

Preface

by Paolo Savona

“Economics: Is something missing?”. The current meaning of the relationship of economics with history is practically summed up in the celebrated question posed by R. E. Solow in his contribution to the felicitous collection compiled decades ago by W. N. Parker.¹ Many economists, in fact, and not just today, have a problem with accepting the role that historical conditions play in the genesis and development of economic phenomena, hence in the possible models to explain them. In the same way, in a time of extremely narrow research specializations, historians not infrequently seek to relegate economic history to the backwaters, out of the mainstream of historical scholarship. Differently motivated though they are, these two patterns of behaviour both favour the same result: widening the gap between economic theory and economic history.

The publication of a collection of Luigi De Rosa's essays by *The Journal of European Economic History* is intended to help bridge this gap by making newly available the work of a leading practitioner of European economic historiography in the twentieth century, a scholar who succeeded in making the discipline the meeting point for diverse cultures and traditions. That, in fact, was his ambition back in 1972 when he founded the *Journal*, sponsored then by the *Banco di Roma* (and now by the Unicredit group). The arrival of the *Journal* worked an extraordinary change in the discipline of European economic history at the time, because it brought together and made more widely available to researchers the best work of the various national schools of economic history, which were largely unaccustomed to international encounter or comparison.

In 1992, in drawing up the balance of the *Journal's* first twenty years, Peter Mathias stressed this element,² with an insight that now, a decade and a half later, seems almost prophetic. Today, thanks to the tumultuous, unforeseeable development of the technology for data transmission and diffusion, the internationalization of research is an established fact in economic history as in every other field of human knowledge.

The *Journal*, therefore, is rightly proud to honour its farsighted founder, and also its editor from 1972 until his death in 2004, not with a merely commemorative volume but with a selection of his own essays, which again offer the economic historians across the world useful material for research and tools of

¹ R. E. Solow, “Economics: Is Something Missing?” in W. N. Parker (ed.), *Economic History and the Modern Economist*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 21-29.

² P. Mathias, “The Journal of European Economic History: its first twenty years (1972-1992)”, *The Journal of European Economic History*, XXI (1992), no. 3, pp. 441-580.

scientific inquiry that have lost none of their validity. The essays reprinted here include several that appeared originally in publications that would be quite difficult to locate today and that can accordingly now gain a broader readership. And, above all, there is an unpublished essay of De Rosa's on the repercussions of the crisis of 1929 on the Italian banking system, an invaluable work made available to us by the generosity of Mrs. Ermelinda De Rosa, whom I thank personally and on behalf of the *Journal*.

The volume is completed by a comprehensive bibliography of Luigi De Rosa's intellectual output – a bibliography, however, that will continue to be updated, enriched by additional works as they are called to our attention by scholars around the world. To scan these more than five hundred titles is to realize the enormous impact that he had on European economic historiography.