

# “A Most Refreshing Dose of Sanity”: Sidney Pollard’s Economic History

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## Abstract

Sidney Pollard was a labor historian who pioneered the study of economic management in history and the understanding of the economic processes by which regions are formed. This article addresses three key moments in his work: his early studies of the genesis of industrial management, his later interest in the reasons for Britain’s relative economic decline, and finally those passages in which Pollard attempted to relate his interests to the history of economic thought. The article concludes by arguing that Pollard is distinguished from other writers, such as Harry Braverman, who addressed similar themes, first by a greater empiricism and second by a greater debt to pre-Marxist socialist theories, including those of Fourier and Saint-Simon.

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Sidney Pollard (1925-1998) was a prominent figure among postwar economic historians. He published more than thirty books, including monographs, textbooks, and collections. In the second half of his career, Pollard was appointed visiting professor at approximately a dozen universities including University of California, Berkeley; Bar-Ilan in Israel; Bielefeld; Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania; Melbourne; the Erasmus University in Rotterdam; the Rockefeller Study Centre in Bellagio; the European University in Florence; Exeter; the University of Delaware; Liverpool; Zurich; and the International University of Japan. In 1990, Pollard became a corresponding fellow of the British Academy. Two festschrifts were presented to him, one in England in 1991 and the other in Germany in 1995, and he received an honorary degree of doctor of letters from Sheffield University in

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1992 (Holmes and Booth 1991; Berghoff and Ziegler 1995). Pollard's books were translated into Italian, Farsi, and Japanese. He also published widely in German as well as English (Pollard 1980b, 1990b; Pollard and Ziegler 1992; Pollard and Ditt 1992). "Few of his generation," wrote the labor historian John Saville, "have equalled the range or excellence of [his] writings" (Saville 1998: 18).

Previous accounts have appeared of Pollard's life and work (Martin 1999; *Times* 1982). Most have concentrated on telling the events of his personal life, including his childhood escape from Nazi-occupied Austria, his refuge in Britain, his brief student membership in the Communist Party, his isolation within the profession at the start of the Cold War, his eventual appointment to a first post at Sheffield University, and his subsequent rise to prominence within the discipline. In the most extensive obituary, Colin Holmes has connected these moments of personal biography to the themes of Pollard's last book, *Marginal Europe*, which described how once-isolated regions could move to the forefront of economic development. Holmes found in this account a metaphor for Pollard's life (Pollard 1997; Holmes 2000).

The focus of this article is narrower. It is concerned with just one aspect of Pollard's published work, namely, his economic history. This study explores Pollard's work as a historian of business and management, and as a commentator on government policy toward industry. Many of Pollard's later works were concerned with these subjects. In addition to *Marginal Europe*, his other books discussed the long history of Britain's economic growth (Pollard 1962), the history of industrial management (Pollard 1980a), the part played by monetary policy in the interwar period, the role of investment in the Industrial Revolution (Pollard and Higgins 1971), the nature of economic development and the means to achieve relative growth (Pollard and Feinstein 1988), the reasons for Britain's economic decline after 1945 (Pollard 1989), and the role of industry in the history of European integration (Pollard and Holmes 1968, 1972, 1973; Pollard 1974, 1997). These books are considered in rough chronological order. An attempt is then made to establish Pollard's significance. What sort of economic historian was Pollard? Where should he be located within the history of the discipline? Do his books add up to a coherent whole?

## I. Masters and Men

Near the end of his life, Pollard published an autobiographical memoir. He reflected that he had never chosen history as a subject. "My natural bent was for generalising, abstract thought, and I was always impatient of exceptions and details which did not fit: thus mathematics was easily my best subject at school (and history my worst)." Almost by chance, Pollard drifted toward economic history: "It seemed to be the best gateway to an explanation of the rise of the modern world, while being closest to the Marxist approach. The choice was purely driven by academic interest. . . . I had no thought for the morrow, and for the likely utility of finding a job afterwards" (Pollard 1998: 199, 203). Having completed his first degree, Pollard began a doctorate, again at the London School of Economics. His thesis examined the history of British shipbuilding (Pollard 1951; Pollard and Robertson 1979).

In 1950, Pollard began postdoctoral work in Sheffield, adopting the Yorkshire working class as the subject of his study. His early work showed a tendency to associate regional and

labor history, merging them together to form one narrative. The region was the place where labor history occurred. The defense of regional identity was the prerogative of local workers. The basis of national economic success was the activity of labor expressed in a regional context. Yet there were always competing regional stories in Pollard's work right from the start. Pollard's very first published book was a history of the Sheffield employers Marsh Brothers. Here, there was a much more conventional account of the links among region, economy, and state:

In these days of large impersonal companies and state-controlled institutions the family business must often appear in danger of dying out. Yet it was largely the family firm, built up, as it was, on the personal integrity and reputation of its partners, each of them liable with all his possessions for the actions of the others, which laid the foundations of Britain's industrial greatness. (Pollard 1959a: 1)

In the spring of 1959, Sidney Pollard approached Edward Arnold with the idea of a general textbook history of the British economy since 1914. The result of their correspondence was Pollard's *The Development of the British Economy*, a 400-page study that would remain in print in different editions for the next thirty years (Pollard 1962; Hamilton 1959). F. M. L. Thompson told *History* that Pollard had "brought Sir John Clapham up to date" (Thompson 1965: 115).<sup>1</sup> In the *Economic History Review*, David Wightman commended Pollard's "very good" narrative while criticizing his tendency to extract the British economy from its international context (Wightman 1963: 562–63). The anonymous author of a review in the *Times Education Supplement* compared the book favorably to rival studies by Ashworth, which ended earlier, and Habbakuk, who was said to have underplayed the role of scientific management. The reviewer concluded by describing the *Development* as "the best [book] of its kind to date" (*Times Education Supplement* 1962; *Listener* 1962).

At this stage, Pollard's colleagues identified him as a labor historian. In 1960, he became a founding member of the Society for the Study of Labour History (Martin 1999: 139–42). Yet the process of writing social history pushed Pollard into further research. He admired a certain style of labor history, which he associated with Cole and Postgate's classic study, *The Common People* (1938). The authors of this earlier book had gone beyond previous, institutional accounts of the labor movement to consider economic criteria, such as living standards, wages, diet, and housing. In other words, they expanded the idea of labor history to include the social experience of workers. According to Pollard, the new emphasis

fitted in with a contemporary interest of economic historians in wage statistics and the like, and with the lively debate in the 1950s and 1960s on the standard of living in the industrial revolution, in which several labour historians took part. (Pollard 1999)

The idea of an alliance between labor and economic history undoubtedly appealed.

Pollard's correspondence from this period has not been kept. We may imagine, however, that he would have wished to take Cole and Postgate's ideas further and to apply the

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1. John Clapham was the Cambridge professor of economic history and was best known for his three-volume work, *An Economic History of Modern Britain* (Clapham 1926–1938). Clapham's book was conceived as a history of British economic life to recent times. Following his death, it was decided to end the account at 1750.

same economic insights to study the experiences of workers in the factories. If so, then he faced two problems. First, there was a general absence of primary material that recorded the experience of eighteenth-century work. The most important records for social history have often been police and judicial records, but these have revealed more about conditions outside the workplace. The second problem concerned the published literature. Not only was work underrecorded, but so also was the experience of management. Very few historians had then attempted to record the changing tactics of owners, accountants, or foremen, let alone the responses of workers to the assertion of managerial initiative. As Pollard wrote, "While there has been a whole series of valuable, detailed histories of firms and industries . . . the gap on management has remained" (Pollard 1962: 1).

At the end of the 1950s, Pollard began to research the role of management in the Industrial Revolution. The first product of this new interest was an academic article, "Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution," published in the *Economic History Review* in 1963 and later reprinted in several other collections (Pollard 1963). The success of this study was largely linked to its novelty. It opened up a whole new area of research. Pollard explored the processes by which a new, "irksome" pattern of daily working had been imposed on an agricultural population more used to the rhythms of seasonal work. He reported that before 1830, there had been no books of management theory on which employers or managers could draw. Many employers fell back on a language of moral obligation. Yet, as Pollard pointed out, this tactic only raised further long-term dilemmas.

For if the employer [could] reform the workers, if he but tried hard enough, whose fault was it that most of them remained immoral, idle and rebellious? And if the workers could really be taught their employers' virtues, would they not all save and borrow and become entrepreneurs themselves, and who would then man the factories?

The problems, Pollard suggested, had not been solved by the process of industrialization but had continued to shape British history through subsequent years. The search for a scientific theory of management "may hardly be said to have advanced very far even today" (Pollard 1963: 255, 270, 271).

The essay on factory discipline reappeared in Pollard's book *The Genesis of Modern Management*, published in 1965. Here, though, its charged message was offset by the argument of several thematic chapters on either side. In them, Pollard described the limited extent of large-scale enterprise on the eve of industrialization. Even into the early years of the nineteenth century, much production continued to be controlled by single artisans working in home-based workshops on a subcontract basis. The rise of the managers was linked to the growth of factories and of mass industries including coal mining, metallurgy, shipbuilding, and textiles. One important stimulus to the expansion of mining was the invention of machinery to drain the deeper pits. The first such engine was installed in the Tyne and Wear coal field as early as 1715. By 1790, such technology had enabled the digging of shafts to 100 fathoms. By 1829, it is estimated that there were 45,500 men employed in the mines in the Northeast alone. The typical size of each industrial unit had by then risen to some 300 workers. In the opinion of a still predominantly rural workforce, coal mining was a dangerous, difficult, and badly rewarded occupation. Hence, the employers faced huge problems of recruiting workers to fill the need for labor as the industry grew. A demand then followed for stewards, directors, agents, bookkeepers, and many other intermediate staff besides to

be situated between the single employer and the employees of the firm (Pollard 1965c: 62–63, 69).

By 1800, the scale of many different enterprises had grown beyond the control of any one man. Only when the owners were required to discipline labor did they see a need to employ a distinct group of managers. Professionals, accountants, foremen, and other overseers were slowly provided with distinct forms of training appropriate to their tasks. This aspect of Pollard's story began with the eighteenth-century conflicts between merchants and clergy as to the suitability of the existing education system. Such figures as the writers Daniel Defoe, William Reynolds, and Erasmus Darwin expressed their contempt for Latin and their preference for a practical education, to contain mastery of the English language, mathematics, and natural philosophy, the skills necessary for a working life. Already by the 1770s, private businesses could be found advertising courses in accounts, shorthand, reading and writing, "gauging," and bookkeeping. Such preparatory schooling was common, but formal management training remained rare. Most often, managers were expected to develop their skills as they worked (Pollard 1965c: 109–10, 113, 122).

Meanwhile, labor had to be recruited, and its previous moral code adapted to the new industrial situation. It was at this point that Pollard's work overlapped most obviously with the insights of his fellow social historians. Many of them had already explored the unwillingness of the old agricultural working class to accept industrial patterns of working; their aversion to ten-hour days, six-day weeks, and mass factory conditions; and their preference for less intrusive, seasonal patterns of employment. The eighteenth-century attack on the lax habits of the British worker took many forms. In *The Genesis of Modern Management*, Pollard cited Manchester factory owners warning of the demons of drink, Chester Bishop's sermonizing against Sunday idleness, widespread prohibitions on bad language, the varied common activities of Messianic sects, and paternalist employers (Pollard 1965c: 192–97).

The *Genesis* also documented the rise of new techniques of accountancy, from eighteenth-century habits that could do little more than prevent theft. Slowly, the individuals who were charged with accounting for each business learned to distinguish among different forms of expenditure or different forms of income, thus enabling a more scientific monitoring of each year's profits. They came to separate the expenses of the owner's household and those of the business. Long into the nineteenth century, however, most accountants remained incapable of distinguishing between capital and revenue. They even had difficulties in perceiving the more obvious difference between fixed investments and current expenditure. When in doubt, which was a frequent condition, most clerks and ledger keepers thought it best to ignore altogether any spending on machines.

The success of a concern, it was firmly believed, would stand or fall with the "quality" of its partners, and there was little that any organized science or even art, like accountancy, could do to help them beyond the industrial technology itself. (Pollard 1965c: 236, 238, 249)

Who would have constituted the most likely audience for *The Genesis*? Some passages read as if they were aimed at readers who just enjoyed social history, whereas other sections seemed to have had a more polemic intent. At the heart of Pollard's book was a critique of managerial supervision as intrusive or despotic to those who suffered it. Yet by surrounding such "contentious" material with a range of more neutral sources, Pollard was able to win a

wider interest in his book. At the end of *The Genesis*, Pollard stressed the limitations of managerial power:

Perhaps the most important conclusion to emerge is that “management”, in our sense, though not a barrier to progress, yet could not be shown to have been an initiator of change either. The pragmatic discovery of new methods was no doubt adequate, but management appears everywhere to have adapted itself merely to the needs of technology, discipline or financial control. Among the many competing explanations there can surely be nowhere a managerial theory of industrial revolutions. . . . But its influence on the texture of the new industrialism, on the new society created by it, was enormous. As far as our evidence goes, it seems to show that “management” was the instrument, if not the originator, of many of the forces which shaped the peculiar forms of rational self-interest, the ambiguities of ownership and control of firms, and above all, the class relations within industry, which became peculiar to Western capitalism. (Pollard 1965c: 271)

There had been previous studies that addressed moments in the history of management, considering for example the publication of medieval treatises on estate management (Oschinsky 1956). Yet Sidney Pollard's book captured better than any previous account the shift between mercantile and industrial management. The birth of management was a large part of the story of industrialization, that extraordinary transformation in people's lives. Reading his book today enables modern readers, familiar as they may well be with contemporary management, to play the story backwards in their minds and to think what life must have been like at a time when the profession could hardly be said to have existed.

The publication of these two books, *The Development of the British Economy* and *The Genesis*, made Pollard's name. The publication of Pollard's first article on factory discipline in 1963 coincided with his elevation to a chair in economic history at Sheffield University. Meanwhile, *The Genesis* went on to secure the Thomas Newcomen Award for the best book on business history published between 1964 and 1966.

Toward the end of the decade, Sidney Pollard's research took a new direction toward a style of economic history that was distinctly arithmetical in character. In 1969, he helped to organize a conference at Sheffield University on the role of capital formation in the British Industrial Revolution. Several papers were commissioned to test a hypothesis. This work was prompted by the research of two earlier economists, W. A. Lewis and W. W. Rostow (Lewis 1955; Rostow 1958). Their work suggested that certain differences would often be found between preindustrial and industrial economies. The former would demonstrate significantly lower levels of investment and capital formation. Indeed, Lewis and Rostow were willing to guess figures for the impact of industrialization in Britain, suggesting that industrialization had increased the rate of capital formation from 5-6 percent to 10-12 percent. If true, then the theory was important. It would have obvious implications for the management of economic policy in industrializing nations. Their work would suggest that the secret of increased productivity was higher capital investment and the source of such investment was saving on the part of companies and governments. Yet other historians had since questioned Lewis and Rostow's figures, suggesting that the role of capital formation had been exaggerated and that the impact of the Industrial Revolution on these figures had not been nearly this extreme in Britain.



To establish which estimates were accurate, an enormous quantity of preliminary statistical work had to be carried out. It was difficult to study the period of “take-off,” for the basis of modern economic statistics was tax returns, and the modern tax system had not been established. According to Pollard, the historian “has to ask his assistants to enumerate data that either have been lost altogether, or which can, at best, be only inferred from indirect evidence.” The task of fully exploring Rostow’s hypothesis would “require nothing less than the resources of a government department to collate the information, and to invent it where it no longer exists” (Pollard and Higgins 1971: 3). After carefully accumulating several hundred pages of statistics, Pollard and J. P. P. Higgins concluded that Lewis and Rostow’s figures had indeed been accurate. Seventeen years later, in a joint collection of essays on the subject written with Charles Feinstein, Pollard restated his initial, empirical defense of the Rostow-Lewis thesis (Pollard and Feinstein 1988: 1–2, 35–72).

Another book was devoted to the 1925 decision of the Bank of England to adopt the pre-war gold standard at parity, which meant immediately a 10 percent increase in the value of sterling. During the following months, the adoption of the gold standard reduced the markets for British industries and led immediately to sharp falls in the standard of living of those dependent on such work. Pollard’s *The Gold Standard* was made up of essays, some by contemporaries and some by later authorities, evaluating the Bank of England’s move. Although many different views were acknowledged, Pollard took the opportunity to state his own opinion. He came down strongly in favor of Keynes and other contemporary critics of this decision, and equally firmly against those historians who had since defended Montagu Norman, the governor of the Bank of England (Youngson 1967; Clay 1957). Pollard’s harshest words were reserved for the bankers. He accused them of being a small and parasitic group, who publicly identified their interests with those of the nation but used their power in reality to the disadvantage of most people. “If they disagreed” with Keynes, he wrote,

it was not only because they did not follow his truths at an intellectual level; it was because they did not want to follow them, since their interests, their priorities and their aims were totally different from those of Keynes, and for that matter, from those of the large majority of the British population.

The same book went on to complain of “the rentier’s or the banker’s mentality, with its emphasis on restriction and stagnation,” which was still pervasive in the 1960s (Pollard 1970: 12). Later, Pollard would explore the obverse of this story, the subsequent history of left-wing demands for the nationalization of the banks (Pollard 1979).

## **2. Against Deflation**

Pollard’s criticisms of the banker’s mentality could easily have been adopted as the motto for a series of books he now began, looking at Britain’s economic decline after 1945. Following Pollard’s talk for BBC Radio’s *World at One* in 1976, the publisher Dennis Dobson wrote to him, thanking Sidney for rejecting the “Thirties-nostalgia” of the time. Pollard had warned that at times of economic scarcity, the state should not become fixated

on the goal of balanced budgets. The cost of them would be met in the quality of people's lives. Dobson's letter ended, "Please, for all our sakes, would you consider writing a short book enlarging your ideas which could be got out very quickly?" (Dobson 1976). From this correspondence, Pollard began to plan a book on the failures of economic liberalism as an economic policy. Provisionally titled *Rake's Progress*, the book appeared six years later as *The Wasting of the British Economy* (Pollard 1982b). Here, Pollard explained the destruction of postwar British industry in terms of decisions taken by the Treasury, which had consistently neglected industry in favor of finance. The natural inclination of productive businesspeople, he suggested, was to encourage industry and employment, build up their own firms, and grow. By contrast, the instinct of the banker was to save. Increased employment would mean—in their eyes—higher inflation. Inflation tended to privilege those currently making money against those who had inherited it or made it in the past. The banks would rather see mass unemployment (with low inflation) than low unemployment and high inflation. Thatcherite economics was an extreme form of the bankers' view. Whatever partial boost it might bring to sectors such as banking, its main consequences would be deindustrialization, increased unemployment, and declining national production. "There seems to be in operation a law of the deterioration of British economic policies," he complained. Economic policy was like the average Russian harvest: "worse than last year's, better than next" (Pollard 1982a).

Pollard welcomed controversy. Few of his peers accepted the full critique. The following is one reader's synopsis of the manuscript that would become *The Wasting of the British Economy* (Johnson 1980). Used to advise the publishers as to whether Pollard's book should appear, the critic advocated silence:

The "immediate cause" of Britain's decline according to Professor Pollard is shortage of productive capacity, and underlying that shortage is a failure by the "economic establishment" to pursue "real" objectives (expansion of the productive base) rather than "symbolic" objectives (balance of payments equilibrium or surplus, maintaining the value of sterling, controlling wages, controlling or reducing the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement [PSBR], etc.). . . . The culprit—the "Economic Establishment"—appears to consist of the City, especially the Bank of England; Politicians; Civil Servants, in particular the Treasury; and academic economists. One of the difficult features of the book is deciding precisely at whose door the author wishes to lay blame, but for the most part the major culprit appears to be the Treasury. . . . It is here at the very nub of his case that he becomes weakest. Where does the Treasury's power lie?

Pollard's response to these comments was no less polemical:

You will know that economic policy is not a science; it is hardly even an art, more a form of politics. As anyone who reads the papers will know, people who disagree in this field quite commonly accuse each other of being unscientific, incompetent and amateurish, in addition to being blind and prejudiced. . . . Can one really expect people actively associated with propagating and teaching a point of view for many years to say, the moment they have a short book, which moreover has kept dry academic proofs to a minimum, "Yes of course, I have been wrong and have done damage all my professional life—I can see that now." Of course not. (Pollard 1980c)



The reviews tended to follow prior lines of politics or interest. The historian of European industrialization H. A. Turner wrote in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* that *The Wasting* “should be compulsory reading for politicians of all parties, union leaders and the spokesmen of industrial and financial interests.” Other reviewers were less sympathetic. An anonymous reviewer in the *Times* pointed out that the author was “anti-monetarist” and called his book “almost unreadable (but that is true of almost all writing about economics by the dreadful gnomes who work in those dismal mines).” Richard Henderson complained in the *Financial Times* of Pollard’s “extreme partisanship,” satirizing his argument as “any investment will do” (Oxborrow 1982: 636–37; Turner 1982; *Times* 1982; Henderson 1982).

It is not known whether Pollard felt more bruised or elated by such comments, but his next monograph was more measured. *Britain’s Prime and Britain’s Decline* engaged with the argument that the decline of Britain could be blamed on a single factor, such as the destructive role played by British trade unions or the overlong persistence of an anti-commercial “aristocratic spirit” within the leading institutions of British society and government. Pollard’s claim, this time, was that all single-cause explanations of failure should be disregarded. Every one of them was based on a counterfactual claim that if one factor, X, had not happened, then Britain would have remained for a long time noticeably more productive than all competitors. Yet, by definition, global economic hegemony is temporary. Compared to that of many rival studies, the argument of the book was unusually upbeat. Britain’s problems were explained as those of maturity, not senescence (Pollard 1989: 261–64).<sup>2</sup>

At the start of his career, Pollard’s left-wing values made it harder for him to secure appointment. Yet, by the late 1960s, Pollard was successful in carving a niche as one of a small number of radical economic historians. So, when Michael Postan was looking for a historian to contribute an article on labor in Britain in the Industrial Revolution for the seventh volume of *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, Pollard was the obvious choice.

We want labour to be studied as a factor of production, e.g. partly in the terms in which Marx and the Marxists have discussed the formation of the industrial proletariat, and partly in the terms in which the subject now features in economic literature, i.e. changes in the flow of labour supplies, including transfers of labour between sectors and industries in the utilisation of labour. (Postan 1967)

Few of Pollard’s contemporaries could have played this dual role.

Following this approach, Pollard collaborated on the eighth volume of *The Cambridge History*, which he edited with the historian Peter Mathias of Cambridge University (Pollard and Mathias 1989). Pollard’s involvement in this series required a different set of skills. First, he had to bring together a diverse range of specialists. Second, he had to negotiate between his own ideas as to how such a collection would be written and the structures inherited from past editors. The book was part of an established series planned as a definitive history of the European economy. The project was born in the interwar years, when economic history seemed to be the sort of objective science that could yield a consensus. The first vol-

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2. For attempts to synthesize the arguments of *The Wasting of the British Economy* and *Britain’s Prime and Britain’s Decline*, see Pollard (1990c and 1990d).

ume in the series appeared in 1941. Pollard and Mathias's work, published some forty-eight years later, was necessarily faced with a different task. How could any single collection impose a common interpretation on moments as diverse as Victorian England and Nazi Germany?

The reviews were mixed. According to the *American Historical Review*, "This is neither a general reference book, an attempt to draw insights from a common analytical approach, nor a confrontation of alternative views" (Knick Harley 1992: 1513–14). Alan Milward, another historian of European integration, understood better the merits of the book. Writing in the *English Historical Review*, he applauded the editors' concentration on international policy. The work on taxation and public revenue was original.

The reader who has actually survived the voyage and read so far will certainly never be the same again. In spite of its excessively pragmatic approach to navigation, this expensive cruise is good value. This volume is a first-rate conclusion to a series which has not always been so good. (Milward 1991: 408–12)

In his earlier writing, Pollard had tended to portray trade unions and the cooperatives as the carriers of an alternative spirit to reinvigorate industrial life. By the 1980s, however, his focus had turned elsewhere. Pollard began to explore the part played by regions in the history of European integration. *Peaceful Conquest* was a first statement of a regional theory of development.<sup>3</sup> The book abounds with numerous cases of regions that developed without the help of geographic advantage (Pollard 1971: 75). There was more to the process of development than simply good location or government grants. As well as supporting a regional theory of industrialization, the author of *Peaceful Conquest* also found something positive in the process of European integration. Pollard later explained the book in the following terms:

In so far as I wanted to say something new, my basic intention . . . had been to show that the industrialisation which gradually covered the greater part of Europe in the two centuries after 1760 was a single process, involving the adoption of similar technologies and organisational changes made necessary by them in one country after another. . . . Industrial regions tended to have more in common with similar regions abroad than with their non-industrial hinterlands, and every "economy", meaning the totality of life within one country, turned out to be an assemblage of separate components each of which . . . could be duplicated abroad. (Pollard 1998: 213)

This period of Pollard's work culminated in the publication of *Marginal Europe*, his last book. This study used the events of Britain's Industrial Revolution as a template against which to compare other periods of economic growth. Industrialization began in marginal regions, which were then able to catch up with more prosperous areas, often in defiance of metropolitan wishes. Pollard suggested that most European growth had happened in a similar fashion. In economic terms, it was often better to be at the margin than the center (Pollard 1997: 193–94, 198, 208, 221, 268). Following its publication, Pollard continued to

3. The ideas in this book had been in Pollard's head for some time. See, for example, Pollard (1990).

4. Letter from David Martin to the author, 23 October 2002.

write; yet nothing was again attempted on such a grand scale. After a short illness, Pollard died in Sheffield on 22 November 1998.

### 3. Science and Society

We have seen throughout this article that his contemporaries showed different estimates of his work. Most comments appeared in response to individual works. A smaller number of historians have given judgment on Pollard's career as a whole. Peter Mathias wrote that the flow of Pollard's publications, "both research monographs and wider studies, was not surpassed in his generation of economic historians for range or extent" (Mathias 2000: 8). Colin Holmes, David Martin, and Don MacRaild have reached similarly positive verdicts, although their interest is more in the events of Pollard's life or in his relationship to the field of labor studies rather than in his economic history (Holmes 2000; Martin 1999; MacRaild 2000: 584–85).

There were two points at which Sidney Pollard himself attempted to place his own work within the field. The first was in "Economic History: A Science of Society?" his 1964 inaugural lecture on being appointed to the professorship at Sheffield. In this article, Pollard argued for an older conception of the subject that he believed was compatible with the works of Smith, Marx, or Marshall. The meaning of economic history depended on a definition of economics. This subject could be treated as the mathematical study of the relationship between supply and demand. Alternatively, it could be understood as a form of social science, the study of what constitutes need and why particular needs arise at certain times. Pollard blamed the British economists of the interwar years for the divergence between the mathematical and social science conceptions, citing in particular Lionel Robbins's famous definition of economics as the study of "human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternate uses" (Robbins 1932: 15). Pollard argued that Robbins's conception placed the work of economists in a realm of universally valid mathematical relationships immune from political or moral scrutiny. In his article, Pollard went on to argue for the rejoining of the two older ideas of economics as containing both fact and judgment. On this terrain, the process of discovering the past could become the means to social "melioration." Pollard recognized the influence of classical theory:

All of us owe an incalculable debt to the genius of Marx, and it has been a tragic loss for the study of history that his teaching has been so often banished or traduced because his latter-day followers have become closely associated not merely with one political movement but with a particular region of the globe.

The work of the economic historian was "a post of great, of frightening, responsibility" (Pollard 1965a: 6, 17, 22). Yet, although impressive in its scope, the article is so general as to provide little guidance. We can best understand Pollard's piece as a declaration of intent rather than as a summary of work already done.

The second point at which Pollard attempted to situate himself within the historiography was in his autobiography. The perspective here was modest. Sidney Pollard showed simply why he had adopted certain research interests at particular times. The most interesting sec-

tions were those that justified the argument of *The Wasting of the British Economy*, which Pollard treated here as his most distinctive economic text. "My starting point," he wrote,

was the strikingly low rate of productive capital investment in Britain: it immediately hit the eye in any statistical comparison, while it accorded with common sense that any rapid economic progress must depend, among other things, on new or improved capital, including human capital. (Pollard 1998: 210–11)

It would follow from Pollard's account that the low rate of investment by businesses and central government was the key explanation of Britain's postwar economic decline. We can see, then, that the central theme of *The Wasting* was connected by this emphasis on investment to Pollard's more historical studies, including his work on capital formation and the role it played in the Industrial Revolution, and on the part played by bankers in the gold standard debacle.

Yet is this how Pollard was regarded in the field? We need to look for external means of judging Pollard's work. We should consider its reception and the image of Pollard that developed in the minds of contemporaries. It might instead be that Pollard's most highly regarded work belonged to an earlier time, the period of the mid-1960s that witnessed both *The Development of the British Economy* and *The Genesis*. In contrast to these books, *The Wasting of the British Economy* was reviewed along party lines, drawing hostile comments from many quarters, as we have seen.

One of the most original of Pollard's projects was work on the historical origins of management. We can therefore compare his study to Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* ([1974] 1999). Published a decade after Pollard's *The Genesis*, Braverman's book became known as *the* classic study on the origins of management. Writers have used such terms as "Bravermania" or "the labour process debate" to discuss the controversy that followed (Burawoy 1985; Friedman 1977). *Labor and Monopoly Capital* maintained that the classic form of management was scientific management, meaning in particular the methods of Frederick Taylor. Such a practice emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. The concentration of capital had then reached a new extent, enabling the generation of surpluses that could be reinvested on technicians who were not directly employed in production. Braverman saw Taylorism as expressing one key principle: the separation of planning from execution. It followed that there was a tendency under capitalism for work to be degraded. The skilled workers who dominated the early years of capitalism were replaced with unskilled workers condemned to more demeaning and unpleasant labor (Braverman [1974] 1999). Charged with assessing the contribution made by his American contemporary, Pollard described the usefulness of Braverman's book for the historian.

One major controversial issue was Braverman's suggestion that modern employment reduces the significance of skill and increasingly creates unskilled labour. This thesis [drew] attention to the recurring question as to what constitutes "skilled" labour and how far skilled artisans, especially those who worked for themselves, could be counted among the working classes. (Pollard 1999: ix–x)

Any comparison between Harry Braverman and Sidney Pollard is likely to show different points in each writer's favor. The success of Braverman's book was linked to the mo-

ment of its publication. Appearing in the aftermath of ten years of mass strikes in the United States, Britain, Germany, and Italy, and throughout the industrialized world, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* connected an academic and an activist experience. Much was also made of the author's background as a working craftsman on the wartime naval dockyards. Braverman worked for seven years in the coppersmith's trade and was later employed in pipefitting, sheet metal work, and layout. His book seemed to prove that workers could contribute to high theory. Yet, despite the fact that Harry Braverman's book was more populist in tone and notwithstanding the greater success that *Labor and Monopoly Capital* had in finding a mass audience, its research base was different from the material on which Pollard's *The Genesis* was based. The main "primary" passage in *Labor and Monopoly Capital* is a close, textual reading of just one source: Taylor's autobiography. By contrast, Pollard's book was based on a long familiarity with many different primary sources: accountancy books, company records, and the like. Although Braverman's theory of management is initially more exciting, it ultimately appears monocausal in contrast to Pollard's *The Genesis*. The only way to establish that Taylorism was indeed the typical form of management would be to demonstrate knowledge of the techniques practiced across a range of industries and throughout a long time scale, but the author of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* eschewed that difficult, empirical task. Sidney Pollard's work on labor discipline was not as angry as Braverman's, yet it was more closely argued. The quality of the factual research was greater, and the message no less convincing.

Sidney Pollard consistently defended a style of economic history in which such abstractions as inflation or growth were not treated as ends in themselves but as evidence of changing human relationships. His touchstone was always the condition of those who did not own capital. How did their lives change from one period to the next? At times, Pollard's books and articles could be moving in their identification with the victims of economic process. This, for example, is Pollard on the conditions of the eighteenth-century workers, faced as they were by the change from a rural to an industrial life: "Here they are," he wrote,

people like ourselves, subjected to the most momentous transformation of their work environment, from domestic or agrarian, family-based labour, to large factory, shipyard or mine. Their well-known landmarks are being swept away, their skills decried, their rhythms of work altered, their social position lowered as the new wealth begins to benefit all the classes except their own. This takes place as one by one their traditional defences are broken or outlawed, as political corruption becomes more glaring than ever, as wars and crises remove what stability was left in the laws of "old England." (Pollard 1964: 39)

Despite Pollard's evident sympathy with the victims of industrialization, Peter Mathias has sought to rescue him from the charge of subscribing to any sort of "generalised Marxism." Such views, Mathias insisted, were never apparent in his economic history and certainly not in Pollard's later, empirical writings (Mathias 2000: 8). One of his colleagues from Sheffield University, David Martin, wondered how far Pollard was able to

impose his interests on what he did. . . . He sometimes spoke of "having" to write something because a publisher or editor asked for it. . . . All his labour in Sheffield stuff arose from the accident of having got a fellowship in Sheffield—and he did tell me himself that when won-

dering about a PhD topic Lance Beales had told him that he should work on Thames ship-building—so he did.<sup>4</sup>

Mathias's judgment deserves consideration. The ideas of Karl Marx were an influence on parts of Pollard's career, swaying his choice of economic history and shaping Pollard's early interest in the relationship between managers and workers. Yet the figure of Marx did tend to disappear from Pollard's books, as Mathias suggested. When Marx was cited, his views were not always accurately represented. In one essay on European industrialization, Pollard named Marx as a thinker who had seen capitalism as taking place primarily with individual nation-states, separated from the rest of the world (Pollard 1982c: 48). What happened in one society could then be copied in another. This is perhaps a fair description of volume 1 of *Capital* and much of Marx's journalism. Yet it makes no sense alongside Marx's interest in the idea of a world economy, which was evident both in the later volumes of *Capital* and in the Marxist debate over the economic causes of 1914.<sup>5</sup> We know that Pollard owned a copy of Lenin's *Imperialism*, but his reading suggests a more superficial knowledge of Kautsky on imperialism,<sup>6</sup> Bukharin on the world market (Bukharin 1929), or Luxemburg on the internationalization of capital (Luxemburg 1951).

The suggestion is of a hasty reading, not of ignorance. Even as late as the 1980s, there are signs that Pollard still continued to engage with Marxist ideas not in his monographs but mainly in book reviews. Pollard's review of one Hungarian economist's *History of Modern Non-Marxist Economics* contains the following tightly phrased verdict on the Cold War then being waged among economists. He began with the protagonists to the right: "With all their elegant ingenuity, and the immense brainpower which has gone into them, the constructs of western economic thought are not difficult to shoot down." The problem was special pleading.

Never avoiding the economists' traditional trap of taking up some select relationships for study at the start, and at the end behaving as though they were the only ones that mattered, economics has lurched from one partial explanation to another, even the most sanguine of disciplines being unable to deny that even if the latest theory was right—a hazardous assumption—then all the teaching up to now must have been largely wrong. Nor does Marxism escape that fate. (Pollard 1981a: 136)

Another review was more directly critical of Marx and the Marxists. This time, its subject was Manfred Turban's analysis of the scheme of extended reproduction, which appears in volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*. Pollard was not impressed:

There is no technical progress in Marx's scheme. Growth occurs because more capital and more labour are added. Thus there is no real growth in terms of a per capita improvement, merely an extension of the system as a whole. Much thought was given to the origin of additional capital; but nowhere is the source of the additional capital explained. Presumably the

5. Pollard possessed at least the following Marxist classics: Marx (1933, 1941a, 1941b, 1946a, 1946b, 1965) and Marx and Engels (1941).

6. Pollard did possess a copy of Kautsky (1912). Yet, apart from this book, Pollard appears to have owned little of Kautsky's independent or mature work.



concept behind it was the expansion of the capitalist economy, taking over its assets until it filled the whole of the body economic. (Pollard 1981b: 678)

There is a certain overlap between Sidney Pollard's argument here and the question that once animated Rosa Luxemburg, namely, How does capitalism ensure its continuous self-expansion? If this was the debt, though, then no interest was paid. Pollard dismissed Luxemburg's "heresy" in just half a sentence (678).

Yet, despite everything, a certain commitment to socialist theory remained. We can cite, for example, a 1976 article on profit sharing. Several writers had previously discussed the strengths of profit sharing as a means of bringing about greater economic justice. Rather than assuming the outcome of the process, Pollard preferred to describe it in historical practice. He looked at the scheme adopted by one late nineteenth-century wool manufacturer, J. T. and J. Taylor of Batley. Pollard argued that the decision made good business sense, employees were more content, and the reinvestment of the bonus fund secured the company's future. Was the decision just? Pollard compared the Calvinist philosophy of the scheme's founder, Theodore Taylor, to the socialist ideals of Robert Owen. Taylor believed in personal thrift. Those who could not keep up deserved to suffer. Owen, by contrast, could imagine a future beyond capital. "There is little doubt," wrote Pollard, "which of them was the more humane, and the greater humanist" (Pollard and Turner 1976: 29).

We could also cite Pollard's long defense of British industry against the short-term and deflationary instincts of the banks. Such themes as a defense of productive industry have their roots in long-established socialist traditions, which predate the revolutionary ideas of Karl Marx. In the 1840s, such "utopian" socialists as Charles Fourier and Henri de Saint-Simon had defended the goals of the "productive classes," including both the working class and the industrial owners, against the "unproductive classes," which meant landowners, financiers, and priests. It is true that Pollard's views had changed since his youth and had even lost a certain analytic rigor, but the intellectual trajectory was still well within the identifiable models of the Left.

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