



ALAN MILWARD

Alan Steele Milward

1935–2010

ALAN MILWARD was a profoundly original British historian who was elected by the Modern History Section to the Fellowship of the British Academy in 1987. Although he is commonly regarded as an economic historian, he worked across many fields including economic theory and policy, economic and political history, and contemporary economic and political studies; he was indeed a modern political economist of a very rigorous kind. He published between 1964 and 2007 in three major fields of European history. These were: first, the operations of Fascist and war economies; secondly, the economic development of European economies from the mid-nineteenth century; and, thirdly, the political and economic construction of the European Union. Alan's work was based on detailed primary research—he knew and used a very wide range of available archives, and his work had deep empirical foundations. This was supported by linguistic skills (he spoke French, German, Italian and Norwegian) which gave him access to archives across Europe, so the geographic scope of his work was unusually wide.

On the basis of this original-source research, his work frequently challenged conventional wisdom (often in rather brusque terms), and introduced fundamentally new perspectives. For example, his analyses of European development suggested that these economies were highly diverse in structure, and shaped by very diverse national decision-making. This approach undercut general economic narratives of both left and right. The European array of nation states was also highly vulnerable to the Fascist challenge: in fact few survived the onslaught. In the aftermath of the Second World War, he argued that the much-vaunted Marshall

Plan was of relatively small significance in European reconstruction; this generated a continuing controversy. Then came perhaps his most powerful 'contrarian' argument: he showed that policy-makers negotiated the creation of the European Communities not as a path to unification but as a framework for realising national economic interests. Rejecting both past and present myths about the EU he argued that, far from being a federal project to transcend the nation state, it was (and is) a complex instrument aimed at maintaining the viability of nation states in Europe. Of course he recognised the profound long-term implications of integration. But his approach calls into question the 'founding myths' of European unity associated with the names of Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, while convincingly demolishing one of the long-standing clichés of anti-EU rhetoric in the UK, namely that the EU is a unifying federal project.

Although Alan had a serious and subtle understanding of economic theory, particularly with respect to international trade and payments, he did not, as some economic historians do, work by applying theory to empirical data. Rather, he attempted to let empirical research inform conceptual understanding, and this led to innovations in his work. One key innovation was an insistence on the importance of diversity among economies, and hence an understanding of European development resting on heterogeneity rather than a uniform adaptation to the spread of capitalism and markets. A second innovation was that he rejected the distinction between states and markets that is frequently found in economics, in favour of an approach that saw states, and hence policy decision-makers, as central to establishing and operating market systems; this was a powerful and continuing theme in his work. He was capable of drawing together insights from his three major areas of work into original perspectives that are acutely relevant to a historical understanding of modern Europe (examples of this will be offered below).

Alan was born on 19 January 1935 and raised in Longton, in Stoke-on-Trent, an only child. His family's circumstances were rather poor, but his parents were articulate and intelligent people, and he remained close to them. At the beginning of the Second World War his father joined the armed services, but was subsequently moved back into civilian life as a post-office clerk; he later became a postmaster in Lichfield. He clearly had important influences on his son, not least that he was a keen cricket player, in which Alan followed him. Alan played cricket at his grammar school, enjoyed cross-country running, read rather widely and listened to classical music (but not opera, for which he had an abiding dislike mainly on class grounds). In due course, he developed a well-informed appreciation of

literature, the theatre, painting and architecture, became keen on bird watching as an escape from academia, and deeply enjoyed wild country in places as far apart as Tanzania (where he went camping), Spitsbergen, the Scottish Highlands and north Norfolk (where much later in life he bought a cottage). At that time too, in his small garden in London, he made an unexpected collection of fruit trees and delicate Mediterranean plants. He also made a notable collection of nineteenth-century German postage stamps. After he left school, Alan took with him a continuing dislike of Stoke-on-Trent. Although not estranged, he remained distant from most of his relatives in and around Stoke, while he continued to be close to his parents and to one school friend, Alan Pedley. He followed the fortunes of the town's two football teams, Stoke City and Port Vale, for the rest of his life and retained his early interest in the novels of Arnold Bennett. His love of cricket also stayed with him all his life, and included playing for the university teams in Manchester, the London School of Economics (LSE), and for some years in a team in the little-known cricket league of Italy.

Alan went to University College London (UCL) with a scholarship, and was happy there as an undergraduate (1953–6), taking a First in Medieval and Modern History. Although Alan did not play an active role in party politics, his best friend from his university days at UCL, the economist Russell Butler, stood for Labour against Edward Heath in the 1966 general election, halving the Conservative majority. When Margaret Thatcher came to power, Alan joined the Labour Party.

Alan's trips abroad began early. In 1955, when he was twenty, he went on an adventurous bicycle trip in Finland using a university travel grant. He cycled into the north of Norway, forming an attachment to that country which never disappeared, and he began to learn the language. This had an impact on his cultural life: he enjoyed theatre, especially Ibsen, and very much liked the work of Edvard Munch.

Alan started his graduate studies at the LSE in 1956, yet had some problems finding a supervisor for his proposed Ph.D., on the armaments industry in the German economy during the Second World War. Contemporary history was regarded as a contradiction in terms, but he found a productive working relationship with Professor William Medlicott (a diplomatic historian), and submitted his Ph.D. in Economic History in 1960. After a short-lived junior position teaching Indian Archaeology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, he became assistant lecturer and then lecturer in Economic History at Edinburgh in 1960. This was a formative period in both his intellectual and personal life, when he made

warm and lifelong friendships with his colleagues Michael Flinn and Christopher Smout, and began to work closely with Berrick Saul on the trajectory of European economic development. In Edinburgh he also met his first wife Claudine Lemaître from whom he gained his fluency in French.

From 1965 he became lecturer and then senior lecturer at the University of East Anglia's School of Social Studies. In 1969 he was invited to the USA as an associate professor of Economics at Stanford but returned to Britain three years later, becoming Professor of European Studies at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, in the Department of European Studies which he created. Alan was responsible for appointing to that department the young political scientist, Helen Wallace, and the economic historian, Richard Griffiths. He was also close to Ian Kershaw and John Breuilly in the History Department at Manchester at the time. It was also in Manchester that Alan met Frances Lynch, who was later to become his second wife.

He spent two periods, from 1983 to 1986 and then from 1996 to 2003, as professor of the History of European Integration at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence where he developed major research programmes. In between the two periods in Florence, from 1986 to 1996, he was Professor of Economic History at the LSE.

In 1993 he was appointed official historian at the Cabinet Office, with the task of writing the history of Britain's decision-making and negotiations with the European Communities and later the EU. This resulted in the first volume of the Official History, *The UK and the European Community: the Rise and Fall of a National Strategy, 1945–1963* (2002), which offered a comprehensive historical perspective on British postwar policy thinking about the UK's place in the emerging world economy. The second volume was written by Sir Stephen Wall, who is also writing the third volume.

Alan published extensively and creatively: nine books as sole author, two major volumes with S. B. Saul on European economic development, two co-authored books and three edited volumes, plus twenty-one journal articles, sixty book chapters, and more than two hundred book reviews across all of his areas of interest.¹

His first theme was the organisation of war economies, looking at war organisation and its impact in the UK, and at the economic impact of

¹ A full list of his publications is available in F. Guirao, F. Lynch and S. M. R. Perez (eds.), *Alan S. Milward and a Century of European Change* (London, 2012). A collection of all Milward's book reviews will be published by Routledge in 2015, edited by F. Guirao and F. Lynch.

Nazism both in Germany and in two important occupied economies. This work resulted in *The German Economy at War* (London, 1965), *The New Order and the French Economy* (London, 1970), *The Economic Effects of the Two World Wars on Britain* (London, 1970), and *The Fascist Economy in Norway* (Oxford, 1972). These were followed by an important work of synthesis, *War, Economy and Society 1939–1945* (Harmondsworth, 1977). With his usual realism he insisted that war was not at all an exceptional condition, that it was not becoming more costly over time, and that economic planning for war was a normal element of economic policy in peacetime. His general argument was that it is impossible to separate strategic concepts from the underlying economic organisation that supported them. So he maintained, for example, that the strategy of *blitzkrieg* was consonant with an economy that could produce high-quality but rather standardised weapons in quantities that could overwhelm opponents in short, intense conflict. But this kind of economic organisation, which was chronically short of raw materials and oil and with relatively high levels of civilian consumption (higher than in Britain), was deeply unsuited for the protracted war that emerged after the failure of the initial attack on the USSR, and after the declaration of war on the USA. This interpretation of the Nazi war economy, which was contested initially by Richard Overly, continues to be debated by younger historians in the field. At the same time, Alan took the political dimensions of the war very seriously, showing that many aspects of Axis strategy depended on underlying Fascist views about the inseparability of society and war, and in particular the idea that war was essential to German and Italian renewal and to overcoming the false gods of liberalism and democracy: ‘... the basis of existence in Hitler’s view was a struggle of the strong for mastery and war was thus an inescapable, necessary aspect of the human condition’.² This ideology and its racialist associations did not conflict with purely economic calculation. The Fascist economies could not use trading networks or colonial resources, and were at their core autarkic. However, it was autarky combined with aggression, and so the attacks on Norway, the Ukraine, and the attempt to seize the Caucasus, for instance, were driven by purely economic objectives linked to critical resources. Despite serious conflicts within the German state, in managing the conquests Fascist ideas merged with long-standing German economic ideologies about the viability of ‘large economic spaces’ to create an autonomous zone subservient to the New Order. Alan saw this as a serious

² Alan S. Milward, *War, Economy and Society 1939–45* (Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 6.

'inward-looking' strategic alternative to the global trading strategies of the UK and the USA.

His work on the economic development of Europe was carried out in collaboration with S. B. Saul, and resulted in major works: *The Economic Development of Continental Europe 1780–1870* (London, 1973) and *The Development of the Economies of Continental Europe 1850–1914* (London, 1977). Each of these is a most important book, of wide scope. The first is organised in part thematically, with studies of agricultural organisation, land management, demographics (including migration), and technological change, and in part geographically, with detailed discussion of these processes in France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland and Scandinavia. The thematic part of this work covers the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, and Romania. The second volume, covering the consolidation and acceleration of industrialisation that occurred after the mid-nineteenth century, is more geographical, covering Germany, France, the Low Countries, Spain, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and South-Eastern Europe. Central to Milward and Saul's approach is the issue of diversity:

It is indeed the basic tenet of our work that processes of development vary more widely in accordance with national historical backgrounds than with anything else. Countries with different structures, in different geographical circumstances, with different timing of change, were bound to have different patterns of development. It is for this reason above all that we have paid scant regard to the thesis of the so-called globalité, or unity, of European development. The fact that natural resources such as coal fields and forests spanned political frontiers gave an international dimension to the growth experience, but the differences were far more important than the similarities. Indeed, it might well be argued that eighteenth-century society was more pan-European than it was in the nineteenth.³

The emphasis on diversity and heterogeneity in Europe contrasts with frequent assumptions among economic historians that economic development consists of countries pursuing essentially similar paths of institutional change, investment and industry creation. This idea of capitalism unfolding in an essentially similar dynamic everywhere really goes back to Marx ('the more developed country only shows to the less developed its own future') but it can also be found in many anti-Marxist writers such as Walt Rostow, and in many institutional historians. Milward and Saul rejected this, on the basis of an approach to development that was far

³ Alan S. Milward and S. B. Saul, *The Economic Development of Continental Europe 1780–1870* (London, 1973), pp. 36–7.

more than merely economic. Their argument was that across European regions and countries, economic development required promotion and support by ruling elites and direct intervention by states. However, elites and states faced widely different political contexts as they sought to support economic change, and this gave rise to very different patterns of investment and forms of economic and political organisation. The result was divergent paths to development, not unity; at its worst, the outcome was a form of fragmentation that made European countries fragile in the face of the determined assault that came from Fascism in the twentieth century.

These themes of difference persist in Milward's powerful analyses of the history of the European Union. His analysis is complex but there are two major themes: first, the factors shaping the creation of the European Communities and the deepening of economic integration within it; and, secondly, British decision-making on Europe and the UK's role in the global economy. There are two broad pieces of theory about the growth of the EU. One is the economics of customs unions, which suggest that when countries remove tariffs between themselves then there is an incentive for neighbouring countries to join, and for the union to grow bigger thereby. The other is from political science, suggesting that common policy functions lead to integration, as a method of simplifying policy systems across countries. Beyond this there is what Alan considered a lazy cliché, though it is still widely held in some British political circles: that the EU was the result of an aggrandising federal strategy promoted by such figures as Schuman and Monnet, and reflecting a Franco-German accord aimed at domination by erasing national states. Alan pointed out that all these rather abstract approaches failed to account for the dynamics of the EU, and instead he conducted a detailed examination of the strategies and negotiations that had led to expansion. The causal factors changed over time, but his overarching argument was that the negotiators who created the European Communities (first around coal and steel, then Euratom, then the economic community) had specifically national economic and political objectives in mind. On the one hand they sought to rebuild allegiance to nation states, and to establish their economic viability in a world of increasing trade and interdependence. On the other hand, they sought to solve the great political challenge of the post-war settlement, namely the role of Germany in European politics, as the transition was made from occupied zones to West Germany as a national state. He argued trenchantly that no concessions of sovereignty were ever made in the European Communities unless they committed Germany

more fully to the European structure. What emerged out of this was a framework for ensuring the viability and compatibility of nation states in a Europe that had long been riven by economic fragmentation and war. The ‘Euro-sceptic’ nightmare of an encroaching federal project was in Alan’s view a serious misrepresentation of the record.

But if Alan Milward was uncomfortable reading for Euro-sceptics he was no easier for Europhiles. In *The UK and the European Community: the Rise and Fall of a National Strategy, 1945–1963* (London, 2002), he took on the idea (also still common) that the UK had made a major mistake in not linking firmly to the European Community initiatives of the 1950s, from the Schuman plan onwards. Milward was initially sympathetic to this criticism, but his views evolved. In a major effort to identify and think through the context of UK decision-making he came to feel that, taken together, the combination of the Commonwealth, sterling as a reserve currency, global trading links, nuclear and other military assets, and the alliance with the USA, were at the very least a reasonable foundation for the decision to remain outside the emerging EC initiatives. The British policy then was in effect that the creation of wider free trade areas, particularly with the United States, was preferable to the creation of a large internal market in Europe. But if this was justifiable (he argued that the independent British strategy was ‘neither vain nor ill-conceived’) in the post-war period it soon enough became clear that many of these UK advantages were insubstantial. It was then that British policy changed. But it changed on the basis of a calculation of national interests, just as it had done among the European Community partners themselves.

Alan Milward was, as Charles S. Maier described him, ‘an inspired contrarian’. He could be a difficult man—he did not suffer fools gladly and was intolerant of ‘wooden tops’ who accepted the clichés of the day. Alan fought his corner strongly and tenaciously. He worked incessantly, wrote book reviews on holiday, and switched off only on the most remote beaches. He supervised twenty-seven doctoral theses during the period 1981–2006—and earned the affectionate nickname ‘Milvy’ with EUI students.

Alan was a member of several journal editorial boards including *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of European Integration History*, *Explorations in Economic History*, *The International History Review*, and later of *Contemporary European History* and *Zeitschrift für Staats- und Europawissenschaften*: he was a founding member of the *Review of European Economic History* and for six years he was adviser to Macmillan for their series ‘Themes in Comparative History’. He was

President for five years of the University Association of Contemporary European Studies (UACES), having been its Publications Secretary and in that capacity responsible for the series 'Studies in the European Community'. He was a member of the Scientific Board of the Institut d'Études Européennes, University of Louvain-la-Neuve and the British representative since its creation on the Groupe de Liaison des Professeurs d'Histoire Contemporaine auprès de la Communauté Européenne, along with Professor D. C. Watt of the LSE.

Alan taught for many years at the College of Europe in Bruges. Much sought after, he also held visiting posts in Paris, Siegen, Illinois, Bruges, Oslo, Trondheim, Århus, and Vienna. He served in the Economic History as well as the Modern History Section of the British Academy and joined the Academy's Overseas Policy Committee (1989–94), he was elected Fellow of the Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters in 1994, and won a distinguished Italian history prize in Florence. He was also given an award for life-long achievement from UACES.

Alan was immensely creative in following through the implications of what he found in the archives that he explored so thoroughly, and he inspired a devoted following of younger scholars who have carried his originality and insights forward. One result of this is a major book on his life's work, *Alan S. Milward and a Century of European Change* (London, 2011), edited by Fernando Guirao, Frances Lynch and Sigfrido M. Ramirez Perez, with contributions from many colleagues and students. Alan was willing to think, without illusions, about the implications of his historical work, also for modern life in Europe. One example of this was his prescient views on the Euro, which he argued was the result of acts of political choice rather than adaptation to a globalising world, and would result in chaotic adaptation processes that would benefit only the wealthy economies. Alan argued in 1998 that the stabilisation conditions for the Euro would make it impossible to achieve acceptable levels of employment and growth.⁴

Likewise, his reflections on the origins and course of Nazism may be very relevant to our current situation. His thoughts here are worth quoting at length:

Speculation about the German character or the supposed peculiarities of German political thought and tradition is escapism. It is to us and our societies that the lesson of history points. And if we are to arm ourselves with moral outrage it should be directed against the first steps of all those who turn the

⁴Alan Milward, 'Bad news for the downtrodden', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4982, 25 Sept. 1998, pp. 4–5.

power of government and the law from its true purpose of protecting all citizens to the purpose of protecting the government: domestic spies of all kinds, unknown and unknowable security services subject to no control but that of their masters, ministers and judges contemptuous of the people they govern. It may be noted that the law of Britain, as approved by the present Attorney-General, would appear to forbid under severe penalty any British civil servant from doing what we are asked to criticise Nazi civil servants for not doing. This does not mean that anti-Semitism is irrelevant to the story . . . Anti-Semitism was one factor, among many, that helped the Nazi movement into political prominence. It helped the Nazi Party and Hitler, once in power together, to fix in the mind of much of the population that there was something called 'the Jewish question'. And every question needs an answer. The Nazi movement itself had several and could not agree on them. After summer 1941 Hitler had only one, most dreadful of all, the one which, in Himmler's words, was 'never to be written', and it was Hitler who made sure that it was this one which was chosen. The machinery with which he put it into practice did not especially depend on the many peculiarities of the Nazi movement or the Nazi state. It could exist—it does exist—in several developed, civilised countries and will probably come to exist in many more in the future.⁵

The kind of thinking that Alan exemplified will continue to be necessary. We have been left with uniquely important scholarly work, which was brought to an end far too soon. Alan was deeply humane, passionate and he was a loyal friend. He was also good company. He was a proud parent, a loving husband to Frances Lynch, and he had a large network of international friendships. In so many ways generous, he is much missed and will continue to be so. He died on 28 September 2010.

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Note. I wish to acknowledge my deep debt to Frances Lynch, who gave me a lot of her time and deeper insights into Alan's life. I was kindly provided with important contributions also from Christopher Smout. I thank them both.

⁵ Alan Milward, 'It can happen here', *London Review of Books*, 7 (No 8, 2 May 1985), 3–6.