Please bring me the New York Times

On the European roots of Richard Abel Musgrave

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Abstract Richard Musgrave was one of 200 academic economists who emigrated from Germany when Fascism came to dominate the country. This memorial lecture traces the German and European roots of Richard Musgrave’s oeuvre, trying to shed light on his family background as well as on the political and scientific factors that influenced his education as an economist. Particular emphasis is given to the development of his notion of public goods.

Keywords Richard Musgrave · Public goods · Emigration from Germany

JEL Classification H0 · B0 · B3

Dear Peggy and Friends of Richard Musgrave, I have come to commemorate Richard Musgrave
– because he was an honorary president of the International Institute of Public Finance,
– because he was one of the godfathers of the Center for Economic Studies and the CESifo Research Network,
– because I learned public finance from his writings,
– because he was a personal friend, and above all,

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– because I want to pay tribute to one of the greatest minds of our economics discipline.

Dear Peggy, let me express my deep condolences. Richard has gone and is a loss for us all, but you have lost the man with whom you shared your life, with all its joys and sorrows, successes and failures. We are all grateful to you for giving Richard the strength and intellectual stimulus that kept him active into old age and for taking care of him.

You asked me to speak about Richard’s German roots because others will review his life in America.¹ I am happy to do so as Richard built a bridge between German public finance theory and English market theory over which many important ideas have been transported in both directions.

1 Exodus

Richard Musgrave ranks among the most prominent examples of the intellectual exodus from Germany and Austria after Fascism came to dominate Germany and Hitler’s brown-shirt hordes started to trample down the values of humanity. As you know, most of the emigrants were Jews as well as left-wing and liberal intellectuals. The list of famous emigrants is endless. It includes people like Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, Albert Hirschman(n), Berthold Brecht, Hannah Arendt, Horst Jonas, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Samuel (Billy) Wilder and many others. Even the list of economists is long. Among others, it includes Joseph Schumpeter, Gerhard Colm, Gottfried Haberler, Friedrich von Hayek, Walther Lederer, Fritz Machlup, Ludwig von Mises, Karl Roskamp, and Wolfgang Stolper. In total, about 200 economists emigrated at the time, 120 of them came to the United States, and one of them was Richard.²

Richard Musgrave was a political refugee, and then again he was not. He went to the University of Rochester in the fall of 1933 with an official stipend of the German student exchange service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) which he had been awarded the year before. He did have a return ticket. However, when he realized how things were developing in his home country, he wisely decided to stay where he was.

He received his MA in economics at Harvard in 1936 and his Ph.D. in 1937,³ and then had a fabulous world career in economics.⁴ However, before he achieved these degrees, he already had a thorough education in Germany. As a scholar, he lived two lives, one in the United States, and before that another one in Germany.

¹Memorial addresses were also given by Henry Aaron, Walter P. Blass, Karl Case, Pamela J. Clyne, David Cutler, Martin Feldstein, Arnold Harberger, Harry D. Krause, Oliver Oldman, Attiat E. Ott, Roger M. Richman, Thomas R. Richman, Paul A. Samuelson, and Robert Solow.
²See Krohn (1997, p. 46).
³See Richard Abel-Musgrave (1937).
⁴For reviews of his achievements, see, e.g., Wiegard (1999) or Cnossen (2007).