



History and Identity: The Case of Radical Economics and Radical Economists, 1945-70

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Abstract

The article uncovers and reconstructs the emergence of radical economics in postwar America, starting with the impact of McCarthyism on economics and the teaching of Marxism through the emergence of the Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE) in 1968. In addition, the issue of the historical identity of radical economists is addressed in the article through its narrative that reenacts its development from McCarthyism to the emergence of URPE.

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How do scholars view the history of economics in the twentieth century? Do they see it as a smooth unfolding of neoclassical economic theory as implied in Marshall's continuity thesis, or do they see a more bifurcated history with the first forty years embracing a pluralism of economic views and discourse and the last fifty years embracing only a narrower neoclassical discourse (with the 1940s being a period of transition), or do they see it as a contested century where neoclassical economics strove to cleanse economics of all other nonneoclassical discourses? Most economists who delve into the history of economics in the twentieth century adopt a synthesis of the first two views while ignoring the third view altogether. As a result, the typical picture of economics in the twentieth century is one of continuity-pluralism-homogeneity. There is no real contestability where institutional, social, and political power is used to de-legitimize and suppress unacceptable theories, no possible alternative to neoclassical economics, and no history of heterodox economics (which is defined as including post-Keynesian, social, institutional-historical, and radical Marxist economics) as a community of scholars engaging with common ideas. Moreover,

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the picture presents dissenting economists as existing in isolated or fragmentary groups of blasphemous or heretical individuals situated out of time (so to speak) with no time-dependent past or future.

The consequence of this ideological darkening of the past has generated present-day heterodox economists, that is, heterodox economists who see, conceive, and reference themselves as moving through time but always contemporary. Their memories, which may be long, are perpetually disjointed, not connected to the present. Hence, many of today's heterodox economists seldom engage in self-reflection and, more important, seldom query where their heterodoxy (their theoretical and, more important for this article, commitment identity) came from or whether it has changed over time. Thus, being without a sense of history and of making their own history, they are largely void of an historical identity, an identity beyond their contemporary selves. To be sure, heterodox economists acknowledge an historical genealogy of economists: Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Karl Marx, Thorstein Veblen, John Maynard Keynes, Michael Kalecki, and Joan Robinson. But their connection to the present is often made with little historical justification so that the genealogy has the appearance of being established outside of history, outside of community, outside of any social mechanism that transmits ideas across generations of scholars.

It might seem that the creation of a historical identity may be the province of nationalists or ideologues for political purposes, but this is not true since all identities, historical or otherwise, are socially and deliberately constructed and all identities have an inherent political agenda. In a contested academic environment in which there is a near hegemony of one intellectual viewpoint, one school of thought, one paradigm, constructing an historical identity for the marginalized scholar serves three purposes: it provides a historical meaning for the isolated marginalized individual, builds an intellectual community in the place of fragmentation, and legitimizes both scholars and ideas. This task is accomplished by delineating the history of the intellectual community, both before and after its formation. This article is part of a larger project in which I intend to write a history of a particular intellectual community and thereby generate for its members an historical identity: the community of heterodox economists and their identity as heterodox economists.

The history of any community of scholars is complex and multifaceted in that it requires the integration of biographical-intellectual studies with institutional histories and histories of thought. It also requires historical reconstruction of social networks, contextualization of the community's history. Finally, it requires a delineation of the process by which blasphemous ideas and scholars emerge, of the process through which blasphemous ideas are transmitted across generations of scholars, and of the methods then used by the mainstream to suppress the scholars and their ideas. What does this mean for the writing of the history of heterodox economics? Because the community emerged within a hostile environment, its history is in part a history of economists coming to understand themselves as supporting a body of theory that is antithetical to neoclassical economic theory, developing social networks and supporting institutions necessary for the community to emerge, and defending themselves and their network and institutions from continual attack by mainstream economists. Once the heterodox community emerges, its history becomes one of growth, change, and evolution within the context of a hostile environment. Of particular interest are the histories of subgroups and the forces that affect their growth and divergence or convergence within the community. Consequently, the history of heterodox economics is not just the history of heterodox economic theory; nor is it only the history of networks

and institutions. Rather, since networks and institutions affect the development of theory, and since theory has an impact on the type of networks and institutions that emerge, the history of heterodox economics draws on both networks and theories and is thus an emergent synthesis of both.

The complexity of the history of heterodox economics combined with the lack of extensive studies on components of the history mean that it is not yet possible to produce a general history or a generalized historical identity. In particular, detailed studies have been produced on specific heterodox theories and on the institutional components of the history and thereby have contributed to creating a historical identity for heterodox economists.¹ Building on Howard Sherman's perceptive but brief discussions on radical economics, this article is a more extensive uncovering and reconstructing of its emergence in postwar America. It starts with the impact of McCarthyism on economics in general and especially on the teaching of Marxism through the various schools of the Communist Party. Although destroyed by McCarthyism, the schools promoted extensive interest in Marxian economic theory that was complemented and extended by Marxian scholarship and more popular writings in journals such as *Science and Society* and *Monthly Review*. The article then deals with the renewed interest in Marxism and radical economics in the 1960s. Drawing on the previous section, the fifth section deals with the history of the emergence of the Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE). The issue of the historical identity of radical economists is addressed through the structure of the article, which is a narrative that reenacts the development of the radical economist's identity. That is, the narrative begins by drawing the reader into the repressive world of McCarthyism and postwar American economics in which there seems to be no hope for a radical Marxist economist. It then takes the reader on a transformational journey, via a narrative, where, in spite of repression, Marxian and radical economics survive and grow. This brighter, more hopeful journey culminates in the formation of URPE. By the end of the article, the reader will have experienced what it concretely meant to be a radical economist, and this is in part what constitutes the historical identity of a radical economist.

I. McCarthyism, Conservatism, and Modernism, 1945 to the 1970s

Out of the Second World War, there emerged two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Their different forms of government and economic systems helped usher in the post-1945 cold war. At the same time, the right wing of the U.S. establishment also worried about the growth of a strong progressive movement, with powerful trade unions, civil rights movement, and women emerging from the home. Hence, it supported any attacks on these movements, including those such as McCarthyism that had the pretense of attacking communists. Thus, the postwar years saw three different forces affecting the landscape of American economics.

The most dramatic of these was the anticommunist hysteria that silenced an entire generation of radical and progressive American academics, including economists. Moreover, the emerging conservative probusiness, antigovernment political and social climate

1. See, for example, Sherman (1970, 1984), Davis (1999), O'Hara (1995, 1999), Fleck (1999), Phillips (1989), and Lee (1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2001).

affected liberal economists in terms of what they taught and what they wrote in textbooks. The final force was the modernization movement where economic departments consciously redesigned their programs to ensure that the most up-to-date versions of neoclassical economic theory were taught using the appropriate mathematical tools. As a result of the confluence of these three forces, all that was taught in this postwar period was neoclassical economic theory, while the descriptive-institutional-oriented approach of the interwar period became less emphasized and eventually nearly disappeared.

In the post-1945 anticommunist hysteria, more than thirty states required academics at public universities to take loyalty oaths, and those who would not take them for whatever reason, including on grounds of conscience and constitutionality, lost their jobs. In addition, universities, including administrators and academics across the United States, held that merely being a Communist Party member made an academic an unfit teacher and hence was sufficient grounds for not hiring, for dismissal, and for denying tenure or promotion. This was later extended to cover situations where academics invoked the Fifth Amendment to refuse answering such questions as naming names or denying that they were communists; were fellow travelers; or were just plain radical, progressive, or unusual, such as supporting the New Deal and New Deal-type economic policies, government regulation, national economic planning, civil rights, Henry Wallace's 1948 presidential campaign, or being a Unitarian or a homosexual. These actions by universities were largely not resisted (at least to any great extent) by their academic staff for a variety of reasons, including fear of reprisal by the university administration.

This meant that after 1945, few progressives, radicals, or communists were hired or remained employed by American universities; and a blacklist actively and jointly maintained by the universities, individual academics, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation ensured that a radical dismissed by one university was not hired by another. Moreover, to avoid the withdrawal of research funds or escape attacks, harassment, social ostracism, or the inevitable dismissal or denial of tenure, many progressive academics voluntarily left academia; took academic positions outside the United States; restricted and censored the content of their lectures (such as not teaching Keynesian economics) since classes were monitored; advised graduate students to do safe, conventional dissertations; and/or at the least redirected their research and publications to safe, more conventional areas. Then there were others who attempted suicide or succeeded or were shot by anticommunist fanatics. Thus, the academy's general (but not universal) acquiescence to, as well as participation in, anticommunist hysteria silenced for the most part an entire generation of radical and progressive academics and snuffed out nearly all critical evaluation of the American "way of life." In particular, at least twenty-seven economists (including Paul Sweezy, Horace Davis, Daniel Thorner, Vera Shlakman, Otto Nathan, Karl Niebyl, Dorothy Douglas, Victor Perlo, Kenneth May, and Paul Baran) were explicitly affected by McCarthyism in one of the ways mentioned above or by being dismissed by government and/or private industry and not rehired as economists or at all. By 1960, with some exceptions, campuses bulged with silenced professors who shied away from opening the minds of their students and were silent about racial discrimination and the Vietnam War.

Concurrently with the anticommunist hysteria, radical and progressive economists were subject to two additional censures. The first was the view that free enterprise was an important basis for intellectual progress, with the implication that academic economists should believe in free enterprise as well as sell it by teaching it to their students. Supported

by the business community (which also completely endorsed the anticommunist dismissals of radical and progressive academics), this view came across as antigovernment, antiunion, and anti-economic planning. Thus, from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, progressive or New Deal-type economists were attacked who taught Keynesian macroeconomics or institutional economics; advocated some kind of government involvement in the economy; and were critical of the organization, operation, and methods of large business enterprises.

The second censure that progressive and radical economists faced resulted from their disinterest or opposition to being respectable neoclassical economists. That is, economic departments wanted to avoid the reputation of being weak in theory and mathematical training, to ensure that their students did not leave complaining that they had not received a good graduate education, and to be at the theoretical forefront of the discipline or at least be respectable. So as neoclassical price theory developed in the 1930s, departments were inclined to hire the up-to-date neoclassically trained theorists. From the late 1930s onward into the 1970s, department after department made clear decisions to hire well-trained neoclassical theorists to transform the way economic theory was being taught to its undergraduate and graduate students. As a result, economic departments became more neoclassical-theoretical in tone and attitude, eventually to the extent that no alternatives were present. Hence, the outcome of the political repression of the postwar years in conjunction with the repressive dominance of neoclassical economists resulted in the near complete suppression of Marxian (as well as institutional) economic theory (Schrecker 1986, 1998; Fones-Wolf 1994; Novick 1988; Fariello 1995; Bowen 1953; Bernstein 2001; Lee 2002).

2. Marxism and the Parties Schools, 1945-57

The blasphemous economics underground of Marxism that survived the interwar period briefly blossomed in the postwar years but in the end was effectively destroyed by McCarthyism. The long-standing Rand School of Social Sciences continued to operate until 1956. While McCarthyism was not the direct cause of its closure, the intellectual climate it created sharply reduced the number of students from the high of thirteen thousand in 1946 as well as the already low interest in Marxian economic theory. Similarly, the Communist Party supported various schools, including the School for Jewish Studies (New York City), Jefferson School for Social Science (New York City), Abraham Lincoln School (Chicago), Samuel Adams School (Boston), Tom Paine School of Social Sciences (Philadelphia), Walt Whitman School of Social Sciences (Newark), Joseph Weydemeyer School of Social Sciences (St. Louis), Seattle Labor School (Seattle), and the Tom Mooney/California Labor School (San Francisco). These schools thrived with more than ten thousand students taking courses in the peak years of 1947 and 1948, although mostly concentrated in New York City.

Economic courses offered by the schools included the American economy in the twentieth century, economic problems of the war, fundamentals of trade unionism, history of modern economic thought, economics of American industry, Soviet economy, monopoly capital after World War II, economics of socialism, economics of U.S. foreign policy, imperialism, economics of U.S. agriculture, and Keynes and Marx, as well as courses in Marxian political economy and advanced seminars on the first and third volumes of *Capi-*

tal. For example, the introductory political economy course at the Weydemeyer School covered topics on commodity production, labor theory of value, price and value, theory of profits, and economic crisis. Throughout the course, neoclassical price theory was critically evaluated, and special attention was paid to refuting Keynes. Texts used in the course included *Wage-Labor and Capital*, *Value, Price and Profit*, and *Capital* by Marx as well as *Nature of Capitalism* by Anna Rochester and *Political Economy* by Lev Leontiev. Moreover, at the Jefferson School for Social Science, the course on the development of modern economic thought started with mercantilism and then dealt with the physiocrats and classical political economy and ended with neoclassical economics and current trends in economic thought, while the course description for “Marxism vs. Keynesism” read as follows:

A critique of the theories of John Maynard Keynes and his followers. Keynesism as the dominant economic ideology of monopoly capitalism. How the social democrats, the liberal bourgeoisie and the reactionaries use Keynesism. Does Keynesism add anything new to economic theory? Tactical questions in relation to Keynesism in the labor movement. *Previous study of Marxist political economy is required.* (Jefferson School for Social Science, 1954 Summer Catalogue: 10)

However, the advent of Truman’s loyalty order in 1947 precipitated a significant drop of students, and the passage of the McCarran Subversive Activities Control Act in 1950 produced a further drop in attendance. Finally, the federal government used the McCarran Act to make the schools, on penalty of fines and prison, register as communist-front organizations, knowing that the process involved would destroy them. Thus, by 1957, none of the schools remained in existence (Fariello 1995; Cornell 1976; Klein 1980; Jefferson School 1953, 1955; Gettleman 1990, 2001).

The various schools supported by the communist and socialist parties did more than provide instruction in Marxian economic theory; they also generated a potential network of “academics” who had an abiding interest in it. For example, from 1942 to 1954, more than 50 individuals taught economic courses at the School for Democracy and its successor, the Jefferson School for Social Science. While most instructors were not trained as economists and many only taught one or two courses, there were 9 individuals who taught on a regular basis for six or more years and hence had more than a passing interest in Marxian theory.² Extrapolating from the Jefferson School experience to all the schools run by the Communist Party, the potential number of individuals in the United States, circa 1950, with an abiding if not scholarly interest in Marxian economic theory was at least 150 (course listings, Jefferson School of Social Science, 1944-54).

2. The trained economists included Davis, who gave a course on the American economy in the twentieth century; Valadimir Kazakevich, who gave courses on the history of economic thought and the economics of socialism; and Perlo, who gave courses on imperialism and Marxian economic theory. The core instructors who were not trained as economists included Elizabeth Lawson, Albert Prago, and Meyer Weise, who gave seminars on *Capital* for nearly a decade; George Squier; Sidney Gluck; David Goldway; and Doxey Wilkerson.

3. *Science and Society*, *Monthly Review*, and Marxian Scholarship, 1945-60

Complementing, supporting, and extending the grassroots interest in Marxism were the scholarly journal *Science and Society* and the magazine *Monthly Review*. First appearing in 1936, the agenda of *Science and Society* was the promotion and extension of Marxist scholarship. Being an independent Marxist journal that accepted different interpretations of Marxist theory, it quickly obtained a circulation of four thousand by 1941 and nearly ten thousand by 1946. Because of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of Marxism, only a small number of articles, communications, and book reviews were written by economists and dealt with economic topics. In its first four years, twenty-one different American academic and nonacademic economists published in or were editors/contributing editors of the journal. However, the collapse of the Popular Front in 1940 as a result of the Hitler-Stalin Pact prompted many of the Marxist-heterodox economists associated with the journal to disassociate and to reject Marxian economic theory. At the same time, the United States's entry into the Second World War meant that others became involved with war-related activities that consumed all their time and energy. Consequently, except for Sweezy and Rochester, all the prewar economists associated with *Science and Society* dropped away; but between 1942 and 1950, new economists (including Kazakevich, May, and Shlakman) were attracted to the journal, which published articles on social security, productivity and exploitation, labor theory of value, Keynesian economics, and Marxism and recent economic thought.

As suggested above, McCarthyism nearly destroyed this collective scholarly interest in Marxism, with its contributors as well as the editors of *Science and Society* being dismissed from their positions or otherwise harassed. Moreover, given the climate of fear, contributors ceased to contribute while others used pseudonyms. Although a desperate situation existed, the scholarly study of Marxian economic theory did not cease. Fewer academic economists published in the journal in the 1950s, but this was offset by an increase in the number of nonacademic economists, such as Joseph Gillman, Paul Mattick, Jacob Morris, and Perlo, publishing there. Topics of the articles included welfare economics, falling rate of profit, value and price, and capital accumulation.

Complementing *Science and Society* was the emergence of *Monthly Review* in 1949. Leo Huberman and Sweezy established *Monthly Review* as an independent socialist magazine devoted to analyzing, from a socialist point of view, developments in domestic and foreign affairs. Since subscriptions rose from five hundred to twenty-five hundred in its first year, *Monthly Review* quickly became a forum for scholarly qua popular articles on domestic and foreign issues, informed in part by Marxian theory. Moreover, Huberman published articles on the fundamentals of Marxian theory, such as surplus value, accumulation, and monopoly. In addition, Sweezy published a number of articles in which he developed his theory of monopoly capitalism, while Baran published articles on economic development and Marxism. But beyond this, there were relatively few articles on or informed by Marxian economic theory by other economists. This was due, in part, to the popular orientation of the magazine and the continual suppression of Marxism and the fear it generated. In the early issues, authors' names were not put on articles because of fear of economic and social reprisals, and teachers' names were not put on the *Monthly Review* mailing list. Moreover, from 1949 to 1960, there was at least one article a year by an economist in which a penname was used. For example, at the height of McCarthyism, 1949 to 1954, Baran published in

Monthly Review under a penname, and Baran was well protected relative to other academic Marxist economists. Moreover, in 1954, Sweezy was thrown into jail by the state of New Hampshire for refusing to answer questions regarding his membership and activities in the Progressive Party, the contents of a lecture given at the University of New Hampshire, and whether he believed in communism. In 1957, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the verdict. Yet in spite of the political risk, at least fourteen different academic American economists, including Davis, Niebyl, and Douglas Dowd, published in *Monthly Review* in the 1950s (Burgum et al. 1941; Goldway 1986; Parry et al. 1986; Clecak 1968; Sweezy 1965; Goldstein 1978; Foster 1987; Lee 2002).

4. Radical and Marxian Economics, 1960-70³

The background to the emergence of radical and Marxian economics in the 1960s started with the postwar emergence of peace groups, the growing civil rights movement, and the collapse of the Communist Party. As a result, not only did pluralism and intellectual openness on the Left begin to emerge; there was also a gradual increase in campus activism, the establishment of the Students for a Democratic Society (1960), and the rise of the New Left movement. Further events of the 1960s, such as the Cuban missile crisis, uprising in the black urban ghettos, the continuation and expansion of the Vietnam War, and the May 1968 student uprising in Paris stimulated the growth of the New Left. Of particular significance was President Johnson's bombing of North Vietnam in early 1965, which sparked protest meetings and rallies that in turn led to teach-ins, starting at the University of Michigan, at more than thirty universities. In this activist, tumultuous environment, interest in radical and Marxian economics increased, assisted in part by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). With the support of Dowd, Huberman, Seymour Melman, and Perlo (all active radical economists prior to 1960), the SDS set up the Radical Education Project (REP) to provide competent research on the issues of Left program and theory to educate student activists. To achieve this end, the REP established research and study groups in areas such as education and the university, the ghetto, labor, Latin America, imperialism, political economy, and the power structure in local communities. It also published literature and study guides on various themes including Marxism, established *Radicals in the Professions Newsletter*, sponsored conferences to bring dispersed radicals together, and ran a speakers bureau.

The decade started off with the simultaneous emergence of the New Left and the journal *Studies on the Left*. Established as a radical history journal whose purpose was to challenge the 1950s consensus view of American history, *Studies* published articles dealing with the economic, political, and social development of the United States. By 1962, this purpose crystallized into the now well-known "corporate liberalism" thesis. The thesis drew upon, in part, Marxist theory and addressed the Marxist and radical concerns about the links between economic and political power in a capitalist economy. Consequently, the journal published a number of economic articles and book reviews that had some bearing on

3. Part of the material in the proceeding and following paragraphs comes from the Wilcox Collection of Contemporary Political Movements that is part of the Kansas Collection located in the Kenneth Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas.

the thesis. The radical Marxist economic articles (which drew upon the breath of heterodox radical Marxian economic theory) and reviews in *Studies* contributed to the growing number of similar articles and reviews appearing in *Science and Society*. Significantly, many of the articles dealt with theoretical issues that were central to Marxian theory, such as articles on the falling rate of profit, Marxism and monopoly capital, reproduction and crisis, productive and unproductive labor, imperialism, and value theory. *Monthly Review* also carried substantive articles, written in a more popular style for intellectuals and activists, on imperialism, economic stagnation and monopoly capital, economic planning, monopoly, and corporations. Moreover, Baran and Sweezy's use of facts, combined with a particular utilization of Marxian theory in *Monopoly Capital* (1966) to examine economic stagnation and monopoly capital, produced a distinct approach to Marxism, known as the Monthly Review school, that was well received by those in the movement. *Monopoly Capital* quickly became the book to read, discuss in study groups, and recommend to radical friends.

This increased interest in Marxian (as well as heterodox) economic theory mirrored the rise of interest in Marxism generally taking place. In 1964, a number of young faculty members at Rutgers University and the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn felt that there were enough Left academics to hold a conference where particular issues and themes could be addressed from a socialist perspective. Thus, a call for papers was sent out announcing a Socialist Scholars Conference (SSC) for socialist scholars of all kinds. The response was overwhelming, with around one thousand scholars and activists attending the first conference in 1965. The SSC continued for another five years, with the last conference in 1970. The conferences attracted not only socialist scholars but also many other people: union members, white-collar workers, college students, and political and community activists. Thus, conference attendance was large by any account: 1965, thousand; 1966, more than two thousand; 1967, nearly three thousand; 1968, six hundred; 1969, eight hundred; and 1970, six hundred. However, this mixed audience and participants meant the academics who led it had difficulty dealing with discussion that dealt with political commitment. This conflict between socialist scholarship, the working towards new theories of social change, and activism that was pushing semipragmatically toward change now eventually resulted in its demise in 1970.⁴

Because historians established the SSC and the subsequent steering committees consisted of academics and scholars from across the social sciences and humanities, the conference theme of socialist scholarship covered a diverse set of historical, literary, political, and economic topics or subjects addressed from those perspectives. The topics of the economic papers included imperialism, third world workers, and workers and revolution. There were also papers on administrative corporatism, economic imperialism, and the political economy of Ernest Mandel. In addition to the SSC, radical historians began to find Marxism a useful tool in starting their research, as illustrated by the founding in 1967 of the SDS-sponsored journal of the history of American radicalism, *Radical America*. The editors of the journal not only voiced their support of Marxism, they also published articles on reading Marx and Mandel's Marxist economic theory.

4. In the early 1980s, the Socialist Scholars Conference was reestablished and is now in its twenty-first year; see www.socialistscholar.org.

The final set of forces supporting the growth of interest in specifically Marxian economic theory emanated from the Communist Party, which was slowly recovering from the disastrous years of the 1950s. In 1964, the historian Herbert Aptheker established the American Institute for Marxist Studies (AIMS) for the purposes of encouraging Marxist and radical scholarship in the United States and bringing Marxist thought into the forum of reasonable debate to produce meaningful dialogue among Marxist and non-Marxist scholars and writers. Its major activity was publishing a newsletter that provided bibliographical information on publications and dissertations that dealt in some way with Marxism and the Soviet Union. It also sponsored symposiums on various topics, including one in 1965 on Marxian methodology in the social sciences; but economics was not one of the disciplines represented and discussed.

A second activity was the establishment of the Center for Marxist Education in New York City in 1969. The purpose of the center, as stated in a flyer it put out, was to fill the "serious theoretical gap in the tremendous activist [New Left] movement which has arisen in reaction to the poverty, racism, violence, corruption and degradation which characterizes life today in capitalist United States." In its first year, it offered classes on various topics in revolutionary theory, including monopoly capitalism and political economy. Taught by Perlo, the monopoly capitalism course entailed a close study of U.S. monopoly capitalism. The course on political economy, taught by Communist Party members who had no apparent training in economics, dealt with the origins and basic features of capitalism, labor theory of value, exploitation, accumulation of capital, causes and consequences of economic crises, imperialism, state monopoly capitalism, and the general crisis of capitalism (Goldway 1986; Clecak 1968; Baran and Sweezy 1966; Barkan 1997; Unger 1974; Buhle 1967; Fischer et al. 1971; Wiener 1989; Gilbert 1968; *AIMS Newsletter* 2.6, November-December 1965: 2).

5. Emergence of the Union for Radical Political Economics, 1965-70

In spite of the McCarthyite repression of the postwar years, scholarly discourse on Marxian and radical economics continued. The contributions and support of the Communist Party schools and their teachers, the popular and scholarly Marxist journals, and the existence of Marxist self-study campus groups and academic economists (including Baran, Davis, Niebyl, Dowd, and Shlakman) all contributed to maintaining Marxian and radical economic discourse throughout the 1950s. In the 1960s, it was enhanced by the establishment of new radical journals, the renewed activities of the Communist Party, the SSCs, and the popularity of the Monthly Review school. On the other hand, many college activists in the New Left movement were also interested in a plurality of non-Marxian ideas, such as existentialism and anarchism. At the same time, they restricted their interest in Marx to his concept of man and alienation and adopted an American radicalism that railed against large corporations, Wall Street, and the exploitative nature of free enterprise and the status quo. As a result, they preferred to call themselves radicals or leftists as opposed to Marxist or socialist (which were felt to be narrower and less inclusive). Thus, by 1965, the college activists interested in economics preferred to see themselves as radical economists, that is, economists who primarily took a critical view of American capitalism and felt that economic theory should address economic-social problems, such as racism, urban ghettos,

gender, and the Vietnam War. The economic theory they used to do this was of secondary importance. Consequently, one could be a radical economist and utilize neoclassical or institutional economic theory. Hence, the term “radical economist” included as subsets “radical Marxist” and “radical institutionalist” economists; but because the common interest centered on radical as opposed to theoretical orientation, most of these young activist economists identified themselves simply as radical economists.

By the mid-1960s, the young radical economists found that the existing outlets and activities did not provide the specialist forums at which they could discuss topics of particular interest to them or provide the academic base that would support their academic careers. To overcome these problems but at the same time to stay within and enlarge this alternative intellectual environment, they established URPE in 1968. It all started at the University of Michigan, when angry young men and women coalesced into a cadre of activists and radicals who became involved in the SDS. Michigan economic graduate students, such as Howard Wachtel and Michael Zweig, participated in the SDS early on; and in 1966, another Michigan economics student, Barry Bluestone, became involved in the SDS-related Radical Education Project, also located at Michigan. The concern of these (and other) graduate students was that they felt that the neoclassical economic theory they were being taught had nothing to do with the real world.

On March 24, 1965, less than two months after American warplanes had begun the systematic bombing of North Vietnam, Michigan had the first teach-in in the United States on the Vietnam War. Nearly three thousand students participated in the teach-in, which consisted of lectures and discussion sessions that lasted throughout the night. Out of the experience there emerged, a year later in April 1966, a Free University at which a number of seminars were given, including one on “Modern Political Economy.” The seminar prompted a number of the economics graduate students who attended it to explore new issues, ideas, and approaches to economic problems and related social issues.

Recognizing the need for continuing contact and discussion, a series of three meetings was held in January 1967 to explore the implications of such an undertaking. The participants included Jim Bass, John Bishop, Bluestone, John Edgren, William Fleischman, Sol Jacobson, Sandy Kelman, Craig Morgan, Dean Sanders, Larry Sawers, Wachtel, Zweig, and Lane Vanderslice. The concern raised by participants was that the socialization of young economists through the tenure process put pressure on them to do conventional mainstream research, but if they decided not to pursue mainstream research, they quickly would become isolated. To deal with both negative consequences, it was felt that some kind of group was necessary, as it would provide a social network for the sharing of a similar critical approach to economics, provide intellectual stimulation, and help members avoid being diverted from their social concerns into the normal pursuits of academic economists. Establishing such a group would require finding an amenable economics department and becoming members of it. As this would take time to accomplish, an interim solution was pursued: that of establishing an identifiable group of individuals pursuing economic and social questions compatible with modern political economy.

Following nearly two years of discussion, a meeting was called to discuss the establishment of an ongoing radical economics organization. Thus, a five-day Radical Economics Conference was held at Michigan from September 4 to 8, 1968. It was attended by a small group of twelve graduate students and faculty members, all of whom were affected and influenced by the civil rights movement, Vietnam War, feminist movement, and the New

Left. Included in the group were Bluestone, Kelman, Wachtel, and John Weeks from Michigan; Zweig from SUNY Stony Brook; Ted Behr and Peter Bohmer from MIT; Michael Reich from Harvard; and others from Eastern Michigan, Miami University, and the Institute for Policy Studies. After much intense discussion, the participants emerged from the conference with the agenda of forming an “on-going organization of new left economists committed to radical teaching, research, and organizing both within educational institutions and within the movement itself” (Wachtel 1968: 17). As a result, a Radical Economics Secretariat was established at Michigan that, in turn, developed a prospectus for URPE.⁵

The prospectus began with a short synopsis of the poverty of mainstream economics that can be summarized as “The Living Dead: Life without Compassion” (Wachtel 1968: 18):

We have been called to accept,
To discuss, to analyze
the status quo and its needs for hegemony.
Let us work for its continuance and not
question its effects.
For our responsibility is to the bidding of the
supplier of our paychecks and not humanity.
And compassion for and commitment to
the starving
the sick
the estranged
the oppressed
the imprisoned
Is irrelevant to
our research
our teaching
our advocacy
our identity as economists.

It then argued that a new type of economist was needed:

An economist concerned with the important problems of the world in which he lives and works; an economist willing to jettison the irrelevant and incorrect portions of the received doctrine, while at the same time willing to embark upon the arduous task of constructing a new economics. (Wachtel 1968: 18; also see Zweig 1968)

5. For those far removed from the life and times of the 1960s, the use of the words *radical* and *economics* might seem unusual. The reason for *radical* as opposed to *Marxist* or *socialist* was given above. As for *economics* as opposed to *economy*, the answer I suggest is twofold. First *political economy* was at that time just another way of saying Marxism and the founders did not want to restrict their union to just Marxists. The second reason is that the founders saw themselves as economists who did economics and more specifically as political economists (as opposed to the usual dry, technocratic, apolitical mainstream economist) who did political economics. Thus the Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE) is simply a self-description of the founders and what they organized.

Recognizing that this new economist could not emerge without some help from his or her friends, the prospectus proposed the establishment of a new organization of economists that would promote an interdisciplinary approach to social problems and the resurrection of the political economist, new courses that reflect the urgencies of the day, a new set of priorities for economic research and joint research, and economic analysis for the needs of the movement. The prospectus closes with the warning that without the existence of an organization for radical political economists, the pressures of society and the mainstream socialization of university and government employment would eventually convert them into supporters of the status quo.

Independent of the activity at Michigan, a group of graduate students and young professors at Harvard in 1968 (including Samuel Bowles, Arthur MacEwan, Thomas Weisskopf, Richard Edwards, Reich, Stephen Marglin, Herbert Gintis, Stephan Michelson, and Patricia Quick) were engaged in seminars and conversations to develop an approach to economics that, unlike neoclassical economics, could illuminate rather than ignore or obfuscate their political concerns with racism, sexism, imperialism, injustice, and the alienation of labor. They tried out their ideas in a collectively taught course on "The Capitalist Economy: Conflict and Power." They subsequently joined and became active in URPE. With their proximity to MIT, it is not surprising that the first activity of the secretariat was to sponsor a New England Radical Economics Conference. Organized by Behr and held at MIT in mid-November 1968, the topics covered at the conference included (1) neocapitalism; (2) Cuba as a model for economic development; (3) the political development of underdevelopment; (4) decentralized socialism; (5) the relevance of Marxist, neoclassical, and institutionalist economic analysis to current problems; (6) what is wrong with the way economics is being taught and applied? and (7) what can academic economists do for the movement? The success of the conference, at which there were more than 120 participants, prompted the secretariat to hold a nationwide conference in Philadelphia in December 19-21, 1968, and distribute the following announcement to about 250 campuses:

RADICAL ECONOMICS CONFERENCE

A national radical economic conference sponsored by the Union for Radical Political Economics will be held in Philadelphia Dec. 19-21. This is an effort to bring together academic economists, non-academic economists, Movement organizers, and other interested persons to discuss "radical economics" and establish a firm basis for a national organization of radical economists. Some of the topics to be discussed are (1) a radical critique of contemporary economics (2) radical teaching and research (3) poverty problems (4) economic development and imperialism (5) the economics of democratic control (6) the relevance of Marxist, neo-classical, and institutional economic analysis to current problems. (*New Left Notes*, December 11, 1968: 6)

The Philadelphia conference was a success, with more than 150 participants from fifty different universities and organizations and as many diverse political perspectives in attendance. Ten papers were presented on topics such as the American economy and contemporary economics, poverty in the domestic economy, economic development and the international economy, and organizational activity. At the conference business session, URPE was formally established as a nationwide professional organization, independent of the American Economics Association. It consisted of an executive committee charged with oversee-

ing the publishing of working and occasional papers, the establishment of a newsletter through which to disseminate information to its members, and the establishment of a quarterly bulletin, which eventually became the *Review of Radical Political Economics*, for the publication of scholarly papers (Unger 1974; Menashe and Radosh 1967; Brazer 1982; McMillian 2000; Wachtel 1968; *New Left Notes*, November 11, 1968; Wachtel and Bluestone 1969; Bluestone 1969; Wachtel and Vanderslice 1973; Reich 1995; Arestis and Sawyer 2000; Edwards et al. 1970; URPE 1969; *AIMS Newsletter*, November-December 1968: 2).

Once formed, URPE and its members quickly undertook activities to develop an ongoing community of radical economists outside of the mainstream community and its socializing influences. In particular, at the local level, regional and area organizers were appointed; local chapters and collectives were established such as the New York chapter (1969), the American University collective (1969), and the Wright State University collective (1970); and six or more regional conferences were held at American University, MIT, the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Michigan, and Oberlin College. At the national level, a national conference to be held in August was established for the purpose of activist and theoretical discussions and for URPE people to get to know each other. In addition, there were activities at the annual Allied Social Sciences Association meetings, starting with Zweig, who led a couple of seminars of the “radicals economics group” at the 1968 meetings. The following year, URPE staged a “counterconvention” under the theme of “towards a radical political economics” consisting of eight sessions, seventeen papers, and two panel discussions. And finally, at the 1970 meetings, URPE put on a session on radical approaches to the teaching of economics followed by four workshops, some films, and a party. These activities, through their intellectual, activist, and social discourse, brought and bonded together radical economists by establishing community-wide goals and values.

To support and reinforce this emerging community, URPE used its newsletter to disseminate information about local, regional, and national activities. The newsletter was also used to announce the establishment of graduate economic programs that contained radical components and to identify economic departments that hired radical economists, to carry course outlines of interest to its members, and to promote radical economic and political discourse. Finally, the establishment of the *Review of Radical Political Economics* not only provided an outlet for scholarly papers written by members of URPE, it, more importantly, provided an alternative to the mainstream journals. Consequently, URPE membership increased from less than 50 in December 1968 to 300-plus by February 1969 to more than 950 members by mid-1971 (and more than 1,600 members by mid-1975).

Complementing the organizational and social building of URPE was the development of a pluralistic radical intellectual milieu compatible with the URPE prospectus. The membership of URPE included both academics and activists (many times combined in the same person). Consequently, much of the discourse among the membership focused on how to combine radical scholarship with working for the movement. The concerns were evident in conference topics and papers and interchanges in the newsletter. More specifically, the concern with radical scholarship focused on critiques of neoclassical economics and the development of radical economic theory, while the concern with activism focused on advocacy economics. The resolution to this potentially divisive discourse came in terms of scholarly work on pressing social and economic issues. That is, the critique of neoclassical economics produced the consensus that, as currently articulated, it could not adequately deal with the

social and economic problems that were of concern to the movement. Hence, the contribution of URPE economists to the movement would be the theoretical and empirical investigations of the problems of imperialism, unemployment, gender, class divisions, racism, education, poverty, crime, health, housing, transportation, inequality, and the environment, as well as the advocacy of radical solutions. Since most economists in URPE were educated in economic departments that taught only neoclassical economic theory, their knowledge of Marxist economic theory and other heterodox theoretical frameworks was meager at best. Keeping with the pluralistic, cooperative ethos of URPE, a multifaceted theoretical discourse emerged whose purpose was the development of a radical economic theory that could then be used to better inform the investigation of social and economic problems and their solutions. This interactive, synergistic relationship between activism and theory generated by 1970 both a distinct radical intellectual milieu and a radical identity that bound together all members of URPE, whether they were academics, activists, or both (*URPE Newsletter* 1969-71; Behr 1969; Anonymous 1969; Michelson 1969a, 1969b; Bronfenbrenner 1970a; Ulmer 1970; Hymer and Roosevelt [1972] 1977; Worland 1972; Weaver 1970; Attewell 1984).

6. Conclusion

The response of mainstream economists to the emergence of radical economics and URPE was one of antagonism and bewilderment. The former was quickly made evident as neoclassical economists claimed that radical economists had a faulty understanding of neoclassical economic theory, were technically deficient and their theories technically inferior to neoclassical theory, and held ideologically slanted political and social values that led them to accept outdated and erroneous theories that at the same time prevented them from understanding how markets really worked and from doing real research. Hence, radical economic theory lacked scientific rigor and was nonquantifiable, while radical economists “pandered to the prejudices and abilities of dumbbells, who can’t understand any other variety” (Bronfenbrenner 1973: 5). Thus, if radical economists and the mush they called theories were to be taken seriously, neoclassical economists argued, they would have to become more neoclassical in language, technique, theorizing, and style. If they refused, then their tenure as academic economists should be brought to an end and as a result their theoretical mush would deservedly disappear from economics. By not accepting the terms offered and, at the same time, persisting to work at developing an alternative radical economic theory, radical economists faced throughout the 1970s intellectual bullying, hostility, and rejection, if not outright reprisals in terms of academic appointments, tenure and promotion, publications, and denial of access to sessions at the annual conference of the American Economic Association (Heilbroner 1970, 1971; Gurley 1971; Olson and Clague 1971; Blackman 1971; Bronfenbrenner 1970b, 1973; Solow 1970, 1971; Lazonick 1973; URPE 1972, 1974a, 1974b; Lifshultz 1974; Arestis and Sawyer 2000).

Neoclassical economists were also bewildered as to what radical economics was if it was not Marxian economics and who were radical economists if they were not Marxists. Without a historical perspective and awareness of the darker side of American society, politics, and academia, they did not realize that postwar radical economics and the identity of radical economists was plausibly the bastard child of McCarthyism. That is, the Marxist and radi-

cal-heterodox economists that emerged from McCarthyism felt attacked, suppressed, and emotionally drained. With their scholarly community and supporting institutions in tatters and the near absence of Marxist economics being taught in universities, the gradual reemergence of a broadly critical radical economics in the 1950s drew upon a broader range of economic arguments.⁶ While the older economists who were trained prior to 1945 still adhered to a dogmatic Marxian theory, the few younger economists were more theoretically pluralistic in their outlook. The older economists provided links to the past: to the old (Soviet-style) Marxist legacy of the 1930s and 1940s and to the institutions and journals that supported it. But as time went on, these links faded more into the background or simply became less prominent as the older economists began retiring from the field and the younger economists, many of whom had not been introduced to Marxian theory in any systematic manner, focused their attention on the events of the 1960s and the new intellectual ideas and new journals that emerged at the same time. Consequently, the activities of the 1960s, such as AIMS and the Socialist Scholars Conferences, that were linked to traditional Marxism had a small impact on the establishment of URPE and on the emerging radical economists.⁷ In short, radical economics, radical economists, and URPE emerged in part because McCarthyism was successful in weakening the dominance of Marxism among American leftists and radicals. And it is this historical legacy combined with the insistence on the pluralism of ideas and theories as well as a life of commitment to activism for dealing with the social-economic problems facing Americans that defined and hence constituted radical economics and the identity of radical economists in 1970:

We have been called to live:
to be responsive and sensitive;
Let us take upon ourselves the urgencies of the world, . . .
enable us to be responsible: . . .
to the people of this world
may we have compassion for
the starving
the sick
the estranged
the oppressed
the imprisoned. (Rossinow 1998: 75)

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6. A similar process took place in the United Kingdom; see Lee (2001).

7. Western or European Marxism was only beginning to affect the thinking of American (and British) radical and Marxist economists at the end of the 1960s. Thus, its influence on the pluralistic tendency in URPE and its formation was minimal. However, this was not the case after 1970.

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