

Paul Bairoch (1930 - 1999)

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With the death of Paul Bairoch on 12 February 1999, the international scientific community lost a friend and a scholar of inestimable value. Born at Antwerp on 24 July 1930 into a Jewish family of Polish origin and of slender means, Paul Bairoch's early years were difficult, like those of very many Jews who were swept into the turmoil of war with its fears and its anxiety, but also with its moments of courage and determination.

In May 1940, the Bairoch family was cast out into exile. After drifting for more than eight months, they settled at Riscle, a small village in the department of Gers in France, where they stayed until the war was over. Paul had fond memories of those four years at Riscle; the village community had welcomed the Jewish families very generously, and had guaranteed their safety in spite of the anti-Semitic laws passed by the Vichy government.

In April 1945, the family returned to Belgium and to Antwerp where Paul rediscovered the neighbourhood of his childhood. But of the 35 Jewish children at his school, only 4 or 5 had survived; at the same time, Paul and his family heard the staggering evidence of the survivors from the concentration camps. Paul Bairoch's parents opened a kosher restaurant, but the family fell on hard times because of the father's bad health. Paul had to find a job. The family set off for Israel in 1949, but Paul's father died in 1950. Paul led an impecunious life, and did not shrink

from working in plantations, in fisheries or on building sites. At the same time, he passed his *baccalauréat*, and took a correspondence course in civil engineering. His return to Europe marked the end of his Israeli experience and the beginning of an academic career in economic history.

In 1956 Paul Bairoch decided to enter the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* (VIth Section). His thesis was on economic growth in nineteenth-century France, and he drew up one of the first indexes of national industrial production. In October 1959, the Institute of Sociology of the Université Libre in Brussels offered him a post as a *chargé de recherches*, and then as a *maitre de recherches*. He gained a doctorate in 1963, and his doctoral thesis was published with the title of *Révolution industrielle et sous-développement* (Industrial Revolution and Under-development) and obtained for him a post as *professeur agrégé* at the Université Libre in Brussels.

At the beginning of his academic career, Bairoch accepted to work two and a half years in Geneva, as economic adviser to the research department of GATT. In 1969, he was appointed Professor of Economics and Economic History at the Sir George Williams University in Montreal. In 1971, when Fernand Braudel offered him a post as Director of Studies at the Ecole Pratique, Paul Bairoch came back to Europe, where he was offered posts at Liège and at Brussels. However, in the end he opted for a post at the University of Geneva, a place that was special to him because it was his wife's home town. He was appointed to the Department of Economic History at the University of Geneva in 1972, and he taught there until 1995 when he became an Honorary Professor.

Paul Bairoch's international renown won him numerous honours: he received the Primo Europeo Corina-Ulisse in 1976; the Collège de France awarded him one of the chairs reserved for foreign scholars, and the Eidgenossene Technische Hochschule in Zurich awarded him an honorary doctorate in 1983.

Paul Bairoch published about twenty books and over 100 articles which are listed in the very fine book his pupils dedicated to him: *Pour une histoire économique et sociale internationale. Mélanges offerts à Paul Bairoch* (ed. Bouda Etemad, Jean Batou, Thomas David, Geneva, 1995).

From this masterly work, we can attempt to define Paul Bairoch's main fields of study, and to assess his principal contributions to social and economic history. Significantly, his first article, published in 1962 (*Revue de l'Institut de Sociologie*, 2) was on the "Myth of Rapid Economic Growth in the Nineteenth Century". The great themes of Bairoch's research are already apparent: the nineteenth century, growth and, what he fought all his life, "myths" and mistaken ideas. The analysis of industrial development naturally induced him to seek the reasons why a whole section of the world economy did not take off (*Le Tiers-Monde dans l'impasse. Le démarrage économique du XVIIIe au XXe siècle*, 1971). Growth rates and disparities in development required a great deal of research on the history of towns (*De Jéricho à Mexico. Villes et économies dans l'histoire*, 1985).

Why did the Industrial Revolution take place only in Europe and not in other parts of the world, and why in Europe did industrialisation begin first in England? (A short time ago Peter Mathias wondered "Why England first?"). Bairoch brings in structural mechanisms that refer essentially to the state of agriculture (agricultural production) as a preliminary condition for the start of industrialisation. So history unfolds, according to dialectics which Bairoch observes as a reaction between "victories" and "disappointments". This is the subject of his last work, *Victoires et déboires. Histoire économique et sociale du monde du XVIIe siècle à nos jours* (3 volumes, Gallimard, Paris, 1997, coll. folio histoire), a sort of spiritual testament in that it is the result of some thirty years of research and teaching. From one discontinuity to another: it is by means of great breaks in continuity "that changes in the history of mankind are essentially effected". Paul Bairoch sees two "fundamental" breaks, the Neolithic Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, the only two revolutions that can be compared, as Paul Chaunu also observed. Just below these, we find "major" breaks: wars, great discoveries, the Reformation, the collapse of communism....And the "victories" are not always innocent, they can lie at the origin of social "disappointments".

As for the mistaken ideas Bairoch denounces, the most famous are well-known to his readers (and his students). Rapid growth in the nineteenth century has been mentioned, what Bairoch calls "the romantic

vision" of the nineteenth century, based on triumphant liberalism. Neo-classical economists tend to think that free trade was the rule and protectionism the exception, whereas Bairoch proves that historically it was the contrary. Hostile to neo-liberalism, he defined himself as a "neo-protectionist", while admitting the risk of sliding towards nationalism.

Paul Bairoch demolishes another "myth": the effect of colonisation on economic history. (This could make "left-wing" economic historians hostile to him.) With great subtlety, Bairoch shows how complex the question is: the colonial countries did not really profit from Third World exploitation (*Mythes et paradoxes de l'histoire économique*, 1993).

It is clearly evident that Paul Bairoch's work is, in short, a summa of thoughts on history. As Ruggiero Romano wrote, Bairoch forcefully makes us aware of one of the great economic, political and cultural challenges of the twentieth and even the twenty-first centuries, development and underdevelopment. Paul Bairoch devoted most of his life to these issues.

The community of social and economic historians will always be greatly beholden to Paul Bairoch for the vastness of his work, and for the renewal he has brought to the great issues of history with his original ideas, subject to abundant controversies which were never lacking. They will be beholden to him also because his work is based on that most rigorous method, quantification. For Bairoch, quantitative method does not mean figure fetishism, but the establishment of a solid statistical base which enables one to follow in the long term the evolution of the world's great economic variables, as his friend Maurice Lévy- Leboyer recalls (*Mélanges, op. cit.*, p.15).

PAUL BAIROCH'S MAIN WORKS

BOOKS*

* English translations of books (generally involving changes) are listed with their date of publication. Translations into other languages appear only with their French title.

Révolution industrielle et sous-développement, SEDES, Paris 1963 (4th edition, Mouton, Paris, 1974), 381 pages. Spanish, Italian and Portuguese translations.

Diagnostic de l'évolution économique du Tiers-Monde, 1900-1966, Gauthier-Villars, Paris, 1967, (revised and augmented 4th edition, 1970), 259 pages.

Under the direction of Bairoch, P., "*La population active et sa structure*", volume I of the series *Statistiques internationales rétrospectives* by Deldycke, T., Gelders, H., and Limbor, J.-M., Edition de l'Institut de Sociologie, U.L.B. Brussels and New York, 1968, 236 pages.

Le Tiers-Monde dans l'impasse. Le démarrage économique du XVIIIe au XXe siècle, Gallimard (collection Idées), Paris, 1971, 372 pages. Revised and augmented 3rd edition (Collection Folio Actuel), Paris, 1992, 660 pages. German, Arab, Spanish, Italian, Persian and Turkish translations.

Le chômage urbain dans le pays en voie de développement, B.I.T., Geneva, 1972, 106 pages. Spanish translation, B.I.T., Geneva, 1973.

The Economic Development of the Third World since 1900, London, 1975 (second edition with minor revisions, London, 1977).

Commerce extérieur et développement économique de l'Europe au XIXe siècle, Mouton, Paris-La Haye, 1976, 355 pages.

Taille des villes, conditions de vie et développement économique, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 1977, 241 pages.

De Jéricho à Mexico. Villes et économie dans l'histoire, coll. Arcades, Gallimard, Paris, 1985, 710 pages. 2nd revised edition, Paris, 1996. Spanish translation.

Cities and Economic Development. From the Dawn of History to the Present, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988, 600 pages.

Storia delle città dalla proto-urbanizzazione all'esplosione urbana del terzo mondo, (Jaca Book), Milan, 1992, 93 pages.

Economics and World History. Myths and Paradoxes (Harvester, Wheatsheaf), New York and London, 1993, 184 pages.

Mythes et paradoxes de l'histoire économique (La découverte), Paris, 1994, 287 pages.

Victoires et déboires. Histoire économique et sociale du monde du XVIe siècle à nos jours, Gallimard, Paris, 1997, 3 volumes, 2,788 pages.

Bairoch, P. and Levy-Leboyer, M. (eds), *Disparities in Economic Development since the Industrial Revolution*, Macmillan, London, 1981, 419 pages.

Bairoch, P. and Itemad B., *Structure par produits des exportations du Tiers-Monde, 1830-1937*, Droz, Geneva, 1985, 201 pages.

Bairoch, P. and Piuz, A.-M. (eds), *Le passage des économies traditionnelles européennes aux sociétés industrialisées*, Droz, Geneva, 1985, 480 pages.

Bairoch, P. and Bovee, J.-P., (with the assistance of Batou J.), *Annuaire statistique rétrospectif de Genève*, Geneva, 1986, 119 pages.

Bairoch, P., Batou, J. and Chèvre, P., *La population des villes européennes 800-1850, Banque de données et analyse sommaire des résultats. The Population of European Cities 800-1850, Data Bank and Short Summary of Results*, Droz, Geneva, 1988, 337 pages.

Bairoch, P. and Korner, M. (eds), *La Suisse dans l'économie mondiale*, Droz, Geneva, 1990, 507 pages.

Bairoch, P. and Toutain, J.-C. (directors), *World Energy Production: 1800-1985*, by Etemad, B. and Luciani, J., Droz, Geneva, 1991, 332 pages.

Bairoch, P. and Hobsbawn, E. J. (Eds), *Storia d'Europa*, volume 5: *L'età contemporanea. Secoli XIX-XX*, Turin, 1996, 1,523 pages.

About 120 articles and contributions to collections of papers.