2 The Influence of Trade on Economic Development

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INTRODUCTION

It is a great pleasure to me to take part in a conference in honour of my old friend Sir Hans Singer. I first met Hans early in 1934 when he was introduced to me by Richard Kahn with an admonition to help him to adjust to life in Cambridge. Two years previously he had embarked on a dissertation on the Kondratieff cycle under Schumpeter in Bonn; but first Schumpeter had left to take up an appointment at Harvard and not long afterwards Hitler came to power. Hans abandoned his research and took refuge in Istanbul. There he was offered a scholarship to Cambridge provided by an unknown donor, possibly Keynes, and in due course arrived there, leaving all his books and other belongings behind in Istanbul.

Cambridge was for him, as it had been for me when I first arrived there from Glasgow, unfamiliar territory to which it took some time to get accustomed. In his first days, Hans was a little concerned to see the billboard reading ‘Australia collapses’. He was much more deeply concerned when a day or two later a billboard read ‘England collapses’. In his ignorance of test match cricket, he wondered if he had been a little rash to forsake the safety of Istanbul for the instability of England.

Gradually, Hans settled in, became a member of Keynes’s Monday night discussion club, and began a new doctorate thesis on ‘Urban House Rents’. This he brought to a successful conclusion in 1936 when he was awarded the fourth ever Cambridge PhD in economics; that is, it was a degree that had been awarded to only three others, of whom I was one. But while it took me eighteen years to publish the gist of my thesis, Hans has still to publish his.

After graduation, Hans joined Walter Oakeshott and David Owen on a Pilgrim Trust Enquiry into the condition of the long-term unemployed, taking part in the preparation of its Report, *Men Without Work*. I saw little of him in those years but I recall that when he came to see me in Scotland it was in an ancient motor car – inevitably a Singer – and that although it brought him safely up a steep hill to my house, the battery, if I remember correctly, had dropped off the running board.
In 1938 he was appointed to the staff of the University of Manchester and remained there (apart from a brief spell of internment) for much of the war. I remember that in the spring of 1941 he assured me, on the basis of pure logic, not inside information, that Hitler’s next move would be to attack the USSR – as he did a couple of months later.

At the end of the war Hans worked for a time in the Ministry of Town and Country Planning (which he thought very ignorant of economic theory, particularly the theory of land values) and followed this with a year at the University of Glasgow. It was at this point that a message arrived from David Owen, by this time Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, inviting me or alternatively Hans to join him in New York. I was otherwise engaged but Hans was delighted to accept the invitation.

It was a turning point in his career. Over the next fifty years, his life was devoted to the problems of the less developed countries, not as a matter of theoretical study but with a view to devising and urging measures of assistance to those countries. This he did during his twenty-two years on the UN Secretariat, where he became Chief of the Development Section and afterwards at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex of which he became a Fellow in 1969 and to which he remains attached twenty-seven years later.

In New York he held a bewildering number of posts both in the United Nations and in academic life. In addition to his many duties at the United Nations, he was a visiting professor at a number of universities and colleges. Books, papers, articles, reviews and reports poured out in an extraordinary variety of publications; and after he returned to Britain he continued to prepare a succession of reports to governments and international bodies, often in collaboration with others. He kept popping up (and still does) with some new idea or fresh comment. He is essentially an economic activist – perhaps one should say ‘visionary’ – full of what he thinks ought to be done, however improbable it may seem that sufficient support for it will ever be mobilized. After all, he did contribute powerfully to get the World Bank and the IMF to take a more elastic and imaginative view of the contribution they could make to helping the developing countries.

Hans’s life has been anything but cloistered. He has made frequent journeys half around the world. There are few of the developing countries that he has not visited and still fewer that he has not advised. He must have addressed a wider variety of academics in a wider variety of places about a wider range of subjects than any other economist, living or dead. He has moved from continent to continent, expounding, advocating, and devising