

REACTION OF THE RES TO THE FRINGE CONFERENCE  
(From the 'Early History of the Association for heterodox Economics')

Aside from the Fringe Conference I also attended the RES Conference where I met by chance the local organizer of the 2000 RES Conference. I told him I was thinking about organizing another fringe conference the following year. He reported this at the meeting of the RES Conference and Programme Committee that took place the day after the Fringe Conference. At the meeting, some Committee members voiced strong views about the Fringe Conference, saying that its existence portrayed the RES as a closed organization not willing to tolerate heterodox views<sup>1</sup> and that they would not like a repeat of the Fringe Conference next year at the 2000 RES Conference. After the meeting, I met again (by chance) with the local organizer and he hoped that the heterodox economists would become involved in the RES Conference and not hold a separate fringe meeting. I reported my conversation to all those who attended the Fringe Conference and the outcome of the ensuing exchange was that we should try to work with the RES. Thus, I wrote to the chairperson of the RES 2000 Conference and Programme Committee (and sent a copy to the RES president Partha Dasgupta) presenting him with a proposal for how the Fringe Conference could become involved in the RES 2000 Conference, with the expectation of dialogue and compromise—to read the letter, see below.<sup>2</sup> However, the response from Dasgupta was, as with my inquiry six years earlier, outright rejection: “The annual conference of the Society is an annual conference of the Society, and of the Society alone (Dasgupta, 1999)”—to read Dasgupta’s letter, see below. Not willing to take no for an answer, I contacted St. Andrews University about rooms for a fringe conference at the time of the RES Conference, but was told that it was University policy not to rent out rooms during the summer to anybody. Refusing to admit defeat and supported by many, such as Chick, Freeman, Hodgson, and Tony Lawson, to hold a second fringe conference in part to keep pressure on the RES Conference to become more like the ASSA meetings, I began looking for an alternative conference site. Andrew Trigg came to my rescue and offered the Open University Conference Centre in London as the site for the conference.

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<sup>1</sup> When reporting this comment to the Conference participants, their response was “but it is true.”

<sup>2</sup> Modeled on the ASSA, the proposal consisted of parallel sessions involving of 30 to 42 papers and a plenary session, all devoted to heterodox economics. To referee the papers submitted for the sessions, I suggested the establishment of a heterodox panel consisting of Chick, Sheila Dow, Freeman, Hodgson, Ian Steedman, and myself.

April 29, 1999

Professor Anton Muscatelli  
Chairperson  
RES Conference 2000  
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Dear Professor Muscatelli:

At the 1999 Royal Economic Society Conference at the University of Nottingham, I organized a one-day Fringe Conference under the name of the Association for Heterodox Economics. I also attended the RES Conference and went to a number of sessions. While at the RES Conference, I met Professor Manfredi La Manna, who is the local organizer for the 2000 RES Conference, and told him that I was thinking about organizing another Fringe Conference the following year. Apparently he reported this at the RES Conference and Programme Committee Meeting which took place on 31 March 1999. After the meeting Professor La Manna and I met again by chance. He told me that some Committee members objected to the Fringe Conference because it portrayed the RES as a closed organization not willing to tolerate heterodox views. He also said that some Committee members would not like a repeat of the Fringe Conference next year at the 2000 RES Conference. Professor La Manna went on to say that he hoped that heterodox economists would become involved in the RES Conference and not hold a separate fringe conference.

I recounted my conversation with Professor La Manna to the heterodox economists who were involved in the Fringe Conference. After a series of interchanges it was agreed we should try to work with the RES. For the Fringe Conference to become part of the 2000 RES Conference, it would be necessary to have parallel sessions devoted to heterodox economics and a panel of heterodox economists to select the papers for the sessions. More specifically, I propose that the number of day-parallel sessions at the 2000 RES Conference be increased to 10 (up from 8 at the 1998 and 1999 RES Conferences). The two additional day-parallel sessions could run for the entire Conference or just, say, two days--such as July 11 - 12. The two day-parallel sessions would provide heterodox economists with choice (which is clearly supplemented by the other 8 day-parallel sessions) vis-a-vis their interest in heterodox economics. This would make it worth their while to become involved

in the Conference. In addition, there should be one plenary session on one of the Conference evenings.

The number of papers involved in the day-parallel sessions would be around 30 to 42, depending on the number of individual sessions per day-session and the number of days the day-sessions run. Clearly there needs to be a panel of knowledgeable economists to referee the papers submitted for the heterodox sessions. Therefore I propose that a panel be established consisting of heterodox economists to referee the submissions for the heterodox sessions. Since the submissions would cover various heterodox economic theories, as well as methodology, history of economic thought, and economic and business history, the panel would need to consist of at least six individuals, suitably spread over these areas. The six individuals I propose for the panel are Professor Victoria Chick, Professor Sheila Dow, Dr. Alan Freeman, Professor Geoff Hodgson, Professor Ian Steedman, and myself.

I offer the above proposals as a way of resolving the concerns of the RES Conference and Programme Committee and involving heterodox economists in the 2000 RES Conference. I fully realized that my proposals constitute just the beginning of our dialogue and that compromise by both sides is needed before a mutually acceptable outcome is arrived at. I am willing to present my proposals before the RES Conference and Programme Committee and to engage in whatever dialogue is necessary for heterodox economists to become an active part of the 2000 RES Conference.

I am looking forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Dr. Frederic S. Lee  
Reader in Economics

cc. Professor Partha Dasgupta  
Professor Manfredi La Manna

University of Cambridge  
Faculty of Economics and Politics

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*From the Chairman:*

*Partha Dasgupta, F.B.A.  
Frank Ramsey Professor of Economics*

7 May 1999

Dr. Frederick S. Lee  
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Dear Dr. Lee,

Thank you for a copy of your letter to Professor Anton Muscatelli (dated 29 April) concerning the Association for Heterodox Economics and your desire that we should find ways to integrate your activities with those of the Royal Economic Society (RES) at the latter's annual conference. I had in fact been informed of your concerns and wishes a while back and have not only given the matter some thought, but have also discussed it with a few members of the Executive Committee and of the RES Conference Committee.

The matter from the perspective of the RES is simple. The annual conference of the Society is an annual conference of the Society, and of the Society alone. Anyone wishing to contribute a paper at the conference is free to submit. Contributed papers are selected by the Programme Chair with the help of the Programme Committee. Papers are accepted if they are good and are rejected if they are below standard. There is no affirmative action programme for fringe groups, or, for that matter, for any other group. Unlike the American Economic Association's annual conference, the RES annual conference does not run sessions in parallel with those of other associations. The Programme Committee typically also develops a number of invited sessions. In order to do so, the Chair approaches expert economists, on topics currently known to be exceptionally vibrant, or on topics judged to be on the point of a take-off, or on themes which have recently yielded insights. (An example of the latter this year was a most interesting session on the micro-economics of child labour in poor countries.) Invited sessions are also created when someone approaches the Chair with a proposal having real intellectual merit. The RES reaches out to non-academic economists, such as those in the Public and Private Sectors, but that's because the Society likes to think that it embraces non-academic economists as well as academic ones. Needless to say, all this would be known to anyone who reads the RES newsletter and the annual "call for papers".

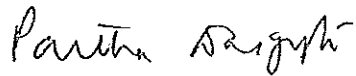
This practice is serving the Society well. Submissions to the annual conference continues to increase, as does attendance. Moreover, there seems to be a general feeling that the intellectual standard has been rising too, markedly. The Society is particularly keen that young economists are encouraged to contribute to the occasion. In fact the best of the young are so good that this year's Programme Committee felt it would serve no purpose to have separate sessions for Young Economists. So, their papers were amalgamated with the rest. I believe we will follow this practice next year as well.

We also have in place an excellent channel of communication with government economists,

journalists, and economists in the private sector. Because it continues to be little known outside the profession that economics has over the past couple of decades or so been exceptionally fertile, I have been anxious that this is appreciated by those who do not have the time we academics enjoy to keep up with developments in the subject. Given all this, there is no case for changing the Society's practice.

Finally, if someone wishes to attend the conference, they are required to register, and this involves paying the fee. It is grossly unfair to the many who register that some should be able to drift in and out of sessions without registering. The possibility of free-riding is increased greatly if other associations hold their annual conferences at the same time, at the same venue. So I am instructing the Programme Chair and Chair of the Organizing Committee of the RES annual conference for 2000 that this should not be allowed to happen.

Yours sincerely,



Partha Dasgupta  
(President, Royal Economic Society)

cc Professor Richard Portes  
Professor Manfredi La Manna  
Professor Anton Muscatelli  
Professor Jonathan Haskel