

Preface

This book contains the contents of special issues of two journals, *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (*EJHET*, 12:3, 2005) and *The Review of Political Economy* (*RoPE*, 17:3, 2005), which were devoted to the life and work of Piero Sraffa. The two issues were respectively introduced and edited by Luigi L. Pasinetti (*EJHET*) and Neri Salvadori (*RoPE*). Both journals are published by Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group). The idea to republish the two special issues together in a book came from Alan Jarvis, editorial director of social sciences books at Routledge/Taylor & Francis, who felt that the material contained in the issues was important enough to warrant a separate edition. He kindly asked me whether this was a good idea and whether I was willing to arrange for the edition. The special editors of the two issues and the editors of the two journals welcomed the idea of a reprint and kindly offered their willingness to cooperate.

This volume reprints the two special issues. The first part contains the relevant material of *EJHET*, including Luigi Pasinetti's introduction, the second part the relevant material of *RoPE*, including Neri Salvadori's introduction. For obvious reasons, any other material contained in the two issues, that is, material not pertinent to the theme under consideration, has been left out.

Both special issues grew out of conferences held in Italy in 2003. The *EJHET* issue contains a selection of papers or parts of papers originally presented on the occasion of the conference 'Piero Sraffa' on 11 and 12 February 2003 in Rome at the Italian Academy of Sciences, the *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* (2004). The *RoPE* issue contains a selection of papers originally given at the conference 'Piero Sraffa 1898-1983' held from 9-11 October 2003 at the *Istituto Italiano di Studi Filosofici* in Naples. The two sets of material are complementary to one another. Together they provide a rich picture of Sraffa, the man and the scholar. Most of the papers make use of Sraffa's hitherto unpublished manuscripts and correspondence kept at Trinity College Library, Cambridge.¹ They provide fascinating detail of Sraffa's life, his academic career, intellectual curiosities, philosophical leanings, analytical preoccupations, style of work, the literature he consulted, the people with whom he discussed, the path his

¹ The catalogue of Sraffa's papers is available on the web:
<http://rabbit.trin.cam.ac.uk/~jon/Msscolls/Sraffa.html>.

interpretative, constructive and critical work took, his originality and depth. The material contained in the two issues thus provides a valuable guide to important parts of the huge amount of Sraffa's unpublished papers and correspondence. These can be studied ever since Trinity College in December 1994 opened Sraffa's archive and huge library to the scientific community.

Given the sheer size of Sraffa's unpublished literary heritage and its intrinsic complexity, the reader must not expect from the material contained in this volume a comprehensive, let alone complete, picture of what is there to be found. However, the papers collected provide detailed reconstructions of important aspects of Sraffa's life and work. The emphasis is on the early Sraffa, who in 1927 moved to Cambridge and stayed there for the rest of his life. Much of the attention focuses on the first period of his reconstructive work which extended from mid 1927 to late 1931, years characterised by an immense fertility on Sraffa's part in which the foundations were laid of his remarkable achievements both as an author and editor. The papers also provide valuable information about Sraffa's relationships with major intellectuals of the twentieth century, including Antonio Gramsci, John Maynard Keynes, Frank Ramsey and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

The interest in Sraffa, the man and scholar, is unbroken and publications making use of his hitherto unpublished papers have given it an additional momentum. Someone who has published relatively little during his lifetime and yet had a lasting impact with each and every one of his works on the economics profession, and who, as we now know, has written a lot, is bound to attract the attention and curiosity of scholars keen to see what there is in the papers above and beyond what is publicly available right now. Therefore it should come as no surprise that the present book reflects only a very small part of the contemporary interest in Sraffa's work. The meetings from which the material derives were only two out of a large number of conferences, workshops, seminars, special sessions at meetings etc. devoted to Sraffa held since the year when he passed away (1983). 1998, the year of the centenary of Sraffa's birth, was *the* year of meetings dedicated to him. The proceedings of several of these meetings have in the meantime been published, while some others are bound to appear soon.

There are numerous other contributions published in various academic journals, collections of essays and books dealing with Sraffa's work and its implications. However, it is beyond this preface to provide an account of them. Suffice it to say that the spirit of Sraffa's work is alive and well. His ideas and concepts keep inspiring numerous economists and social scientists.

Possessed of an impeccable logic and a profound knowledge of history and reality, Sraffa was without doubt one of the most important intellectuals of the twentieth century. He scrutinised carefully the received marginalist doctrine and pointed out serious shortcomings in it. He elaborated an alternative approach to the problems of value and distribution rooted in the surplus tradition of the classical economists. In terms of a famous phrase coined by him (Sraffa, 1926, p. 535), it may be said that there is reason to presume that from these clashes of thought the spark of an ultimate truth has not yet been struck. This should be reason enough to study in depth Sraffa's contributions.

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