



PETER WILES

Peter John de la Fosse Wiles 1919–1997

PETER WILES'S presence at the suppression of the Poznań riots and of the Budapest uprising in 1956 was decisive in transforming him from an Oxford tutorial don into a critic of communist authoritarianism. One of the first British academics to be officially invited to the USSR after the War (Moscow, 1952) and early gaining experience of America (Columbia University, 1958), he became Britain's foremost analyst of comparative economic systems. By the end of his life—he was 77 when he died in 1997—the Soviet Union had passed into history and with it the brand of comparative economics in which he excelled. Indeed, because after the collapse of the east European communist regimes (and until the Russian financial crisis of August 1998) the world's economies were almost uniformly being modelled on a 'Chicago–Washington consensus', his formulation of the rules for any aberrant system could have been seen as irrelevant. Wiles had focused on economies deviant from mainstream models, using a methodology which owed something to the 'stylised facts' of Nicholas Kaldor, with whom he aligns himself in his principal work, *Economic Systems Compared* (1977). For each system he established an *Idealtypus* (his preferred term), among which, besides the Soviet, the socialist or communal types included notional Illyrias, Pannonias, idiorrhythmic Byzantine monasteries, Israeli and Mexican communes and British universities of that time. Among libertarian models he differentiated varieties of capitalism, culminating in an extreme of kleptocracy, aspects of which are indeed now exhibited in post-communist Russia.

Peter Wiles was born on 25 November 1919 in Guildford, Surrey, to Helen, daughter of Sir Claude de la Fosse, of Huguenot origin, and his

Proceedings of the British Academy, 101, 539–553. © The British Academy 1999.

wife Minnie. He grew up fatherless because Joseph Wiles died in the contemporary influenza epidemic, just six months after the birth. Recently returned from army service, his father had been about to take up school teaching, and hence had few resources for his widow to inherit. His mother (from whom it seems he inherited a certain impishness) returned to her parents, living in Merrow on the outskirts of Guildford, and Peter's childhood was thus spent in the de la Fosse household: his grandfather's Indian Civil Service career had concluded as Vice-Chancellor of Allahabad University. His paternal uncle was a Whitehall mandarin, Sir Harold Wiles, of whose three sons one is a Canon of Christ Church, Professor Maurice Wiles (FBA 1981), whose own son, the solver of Fermat's last theorem, is Professor Andrew Wiles (FRS 1989). Peter attended Lambrook School, Bracknell, and Winchester College and followed his grandfather to Oxford, although to New College rather than Trinity. Competitive success attended him at every stage: from his preparatory school he won a Scholarship to Winchester and from there the Senior Scholarship in the 1937 examination into New College. Bespectacled (for he had indifferent eyesight from childhood) and of small physical stature, Peter would have been a ready butt of others in the school environment of the day had he not developed a verbal ferocity in defence. Indeed, his quick repartee raised his peer popularity though sometimes also the hackles of authority—one of his verses satirised a somewhat pompous headmaster's manner in granting an *exeat*. Two of his masters were especially influential: Donald McLachlan, later Foreign Editor of *The Economist* and founder of the *Sunday Telegraph*, inspired his command of modern languages, and Francis King, who taught him classics, was the key encourager of his time at Winchester. The then Dean of New College who conducted the selection at Winchester was Richard Crossman, with whose political views Peter was later broadly to align himself. At the outbreak of the Second World War he took a commission in the Royal Artillery, but not before he had gained a distinction in Honour Moderations in Michaelmas Term 1939.

A combination of his evident talents and German, French, and Russian from school soon marked him out for attachment to the Intelligence Corps. Already a Captain by the time of Alamein, he monitored enemy radio voice communications ('Y Service') from forward positions in the Western Desert. General Montgomery's Chief of Intelligence, Sir Edgar Williams, later confirmed their value to the Eighth Army and noted that the corresponding top secret Ultra signal

intercepts were used essentially as confirmation. He was twice mentioned in dispatches, but he and his senior signals officer proved incompatible and reasons were found to return him to Woolwich. His slow return route passed through Algiers and awaiting transport to England he worked in Sigint there and was able to solve at sight a German cipher problem which had perplexed the resident decoders. His last war-service posting was at Bletchley, in high intellectual Oxbridge company.

As his war service drew to a close, while still at Bletchley, he married in March 1945 a childhood friend, Elizabeth Coppin. Daughter of a naval officer who had retired to Guildford, she had a brother who was with Peter at Lambrook School. She was not, however, to take serious note of her future husband until, as a freshman back from his first Oxford term, he clashed with his future father-in-law over British guarantees to Poland, Wiles contending that, however provocative Germany might allege such an act to be, the UK should supply Poland with a deterrent strength of military aircraft.

On returning to New College, he switched to Modern Greats (as most then referred to Philosophy, Politics, and Economics), and was taught economics by Sir Henry Phelps Brown, a Fellow from 1930, who (after an interval on war service, also in the Royal Artillery) took in 1947 a Chair at the London School of Economics (where they met again). The University permitted those having passed one Public Examination and with war service for nine terms since matriculation to proceed without further examination to BA (which Wiles did in 1944), and with 21 terms' standing to become MA, as Wiles did in 1945. Thus he was already a Senior Member of the University while reading for a first degree. Wiles was dissuaded from sitting Finals by Warden Sumner of All Souls after he had gained a Prize Fellowship there in November 1946, who is reputed to have advised him 'Don't put temptation in the examiners' way'. Within two months New College, apprised of Phelps Brown's impending departure, appointed Wiles a 'Lecturer not on the Foundation': he thus supplied the College's economics teaching from January 1947 until he formally took over when elected to a tutorial Fellowship starting in October 1948. He used his successive Fellowships for wide reading and reflection. Teaching the economics of Marshall and Keynes (formal mathematical economics came to Oxford in the mid-sixties, monetarism in the seventies) and lecturing and writing for the Liberal Party reflected the thought that permeated his life's writings. The message of his principal work while at

Oxford, *Price, Cost and Output* (1956; 1962), was that the market was efficient at the level of the enterprise, subject to 'an obligation on the state to ban the 'anti-welfare' practices of entrepreneurs' (p. 295). Well versed in the classical economists, his Appendix on 'The Full Cost Principle in the Older Economists and a Few Modern Misunderstandings' (pp. 71–84) reviews the inadequacies of microeconomics in Smith, Ricardo, Mill, Marx and Jevons until Marshall amalgamated into one system the 'representative firm' covering its full cost and industry-wide choices made on marginal-cost criteria. His respect for Marshall is frequently expressed, commenting towards the end of the book 'Yet again, it is all in Marshall' (p. 206).

But his interest was already turning towards the USSR and he published (with Trudi Schultz of the Oxford University Institute of Statistics, a specialist on UK household budgets) an assessment of 'Earnings and Living Standards in Moscow' in the *Bulletin of the Oxford University Institute of Statistics* (vol. 14, 1952). His data were from what he could glean earlier that year in Moscow, to which he had been invited with other Western scholars for an International Economic Conference, an event with a dual purpose. Ostensibly the gathering was to promote Stalin's book, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, and formed part of Soviet efforts to mobilise centrist and socialist opinion-formers in support of the Stockholm Peace Appeal of 1950. But it may also have been manipulated by Soviet academics to restore links with the world outside, which might be persuable on the eventual death of the dictator. If that were so, Wiles was an ideal intermediary and, with the 'thaw' that followed Stalin's death in 1953, he began examining the fundamentals of the Soviet system ('Scarcity, Marxism and Gosplan', *Oxford Economic Papers*, vol. 5, 1953) and collecting for propagation in the West the work of East European economists questioning the dogmas of Marxist-Leninist economics. Such interest led him to participate in a delegation of British economists to a conference in June 1956 in Warsaw, to transmit to outsiders the sweeping conclusions of the National Congress of the Polish Economic Society, which two weeks previously had produced a comprehensive critique of the Soviet-type command economy and had formulated the radical alternative of market socialism. For publication in *Oxford Economic Papers* (vol. 9, June 1957), Wiles edited the contributions to that Congress by Włodzimierz Brus and Jozef Pajestka and wrote an introduction, 'Changing Economic Thought in Poland'. Brus, who later emigrated to the UK and became Professor of Modern Russian and East European

Studies at Oxford and a Fellow of Wolfson College, then noted the breadth of Wiles's knowledge of the Soviet-type economy and the originality of his analysis. His Polish hosts reciprocated and he published a call for Polish agricultural reform in *Mysl* (vol. 3, 1958). A visit to Poznań concluded the British delegation's stay. It was thus by chance that Wiles was there on the very day that a peaceful workers' demonstration was bloodily suppressed by Polish security forces. Four months after Poznań, he went to Budapest to meet the economists advising the reformist Hungarian government of Imre Nagy and found himself trapped incommunicado for four days in his hotel while Soviet tanks battled to conquer the city. Awareness of east European demands for freedom and the accompanying repression was to mark the rest of his work.

The Wileses' Headington house received not only his pupils in PPE but a miscellany of those to whom he was moral tutor, together with refugee students from eastern Europe. Oxford undergraduates had collected money to bring over and support two students from displaced person camps in Germany and Wiles, with his Russian and German, was deputed to travel to Kiel to conduct them over. There was no problem with the young Czech, but the Russian, Sergei Utechin, declared that he could not leave behind his aged and blind father, also in the DP camp. Wiles returned with the Czech and proceeded to gather sufficient funds to bring to Oxford both father and son. Utechin was admitted in 1952 to the very new St Antony's College: he took a B.Litt., completed the doctorate he had started at Kiel University and became a Research Fellow of St Antony's before taking a professorship in the United States. The Utechins *père et fils* stayed only briefly with the Wileses who found them a suitable university landlady, in whose house Utechin met a Ruskin student, Patricia Rathbone (later Secretary to Sir John Hicks and to Sir Isaiah Berlin), who soon became his wife and of whose son, Nicholas, Peter became the godfather. After the suppression of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, the Wiles family gave six months' hospitality to two refugee students from that country, both of whom went on to successful academic careers. The Wardenship of New College had by then passed to Sir William Hayter: just retired from the Foreign Service, he had as Ambassador to Moscow seized the opportunity of the post-Stalin 'thaw' to secure a visit to the UK (including to Oxford) of Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet Party leader, and Nikolai Bulganin, Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. Wiles was a great asset to Hayter in the visitors' tour of the College,

which ran the gauntlet of students protesting at the Polish and Hungarian repressions, and commenting on Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin at the Party Congress the previous February with the song 'Poor Old Joe'. This was at a time when he was forecasting to his pupils that the USSR would collapse: 'It's built on lies and evasion' one of them recounts from a tutorial in 1957.

Research, publications and outside activities did not distract him from his pupils—the archives show that he undertook the normal teaching 'stint' and was an outstanding generator of Firsts in PPE. It was typical of his style that in a record crop (12 Firsts, of which three congratulatory, in 1951) he forecast to one, a future Head of an Oxford College, 'You'll get a First, and so you'll get nowhere'. By such 'put-downs', telling barbs, witty comments or military expletives, he encouraged the bright but idle to exert themselves, got all to think more profoundly, and fostered literary style. To his pupils he was not just an inspirational tutor ('life-enhancing' recalled one), but a sharer of the serviceman's experience through which most had passed. Good English was his touchstone: economics that could not be so expressed was useless, he told one pupil—the process of thought could use geometry, algebra or mathematics, but clarity of written expression was a necessary condition for sound economics. Biblical and monastic parallels vie with the classics in his writing. Thus, in *The Political Economy of Communism* (1962) he observes that in Soviet ideology 'Communism, its ultimate goal, is principally an economic concept. . . . The Soviet Union achieves economic growth as Medieval Europe achieved Christianity' (p. 253). Short of that ideal state, 'Soviet planning is a sort of nationalized standard costing: a continuous costing by a ruthless police state of actual performance with standard set. It is as if every cost accountant were as powerful and demanding as the Lord himself, in the parable of the talents' (p. 259). A fellow student of the later playwright, Dennis Potter, recalls Wiles tackling Potter's Marxist notions by pointing out the inadequacy of the labour theory of value in that it implied that the most valuable building on earth would have to be the pyramids. His past pupils well remember his sense of humour, his sharp criticisms of contemporary economists and the stimulus they found in his personal digressions explaining to them topics on which he was working. One student who had spent some time in business before returning to Oxford (and a New College Fellowship), recalls Wiles's account of the full cost controversy when Philip Andrews and Elizabeth Brunner of Nuffield College were surveying businesses and examining corporate

accounts to prove that most decisions on a firm's pricing and production were assessed on average total cost and average total revenue, and hence showing scant empirical basis for the marginalist school of Jevons, Menger, Walras, and of course Marshall. That student applied Wiles's view to his own firm where, on finding full-cost pricing, he improved its profitability by a switch to marginalism.

Wiles's personal remit extended far beyond tutorials, lectures, his secretaryship of the College tutorial committee and faculty meetings. As speaker and pamphleteer he was an active Liberal when that Party held but six seats in the Commons; regularly participated in the BBC 'Brains Trust' programme; and found time to translate Russian memoirs (Princess Zinaida Sebakovskaya's *The Privilege Was Mine*, 1959). When McLachlan asked him during the Long Vacation of 1951 to contribute a reflective essay, he wrote three articles under the title 'Agenda for an Age of Inflation', which were not only prescient on the future ratio of prices to real estate and equities, but also foreshadowed his later work on 'wage-push' inflation in 'Cost Inflation and the State of Economic Theory' (*Economic Journal*, vol. 83, 1973 and vol. 85, 1975).

His Oxford household was enlarged to two daughters and a son: Judith, born 1947, is a civil servant in the Home Office; Penny, born 1949, is a teacher; and Andrew, born 1950 and following on to New College, is a director in the Housing Corporation. There are nine grandchildren. By the late 1950s, however, the marriage was no longer a success and Wiles chose to spend four months as Visiting Professor at Columbia University, where Abram Bergson and Carl Shoup were leading a new team of doctoral students on research into comparative economics. On his own in New York, he became friends with the Graduate Department librarian and administrator Carolyn Stedman, a New Englander, later to become his second wife. Divorce came in 1959—his first wife subsequently married another Oxford economics tutor, Norman Leyland of Brasenose—and he chose to leave Oxford. His resignation from New College took effect in June 1960 after his pupils had sat Finals. Oxford had just acknowledged the need for embedding his specialty by creating a Lecturership in Soviet Economic and Political Institutions, filled by a historian, George Katkov, as Fellow of St Antony's in 1959. He spent 1960/61 as a research fellow at the Institute of International Economics of the University of Stockholm, where he worked and clashed with Gunnar Myrdal's socialism, and added Swedish to his Spanish and Polish. Thus in his

forties, the most productive decade of his life, he was reading in any of six foreign languages work pertaining to the new specialisation, Soviet-type economics. He accepted a Chair at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, where he wrote *The Political Economy of Communism*. Meanwhile, in this country the University Grants Committee had accepted the report of its Sub-Committee on Oriental, Slavonic, East European and African Studies (published in 1961 under the chairmanship of Sir William Hayter) recommending the funding of posts in the application of the social sciences to the regions indicated in its title—the world round was completed with the (soon following) Parry Report on Latin American studies. ‘Hayter Centres’ with finance guaranteed for ten years were established for the multidisciplinary teaching of Russian and East European studies at the Universities of Birmingham, London, Oxford, Glasgow, and the University of Wales at Swansea, with up to five lectureships in each. So sudden and large an expansion necessitated a broad trawl for suitable candidates, and at least three of those appointed were Britons recruited from abroad. He returned from New England to the University of London to a new Chair of Russian Social and Economic Studies to be held jointly at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies—the University’s ‘Hayter Centre’—and the London School of Economics. He remained there from 1965 until retirement in 1985.

In LSE he was soon caught up in the student unrest of 1968, backing the Director, Professor Walter Adams, whose Rhodesian connection was held against him. But in general he preferred not to be enmeshed in administration and both there and at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies he devoted himself generously to his numerous doctoral students. They recall profiting from his forthright criticism: he was able to identify everyone’s assets, perceive their gaps, and bring out their best with a few succinct words. At the LSE, in turn, Wiles renewed the link with Henry Phelps Brown, whom he respected as his mentor and found influential in encouragement and constructive argument. For wider audiences, he was a highly accomplished lecturer and established an LSE seminar, Economic Problems of the Communist World, which attracted leading specialists in the field. From 1970 until formal retirement in 1985, he ran jointly with the Ministry of Defence an annual conference of academics and Whitehall desk-officers assessing the Soviet, East European and Chinese economies. That series had been started in 1966 by Edward Radice (then the Ministry’s Head of Economic Intelligence and on retirement a Fellow of St Antony’s)

and ended on a gala note in 1990, when for the first time Soviet economists could be invited. Such audiences were enlightened by Wiles's pioneering investigations into topics concealed by the official and sparse statistics, such as income distribution (*Distribution of Income, East and West*, 1974), unemployment ('A Note on Soviet Unemployment', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 23, 1972), and Chinese technological policy (in Peter Nolan and Dong Fu-reng (eds.), *The Chinese Economy and Its Future*, 1990). He was elected Fellow of the British Academy in 1990.

Leaves during his long tenure of the Chair afforded him wide-ranging academic mobility—in France (Collège de France and, later, École des Sciences Politiques), Holland (Erasmus University, Rotterdam), Japan (Waseda University), China (Wuhan University), and Russia (Plekhanov Institute, in a faculty chaired by the young Ruslan Khasbulatov, who was to become the anti-Yeltsin leader of 1993). American universities were, however, his preferred environment, especially after marrying Carolyn in 1960: it was in her house in New York State that they spent vacations. He held Visiting Chairs at various times at City College of New York, Dartmouth College (Bi-Centennial Professor) and Wayne State in the United States, and at the University of Windsor in Canada, rounding off with a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC. His last major conference was at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, in July 1992, the papers of which were published as Chang Ha-Joon and Peter Nolan (eds), *The Transformation of the Communist Economies* (1995): his paper characteristically warned against 'Capitalist Triumphalism in the Eastern European Transition'. His last public lecture was in March 1995 at an international panel formed at the annual conference in Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies in memory of Alec Nove. Alzheimer's Disease had already taken hold and ruptured his habitual flow, and his trenchant insights into the post-Soviet economic decline were sadly fragmented. He struggled gamely against the affliction, remaining alert and in contact with family and colleagues, but pneumonia cut it short and he died on 11 July 1997. He had long abandoned the conventional Anglicanism that was his educational environment, but insisted that he was an agnostic and not an atheist. Because his orientation was no longer specifically Christian, his family arranged a private cremation at Golders Green Crematorium.

As an institutional economist when that approach was out of

fashion (the present decade sees its renaissance), he deployed economics, political science and history to investigate the motivations and mechanisms of economic activity, first, in a market economy in *Price, Cost and Output*, secondly in an administered economy in *The Political Economy of Communism* and *Communist International Economics* (1968), and thirdly in any system in *Economic Institutions Compared*. Interspersed among the books were numerous papers relating institutions and economic activity, of which an early and important study was in the *Economic Journal* (vol. 65, 1956). As its title, 'Growth versus Choice', implies, he developed a contention, first made by Maurice Dobb (*Soviet Economic Development since 1917*, 1948) that rationing, consumer-good standardisation, and other allocation mechanisms allowed Soviet-type planners to mobilise capital resources for more rapid economic growth than was possible under a free market. The mere aggregation of such resources did not, however, engender optimal growth (as one of the goals defined by planners) and he participated keenly in a long 'investment efficiency' debate (launched by Dobb, *Soviet Studies*, 1951 and Alfred Zauberman, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1955), winding up in 'Soviet Investment Criteria' in a symposium he edited in 1988 (*The Soviet Economy on the Brink of Reform*). In the same field he joined, with 'Are There Any Communist Economic Cycles?' (*ACES Bulletin*, vol. 24, 1982), a long debate on whether in planned economies investment or other fluctuations induced a cyclical pattern in output. It had been initiated by the Secretariat of the UN Economic Commission for Europe in its *Economic Survey of Europe in 1955* (1956), in a text drafted by Rudolf Nötel, and revived by Tamás Bauer (*Acta Oeconomica*, vol. 30, 1978) and János Kornai (*The Economics of Shortage*, 1980). Wiles contributed a preface to the definitive study, Peter Mihályi, *Socialist Investment Cycles. Analysis in Retrospect* (1992), associating downturns with the rational expectations of planners with imperfect knowledge of investment costs and upturns with political decisions which, as Wiles emphasised, sought the constancy of consumption—not, as others had argued, relegated to a residual. He analysed consumption when prices were controlled but households were free to spend incomes the aggregate of which exceeded the value of goods and services on offer by planners (or in mixes unacceptable to households) and in 'Price Indices under Suppressed Inflation' (in Armin Bohnet (ed.), *Preise im Sozialismus*, 1984) showed the need for measurements other than conventional index numbers. In similar context he examined production which escaped planners'

resource and price controls ('The Second Economy: Its Definitional Problems' in Bruno Dallago (ed.), *The Unofficial Economy*, 1987) and sketched what could be evaluated of 'Income Distribution under Communism and Capitalism' (*Soviet Studies*, vol. 22, 1971) and, much later, when data had become available after the collapse of communist regimes, commented on 'Wage Inequalities East and West' (*Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 72, 1994).

In the trilogy which is his principal work, Wiles defined an economic institution as any combination of persons whose deliberate actions have an outcome which others would exchange for their own goods or services. In reviewing the motive forces in such institutions, he chose three forms, profitability, morality and amorality. The 'normal advanced capitalist economy' was of the first form, predominant in a model he dubbed 'Helvetia'; the second would follow moral precepts (he considered specifically relevant Orthodox, Catholic and Quaker tenets); and the principles underlying the third were wholly amoral. For these latter—for which he revived the term kleptocracy—'we lack altogether a political or economic theory which may describe a state which is really an estate' (*Economic Institutions Compared*, p. 451). He followed earlier contentions that, similarly, 'the administered economy seems an intractable problem for economics in its present form' (Robert Campbell, in Henry Rosovski (ed.), *Industrialization in Two Systems*, 1966, p. 203), because 'many maximands are no maximands' (p. 253), although conceptually it was implementable by 'perfect computation' just as capitalism could be by perfect competition. For all systems the 'administered economy' was the paradigm for decisions and their implementation within the basic productive entity, the enterprise. The exception was 'idiorrhymy' whereby participants pursue their own maximands, provided they make some specified contribution to the enterprise overall. Wiles cited Mount Athos, British and German universities and certain professional partnerships as his case studies, but the decentralisation of big capitalist enterprises (and British universities today) into 'profit centres' are other examples. He later returned to the founts of economic motivation in 'Political and Moral Aspects of the Two Economies' (in Hans-Hermann Höhmann and Alec Nove (eds), *Economics and Politics in the USSR*, 1986). Enterprises of administered systems when engaged in international trade were confronted with world supply and demand and their relative prices, and in *Communist International Economics* he perceived them trading non-optimally. He took as a criterion maximisation by such enterprises of

their profit, whereby, if the general price level and the exchange rate are flexible such that the latter equals purchasing power parity, they would adjust their trading to the point that exports plus net long-term capital flow equals imports. If under such conditions, Wiles observed, 'there is less trade than this we say there is autarky and if there is more—a less commonly considered deviation—we shall call it hyperpoly or over-trading' (p. 425). Wiles made a number of forays into the political determination of international trade, not only in *Economic Institutions Compared*, but also in 'Trade and Peace' (*Studies in Comparative Communism*, vol. 1, 1968); in 'Embargoes as Instruments of Ostpolitik: an Attempt at a Scientific Justification' (*Osteuropa*, vol. 34, 1984); and in an entry on 'Economic War' in *The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics*, 1987 (vol. 2).

He entered the field of comparative economics when it comprised two schools which may be characterised as political economy and 'economic morphology'. The first approach divided the world into 'developed capitalism', Soviet communism, and underdeveloped (or Third World) countries, a classification which broadly corresponded with political allegiance—the 'West', led by the United States, confronted by the 'Soviet bloc', led by the USSR, and the 'non-aligned', led by India, and (proclaiming opposition to both 'hegemonies') China. The relationship between the First and Third Worlds was a zero-sum game of colonial exploitation or of trade in secondary products against primary commodities, in which the latter suffered declining terms of trade. Raul Prebisch's theory of dynamic comparative advantage and Sir Hans Singer's relative income elasticities (greater for manufactures than for foodstuffs) were sufficiently powerful to evoke the convocation of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD I) in Geneva in 1964. A second school, based on earlier work by Oskar Lange, Abba Lerner, and Joseph Schumpeter, had by then emerged of 'economic morphology', drawing on systems analysis for decision-making models.

Wiles chose another approach, making first a taxonomy of the functions of an economy and then determining the incentives which motivated the use of productive factors. Adopting Kaldor's procedure of 'stylized facts', he typified systems ranging in market-intensity from 'Helvetia' and 'Chicago' through mid-points of 'Pannonia' (Hungarian market socialism) and 'Illyria' (a term due to Benjamin Ward for Yugoslav worker management) to 'Full Communism', and postulated that actual practices eclectically took system components from any or

all. A capitalist firm, for example, would operate in its external relations as a market decision-maker, but in internal relations it was a command economy. Such heterogeneity, as he put it in *Economic Institutions Compared*, meant that 'it is of the essence of comparative economics that not very much is comparable'. Although he published eight years after John Hicks's *A Theory of Economic History* (1969), he failed to note a fourth school thereby founded—that just three systemic relationships effected the consonance of demands with supplies and of present with future use, namely custom, command, and the market, and within each a graduation of decision patterns from 'aboveness' to 'belowness'. Wiles's ideas link with these, but had he used Hicks—then under the critiques of mainstream economic historians, at least until Hicks's rebuttal (*Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 1977)—he might not have limited his remit to what he termed 'modern' as opposed to 'anthropological' economies. But the 'modern' focus of his comparative analysis had a minatory purpose. In the influential *Foreign Affairs* (vol. 31, 1953) his title embodied the warning that 'The Soviet Economy Outpaces the West', and rivalry with capitalism—the period was termed one of 'competitive co-existence'—arose because 'much the most important feature of the Soviet economy . . . is its extremely rapid rate of growth. . . . The whole of society is dedicated to just this end' (*Political Economy of Communism*, p. 253). He sought to explain the dynamism of communism in both geographic expansion and domestic growth. In describing 'state socialism', he saw 'the free world [as] unattracted by its ugly face' but 'in all its Stalinist grandeur it caused the Soviet economy to grow faster than any major economy has ever grown, and formed the material base for the greatest empire the world has ever seen' (p. 16). In those terms the deceleration and extinction of Soviet economic growth was a race between the exhaustion of labour and natural resources and the growing inefficiency whereby they were combined into the production of goods and services. Appreciation of the potential of planning a high rate of saving led him to over-estimate the achievements also of eastern Europe. On the German Democratic Republic, he commented 'clearly a very great success; gives the lie to the notion that Soviet-type economies cannot be advanced' and that Czechoslovakia 'the next wealthiest, is far more successful than is ordinarily believed, especially by Czechs and Slovaks' (*Economic Institutions Compared*, p. 403). His rejection (in Morris Bornstein and Daniel Fufeld (eds.), *The Soviet Economy*, 1966) of the hypothesis (outlined by Jan Tinbergen, *Soviet Studies*, 1961 and amplified by Jan

Prybyla, *Russian Review*, 1964) that the two systems would converge was almost total: 'while high convergence theory is largely (but not altogether) hot air and wishful thinking, there exists a great deal of low-level convergence in fact, all of it easily explicable and much of it very regrettable' (*The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics*, 1987, vol. 1, p. 645). Convergence of course came in 1989–91 not by mutual assimilation but by the abrogation of the Soviet-type economy. As a reviewer of a book to which Wiles contributed wrote, 'one fears that knowledge on centrally planned economies will sink into oblivion, like an intellectual Atlantis' (Gerard Roland, *Journal of Comparative Economics*, vol. 22, 1996, p. 319).

Scrupulous in citing his sources, he opened *Economic Institutions Compared* with an evocation of 'pavement artists who write beneath their chalk pictures "All My Own Work"'. How arrogant! I reject sole responsibility even for the mistakes' (p. vii). His trilogy was indeed 'all his own work' in another sense, for with one exception he eschewed the direction of outside-funded collaborative projects. He made that choice despite the coincidence of his return to this country with the start of purposive research government funding through the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) under a new Labour Government (and which Michael Posner was later to save from a Conservative Minister's proposed abolition by an adroit concordat which altered it to today's Economic and Social Research Council). The first symposium under his editorship was *The Prediction of Communist Economic Performance* (1971), a reproduction of papers originally gathered by Bertrand de Jouvenel in the French journal *Analyse et Prévision* and updated with reflections by the same authors on where and why actuality had diverged from forecast. 'The essence of a good prophet', he wrote in the 'Introduction', 'is to recognise his own fallibility and to improve his own methods; for this reason our intention was to exercise *samokritika*, each on his own effort' (p. 1). Exceptionally he took on a two-year SSRC project on thirteen small 'developing' economies, which was reported under his editorship as *The New Communist Third World* (1981). 'Editorial policy' he observed 'was to "Let Thirteen Flowers Bloom" in the new garden of tropical Sovietology, subject to the presentation of certain standardised information' (p. 7). Among those thirteen states (of which Cuba, like China, was treated *passim* rather than by a separate chapter), only Cuba and North Korea remain politically as they then were. The others are now just poor underdeveloped countries hoping for some debt remission. Angola, Ethiopia,

Mozambique, and Yemen were for Wiles ‘the New Communist Third World’; Benin, Congo, Madagascar, and Somalia were ‘marginals’; Albania and North Korea were ‘independent Stalinists’; while Mongolia and Vietnam were already integrated with the USSR into the CMEA (he preferred abbreviation by initial to acronyms, such as here Comecon, and he created so many of his own that each book carried a prefatory list).

Wiles’s last book appeared in 1985, *Economics in Disarray*, edited with Guy Routh. In intent and in his own contribution, the contributors expressed serious doubts about the pervasiveness of the neoclassical paradigm in contemporary economics. In that sense it summarised his life—a classic liberal, as opposed to the radical right as he was to the authoritarian left, and as much to monetarists as to Marxists. He focused on the motivations and structure within economic organisations, and was at once economist, political scientist, and historian.

MICHAEL KASER

St Antony’s College, Oxford

Note. My thanks are due to Elizabeth Leyland, Carolyn Wiles, and Maurice Wiles, as well as to Quintin Bach, Włodzimierz Brus, Alistair Buchanan, Antoni Chawluk, Michael Foot, Stanislaw Gomułka, Agata Gueullette, Uwe Kitzinger, Anthony Loehnis, Ben Roberts, Tom Snow, and Patricia Utechin; also to staff at New College, Oxford (Susan Ashcroft-Jones, Caroline Dalton, and Barbara Vardag) and Oxford University (Philip Moss).