive Committee was charged to consider the proposal and concluded the following year that the AEA should “reaffirm strongly the wisdom of the founders of the Association in . . . prohibiting the Association as such from taking an official stand or committing its members to any position on economic questions.” (aer 1969, p. 575).

In 1969 at the AEA's Business meeting: "a group of approximately twenty-five members of 'a group of radical economists' filed into the meeting room. Their spokesman, Harvard's Arthur MacEwan, demanded, on behalf of the group, that he be permitted to present a statement to the meeting." (aer 1970, p. 487) After some pushing and shoving, the statement was read:

economists do not merely praise the system; they also supply the tools – indeed, they are the tools – instrumental to the elite's attainment of its unjust ends. They show how to manipulate people so that the system's hinges are smoothly oiled.

(...) the A.E.A. plays directly destructive roles in our society. It serves to insure the perpetuation of professionalism, elitism, and petty irrelevance. It serves to inhibit the development of new ideas, ideas which are reflective of social reality.

Our conflict with the A.E.A. is not simply an intellectual debate. (...) Our conflict is a basic conflict of interests. The economists have chosen to serve the *status quo*. We have chosen to fight it. (ibid., pp. 488-9.)

Thus, in scandal, the radicals announced their challenge to the profession.

Out of this period of activity and protest it is apparent that talk of an alternative approach to economics began to take hold of the radical group. Radicals were moving from a critique of economics's defective choice of subjects, ignoring the real social concerns of the age, to a critique of the content of economic theory. At the 1969 AEA meetings, the Harvard radicals introduced their Soc Sci 125 course as the beginning of a new approach to economics (Edwards & MacEwan 1970).<sup>11</sup> The Harvard radicals

---

<sup>11</sup>It was followed by a discussion with Paul M. Sweezy, Phillip Saunders, and John R. Coleman. In



dismissed the traditional curriculum: “Our effort to develop a new curriculum is motivated by the conviction that the orthodox approach to economics cannot deal with the important problems of modern society. . . . The marginalist approach is useful only if, accepting the basic institutions of capitalism, one is primarily concerned with its administration.” (Edwards & MacEwan 1970, p. 352). At the close of 1969, a year into URPE creation, radicals were rushing to design a new alternative economics.

### 3 A paradigm to overlap economics and politics

Throughout its early years, URPE organized a score of regional conferences to draw supporters and address subjects foreign to an academic setting.<sup>12</sup> The most important conference held during this period took place in Boston. In 1969 there were two URPE chapters in the Boston area, one at Harvard and the other encompassing MIT and the other campuses. The two chapters ran a conference at the MIT Student Centre on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1969, entitled the “New England Regional Conference”. The major theme of the conference was “the construction of an alternative paradigm.” (urp 1969b, p. 1)<sup>13</sup> The main speaker was Paul M. Sweezy, who proposed that Marxism

---

a similar introductory mode Zweig 1972 presented a principles course in economics integrating radical and conventional analysis.

<sup>12</sup>The first was a “Middle Atlantic Conference” in Washington, held to coincide with President Nixon’s inauguration on January 18<sup>th</sup> 1969. The morning sessions were devoted to critiquing Nixon’s economic program and discussing alternative economic development strategies. The afternoon sessions dealt with reformulations of economic theory. Interestingly, the final session of the meeting was concerned with the role of political economists. Opinions were divided between those that thought that the focus should be on research (developing a new approach to economics in research oriented institutions) and those that argued that efforts should be concentrated on teaching (radicalising students in teaching oriented institutions). Lee ((2004a), p. 190) notes over six conferences that year, held at American University, MIT, University of California at Berkeley, University of Michigan and Oberlin College .

<sup>13</sup>Another session of the conference that was reported in some detail in URPE’s *Newsletter* was devoted to imperialism, chaired by Arthur MacEwan with Harry Magdoff, Michael Tanzer, Stephen Hymer, Stephen Resnick and David Schecter.

was the theoretical alternative to orthodox economics. Sweezy left an appeal to aim beyond a critique of orthodox economics: “We must all pass through a stage of ridding ourselves of the brainwashing we have received in graduate schools, but new theoretical research must free itself from the framework of traditional economics to construct the convincing alternative which is essential to the success of any radical movement.” (urp 1969b, p. 2)<sup>14</sup>

Yet, Sweezy’s proposal did not seem to entice the radicals.<sup>15</sup> Instead, debate was focused on the competing views of two Michigan graduates: Michael Zweig and John Weeks. Zweig’s “New Left Economics” article began by noting that the critique of economics had as its starting point a critique of contemporary American society as racist and imperialist (Zweig 1971a, p. 67).<sup>16</sup> He added that standard economics was either useless for the construction of a “decent society” or, what was worse, supportive of the *status quo*. Zweig established a correspondence between the apparatus of economic theorising and its political content. He argued that the fault was in marginalism:

Marginalist analysis can be pernicious as well as irrelevant. The spirit of marginalism is one of small adjustments on the periphery of some large aggregate whose fundamental and overall character is not an issue. (This spirit is particularly well suited to the bureaucratic mind.) But the larger

---

<sup>14</sup>The paper was of some significance, it was published in the *Monthly Review* in January 1970 and in the 1970 spring issue of the *RRPE*, finally it was republished in the very important July 1971 *RRPE* issue of which more will be said later.

<sup>15</sup>There was deep admiration for *MR*’s combativeness in particular during the academic repression of the late 1950s. However, there were no close intellectual ties between *MR* and the radicals. Although some radicals published in the *MR*, there was never extensive collaboration or explicit endorsement of the *MR*-line (interview with Arthur MacEwan, Richard Wolff, 2003).

<sup>16</sup>The paper had first appeared in the published at URPE’s first conference papers from their Philadelphia 1968 conference meetings, and was probably the most cited article on radicals’ early critique of the mainstream. It was one of the few contemporary texts included in Mermelstein 1970 which surveyed the history of radical critiques of economics. I quote from its reprint in July 1971 in the *Review of Radical Political Economics*.

questions are almost never asked. The spirit of marginalism is ill suited to radical questioning of the precepts of economic and social arrangements, and it is equally ill suited to deep, revolutionary change. (ibid, p. 68)

Zweig challenged economics' alleged neutrality, he argued that "standard economics violates neutrality by militating against asking and answering certain radical questions. Economics is not, and cannot reasonably be expected to be, neutral." (ibid, p. 73) Although the subject of economics's questions was part of Zweig's critique, it was subordinate to the influence of the theory at the foundation of economists' research. For him, the faults of economics rested at the level of its theory.

The significance of Zweig's "New Left Critique of Economics" can be gauged by having motivated the first article of the *Review of Radical Political Economics*, URPE's scholarly journal. The author was John Weeks who stated that: "It is not because marginal analysis is reactionary that economics supports the status quo, it is because economists are reactionary and choose and use their questions, tools, and governments accordingly." (Weeks 1971, p. 75 , emphasis in original) Weeks argued that the profession gained from the existing social and economic order, for him "the practitioners of standard economics are part of an economic and social elite, and therefore can no more be expected to develop and encourage radical analysis than businessmen as a group can be expected to advocate workers' control of production"; "they draw their wealth and influence from these social institutions" (ibid., pp. 75-76) and thus had a vested interest in their perpetuation.

Both Weeks and Zweig were trying to reason what they understood as the economics profession unwillingness to tackle the pressing questions of the time, particularly the advent of war, imperialism and poverty. They offered contrasting answers to the problem, one focusing on the content of theory, the other on economists' commitment to

the *status quo* in their status as intellectual elite. Radicals' critique of economics was thus, in 1969, not consensually established.

In a July 1971 issue of the *Review of Radical Political Economics*, entitled "On Radical Paradigms in Economics," the design of an alternative approach was redressed as the design of an alternative paradigm. The introductory paper of the volume by Gerald E. Peabody surveyed Thomas S. Kuhn's work on the history and philosophy of science. The goal of the special issue was to "call for such a revolution in the paradigm that provides the world view for current economic thought" (Peabody 1971, p. 1).

The special issue of the *Review* explored the definition of an alternative (radical) paradigm for economics. The major elements of the debate were economics' input to a progressive change in American society and the interplay between power (in society, in the profession) and ideas. The radical paradigm was named a "paradigm of conflict":

A paradigm of conflict asserts that for each conflict there is a grouping of the members of society into a small number of classes. The class position of an individual is determined by some objectively verifiable relation to the issue of conflict, although the individual need not himself be aware, or conscious, of his class status. A society is characterized by the conflicts it contains, and consequently by the class structures associated with these conflicts (Zweig 1971b, pp. 48-49)

While acknowledging that Marxism was the best known elaboration of this paradigm, Zweig argued it was not the sole one: "For Marxists the conflict is ultimately rooted in a labor theory of value. (...) Those who reject the labor theory of value see other roots of conflict endemic to capitalism. (ibid., p. 50)

Zweig portrayed economics as an ideology, which disciplined people's views of the

world and precluded revolutionary action.<sup>17</sup> He argued that: “To bourgeois economists, such non-marginal, systemic attacks are irrational and uncomprehensible in economic terms. They have no intellectual or formal analytic tools to deal with such behavior.” (ibid., p. 45)

The interplay of “knowledge” and “life” was a major concern for the radicals. They argued that:

In choosing to be a scientist and to participate in this interaction as observer, the would-be scientist must decide whether she can accept the bounds to be placed on her experience, spending most of her working life in the role of objective, rational woman, alienated by the scientific mode of inquiry from being able to experience the observed, the Out-There, in more meaningful ways. (Behr et al. 1971, p. 25)

Radicals called for empathy with society and its ills. Society should be experienced subjectively if it was to be experienced at all. This was connected to a critique of objectivity. Radicals corresponded objectivity with the objectification of subjects which benefited the interests of the *status quo*, by constructing and maintaining a “machine-like” social system. To recover subjectivity, join “life” and “knowledge”, the radical was prescribed to abandon the norms of academe. The power structure of the classroom had to be subverted, and the radical had to move closer and participate in political movements. Radical economics was finally defined as knowledge with the purpose “of

---

<sup>17</sup>At the focus of the radicals’ criticism, marginalism was replaced by the concepts of “harmony” and “equilibrium” to describe bourgeois economics’ structuring principles. The term “bourgeois” took the place of the more commonly used terms of “conventional,” “standard,” “orthodox,” “contemporary,” denoted Zweig’s belief that “‘conventional’ economics is rooted in bourgeois ideology, and deserves an adjective which reflects that fact. One point of this paper is the demonstration of these roots and a challenge to the notion that economics is value-free” (Zweig 1971b, p. 43).

being destructive, non conservative, of the existing social order” of assisting revolution (ibid., p. 30; Zweig 1971c, p. 84).

Much had changed from URPE’s 1968 prospectus and conference debates to the 1971 special issue of the *Review*. In the context of growing campus unrest, and on the back of efforts to develop radical courses and literature, Radical Political Economics was presented in 1971 as a paradigm, and consequently as an alternative to the prevailing economic theory. Parallel to this development was the belief that the behavior of the profession was structurally bound with its paradigm, they were one and the same, scientific framework and politics overlapping. Even those that earlier held a dissociation between the politics of economics (the theory) and the politics of economists (the profession), came to the view that conventional economics should be discarded for a radical alternative. John Weeks in 1972 recanted his earlier views:

He [Michael Zweig] is absolutely correct in saying that my analysis took appallingly little account of the role of capitalist institutions in conditioning our thoughts, as well as controlling our lives. The adequate understanding of these institutions is something which my formal training insured I would not learn, and while I feel I have liberated my thinking a bit, I have no pretensions to adequate understanding. It is clear that Mike has gone much further than I, and I have much to learn from him and others. (Weeks 1972, p. 121)

If we translate the radicals’ proposals into the terms of a cultural map, we identify two fundamental coordinates: the overlap of knowledge and politics and the opposition between objectivity and subjectivity. The fundamental characteristic of radicals’ cultural cartography was the *overlap between science and politics*. The two cultural

domains were indistinct and nested the “scientific paradigms”. The radicals located their paradigm linked to the “revolutionary movement” in America, as a science for the oppressed and their emancipation. The radical map had no place for “neutrality”, denying the mainstream’s refuge. They placed the professional mainstream as implicated with the “conservative forces” in society, as part of the ideology of the “status quo”. While the radical paradigm was overtly partisan, the mainstream’s was said to be of concealed partisanship. So with politics and science indistinct, paradigms and the social forces were bound and irrevocably in conflict, distanced in the cultural map.

A further source of separation for radicals and mainstream in the cultural map was their choice of *subjectivity* or *objectivity*. Radicals located traditional economics overlapping with objectivity. Crucially, for them objectivity was also objectification or alienation. The alleged mainstream’s denial of the subjective was with counter-cultural overtones made into a denial of “life” itself. The traditional economics paradigm was said to depoliticise and de-socialise the scientist while training students to become “machine-like,” - objectivity was equated to the ideology of the *status quo*. In contrast, radicals located themselves in subjectivity. Their scientific approach would allow the scientist to be close to the ills of society and hence revolt against injustice. Its goal was to teach people how to live without alienation, engaged in social change.

## 4 A paradigm denied

The radical activities, notably their protests in the campuses and at the 1969 AEA meetings, occasioned interest in the new group and its economics. In less than a year the *Journal of Economic Literature* published a survey on radical economics.<sup>18</sup> The text

---

<sup>18</sup>The *Journal of Economic Literature* had just began in 1969 and its editor, Mark Perlman, had asked Martin Bronfenbrenner to write a survey article on a topic of his choosing. Bronfenbrenner chose

authored by Martin Bronfenbrenner,<sup>19</sup> was competent in its depiction of radicals' work. Understandably, because radical economics in 1969-70 was in a process of definition, Bronfenbrenner did not have much to survey and he ran tangents into the history and ideology of radicalism and socialism, with little bearing on the immediate subject matter.

The survey was shy of a critique of radical economics. There were criticisms but these were targeted on particular authors and papers. At times, Bronfenbrenner was also unashamedly complimentary: "Like too few of the rest of us, radical economists take their teaching seriously." Bronfenbrenner's main conclusions in 1970 were akin to later reactions to radical economics. Firstly, that "Radical economics should be recognized as a legitimate field of concentration in the study and practice of economics." Secondly, that the profession "require, and should continue to require, exposure of radical economists to orthodoxy" (idem.) The author expected that "the rise (or revival) of radical economics in America has far to go before it recedes" and argued that this growth should occur within the profession and without antagonisms (Bronfenbrenner 1970, pp. 758, 755, 763-5, 757).

---

radical economics in March 14, 1969, excited with the prospect of a resurgence in Marxist thought (a subject he had surveyed in 1964). At the time of this engagement, radical economics was expressed only in the Philadelphia Conference papers.

Perlman reacted negatively to Bronfenbrenner's first draft. The editor felt that in the paper radical economics was only radical economists and he could not see its content. Furthermore, he argued that Bronfenbrenner in his conclusions had been too sympathetic to the radicals while no clear benefits to the approach had been identified in the body of the survey. Perlman's referees all praised the text with only minor suggestions in style and only the editor seemed to have serious objections to it, wanting to see more on the work of Joan Robinson. The exception negative referee was the only radical consulted, John Gurley, in a second round of refereeing. He strongly opposed Bronfenbrenner's focus on the young radicals and demanded a longer genealogy. (Mark Perlman Papers, The Economists' Papers Project, at Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, U.S.A., box 24)

<sup>19</sup>Bronfenbrenner was perhaps unique in being simultaneously a member of URPE and of the right-liberal Mount Pelerin Society. Bronfenbrenner drew upon URPE publications and captured many nuances that were lost to later commentators. For instance, he distinguished URPE economists from the *Monthly Review* group, and he noted radicals' concentration in the field of economics of education.



Radicals from 1969 kept a presence at the AEA meetings.<sup>20</sup> Worthy of special mention is their participation in the 1971 convention. The President-elect of the AEA for 1971 was John Kenneth Galbraith. Using his presidential prerogative, Galbraith prepared a programme for the meetings that showcased radicals' work, with sessions on: the "Military-Industrial Complex," "Some contradictions of Capitalism," papers on "taxation of the rich," radical education and the political economy of women. The 1971 Richard T. Ely lecture was delivered by the critic of American economics, Joan Violet Robinson and Galbraith gave a special luncheon in honor of Gunnar Myrdal, an author renown for his analysis of race relations in America and the role of ideology in economic theory.<sup>21</sup> In Galbraith's Presidential Address, delivered in 1972 he gave pride of place to the radicals, "the main problem with orthodox economic ideas – which Galbraith asserted were under attack from a 'new and notably articulate generation of economists' – is the separation of power from its subject." (Galbraith 1973 and also see Jones 1972) As it happened with many of the events related to radical economics the press has eager to register the commentary: "In a press conference, [Galbraith] encouraged so-called non-establishment economists to 'get their ideas met by making their demands painful'." (Harbron 1972).

Galbraith was sympathetic to the radical cause, at Harvard he was an ally of the radicals in their departmental disputes. However, Galbraith should not be taken as

---

<sup>20</sup>In 1969 radicals organized a session on the "Economics of Imperialism" with papers by Richard D. Wolff, Theotonio dos Santos, Harry Magdoff, and with discussants Stephen Hymer, Victor Perlo and Arthur MacEwan. The session was published in the meetings' Papers and Proceedings. For 1970 see Gintis 1971 and Gurley 1971.

<sup>21</sup>At the business meeting under Galbraith's chairmanship, a group of women (including several URPE radicals)(interview with Laurie Nisonoff (2003)) motioned the AEA accusing the organization of making economics "a man's field" and called for greater equality in training and hiring of women economists. With Galbraith's support, a Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP) was created to investigate the extent of gender discrimination. In the same meeting Galbraith opposed a motion condemning the US war in Indochina, as a violation the Association's Charter (aer 1972a).

representative of the profession at large. In fact, some AEA members were angered by his handling of the 1971 meetings. Arthur Okun bolted that: “It was the worst thing I ever saw.” (Collier 1973)). The radicals’ prominence at the 1971 meetings should not be taken as the profession’s endorsement of the URPE project. Rather, the significance of the 1971 meeting was that Galbraith offered the radicals a platform that ensured the remainder of the profession would hear their challenge, take it seriously and respond.

Interestingly, the most explicit and detailed response to the economics of the radical left was authored by a visiting Swedish economist. In his 1969-70 visit to the USA, Assar Lindbeck had been impressed by the economic arguments of the New Left students. In a book entitled *The Political Economy of the New Left: An outsider’s view*, he looked to outline the content of New Left’s economics and to show its shortcomings from the neutral position of a non-American.<sup>22</sup>

Lindbeck zoomed in on the radicals’ critique of marginalism and professional neglect of the “interaction between economic and political factors.” (Lindbeck 1971, p. 17) In a style characteristic of his “outsider stance”, the author both accepted and rejected the radicals’ criticism. He acknowledged that insufficient work had been done on important social ills (prominently racism, poverty and war), though offering the caveat that economists were beginning to address these subjects. He also denied the radicals’ claims by stating that contemporary economic methodologies were well equipped to deal with these issues. Fault lay in an inadequate translation of economics’ insight to

---

<sup>22</sup>Lindbeck was not clear about his sources, he seldom made references, but in his introduction he noted three compilations of New Left texts. Only one of these contained any texts by URPErs, notably Zweig’s “New Left critique of Economics”, it is thus not surprising that Lindbeck only partially debated radical economics. That the book should not be seen as a response to radical economics was noted by Paul A. Samuelson in the book’s foreword and by at least one of the book’s reviewers. (Samuelson 1971, p. xvi and Heilbroner 1972, ft. 1) Nonetheless in a section titled “New Left’s Critique of ‘Traditional’ Economics” Lindbeck’s comments do touch upon some of the radicals’ (Zweig’s) critical claims. My reading of Lindbeck is focused on this section.

the public (ibid., pp. 23, 25).

For Lindbeck, the radicals' critique was grounded on two misunderstandings. Firstly, they failed to recognize that “economists are economists only and not also at the same time sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, philosophers, and so on (or social reformers or even revolutionaries).” (ibid., p. 22) Secondly, he stated that radicals misunderstood the distinction between positive and normative economics, Lindbeck illustrated:

It is, of course, possible to study the effects on prices and quantities in the oil industry of a tax on gasoline, regardless of our feelings about the tax or about the oil industry, for that matter – an example of positive economics. The only subjective element in *positive* economics is, in principle, the choice of topic (ibid., p. 26)

According to Lindbeck, within the boundaries of positive economics, separate from normative economics and other social sciences, economists could produce objective, apolitical work.

It is striking that Lindbeck's response to the radical critique echoed similar opinions by other authors. Typically the stage for these reflections was the AEA annual convention. One instance of debate that I wish to single out occurred in a session, “The state of economics: the behavioral and social sciences survey”, devoted to a report on the future prospects for the economics profession.<sup>23</sup> The debate over the report is worthy of note because it directly addressed radical economics as an alternative approach to

---

<sup>23</sup>The report was part of a series reviewing the various behavioral and social scientific disciplines and providing advice to administrators and policy makers on the needs and opportunities for their development. The reports were organized under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences and the Social Science Research Council (Riecken 1971, p. 43). The report is of some historical interest since it bore the ambitious (and ultimately unreasonable) plan of massive expansion of doctoral programs in economics - a projected trebling of doctorates in ten years (Barber 1996, p. 23).

conventional economics.

The radical commentator was John G. Gurley,<sup>24</sup> who objected to the report for ignoring radical economics. Gurley claimed that the report reproduced mainstream economics' distorted conception of reality, "short on social relevance, precisely because its ruling paradigm – its conceptions of the world – excludes power, conflict, and disruptive change within a historical setting – that is, because it excludes a large part of reality." For Gurley the political economist "studies economic problems within the historical context of ruler-subject relations, . . . he actively takes the side of the poor and the powerless, and he generally sees the system of capitalism as their oppressor." Gurley's argument is akin to the "paradigm of conflict" onto which radical economists converged by 1971 (Gurley 1971, p. 54-55, 62)

One of Gurley's discussants, Robert L. Heilbroner was sympathetic to what he interpreted as the radicals' main goals: "to widen and deepen the range of what is called economic analysis." Yet, despite Heilbroner's stated interest in radical economics, he argued that the definition of the goals of economics was not a task for economists: "here, fortunately, the professional competence of the economist comes to an end, and he can do no more than take his place within the polity, to urge whatever goals – equality, freedom, growth, ecological balance and whatever – he seeks for society." For Heilbroner, an economist abandoned his field of professional competence once he turned to advocacy. He raised other criticisms, namely that radicals failed from "over-generalization," querying: "Is it capitalism alone – as the radical economists seem to maintain – that is responsible for the ills of racism, alienation, exploitation, bureaucratic indifference, etc.?" Heilbroner noted that radicals' lacked scientific precision, when

---

<sup>24</sup>Gurley is an interesting case of an established economist, just ending his term as editor of the *American Economic Review*, who converted to the radical camp.

spreading “a humanist-sounding gloss over areas of . . . ignorance,” (Heilbroner 1971, pp. 66-67)

Another of Gurley’s discussants and a co-author of the report, Robert M. Solow, was more strongly worded against radical economics. In Solow’s view radical economics did not deserve mention in the report, since the radical body of work was neither “large” nor “important.” (Solow 1971, p. 63) Solow went on to criticize radical economics: “I think that radical economics as it is practiced contains more cant, not less cant; more role-playing, not less role-playing; less facing of the facts, not more facing of the facts, than conventional economics.” (ibid., p. 63) The author took issue with the radicals’ claim that they had an alternative paradigm: “It is more a matter of posture and rhetoric than of scientific framework at all”, he continued: “the function of a scientific paradigm is to provide a framework for ‘normal science.’ But there is little evidence that radical political economics is capable of generating a line of normal science, or even that it wants to.” (ibid., p. 64)<sup>25</sup> For Solow, scholarship was the interplay of “knowledge of technique and acquaintance with data” (ibid., p. 65) which he found absent from the work of the radicals.<sup>26</sup>

In the early 1970s Solow took up the role of champion for conventional economics. In another article entitled “Science and ideology in economics,” he responded to some of the radicals’ criticisms, “the questions [that] confront any teaching economist these days who talks to his students and reads the handwriting on the wall” (Solow 1970, p. 94).<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup>Solow stressed the need for quantitative investigation (“calculations”) and he found that radicals were disdainful of this sort of enquiry, he added with irony: “And when and if any of them [calculations that would prove the radicals’ assertions] is done, you know who will do it – some poor damned graduate student in some conventional department, supervised by some conventional professor of conventional economics.” (idem.)

<sup>26</sup>Solow’s claim was not unreasonable, radicals preferred to present their challenge in essays describing the distinctive features of their paradigm over producing exemplars of it.

<sup>27</sup>The article was initially intended as a response to Heilbroner 1970, an article in the same issue commissioned to reflect the radicals’ critique. However, Solow is responding to more than Heilbroner’s

Solow accepted that new urgent subjects had emerged in the late 1960s, but he asked for patience towards economic science: “It takes time for middle-aged men to change their research interests and their teaching, and it may take even longer for them to drum up any interesting and useful things to say.” (Solow 1970, pp. 95-6) Solow also accepted that economists avoided the “dangerous” questions, whose answers may challenge the system. But he added two good reasons to justify this disregard: most such subjects were outside economists’ competence, and some questions were prohibitively difficult to answer:

A study of “the size and distribution of the benefits of the war economy by socioeconomic grouping” scares me more by its impossible difficulty than by its possible subversiveness. I doubt that the data are available to do such a study with the rigor and precision that the profession now demands. (ibid., p. 98)

Solow argued for the avoidance of the difficult subjects as a virtue. The profession’s demanding standards could not accept such “vague and unanswerable” explorations.

Solow defended the profession’s standards of objectivity, a frequent target for radicals and student critics. Solow acknowledged that despite professional standards some ideology crept into economists’ work (ibid., p. 99) however, this taint of ideology could be avoided if economists chose adequate questions. Characteristically, he sought to show how the problem of ideology could be contained:

It is a little hard to see how ideology sneaks into an attempt to discover how purchases of frozen orange juice respond to changes in price (even a socialist planning board might want to know that), or – to take something

---

personal interpretation of the radical critique. It is likely that Heilbroner and Solow were chosen to be Gurley’s discussants because of their prior reflections in *Public Interest*.

more specifically capitalist – how the plant and equipment spending of corporations is related to their sales and profits, interest rates, stock prices, taxes and other things. (ibid., p. 100)

It was possible “to make social science as nearly value-free as it is possible to be” (ibid., p. 101) by fostering professional criticism. Radicals were thus invited to participate in the professional community by respecting its rules, the profession’s “standards of rigor, precision, and reliance on systematic observation interpreted by theory.”

In the cultural cartography of the self-appointed spokespersons for the “conventional theory” there was a clear demarcation between objectivity and subjectivity of the researcher, but a tortuous boundary between science and politics. The mainstream’s response focused explicitly on the alleged overlap between politics and science (or scientists) and the threat this might represent for the profession’s claims to objectivity. Defenders of the mainstream argued politics and economics should remain separate. They acknowledged that the boundary was at times difficult to draw. One could be near science and far from politics, but there was no means of being wholly immune to the influence of society and “ideology”. By conventional economists’ own admission there was a difficult balance to strike, one should be close enough to identify the social ills in need of response and yet also ensure that economists work in near isolation from partisanship and societal commitments. Furthermore, for the mainstream politics entered economics unsystematically, through individuals as part of “personal tastes,” alongside for instance personality, as the starting point of any scientific voyage.

To move away from the influence of personal tastes and closer to the ideal of “objective”, “neutral” scientific knowledge, the scientist had to pose sensible, quantifiable questions and then open his work to professional criticism as an antidote to personal idiosyncrasies. The mainstream mapped a path of “knowledge of technique and ac-

quaintance with data” that economists should travel towards science. This route to science was part of a single paradigm of economics, the mainstream denying radicals’ claim that they offered a new paradigm. The radicals were seen as abandoning the pursuit of science to do politics, what Solow called “cant and role-playing”. In the mainstream’s map, the radicals, with their claims of joining politics and economics, were located at the margins of science.

## 5 Political discrimination

Early in the 1970s there were signs that radical economics was having an impact on the economics profession. Paul A. Samuelson edited his portrayal of Karl Marx in his influential textbook.<sup>28</sup> The change in Samuelson’s *Economics* did not go unnoticed by contemporaries. They were surprised by his new assessment of Marxism: “Marxism may be too valuable to leave to the Marxists. It provides a critical prism through which mainstream economists can – to their own benefit – pass their analyzes for audit.” ( cited in Brazelton 1977, p.117)<sup>29</sup> Further, change was reflected in the syllabus of the “economics principles” courses. For instance at Columbia University in addition to Samuelson’s textbook, teachers were reported to have used David Mermelstein’s collection of heterodox texts, with writings from such diverse authors as Paul Sweezy, Paul Baran, Ernest Mandel, Herbert Marcuse, Karl Marx, Galbraith and Oscar Wilde (Mermelstein 1970).<sup>30</sup> It would be an exaggeration to argue that these developments

---

<sup>28</sup>See Klamer 1990, p. 150 which studies compares the editions of Samuelson’s influential textbook. Samuelson went on to spark a controversy in the *Journal of Economic Literature*, on the economics of Marx which ran for several years.

<sup>29</sup>It was also remarked that Samuelson had broadened the scope of economic inquiry to “questions that border upon such related disciplines as sociology, anthropology, political science, psychology and history.” (Brazelton 1977, p. 115)

<sup>30</sup>The book ran a number of editions throughout the decade, with a final third edition in 1976.



represented a major transformation (or radicalisation) of the profession; in fact some saw it as mere “seasoning” of a larger banquet:

None of the senior faculty at Columbia objected to the introduction of radicalism into the economics curriculum. “We’re very glad to have some unorthodox teaching around,” said Prof. Harold Barger. “Suitable seasoning is very desirable. Of course, if someone told the senior faculty we’d have to teach nothing but Karl Marx, I think there would be a revolt.” (Salmans 1970, p. S3-2)

Although changes to the textbooks and course content bore evidence to the profession’s acceptance of radical subjects, it was not the mark of wholesale or wholehearted approval. As young radicals began to be considered for tenure most saw it refused, while others were even denied renewal of their contracts. The most publicized of the clashes over hiring between radicals and mainstream economists happened at Harvard with Samuel Bowles as the protagonist.<sup>31</sup>

Bowles was considered for tenure at Harvard in 1972-73. He received the sponsorship of three of the most prominent members of the department: Wassily Leontief, Kenneth J. Arrow and Galbraith. “Yet despite such impressive backing, Bowles’ promotion was turned down by a vote of the whole senior faculty.” (Lifschultz 1974, p. 28)<sup>32</sup> The head of the Harvard department, James Duesenberry accepted that the decision was

---

<sup>31</sup>Bowles joined the Harvard faculty in 1965 from Yale. On his arrival, Bowles did not hide his left convictions; he refused to sign the State teacher’s loyalty oath and was threatened with dismissal. Loyalty oaths were instituted during the 1950s witch-hunt years, as historian Helen Schrecker has shown “Almost every state, whether or not it investigated its universities or had them investigate themselves, imposed some kind of a loyalty oath on its teachers. . . . By the late fifties, thirty-two states required loyalty oaths” (Schrecker 1986, p. 116). Bowles opposed what he saw as “an interference with freedom of speech” and succeeded in defeating the University authorities, remaining in the economics faculty. For this he benefited from “very encouraging support from my own department and elsewhere.” (na6 1966, p. 9)

<sup>32</sup>Bowles received five votes for tenure out of a 24 full professors of the department at the time (*Kennebec Journal* (1973)).

tantamount to an assessment of radical economics: “We have people here who are claiming to have a substantial set of new developments. I simply have to say that, in my opinion, the amount of evidence they have put on the table has just not been that significant.” (Idem.) Duesenberry voiced the standard assessment held by conventional economists. Radical economics was seen as “negligible,” not to be rejected, but to be “neglected.” (Solow 1971, p. 63) Bowles was not the only radical at Harvard that failed to be reappointed with tenure. Soon after, the department decided not to reappoint Arthur MacEwan prompting an outcry by graduate students. The press noted the double denial of tenure (Weintraub 1973) and recorded that similar decisions had been made in the past for Herbert Gintis and Thomas Weisskopf (lat 1973). The student protest and the media attention seems to have been successful in reversing the decision over the hiring of Gintis (Lifschultz 1974, pp. 28-29).

As I have shown, Harvard was home to one of the largest groups of radical graduate students and young faculty. Although some students remained in the graduate program, the dismissals effectively dissolved the radical group. A few years later Harvard would hire one of its radical graduate students, William Lazonick, to the faculty so to carter for a continued demand for radical subjects.

Following the very public case of Bowles and MacEwan, a string of cases of non-renewal of the radicals’ contracts occurred in 1974: four from San Jose State University, one from Lehman College (CUNY) and one from the University of Massachusetts – Boston (again generating some public attention (Golden 1975b, p. F1). The events at San Jose in California were particularly shocking, since it was seen as a center for radical scholarship in the West Coast. The dismissals there came from an administrative decision, contravening a previous departmental vote (Rowe 1974, p. D6). The URPE steering committee branded the firings as politically motivated: “an attempt to get at

those teachers who have good and close connections with students – at those who point the finger at capitalism.” (cited in Golden 1975b, p. F1).

Reacting to the growing threat placed on the radicals’ employment, URPE protested the AEA meetings in San Francisco, December 1974. “About 60 radical economists, representing the Union of Radical Political Economists [sic], picketed the economic association presidential address late Sunday to protest the firings chanting such slogans as “they say cutback, we say fight back”” (Rowe 1974, p. D6).<sup>33</sup> With no stated endorsement from URPE, William H. Behn and Henry M. Levin (both colleagues of Gurley at Stanford, and the latter a former collaborator of Bowles in the field of the economics of education) presented to the meeting four proposals on the subject of hiring.

For the purpose of the current argument the third Behn and Levin resolution was the most significant, as it dealt with political discrimination in hiring practices and made direct reference to the events at San Jose State University and Lehman College.<sup>34</sup> It read: the AEA “shall establish a standing committee, the Committee on Political Discrimination, whose members shall be appointed each year by the President of the Association to collect information on issues of fact in cases involving termination of employment for alleged political reasons.” (ibid., p. 444)<sup>35</sup> Not surprisingly, the proposal

---

<sup>33</sup>To have expect some form of response from the AEA was not unreasonable, the previous year John G. Gurley had been elected to the Vice-Presidency of the association and Paul M. Sweezy to its Executive Committee. Furthermore, the Association’s acting president for 1974 (and therefore presiding over the proceedings) was Robert Aaron Gordon, father of David Gordon, a radical at the New School for Social Research.

<sup>34</sup>The last and most ambitious of the proposals urged “economic departments to take immediate measures to attract and hire permanent (tenure track) economists working in the Marxian economic paradigm”. (aer 1975, p. 442) The motion was found out of order and was never subject to discussion. Two other resolutions dealt with political discrimination of students and publicity of job openings.

<sup>35</sup>In the 1972 meetings there had been a motion denouncing political discrimination and asserting the Association’s strong condemnation of political discrimination against radicals in hiring decisions or government grant allocation (aer 1972b). However, this had not been accompanied by direct action by URPE neither did it produce such a clear result as the 1974 creation of the Committee on Political

was controversial. The reference to San Jose and Lehman College was deleted early on in the debate, with the assent of Behn and Levin. Discussion raged on between those that agreed with the creation of the Committee on Political Discrimination and those arguing that the committee would be replacing the mandate of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and thus arguing that efforts should be concentrated in allowing the AAUP to work more effectively. But finally, the Behn and Levin proposal prevailed, voted and passed by the majority.

As outlined, the President of the AEA Robert A. Gordon appointed Kenneth J. Arrow to head the Committee. It is significant that Arrow, a Harvard professor, was chosen for the task. Arrow had been supportive although not enthusiastic of his fellow radical faculty. He was beyond suspicion of being aligned either with conservative or radical politics. Harvard's public image had been tainted by the non-tenure decisions on the radicals,<sup>36</sup> and it was desirable that a Harvard faculty be the maker of peace.

The AEA Committee on Political Discrimination concluded its first three reports in 1976. The first concerned Patricia Quick's dismissal from the University of Massachusetts at Boston Harbor. Quick had her contract suspended with the promise that once she submitted her PhD thesis she would be reinstated. However, after approval of her thesis with a high grade at Harvard University, she was denied a new contract on the grounds that her thesis was lacking in quality. After interviews to members of the department, the Committee found:

no basis for criticizing the Personnel Committee on political grounds. The issues raised dealt with matters as methods of verifying hypotheses, preci-

---

Discrimination.

<sup>36</sup>In 1975, a report on Harvard's teaching indicted it of being too narrowly construed, and that same year Wassily Leontief, a Nobel laureate, resigned from the department disillusioned and critical (Golden 1975a).

sion in the formulation of propositions and ideas, command of the scholarly literature to which the thesis is intended to contribute, congruency of expression and exposition, critical evaluation of sources, and so forth. In particular, we found no evidence that the Marxist thrust of the thesis was regarded itself as objectionable.<sup>37</sup>

Concerning the case of David Barkin, dismissed from Lehman College, the Committee found that: “the Department appears intolerant of new ways of teaching and research, in particular, giving little or no credit to teaching and publication in Spanish. On the other hand, it found no definite evidence that the discrimination, which certainly appears real, is based on political motives.” There was a sense that “normal procedures had been bypassed” but no condemnation was voiced.<sup>38</sup>

The Committee produced a joint and lengthy report for the San Jose cases which initially included six complainants (one, Douglas Dowd, was reinstated with tenure as the investigations were being conducted). The San Jose troubles seemed to have originated over the election of a department chairman, an appointment made by the administration against the majority of the faculty vote. The radicals argued they were being persecuted for having objected to the administration’s interference with departmental affairs. The AEA committee was unequivocal in denouncing violations of procedural rules, i.e. in the nomination of the chairman and in bypassing the faculty

---

<sup>37</sup>In a comment accompanying the report, the committee added:

it seems important to stress that the thesis lay beyond the boundaries of traditional work in economics in its methodology. Any work of this sort runs the risk of being considered by some at the leading edge of research (and in this sense to be “revolutionary”) while others will find it lacking in the basic concepts and techniques that are the mark of a competent researcher in the discipline.

“Report - Fact-Finding Panel on the Complaint of Professor Patricia M. Quick”, June 2, 1975. Kenneth J. Arrow Papers, Economists’ Papers Project, Duke University, Box 6.

<sup>38</sup>“Report of the Committee on Political Discrimination to the Executive Committee, American Economic Association, 19 March 1976”, Arrow Papers, Box 8.

personnel committee in making faculty appointments. Although the report came out condemning the University administration as violating academic freedom, it deemed such issues out of its jurisdiction. The report concluded that “such that intra-university politics, per se, are to be distinguished from the “political reasons” alluded to therein such that they do not belong to the Committee’s jurisdiction.”<sup>39</sup>

The Committee’s ineffectiveness was blatant and acknowledged by its members. They reported to the AEA Executive Committee that their “original mandate will rarely, if ever, be feasible to execute”. They were pursuing “direct factual evidence” of political discrimination. Following the professions’ conventional cultural map where science and politics were separable, this entailed observing the foreign interference of political discourse into the evaluation of a radical’s work. The Committee members recognized this was a very demanding burden of proof: “it must be candidly said that if political factors did enter, say in evaluation of research or of teaching, it would require only the slightest skill on the part of administrators or departments to conceal the fact. Indeed it might require no skill at all because the factors may well be operating at an unconscious level.”<sup>40</sup>

For radicals political discrimination was inherent in any evaluation of scholarly work, even if it appeared couched in respectable and objective language. As Samuel Bowles wrote to the AEA’s Secretary, Elton Hinshaw, “In the last analysis, the evaluation of all scholarly work is and must be informed, at least in part, by considerations which extend far beyond the boundaries of the science, necessarily reaching into realms which would generally be considered political” and he added “failing to locate a ‘smok-

---

<sup>39</sup>“American Economic Association Committee on Political Discrimination. Panel Report: San Jose State University Cases”, Arrow Papers, Box 8.

<sup>40</sup>“Report of the Committee on Political Discrimination to the Executive Committee, American Economic Association, 19 March 1976”, Arrow Papers, Box 8, folder “AEA – Committee on Political Discrimination”, p. 6.

ing gun', as you put it, the committee is generally reduced to a finding of no political discrimination, even in situations which bear a very strong ideological and even petty political odor." Bowles declined the invitation to be a member of the committee.<sup>41</sup>

In 1976 the C.P.D. had a total of eight cases under investigation. To the national media, Arrow explained that there was great difficulty in determining whether discharges resulted from political beliefs, the quality of a professor's work, or the recession, which had forced some colleges to lay off faculty members (Epstein 1966, p. A29).<sup>42</sup> The feeling of frustration led the Committee to propose that it "receive complaints and indeed encourage them. However, it should turn over the complaints to the A.A.U.P. and offer its cooperation."<sup>43</sup> By 1977 the Committee on Political Discrimination was no longer investigating new cases of dismissal and was forwarding all complaints to the AAUP (Aer 1978, p. 450).<sup>44</sup> Later in the decade according to Jordan Kurland, the acting general secretary of the AAUP, the number of cases of dismissal began to fall (Epstein 1966, p. A29), and the Committee on Political Discrimination stopped reporting to the Executive Committee, effectively from 1979.<sup>45</sup>

The aftermath of the dismissals and the slow and ineffectual response by the AEA (elusive in its conclusions and thus unwilling to be drawn into the faculty disputes)

---

<sup>41</sup>Letter from Samuel Bowles to Dr. C. Elton Hinshaw, May 8, 1978. Arrow Papers, Box 8.

<sup>42</sup>The radicals acknowledged the effects of the recession leading to reduction in faculty numbers, but warned that this would serve as a cover for pursuing political firings (urp 1970c, p. 5).

<sup>43</sup>"Report of the Committee on Political Discrimination to the Executive Committee, American Economic Association, 19 March 1976", Arrow Papers.

<sup>44</sup>In 1978 the case report on Robert Cherry was concluded. The summary was that: ".. the Committee is unable to judge the merits of the department's grounds for not reappointing Professor Cherry. The Committee finds no evidence, however, that the reappointment decision was based on political discrimination." Arrow reacted to the new Committee President, Carl Stevens that: "I must say I have the distinct feeling that Cherry was treated harshly and very likely in a discriminatory fashion, but he did not get clear evidence that the motivation was political." (Letter from Carl Stevens to Kenneth Arrow, April 14, 1978, reply from Arrow dated April 20, 1978. Arrow Papers, box 8).

<sup>45</sup>Lee (2004b) has researched a larger number of cases of dismissal and what can only be termed bullying of radicals. I have focused here on the major cases, those that reverberated in the AEA and caught national media attention.

only gave credence to the radicals' suspicion towards the profession.<sup>46</sup> To preserve their jobs, the formerly outspoken radicals were attempting to go unnoticed, as the *New York Times* revealed:

With university jobs generally scarce these days, some so-called “closet radicals” have tried to sneak onto campuses by sending in job resumes that hide their radicalism. Others, who already have jobs, try to keep their jobs by having mail from the Union for Radical Political Economics sent to their homes rather than to the office, where anti-radical department chairmen might notice. (Golden 1975b)

Denied tenured posts at the elite institutions where they had obtained their PhDs, many radicals had to find employment in less prestigious Universities or in liberal arts colleges where there was limited opportunity for research. Dispersed throughout the country, a number of radicals managed to cluster in departments where radical graduate programs could be designed and radical research along academic lines could be pursued. The most important achievement of the radicals in this regard, and one that I wish to narrate in some detail, was the concentration of radicals at the University

---

<sup>46</sup>In the 1975 meetings, radical economist David Gordon on behalf of the committee, produced a statement “entitled ‘Taking Political Discrimination Seriously’ that called for broadening the functions of the Committee,” (aer 1976, p. 444)) but a discussion of the proposal was considered out of order for not having arrived in the regulatory thirty days in advance of the meeting. The extension of the functions of the committee were endorsed in its 1976 report and entailed a study of the comparative career paths of radicals and conventional economists, it was modeled on a very revealing study ran by the AEA’s Committee on the Status of Women in the Economic Profession (CSWEP). Despite Gordon’s continued urgings (aer 1977, p. 441) the executive committee only accepted the study in December 1977, with a funding allocation of \$10,000.

The study proposal sketched by Harvard economist Michael Piore was never conducted with the judgment that the funding was insufficient. In the impressions of Carl Stevens head of the Committee in 1978, the AEA Executive Committee considered: “in light of budget constraints and prior actions of this kind, a very generous, maximum allocation. It should not be construed as only weak support for such a study. At the same time, the Executive Committee has doubts about the prospect of designing an effective study in this domain.” (Letter from Carl Stevens to Kenneth J. Arrow, September 12, 1978, Arrow papers, box 8.)



of Massachusetts –Amherst (U.Mass.- Amherst),<sup>47</sup> which remains the most important center for radical research.

The origins of a radical center at Amherst are closely connected with Samuel Bowles’s dismissal from Harvard. Since 1967 the U.Mass.-Amherst department had been in a state of turmoil. It had repeatedly received poor assessments by external committees (in 1967 and again in 1971) despite an investment in hiring “high flyers,” mainly “mathematical economists, . . . to the avoidance of such traditional fields as macroeconomics, public policy, monetary theory, and economic history” (Lifschultz 1974, p. 30). In 1971-72, alongside the disputes over hiring that split the faculty, another conflict was added over the firing of a radical teacher, Mike Best. The University administration sidestepped the department and decided not to renew Best’s contract. The head of the department saw the interference as undermining the department’s authority and his own, and resigned (*ibid.*, p. 30).

In a move to heal the divisions in the economics department, the Dean of the faculty, Dean Alfange, was nominated acting head of the Economics Department. Concerned by a fall in the number of undergraduates in economics, Alfange came to agree with the criticism that hiring had been too narrowly focused (Lifschultz 1974, p. 52). Bowles had taken a year off from Harvard in 1972-73 and was at U.Mass.-Amherst’s Labor Center. Predicting the problems he would face with the upcoming “tenure or out” decision, Bowles showed interest in joining the University (Walsh 1978, p. 34). His bargaining power was patent in that he did not ask for a job but rather for a center of

---

<sup>47</sup>Amherst lies 90 miles west of Boston, the hub of the “five colleges”: U.Mass-Amherst, Amherst College, Hampshire College, Smith College and Mount Holyoke College. The University of Massachusetts at Amherst was originally and until 1931, the Massachusetts Agricultural College. In 1970 Amherst was still a mainly rural community, “a cow town”. According Herbert Gintis, this is to be taken literally, he recalls that in the 1970s there were cows grazing around the campus (interview with Herbert Gintis, 2003). It was an unlikely destination for urbane radical intellectuals.

radical research: “pointed out that one of the greatest obstacles to the development of radical scholarship in economics was that academics interested in its development were scattered and isolated from fellow colleagues” (Lifschultz 1974, p. 52). Bowles thus suggested that alongside his hiring with tenure, the department should also employ Herbert Gintis, Richard Edwards, Stephen Resnick, and Richard Wolff, the first two from Harvard, the other two at the time teaching at City College New York.<sup>48</sup>

By 1976 the department of twenty-five members had ten who despite their differences would accept the label of Marxists. They were the largest and most visible group of radicals at the time, and graduate students with strong credentials were attracted to the department, which pleased some of their conventional colleagues in the department and the University’s administration (*ibid.*, pp. 34-35).

Although U.Mass-Amherst hosted the most publicly visible and influential group of radical economists, it was not the only place where radicals were able to maintain radical courses and a radical graduate program. Other departments that merit reference were located at the American University in Washington D.C. and at the New School for Social Research in New York City. As evidenced by the geographical distribution of these departments and despite the high mobility of academics, Radical Political Economics remained in the early 1970s primarily Northeastern based. On the West

---

<sup>48</sup>Bowles, Gintis, Resnick and Wolff were hired into tenure track positions (the exception was Edwards who had just finished his PhD). As Alfange faced criticism for the hiring of radicals, his comments in a memorandum repeated Galbraith’s 1972 Presidential Address and the radicals’ appraisal of the profession:

It seemed to me impossible . . . for the department to continue to remain insensitive to the ferment taking place within the discipline of economics, in which a substantial number of economists – including some of the most prestigious members of the profession – were challenging the dominant neo-classical paradigm and calling into question the ability of the profession utilizing that paradigm adequately to deal with many of the most urgent social problems in the nation and the world. (Lifschultz 1974, p. 52)

Coast there were also groups of radicals at Stanford University<sup>49</sup> and at the University of California at Riverside,<sup>50</sup> but the role played by radicals in these departments was marginal and precarious.

By 1975 radical economics was thus no longer a feature of Harvard, MIT or Yale but a major voice coming out of U.Mass.-Amherst, New School and less prominently of American University, Stanford University and U.C.-Riverside. The departments mentioned were “radical departments” in so far as they supported radical research and despite radicals being always in a minority position. As a result of its relocation away from the elite campuses and as universities quieted in the mid-1970s, radical economics retreated from full confrontation with the profession. Within the halls of academia it was a critical voice, but no longer scandalous or disruptive.

## 6 Boundaries and migrations

The definition of radical economics was punctuated by the campus unrest of 1968-1972. It was propelled by faculty disputes, by siding with the protesting students, and through radicals’ involvement in the left political movement which estranged the group from the principles of professional economics. Radicals through the design of undergraduate

---

<sup>49</sup>At Stanford University in 1975 and “following a four year student struggle, the economics department established a field in “Alternative Approaches to Economic Analysis”” (urp 1970a). The department counted with John Gurley, Duncan Foley and Don Harris who had in that year become a tenured faculty member. Although this was a small group in a large department it counted with the support from radicals in other departments, namely Anthropology, Education and the Food Research Institute. See also Christiansen 1974.

<sup>50</sup>At the University of California – Riverside, acceptance of radical economists was won after a two-year battle. The most prominent radicals there were Howard Sherman and E. K. Hunt. The department’s chairman Roger Ransom commented on at the presence of 3 radicals in the 11 strong department, “I don’t think that makes our department radical ...but it’s more than a sidelight.”. Ransom’s assessment of the radicals was that “I think the radicals are weak on analysis... but they are very strong on laying out the issues and this turns students on.’ As a result they swarm to the radicals’ classes” (cited in Trombley 1975).

courses, writing of textbooks and conferences organized by URPE began to actively design an alternative economic paradigm.

The principal features of their alternative economic theory was a re-mapping of the economist's place in society. They argued that the economist should not seek distance from politics, from a commitment to the dispossessed. To the radicals any desire to remain neutral and avoid the critical questions was to place obstacles on social transformation.

Conventional economists were not quick to respond, the majority looked away from the radical criticisms. Those that felt engaged by the criticism responded harshly to economists blurring of old time boundaries, and called for economics to have some immunity from political and subjective passion. The context and timing of the conventional economists response suggests that they were most worried by the public scandal. Radicals were effective in making themselves heard in the media: first, with their support for the Harvard strike, then with the 1969 AEA protest, later in 1971 at the New Orleans AEA meetings organized by Galbraith and finally and most damagingly, with the accusation of political discrimination underlying denial of tenure and dismissals in mid-1970s.

The creation of the Committee on Political Discrimination, initially called for by radical sympathizers, served to affirm the conventional economists' cultural cartography. In all cases investigated the Committee found no evidence of political influence because it found no explicit statement by protagonists to that effect. This was the understanding that politics was separate from economics and could only be joined by explicit personal intervention.

Radicals' migration into less prestigious universities reveals the dynamic character of boundary work. The cartography enacted by the Committee on Political Discrimi-

nation denied radicals the joining of science and politics. Radical work was allowed to be tagged as less relevant, interesting and prestigious. As the conventional cartography asserted radical economics was negligible. If this was not the case in 1970, when this statement was pronounced, because of radicals' presence in elite institutions and public attention to their offerings, they were marginal by the late 1970s.

## References

- (1966). Bowles's son to fight loyalty oath. *The New York Times*, (pp.9̃). March 11.
- (1969a). Confronting the aea. *Newsletter of the Union for Radical Political Economics*, 1(3), 1–2.
- (1969). Minutes of the executive committee meetings. In *Papers and Proceedings of the Eighty-first Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association*, volume 59 (pp. 574–577).: American Economic Association.
- (1969b). New england regional conference. *Newsletter of the Union for Radical Political Economics*, 1(3), 3–7.
- (1970). Annual business meeting, december 29, 1969 new york hilton hotel, new york, new york. In *Papers and Proceedings of the Eighty-second Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association*, volume 60 (pp. 487–489).: American Economic Association.
- (1970a). Economics at stanford. *Newsletter of the Union for Radical Political Economics*, 7(6), 34.
- (1970b). Political economy for the university of michigan. *Newsletter of the Union for Radical Political Economics*, 2(4), 12–16.
- (1970c). Political firings! *Newsletter of the Union for Radical Political Economics*, 6(6), 5–8.
- (1972a). Minutes of the annual meeting december 28, 1971 new orleans, louisiana. In *American Economic Review*, volume 62 (pp. 470–474).: American Economic Association.
- (1972b). Minutes of the annual meeting toronto, ontario december 29, 1972. In *Papers and Proceedings of the Eighty-fifth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association*, volume 63 (pp. 471–473).: American Economic Association.
- (1973). 2 held losing harvard posts due to politics. *The Los Angeles Times*, (pp.2̃1). 3 January.
- (1975). Minutes of the annual meeting san francisco, california december 29, 1974. In *Papers and Proceedings of the Eighty-seventh Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association*, volume 65 (pp. 441–447).: American Economic Association.
- (1976). Minutes of the annual meeting dallas, texas december 29, 1975. In *Papers and Proceedings of the Eighty-eighth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association*, volume 66 (pp. 465–467).: American Economic Association.

- (1977). Minutes of the annual meeting atlantic city, new jersey september 17, 1976. In *Papers and Proceedings of the Eighty-ninth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association*, volume 67 (pp. 434–436).: American Economic Association.
- (1978). Minutes of the annual meeting new york, new york december 29, 1977. In *Papers and Proceedings of the Ninetieth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association*, volume 68 (pp. 440–444).: American Economic Association.
- Barber, W. J. (1996). Postwar changes in american graduate education in economics. In A. W. Coats (Ed.), *The Post-1945 Internationalization of Economics* (pp. 12–30). Supplement to volume 28 of the History of Political Economy.
- Behr, T., Garlin, V., Morris, J., & Roehl, R. (1971). Towards a radical political economics. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 3(2), 17–42.
- Bluestone, B. (1969). Report of the secretariat. *Newsletter of the Union for Radical Political Economics*, 1(1), 5–7.
- Bowles, S. & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Basic Books.
- Brazelton, R. W. (1977). Samuelson's principles of economics in 1948 and 1973. *Journal of Economic Education*, 8(2), 115–117.
- Bronfenbrenner, M. (1970). Radical economics in america: A 1970 survey. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 8(3), 747–766.
- Caute, D. (1988). *Sixty-eight: the year of the barricades*. Hamilton.
- Christiansen, J. (1974). Could karl marx teach economics in america? *Newsletter of the Union for Radical Political Economics*, 6(3), 32–33.
- Collier, B. (1973). A most galbraithian economist. *The New York Times*, (pp. 296–304). February 18.
- Edwards, R., Reich, M., & Weisskopf, T. (1971). *The Capitalist System: A Radical Analysis of American Society*. Prentice-Hall.
- Edwards, R. C. & MacEwan, A. (1970). A radical approach to economics: Basis for a new curriculum. *American Economic Review*, 60(2), 352–363.
- Eichel, L. E., Jost, K. W., D.Luskin, R., & Neustadt, R. M. (1970). *The Harvard Strike*. Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Epstein, N. (1966). Radical teachers find new climate on campuses. *The Washington Post*, (pp. A1,A6). October 25.

- Galbraith, J. K. (1973). Power and the useful economist. *American Economic Review*, 63(1), 1–11.
- Gieryn, T. F. (1983). Boundary-work and the demarcation of science from non-science: Strains and interests in professional ideologies of scientists. *American Sociological Review*, 48(6), 781–795.
- Gieryn, T. F. (1995). Boundaries of science. In J. C. P. Sheila Jasanoff, Gerald E. Markle & T. Pinch (Eds.), *Handbook of Science and Technology Studies* (pp. 393–443). Sage.
- Gieryn, T. F. (1999). *Cultural boundaries of science - Credibility on the line*. Chicago University Press.
- Gintis, H. (1971). Education, technology, and the characteristics of worker productivity. *American Economic Review*, 61(2), 266–279.
- Gitlin, T. (1987). *The Sixties: years of hope, days of rage*. Bantam Books.
- Golden, S. (1975a). Harvard economics teaching criticized. *The New York Times*, (pp.1). 9 February.
- Golden, S. (1975b). Radical economists under fire. *The New York Times*, (pp.1). 2 February.
- Gurley, J. G. (1971). The state of political economics. *American Economic Review*, 61(2), 53–62.
- Harbron, J. (1972). Dissident voices heard at economic conference. *The New York Times*, (pp.39). December 29.
- Heilbroner, R. L. (1970). On the limited “relevance” of economics. *Public Interest*, (21), 80–93.
- Heilbroner, R. L. (1971). Discussion. *American Economic Review*, 61(2), 65–67.
- Heilbroner, R. L. (1972). Radical economics: A review essay. *American Political Science Review*, (pp. 1017–1020).
- Isserman, M. & Kazin, M. (2004). *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*. Oxford University Press.
- Jones, W. H. (1972). Things changing in u.s. economic establishment. *The Washington Post*, (pp. D10). December 31.
- Klamer, A. (1990). The textbook presentation of economic discourse. In W. J. Samuels (Ed.), *Economics as Discourse* (pp. 129–165). Klumer Academic Publishers.



- Lee, F. S. (2004). History and identity: The case of radical economics and radical economists, 1945-1970. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 26(2), 177–195.
- Lifschultz, L. S. (1974). Could karl marx teach economics in america? *Ramparts*, (12), 27–30 and 52–59.
- Lindbeck, A. (1971). *The Political Economy of the New Left: An outsider's view*. Harper and Row Publishers.
- Mata, T. & Lee, F. S. (in press). The role of oral history in the historiography of heterodox economics. *History of Political Economy*, (pp.~).
- Mermelstein, D. (1970). *Economics: mainstream readings and radical critiques*. Random House.
- Morgan, E. P. (1991). *The 60s Experience*. Temple University Press.
- Nossiter, B. D. (1969). Radicalism course splits harvard. *The Washington Post*, (pp.~8).
- Peabody, G. E. (1971). Scientific paradigms and economics: An introduction. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 3, 1–16.
- Riecken, H. W. (1971). Discussion. *American Economic Review*, 61, 67–68.
- Rowe, J. L. J. (1974). Economic association to investigate dismissals of 7 radical professors. *The Washington Post*, (pp.~6). December 31.
- Sale, K. (1974). *SDS*. Vintage Books.
- Salmans, S. (1970). Boat gets rocked in economics but young teachers shun term “radical”. *The New York Times*, (pp. S3–2). December 27.
- Samuelson, P. A. (1971). Preface. In A. Lindbeck (Ed.), *The Political Economy of the New Left: An outsider's view* (pp.~). Harper and Row Publishers.
- School, U. C. N. (1971). Political economy at the new school. *Newsletter of the Union for Radical Political Economics*, 3, 14–16.
- Schrecker, E. W. (1986). *No Ivory Tower: MacCarthyism and the Universities*. Oxford University Press.
- Secretariat, U. (1969). The union for radical political economics: A prospectus. In *The Conference Papers of the Union for Radical Political Economics, Philadelphia, December 1968* (pp. 173–4). The Union for Radical Political Economics.
- Solow, R. M. (1970). Science and ideology in economics. *Public Interest*, (21), 94–107.

- Solow, R. M. (1971). Discussion. *American Economic Review*, 61(2), 63–65.
- Trombley, W. (1975). Rise in radical economists creating rifts on campuses. *The Los Angeles Times*, (pp.9). Reprinted in the Syracuse Post Standard, December 27.
- Walsh, J. (1978). Radicals and the universities: “critical mass” at u.mass. *Science*, 199(4324), 34–38. January 6, New Series.
- Weeks, J. (1971). Political economy and the politics of economists. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 3, 75–83.
- Weeks, J. (1972). A note on political economy and the politics of economists. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 4, 121.
- Weintraub, R. (1973). Harvard economics teaching criticized. *The Washington Post*, (pp.Å8). 3 January.
- Zweig, M. (1971a). Bourgeois and radical paradigms in economics. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 3(2), 43–58.
- Zweig, M. (1971b). Bourgeois and radical paradigms in economics. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 3, 43–58.
- Zweig, M. (1971c). On economics and the politics of economists (a response to john weeks). *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 3(2), 84–88.
- Zweig, M. (1972). Teaching radical political economics in the introductory course. *American Economic Review*, 62, 434–438.