

JACQUES MAYER (1917–2011): IN MEMORIAM

Jacques Mayer, a former co-editor with John Kendrick of the *Review of Income and Wealth* (1972–1973), died in October 2011. He was 94.

Born during the second half of World War I, he was of adult age when World War II broke out. Under the circumstances, he had to interrupt his scholarship in one of the highest and most influential French University establishments (“Ecole normale supérieure—Sciences (option Mathématiques)”). He had been a student there from October 1937 to the middle of September 1939, when he was called to the Army. After the French collapse of May–June 1940, he was a war prisoner in a German camp until April 1941. He was then set free for health reasons, thanks to an Austrian doctor.

During the following year and a half, he had to escape the anti-semitic Vichy government legislation by moving to the South of France (his family dispersed actually but fortunately entirely survived the war). When the German Army occupied the so-called “Free Zone” (Southern part of France), after the Allied Forces landing in North Africa (November 1942), he crossed the Spanish border, with a cousin of his. Afterwards he reached Morocco by boat, where he was incorporated in the American Army in December 1942. In 1944 he participated in the campaign of Italy and the landing in Provence (South-East of France).

After leaving the Army, he resumed his scholarship at the Ecole normale supérieure (January–September 1946).



Source credit: European Union

From 1947 to the middle of 1955, Jacques Mayer was engaged in research activities, firstly in the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), secondly in the Institut de Science Economique Appliquée (ISEA), directed by François Perroux. Perroux had played a significant role in acquainting the French with the work done elsewhere, for instance by Simon Kuznets, on national income estimates. However, in between the CNRS and the ISEA, during a one-year “Rockefeller Fellowship”, Mayer had spent 6 months in the Department of Applied Economics, created and led by Richard Stone in Cambridge (Jacques always remained a great admirer of Stone). These were formative years in various fields, including micro and macro economics, and also economic history. For instance during his stay in the Perroux Institute, he had to investigate the feasibility of preparing a kind of modern style national accounts for France in the pre-revolutionary period, the middle and the end of the 19th century.

However the turning point in Mayer’s career took place in June 1955 when he joined, in the Ministry of Finance (Service des études économiques et financières SEEF—Economic and Financial Studies Department), the small staff which, under the leadership of Claude Gruson, had recently elaborated a well-embracing sophisticated new national accounting framework (the main role in this innovative work had been played by Louis-Pierre Blanc, René Mercier and Jean Sérisé). An essential characteristic of this undertaking was the very close relationship advocated between the accounting conceptual framework and actual estimates on one hand and their intended uses as tools for preparing economic policy decisions, primarily the Government annual budget, on the other hand. In this context Jacques, as Head of the National Accounts and Economic Budgets Division, had to impulse and supervise both the building, extension and improvement of national accounts for the recent past and their projection to the near future. Those projections were a combination of forecasts and actual or intended policy measures in a framework using national accounts interrelations and some key variables. As, during a long period of time, this work was done without using a completely formalized econometric model, the approach followed was said “semi-discretionary”.

In Gruson’s mind a similar approach had to be followed for the study of medium term policy, though in this case input–output tables, as part of the national accounts framework, had to play a more prominent role. On the other hand, financial accounts too were to be developed as an integrated component of the national accounts framework both for short term analysis and for checking the financial (structural) equilibrium of the medium-term projections.

In this context of “indicative planning”, as this approach was called at that time, the first half of the sixties was a rather complicated period, due to the introduction of a new division of labour between the Ministry of Finance (a Directorate for Forecasting—Direction de la Prévision—was created there) and the central statistical office (INSEE) to which the responsibility of the national accounts was transferred, together with the preparation of medium term projections.

Finally, in February 1967, Jacques was appointed as Head of the Directorate for Economic Synthesis in INSEE. This Directorate was in charge of the national accounts, the analysis of short term economic trends, medium term projections

and regional statistics. In this capacity, he was deeply involved in the working of the Planning institutional machinery. He regretted very much that, after the Général de Gaulle active support, the indicative planning orientation was later on to lose any influence.

From there on Jacques Mayer's professional career developed entirely in the field of official statistics in a broad sense.

In parallel with his work in France and on the basis of the progress achieved there, Jacques was intensively involved in international activities. At the end of the fifties, all the sixties and the beginning of the seventies, he was one of the most distinguished national accountants who played an eminent role in the development of national accounting and the consolidation of an internationally normalized complete system.

On the United Nations side, he was from 1965 to 1968 a member of the Expert Group [among other members were Odd Aukrust, Bernardo Ferran, George Jaszi, C.A. Oomens, etc], chaired by Richard Stone, who prepared the 1968 SNA on the basis of the introductory Report drafted by Stone and thanks to the enormous amount of work carried out by Abraham Aidenof of the UN. The 1968 SNA represented a big jump from the 1952 previous version. In the meanwhile, starting from the late fifties, Mayer was a member of a Group of Rapporteurs convened by the UN Economic Commission for Europe on the comparisons of national accounting frameworks used in Europe, the SNA and the System of Balances (Material Product System). This topic was considered very important at that time in Europe for both statistical and political reasons.

Some time before the process of revising and extending the 1952 SNA and the corresponding version of the OECD System was launched, the European Community had started discussions aiming to develop progressively its own system of national accounts, the 1952 UN/OECD simplified system being considered too poor for the community needs. Here took place a rather paradoxical episode. I was in the beginning of the sixties a kind of expert on agricultural accounts. However Jacques was asked by the Statistical Office of the European Communities to prepare a Report, published in 1963, on "Methods used by member countries in the building of economic accounts for agriculture". Conversely, if I can say, I was asked a little later to draft a report too, published in 1964, "Propositions pour un cadre communautaire de comptabilité nationale" ["Proposals for a Community National Accounting Framework"], when obviously Jacques was a more experienced and much better expert in national accounting as a whole than I was then. This episode illustrates how open-minded was Jacques toward a young colleague in his own field of expertise. He never tried, I think, to take the lion's share.

Soon after the adoption of the 1968 SNA, Richard Stone proposed to the UN a framework trying to develop an integrated system of demographic and social statistics, with instrumental analogies with the SNA but in the absence of a common numéraire analogous to the monetary unit in the field of economic accounting. Mayer chaired the Expert Group which in July 1970 discussed the first draft presented by Stone. The attempt finally collapsed but contributed to the flow of discussions that followed the criticisms addressed to economic growth and the economic accounts in the beginning of the seventies. These discussions were very intense both nationally and internationally. In France for instance Mayer

organized in November 1972 a Seminar in INSEE whose topic was “Faut-il corriger la Comptabilité nationale?” [“Is adjusting national accounting necessary?”] He prepared an Introductory note to the debates in which not surprisingly he did not recommend a new aggregate, but rather a set of indicators.. He then supported actively the extension of social statistics (it was then the time of the social indicators movement) and the creation of a kind of Social Report (synthesis of social statistics and analysis).

Though the criticisms to economic growth and national accounting had encompassed both welfare issues and environmental ones, international activities were above all directed during the seventies toward mitigating the first concern. In France however, a better balance was achieved between the two types of questions. After the creation in 1971 of a Ministry in charge of the environment (after the US and the UK), a Groupe Interministériel d’Evaluation de l’Environnement [Interadministrative Group for the Assessment of the Environment] was established in 1972 under the chairmanship of Claude Gruson, a former INSEE director general and initiator of the new French system of national accounting during the fifties. The first of the seven Working Groups created then was a group called “Statistique, comptabilisation et concepts économiques de l’environnement” [“Statistics, Accounting and Economical Concepts for the Environment”), which Mayer chaired.

Apart from his activities in Government, Jacques was during all this period a very active member of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth, as was Jean Marczewski from the French University side. He attracted me to the Association on the occasion of the General Conference held in Lom (Norway) in 1965 (not a bad capture indeed as, since then, I missed only one General Conference!).

From the General conference of 1971 till the 1973 Conference, Jacques Mayer and John Kendrick were co-editors of *The Review of Income and Wealth*. Before them Odd Aukrust (Norway), assisted by Per Sevaldson, had been the Editor since 1965 when the series of Conference books had been replaced by a quarterly Review (first issue published in March 1966). John and Jacques did not bear the work load of the Review during such a long time. The size of the Review had increased in the meanwhile. Above all Mayer was appointed in 1973 as Director General of Eurostat, which was not compatible with the task of co-editor of an international Review. Nancy Ruggles became in 1973 Managing Editor of the ROIW, together with an increase in size of the Editorial Board.

Jacques Mayer spent 4 years in Luxembourg (1973–1977). As three new Member States had joined the Community, he had to reorganize Eurostat consequently and completely devoted his time to managing the Office.

After he left Eurostat, he came back to INSEE in the middle of May 1977 as adviser to the Director General who was at that time Edmond Malinvaud. From this moment until his retirement in June 1982, he was actively engaged in reflections concerning two innovative fields: Natural Assets Accounting and Data Banks.

On Natural Assets Accounting, Jacques chaired from 1979 to 1982 (I took over this task after his retirement) a Group on Methodology in the “Commission interministérielle des comptes du patrimoine naturel” [“Natural Patrimony/

Wealth Accounts Commission”] created by Prime Minister Raymond Barre. This Group was in charge of proposing a conceptual framework (Jean-Louis Weber played a major role in this elaboration) whereas other Groups prepared pilot accounts for forestry, continental water, wild fauna and flora. The publication of the results, both methodological (inter alia accounts for ecosystems were proposed) and practical, in December 1986 represented a remarkable step ahead. Unfortunately this pioneering effort was discontinued.

In 1980, Jacques was asked to supervise the building of a set of INSEE Data Banks and to propose a strategy for doing so. He had been actually aware for a long time of the potentialities of using computers in statistical activities.. At the 1965 General Conference of the IARIW he had presented a paper called “Quelques remarques sur l’utilisation des calculateurs électroniques en comptabilité nationale”, which was published in the first issue (March 1966) of the ROIW. In this paper he discussed the use of computers for both establishing and using the accounts. He was so confident of these potentialities that he went so far as imagining a time when all individual elementary transactions would be registered at the moment when they take place, thus making the preparation of the national accounts entirely automatic! Fifteen years later the issue at stake was the dissemination of statistical data. However in a close future the emergence of Internet was to change radically the perspective. Nevertheless Mayer, in connection with Jean-Louis Bodin, had perceived that, due to the increasing use of computers, people in charge of the dissemination of statistical data had to change their way of thinking.

After his retirement, he taught Economics during three years, mostly on the basis of national accounting, in a University establishment for already active professionals (the “Conservatoire national des arts et métiers”).

He had still some international activities. In 1983 he chaired the organizing committee of a Regional Seminar for French speaking African countries on Statistics for natural resources and the environment. Finally he participated in May 1988 in Beijing in an international conference organized jointly by Data for Development (a non government organisation managed by Jean Salmona) and the Chinese Planning Ministry. The topic was “Strategies and methodologies for planning, conceiving and developing information systems in Public Administration”. Jacques presented an Introductory paper on “The Case of Market Economies”. This was his last post-professional activity.

Then, with the philosophy of life which characterized him, he enjoyed with his wife Hedda a long period of “full exercise” retirement, keeping his mind active until the end.

I had the great privilege of being a very near friend of Jacques Mayer during 60 years.

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