

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Nearly modern IPE? Insights from IPE at mid-century

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## Abstract

Disciplinary debates within IPE often leave as an open question how contemporary scholars may build on and incorporate insights from its rich intellectual history. In this article I examine the work of three scholars who are rarely grouped together, but who should be recognised today as engaged in an IPE-inflected debate: Karl Polanyi, E. H. Carr, and David Mitrany. They advanced distinct IPE-centred ways of framing the central problems of the post-1945 world, which are remarkable for how they prefigure important themes in modern IPE scholarship. By assembling and considering their work collectively, I make two arguments: (1) we should recognise their contributions as a precursor to modern IPE; and (2) their work, with certain caveats, provides valuable intellectual resources for contemporary scholars. Their combined work should be considered as part of the common heritage of IPE.

**Keywords:** E. H. Carr; Disciplinary History; International Political Economy; David Mitrany; Karl Polanyi

## Introduction

The debate over the past two decades about the disciplinary history of International Political Economy (IPE) has left the field richer and more aware of its disciplinary origins,<sup>1</sup> intellectual roots<sup>2</sup> and institutional organisation.<sup>3</sup> This stands in marked contrast to the situation Susan Strange encountered in 1970 when she first called for a new field of enquiry to understand the growing complexity of the international political and economic system.<sup>4</sup> Despite the

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Peter Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane, and Stephen D. Krasner, 'International organization and the study of world politics', *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), pp. 645–85; Nicola Phillips and Catherine E. Weaver (eds), *International Political Economy: Debating the Past, Present and Future* (London, UK: Routledge, 2011); and John M. Hobson, 'What's at stake in doing (critical) IR/IPE historiography? The imperative of critical historiography', in Brian C. Schmidt and Nicholas Guilhot (eds), *Historiographical Investigations in International Relations* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 147–70.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Geoffrey R. D. Underhill, 'State, market and global political economy: Genealogy of an (inter-?) discipline', *International Affairs*, 76:4 (2000), pp. 805–24; Matthew Watson, *The Foundations of International Political Economy* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2005); John M. Hobson, 'Part 1 – Revealing the Eurocentric foundations of IPE: A critical historiography of the discipline from the classical to the modern era', *Review of International Political Economy*, 20:5 (2013), pp. 1024–54; and John M. Hobson, 'Part 2 – Reconstructing the non-Eurocentric foundations of IPE: From Eurocentric "open economy politics" to inter-civilizational political economy', *Review of International Political Economy*, 20:5 (2013), pp. 1055–81.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Mark Blyth, *Routledge Handbook of International Political Economy: Global Conversations* (London, UK: Routledge, 2009); Leonard Seabrooke and Kevin L. Young, 'The networks and niches of international political economy', *Review of International Political Economy*, 24:2 (2017), pp. 288–331; and Ben Clift, Peter Marcus Kristensen, and Ben Rosemond, 'Remembering and forgetting IPE: Disciplinary history as boundary work', *Review of International Political Economy*, First View (2020), pp. 1–34, available at: <https://doi-org.proxy.library.carleton.ca/10.1080/09692290.2020.1826341>.

<sup>4</sup>Susan Strange, 'International economics and International Relations: A case of mutual neglect', *International Affairs*, 46:2 (1970), pp. 304–15.

disagreements at play in this lively debate, IPE scholars have learned much about their field, including how at its origins IPE was an effort to understand and comprehend the global political economy as a holistic field of activity. Although its subject contains seemingly separate political, economic, and social currents, IPE-inflected research is an attempt to weave these together to generate an integrated terrain of study. Understanding the contours of this intellectual history promises to enrich our current research efforts by making scholars aware of the lineage of their ideas and concepts, and by pointing to where this heritage continues to resonate with current research.

At the same time, there remains a curious gap in our newfound appreciation of IPE's disciplinary and intellectual history. Many follow Benjamin Cohen in accepting that IPE more or less emerged as an institutionalised field of study in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Those who contest this dating either locate the roots of IPE in the eighteenth or nineteenth century,<sup>6</sup> or point to non-Western thinkers as important contributors in their own right.<sup>7</sup> The interwar period, however, remains something of an enigma. There were of course individual minds of brilliance at work during this period, but these scholars and intellectuals either worked alone or outside of what we would today recognise as a modern IPE frame of reference.<sup>8</sup>

But as I will establish, there is strong evidence of a recognisably IPE-inflected debate during this period. In particular, I highlight the contributions of three scholars and public intellectuals who are rarely grouped together, and who themselves have an uneven presence in the academic history of the discipline: Karl Polanyi, E. H. Carr, and David Mitrany. They were concerned to understand and chart the future of what they considered to be a world market economy, and they used methods and examined issues that resonate today with different strands of IPE scholarship. Reading their work together, as a collective intellectual resource for IPE scholarship, promises to enrich our understanding not only of the intellectual history of modern IPE, but also of the kinds of questions we might ask of our subject.

I organise this enquiry by first considering why we should be interested in the intellectual history of IPE prior to its emergence as a formal discipline of study. I then establish how the work of Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany very clearly resembles an IPE-inflected conversation before and after the Second World War. In slightly different ways but focused in common on the same major themes, they engaged in what today we would recognise as IPE scholarship. Finally, I reflect on how their work can still add value to existing research. Most importantly, this includes reviving what Benjamin Cohen might call 'big picture' thinking in IPE, and draws attention to the impact of political mobilisation for our understanding of the structure of the global political

<sup>5</sup>Benjamin J. Cohen, *International Political Economy: An Intellectual History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 1. See also Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner, 'International organization and the study of world politics', pp. 655–7; Underhill, 'State, market and global political economy', pp. 808ff; David A. Lake, 'Open economy politics: A critical review', *Review of International Organization*, 4:2 (2009), p. 222; and Hobson, 'What's at stake in doing (critical) IR/IPE historiography?', p. 149.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Watson, *The Foundations of International Political Economy*; Hobson, 'Part 1 – Revealing the Eurocentric foundations of IPE'; Hobson, 'Part 2 – Reconstructing the non-Eurocentric foundations of IPE'; many contributors to Phillips and Weaver (eds), *International Political Economy*; and David Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah, *Savage Economics: Wealth, Poverty, and the Temporal Walls of Capitalism* (London, UK: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Nicola Phillips, *Globalizing International Political Economy* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2005); Blyth, *Routledge Handbook of International Political Economy*; Gregory Chin, Margaret Pearson, and Wang Yong, 'Introduction – IPE with China's characteristics', *Review of International Political Economy*, 20:6 (2013), pp. 1145–64; Eric Helleiner and Arturo Rosales, 'Peripheral thoughts for International Political Economy: Latin American ideational innovation and the diffusion of the nineteenth-century free trade doctrine', *International Studies Quarterly*, 61:4 (2017), pp. 924–34; and Heloise Weber, 'Is IPE just "boring", or committed to problematic meta-theoretical assumptions? A critical engagement with the politics of method', *Contexto Internacional*, 37:3 (2015), pp. 913–44.

<sup>8</sup>Cohen defines IPE very succinctly as a field that 'teaches us how to think about the connections between economics and politics beyond the confines of a single state'. Although austere, this definition is faithful to the understanding of IPE offered by the citations in fns 1–7. Cohen, *International Political Economy*, p. 1.

economy. More controversially, it also highlights the value of problematising how the idea of history is encountered in IPE. But their work is not without silences and gaps, and I consider how we need to account for what they failed to do (or did poorly or incompletely) in order to use their work to advance the state of knowledge we associate with modern IPE research. Bringing the work of Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany to light as part of the common heritage of IPE scholarship promises to enrich the stock of intellectual tools which contemporary IPE practitioners can use in their own research.

### Why investigate the intellectual roots of IPE?

Although many agree in the main with Benjamin Cohen's account of IPE's disciplinary emergence, its intellectual roots are much more contested. The Eurocentric bias intrinsic to key IPE thematic concerns has been questioned, along with the way in which non-Western ideas have been marginalised as an important part of IPE's intellectual heritage.<sup>9</sup> Some have also drawn attention to how the contribution of development economists, peace theorists, and historians of colonialism and imperialism have been displaced as formative contributors to modern IPE.<sup>10</sup> The combined point of critics who worry that Cohen draws an unnecessarily narrow lineage for IPE-inflected thought is that it diminishes the range of intellectual resources we may utilise in our research, and therefore biases some of the conclusions we may draw.<sup>11</sup> This is a cost we should worry about.

The extent of these costs has been revealed in recent scholarship on the historiography of International Relations (IR), which strongly suggests that broadening the scope of an academic discipline's history enriches our understanding of the intellectual resources open to its practitioners. For example, a concern over how to manage global race relations within the context of colonial administration has recently been revealed to be an important impetus behind the development of a theory of IR, well before the discipline's usual assumed start date of 1919.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the ideational framework, which today underpins the economic structure of globalisation, emerged through an extensive discourse of globalism that took place during the middle decades of the twentieth century, where there was very little consensus on either the role of international organisations or the organisational principals of political space.<sup>13</sup> We should be wary, therefore, of attributing unassailable staying power to the ideology of global governance and its institutional framework. Even the seeming triumph of neoliberal ideas as a foundation for world market economy was not the inevitable consequence of a well-planned and financed intellectual 'take-over' of the academy. Rather, neoliberalism owes much of its early success to practical work done by those

<sup>9</sup>See citations in fns 6–7.

<sup>10</sup>See Craig N. Murphy, 'Understanding IR: Understanding Gramsci', *Review of International Studies*, 24:1 (1998), pp. 418–20; and Ben Clift and Ben Rosamond, 'Lineages of a British International Political Economy', in Blyth, *Routledge Handbook of International Political Economy*, pp. 89–105. These scholars harken back to earlier commentaries on the academic history of IPE that contextualise its intellectual traditions in rather more heterogeneous terms. See Dan R. Waller, 'The political economy literature on North–South relations: Alternative approaches and empirical evidence', *International Studies Quarterly*, 22:4 (1978), pp. 587–624; Waltraud Morales, 'The old in the new controversies of International Political Economy: A field of study revitalized', *International Studies Notes*, 6:3 (1979), pp. 16–20; and Thomas J. Biersteker, 'Evolving perspectives on International Political Economy: Twentieth-century contexts and discontinuities', *International Political Science Review*, 14:1 (1993), pp. 7–33.

<sup>11</sup>It is important to acknowledge here that Cohen has responded to many of these criticisms by widening his conception of the intellectual sources of IPE. Benjamin J. Cohen, *Advanced Introduction to International Political Economy* (2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edn, Aldershot, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019).

<sup>12</sup>Brian C. Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), ch. 4; Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), ch. 5.

<sup>13</sup>Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939–1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 272–8.

at the organisational coalface of seemingly obscure institutions, which might have few material resources but plenty of influence over how the world is made 'visible'.<sup>14</sup> In other words, by paying close attention to intellectual debates that are part of a trajectory of seeing the world in a particular way, we can recover and recapture ideas and concepts, which, while no longer seemingly active, continue to resonate with how the world is organised.

It is my contention that an important part of IPE's intellectual history is not yet fully visible. Many of us of course are familiar with the work of brilliant individuals such as Antonio Gramsci, Friedrich Hayek, Albert Hirschman, and John Maynard Keynes, or even Gunnar Myrdal or Joseph Schumpeter, all of whom made important contributions to the history of political economy and have been picked up by IPE scholarship to varying degrees. We might also consider here Fabians and liberal internationalists in England, although much of their writing was in a more journalistic vein.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, I would argue that when considered as a formative influence on the intellectual history of IPE, none of these scholars have been grouped together as part of a collective endeavour to advance a kind of IPE-inflected approach to the organisation of the global political economy, or world market economy as it was more often described during this period. This is not the case with Polanyi, Carr and Mitrany, whose combined work over this same period provides an important common point of departure capable of offering intellectual resources to contemporary IPE scholarship that can complement and reinforce our existing research efforts. In the next section, therefore, I reassemble a conversation among them and consider their work as part of the intellectual history of IPE. They have never before been considered together in this way, although on occasion one or the other may be linked to IPE (and on rare occasions two of the three). But as I demonstrate, this overlooks both the professional networks that they shared and the remarkable degree of coherence in their collective view of the emerging structure of world market economy, as well as the ways in which they believed certain challenges needed to be addressed. When read collectively I believe their work should be considered as 'nearly modern IPE', and that it is an appropriate collective intellectual resource for IPE scholarship.

## IPE at mid-century: Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany<sup>16</sup>

### **Connections and associations**

At first glance, the claim that the work of Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany can be yoked together to constitute an opening to IPE might appear counter intuitive. Carr and Mitrany are rarely mentioned in existing disciplinary histories of IPE, and if so, they are usually counter-posed to each other intellectually because of their seemingly contrasting views on international organisations.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), pp. 16–19.

<sup>15</sup>The impact on IPE of Gramsci and Hayak needs no introduction. There have yet to be accounts provided for Myrdal and Schumpeter. On Hirschman, see Ilene Grabel, *When Things Don't Fall Apart: Global Financial Governance and Development Finance in an Age of Productive Incoherence* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018); on Keynes, see Jonathan Kirshner, 'Keynes, legacies, and inquiry', *Theory and Society*, 38:5 (2009), pp. 527–41; on the Fabians, see Lucian M. Ashworth, *A History of International Thought: From the Origins of the Modern state to Academic International Relations* (London, UK: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>16</sup>Although each of these individuals published continuously throughout their careers, I am particularly interested in their published work in the years leading up to and just beyond the Second World War, including most importantly Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957 [orig. pub. 1944]); E. H. Carr, *Conditions of Peace* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1942); E. H. Carr, *Nationalism and After* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1945); E. H. Carr, *The New Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957 [orig. pub. 1951]); David Mitrany, *The Progress of International Government* (London, UK: George, Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1933); and David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System* (Chicago, IL: Quadrangle Books for the Society for a World Service Federation, 1966 [orig. pub. 1943]).

<sup>17</sup>Two exceptions here are Randall Germain, 'E. H. Carr and IPE: An essay in retrieval', *International Studies Quarterly*, 63:4 (2019), pp. 952–62 and Lucian M. Ashworth, 'David Mitrany on the international anarchy: A lost work of classical realism?', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 13:3 (2017), pp. 311–24.

Polanyi, on the other hand, has a strong presence in the field, powered most importantly by the way in which a clutch of concepts that he developed have been widely taken up in IPE scholarship, among them the distinction between embedded and disembedded economies, the idea of a double or counter-movement, and his portrayal of the institutional foundations of the nineteenth century international economy.<sup>18</sup> Yet, as I will detail below, not only did they agree on the fundamental nature of the challenges facing the postwar world and the direction to be taken to meet them, but many aspects of their respective solutions also resonated with each other. From the mid-1930s until the early 1950s these three thinkers were engaged in what should be described as an effort to consider the problems of world market economy from the perspective of what we can recognise as nearly modern IPE.

This effort was facilitated by their activities as public intellectuals along with a certain amount of professional engagement. Before moving to London in 1933, for example, Polanyi had a long history of publishing in left political circles in Vienna, and he taught and lectured in workers' venues and educational institutions in London after moving there.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, even though he resided in the US throughout much of the war years, he returned to London just before the end of the war, partly in anticipation of participating in debates about the future.<sup>20</sup> He greatly admired Carr's analysis in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, and corresponded with him on occasion after the war in connection with projects he was working on.<sup>21</sup> I have been unable to establish any direct connection between Polanyi and Mitrany, although there was correspondence in the 1950s between Mitrany and Polanyi's brother, then a lecturer at Manchester University, over issues connected to Michael Polanyi's role with the Congress of Cultural Freedom.<sup>22</sup> Mitrany also apparently hired Polanyi's wife, Ilona Duczynska, to undertake some research for him in connection with his book *Marx Against the Peasant*.<sup>23</sup> So while it is quite possible that Polanyi and Mitrany knew each other and perhaps even interacted, there is no evidence that I have found so far that they had any kind of a professional relationship.

Mitrany and Carr, on the other hand, were both involved for much of their professional lives with Chatham House, host to the Royal Institute of International Affairs: Carr joined in 1922 and Mitrany in 1925. They participated in study groups sponsored by Chatham House before and during the war, and there is no question that they would have attended some of the same events.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, there are many similarities between sections of Carr's *Conditions of Peace* and Mitrany's *A Working Peace System*, both of which were in development at the same time (and most likely

<sup>18</sup>Polanyi's presence in IPE can be traced to the early 1980s, when John Ruggie insightfully used *The Great Transformation* to reflect on the nature of international regimes. For reviews of Polanyi's presence in IR and IPE, see Gareth Dale, 'In search of Karl Polanyi's International Relation's theory', *Review of International Studies*, 42:4 (2016), pp. 401–24; Hannes Lacher, 'The politics of the market: Re-reading Karl Polanyi', *Global Society*, 13:3 (1999), pp. 313–26; and Randall Germain, 'International Political Economy', in Gareth Dale, Christopher Holmes, and Maria Markantonatou (eds), *Exploring the Thought of Karl Polanyi* (New York, NY: Agenda Publishers, Columbia University Press 2019), pp. 27–48.

<sup>19</sup>Gareth Dale, *Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016), ch. 4.

<sup>20</sup>However, he did not reside for long in England due to the lack of professional opportunities. Instead he took up a series of visiting appointments at Columbia University from 1946 until 1953, when he retired from teaching and moved to Toronto to be with his wife. He continued to research and write more or less until his death in 1964. Dale, *Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left*, pp. 187–98, 202–15.

<sup>21</sup>Dale, 'In search of Karl Polanyi's International Relation's theory'; Dale, *Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left*.

<sup>22</sup>Mitrany Papers, Box 64, International Activities, File: 'International Activities: A–L', letter to Michael Polanyi dated 18 April 1957.

<sup>23</sup>Mitrany Papers, Box 24, Planning, File: 'Marx Against the Peasant', 'Notes on Incidents while Working on *Marx Against the Peasant*'; Dale (*Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left*) does not record any connection between Polanyi and Mitrany, and there do not appear to be any letters among Polanyi's archived correspondence either to or from Mitrany (personal correspondence with Gareth Dale).

<sup>24</sup>It is also the case that both Carr and Mitrany worked for the British Foreign Office during the First World War, and were involved in competing bids to provide wartime research to the Foreign Office during the Second World War. The bid in which Mitrany participated was ultimately successful, and he spent two years at Oxford working for the Foreign Research and Press Service, responsible for research related to southeastern Europe.



discussed at Chatham House).<sup>25</sup> Beyond this, they shared a mutual interest in Soviet Russia and its place in the world, as well as a healthy interest in the future of international organisation after the war. They were also frequent reviewers of books on these subjects, including each other's work.<sup>26</sup> Finally, their professional networks overlapped to a considerable extent,<sup>27</sup> which perhaps explains why both were invited to apply for the Wilson Chair in International Politics at Aberystwyth University in 1936.<sup>28</sup>

Below I sketch the remarkable congruence of thinking between these three scholars over the critical challenges facing the world during a tumultuous period. I highlight three overlapping themes woven through their analyses, each of which are heavily inflected with modern IPE concerns. The first theme is the depth and scale of the changes confronting existing political and economic arrangements and institutions; they all agreed these were deep-seated and fundamental. The second theme is their agreement that although the origins of these changes lay in the Industrial Revolution and the societal reactions provoked by it, this trajectory was inevitably and necessarily directed towards world market economy, which placed unprecedented pressure on existing international arrangements. And finally, they agreed on the centrality of the state for all of these changes, which both confirmed the fundamental nature of the transformations of the past century and anchored the possibilities of political action going forward. Interestingly, as I will further emphasise, they also shared a conviction that these changes could only be appreciated, understood and successfully tackled by abandoning the past as a guide for future developments. The world was moving towards a 'new society', to adopt the title of Carr's 1951 BBC lectures (and subsequently published under the same name), and existing political and economic arrangements needed to be seen and recast in this light.

<sup>25</sup>They would also meet and correspond on occasion. There is a record of several meetings between Carr and Mitrany in the Carr archives, and at least one instance of Carr writing to Mitrany asking for material connected to his research on the history of Soviet Russia. See entries in Carr's appointment diaries for 3 March 1943, 29 November 1943, and 20 February 1946 (Carr Papers, Box 29–30, Appointment Diaries and published reviews/interviews/obituaries), and Mitrany Papers, Box 59, Books, Publishers, Bellagio Conference, File: Books, Articles, Reviews, Criticisms; letter from Carr to Mitrany dated 31 March 1952. Rosenboim also notes correspondence between Carr and Mitrany in May 1943 over the question of functionalism and its relationship to nationalism, while Jones confirms that both sat on a wartime Chatham House-sponsored working group that considered the problem of nationalism in world affairs. Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism*, p. 44, fns. 91–2; Charles Jones, *E. H. Carr and International Relations: A Duty to Lie* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 87.

<sup>26</sup>Carr almost certainly reviewed Mitrany's book *Marx Against the Peasant*, while Mitrany reviewed *The New Society*. Very oddly, however, I could find no evidence in their papers that either reviewed *The Great Transformation*. On Carr's review, see Mitrany Papers, Box 24, Planning, File: 'Marx Against the Peasant', letter to Margaret Lambert dated 20 December 1951; on Mitrany's review of Carr, see Mitrany Papers, Box 65, Correspondence, Letters to Press, Book Reviews, File: 'DM Book Reviews 1943–', review of *The New Society* for Chatham House, 1951.

<sup>27</sup>Carr's London network included Chatham House, the LSE, the Foreign Office, and *The Times*, where he was deputy editor during the war. Mitrany's London network revolved around Chatham House, the LSE, his business connections stemming from his involvement with Lever Brothers, and the business-funded research group Political Economic Planning, or PEP, and during the war years the exiled diplomatic community. Interestingly, Carr's first wife also worked at PEP during the war, adding a further layer of overlap to their networks. Both Carr's and Mitrany's papers include numerous meetings and correspondence with the same people throughout this period, and they also both participated in at least one meeting of the International Studies Conference, an interwar initiative to promote the study and teaching of international politics. It is worth noting in this regard that Polanyi also maintained direct contact with several Hungarian exile groups, who would have been familiar in turn with Mitrany from his post-First World War work on central and eastern Europe for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. David Long, 'Who killed the International Studies Conference?', *Review of International Studies*, 32:4 (2006), p. 608, fn. 17; Jonathan Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity: E. H. Carr 1892–1982* (London, UK: Verso, 1999), p. 84.

<sup>28</sup>Aberystwyth Vice-Chancellor Ifor Evans wrote to Mitrany asking him to consider applying to the post in late 1935, which he declined. Carr of course became the fourth Wilson Chair in 1936 and held the post until 1947. Mitrany Papers, Box 57, American Academic Activities, File: 'Academic Activities – Personal', letter from Ifor Evans, dated 16 December 1935.

### ***The historical challenge of fundamental change***

The starting point of their analyses coalesced around the origins and consequences of the Industrial Revolution. In Polanyi's now well-known formulation, the Industrial Revolution was grounded in the release of the market economy from the shackles of social convention, and this unprecedented movement severed the social bonds connecting English labourers to society, nearly destroying their social fabric in the process. Nothing could be more fundamental or transformative than this process, and it set the template for the reaction of societal self-protection that he labels the 'double movement'.<sup>29</sup> Carr emphasises a slightly different outcome of the Industrial Revolution, namely how it recast the economic landscape. While both Polanyi and Carr are pre-occupied with and critical of the place and role of liberalism in organising market economy, Carr pays more attention to the way in which one feature of the Industrial Revolution – the rise to prominence of large, centralised business concerns and cartels – upended the classical market economy of competitive firms.<sup>30</sup> The main effect of this was to draw the state deeply into the organisational logic of the market economy. As he notes, by the mid-twentieth century the *laissez faire* competitive economy of the earlier period had been replaced with the planned economy, where the state took the lead to organise economic life.<sup>31</sup>

Of the three scholars considered here, Mitrany had perhaps the most openness to the positive effects of big business and its capacity to weather the sea changes of the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, he occupied a most unusual position as a public intellectual and academic who also straddled the business world. Not only was he appointed to a prestigious Professorship at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where with the exception of the war years he spent six months a year from 1933 until 1953, but for several decades from about 1930 he was heavily involved in a private research organisation called PEP (Political and Economic Planning), based at Queen Anne's Gate in London and funded by British business concerns. Even more interestingly, from 1943 he was appointed 'Advisor on International Affairs' to the board of Lever Brothers and Unilever Ltd, an internationally active Anglo-Dutch conglomerate. This appointment provided him with a decent stipend, an office at Unilever House, and access to some of Unilever's corporate research resources until he retired in 1960.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps because of this involvement in the world of business, Mitrany entirely concurred with Carr on the economic effects of the Industrial Revolution. Most importantly, it redrew the economic landscape to push it towards a planning model, where large organisations had an advantage, but which also involved the state intimately and organically in the planning process. Even more forcefully than Carr, Mitrany recognised that as states became more embroiled in national planning, this imperative quite naturally – indeed, necessarily – extended into the international economy. This was a challenge he first charted during the early years of the Great Depression,<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, p. 76.

<sup>30</sup>Carr, *The New Society*, pp. 27–32. Interestingly, Polanyi also recognised that large industrial concerns had an enormous interest in controlling their environment, but that this was made exceptionally difficult when money was released from its previous social bonds to become what he terms a 'fictitious commodity'. In his analysis, the commodity form of money that a genuinely self-regulating market had to adopt made it impossible to sustain a stable business environment. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, pp. 193–5.

<sup>31</sup>Carr, *The New Society*, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup>Anderson provides an overview of Mitrany's professional life, while Pedlar details his involvement with Lever Bros and Unilever. For an exploration of how Mitrany's involvement with Lever Brothers and Unilever contributed to his functional conception of international organisation, see Or Rosenboim, 'From the private to the public and back again: The international thought of David Mitrany, 1940–1949', *Les Cahiers européens de Sciences Po*, 2:2 (2013), available at: [http://open-access.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/18401/1/n%C2%B02\\_2013\\_Rosenboim%20%281%29.pdf](http://open-access.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/18401/1/n%C2%B02_2013_Rosenboim%20%281%29.pdf) accessed on 23 October 2109 via City, University of London Institutional Repository; Dorothy Anderson, 'David Mitrany (1888–1975): An appreciation of his life and work', *Review of International Studies*, 24:4 (1998), pp. 577–92; Frederick Pedlar, 'Mitrany in Unilever', *Millennium*, 5:2 (1976), pp. 196–9.

<sup>33</sup>David Mitrany, 'The political consequences of economic planning', *Yale Review*, 23:4 (1932), pp. 697–701; Mitrany, *The Progress of International Government*, p. 127.

but in his view both the war and the growing intersection of nationalism with social concerns exacerbated its consequences. As he cautioned several times in the years immediately following the war, national planning could not work side by side with *laissez faire* in the international sphere.<sup>34</sup> Private firms were becoming increasingly dependent on states to provide the common economic infrastructure on which their activities relied, and with this came a much deeper public involvement in 'private' issues. This could only make international politics a more sharply zero-sum game.<sup>35</sup>

Mitrany joined Carr on another aspect of the deep-seated nature of change confronting the postwar world, which was how to organise and provide for what they both called the 'service state', or what today we call the welfare state. They concurred on the historic significance of the advent of social security and its provision by the state, and saw in this development a profound and deep-seated transformation in the way that citizens related to each other, to the economy, and to their polity. But they also recognised – Mitrany slightly more emphatically than Carr – that this development raised the stakes for international cooperation. With states now seemingly held responsible for the social security of their citizens, the consequences of providing this made the operation of market economy an even more important political issue with potentially conflictual international consequences. It is on this final point that Mitrany, Carr and Polanyi are also joined: the scope conditions of the 'great transformation' lay in the organisation of *world* market economy, and especially in the imperative to recast its operative principles. How to do this was a critical concern that they all agreed required concerted state action.

### **The international scale of the economic challenge**

Modern IPE is split on the relationship of national economies to the global political economy. On one side are many who adopt what is now identified as an 'open economy politics' (OEP) view, which is that the global economy is the sum total of all domestic (or national) economies added together in terms of their international economic exchange.<sup>36</sup> IPE from an OEP perspective derives the structure of the global political economy from the cumulative interactions of its constituent elements; its structure and organisation reflect how the preferences and interests of these elements get transmitted upwards (and hence the focus on the triptych of ideas, interests, and institutions). On the other side are those who view the structure of the global political economy as the principal source of its defining features, where pressures from the structure are refracted downwards to the constituent units. The structure itself provides for its central dynamics, whether we call this structure 'global capitalism', 'global economy', or even 'world system'.<sup>37</sup> Modern IPE is in part a dialogue among competing views over the weight of the global for our subject.

<sup>34</sup>David Mitrany, 'The international consequences of national planning', *Yale Review*, 37:1 (1947), p. 28; David Mitrany, 'New horizons for management', *Millennium*, 5:2 (1976), p. 195 (this piece was originally published in *Progress*, 222 (spring 1949), the internal magazine of Unilever, Inc.).

<sup>35</sup>David Mitrany, 'National planning and international conflict', *Common Wealth Review*, 3:9 (New Series), pp. 9–10; see also Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*, pp. 70–4.

<sup>36</sup>For discussion of open economy politics as an approach to IPE, see Cohen, *International Political Economy*, Lake, 'Open economy politics'; and Thomas Oatley, 'The reductionist gamble: Open economy politics in the global economy', *International Organization*, 65:2 (2011), pp. 311–41.

<sup>37</sup>We can see this debate at work throughout IPE's modern history and across different intellectual traditions. See, for example, Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, NY: Academic Press, 1974); Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., 1986); Robert W. Cox, *Production, Power and World Order: Social Forces and the Making of History* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1987); Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); William Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); and Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire* (London, UK: Verso, 2012).



If OEP scholarship reveals an ongoing divide in modern IPE, it is instructive to recognise how very much at home in this debate are Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany. On the OEP side, as it were, I would place Carr and Mitrany, albeit not without taking note of an important caveat. For each of them the line of formation of market economy moves from the national to the global and runs most importantly through the Great Powers of the day, most significantly the United States and Russia, followed at some distance by Britain. This is because of the great weight each places on the newly developed capacity of states to plan their economies. For Carr and Mitrany, as we saw above, this would inevitably lead to the need to organise and plan the global economy. Carr foresaw this very clearly in his wartime work, *Conditions of Peace*, in which he observes that the post-war world will be a world of disorganised capitalism, desperately short of raw materials and investment, but yet at the same time faced with overwhelming demand for reconstruction and employment opportunities.<sup>38</sup> Only a few years after the war, in the lectures on *The New Society*, he extended these observations to include the effects of a deep-seated change in the attitude towards work and material living standards, both of which amplified the crucial requirement to plan economic exchange on an international scale.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, he saw that decolonisation – then in its infancy but gathering pace – would add to this demand because the new states of the world would not be satisfied with joining a world left to the dictates of *laissez faire* economics and the so-called ‘harmony of interests’.<sup>40</sup> From every vantage point that he contemplated the future of world market economy, Carr predicted a central role for state planning.

Mitrany also considered the importance of planning on an international scale for the market economy to operate successfully, but he did not always and necessarily connect this to states *per se*. Carr and Mitrany are often contrasted in terms of their views on the importance of international organisation in international relations, but in one important respect this is a false distinction, for both saw the intrinsic need for planning even though they believed it could best be carried out by different means. Carr’s reading of modern history placed the state at the center of the action, whereas Mitrany was rather more impressed by the myriad activities carried out by delegated authorities that enabled modern life to progress easily from day to day, and which were not directly subject to government influence (even if they required government direction to be established).<sup>41</sup> This was how, for him, politics and economics had become progressively entwined during the nineteenth century within national states, and he was convinced this was also the best path forward on an international scale.<sup>42</sup> A sustainable world market economy required a common, public infrastructure for all the reasons Carr laid out, but Mitrany saw this infrastructure being established less by constitutional means (that is, by formal treaties between states) and more by functional means, by which sovereignty would, in his terms, be ‘abridged’ from centralised to functional authorities that were better placed to deliver the services modern life demanded.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, pp. 173–7, 182–4.

<sup>39</sup>Carr, *The New Society*, p. 87.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 95–6.

<sup>41</sup>As one scholar notes in relation to Mitrany’s functional theory of politics, while it placed government at its centre, it was not necessarily a ‘state-based’ theory of government. Lucian M. Ashworth, ‘David Mitrany and south-east Europe: the Balkan key to world peace’, *The Historical Review*, 2 (2005), p. 219.

<sup>42</sup>Mitrany, ‘The political consequences of economic planning’, pp. 692–7. Polanyi echoes some aspects of Mitrany’s more functional view of the historical process. For both scholars the advent of nineteenth-century market civilisation reflects the complex interactions of many functional entanglements connected to how society was organised *in toto*, rather than being a singular product of class antagonism. See Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, pp. 152–4.

<sup>43</sup>Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*, p. 30. This point is reaffirmed in Jens Steffek, ‘The cosmopolitanism of David Mitrany: Equality, devolution and functional democracy beyond the state’, *International Relations*, 29:1 (2015), pp. 29–31. Carr was at times also rather ‘functional’ in his view of how planning and indeed international cooperation in general might best be carried out, especially in relation to achieving the requisite level of what Suganami refers to as ‘welfare internationalism’, which both Mitrany and Carr advocated. He was furthermore quite pragmatic about how freedom for all could be attained, especially where it involved the infringement of some liberties so that certain basic functions in society (such as driving) could be

Moreover, Carr and Mitrany agreed that the provision of this common, public economic infrastructure on an international scale could only come from some combination of American and Soviet leadership. Both recognised that each new colossus had come through the interwar period a changed nation, and that the new institutions each had forged would have an outsized impact on global political and economic arrangements. In this sense they are not ‘purist’ OEP scholars insofar as they would insist that the structure of the global political economy is disproportionately influenced by only a handful of states, those which are also Great Powers: they did not entirely abandon an appreciation of the ‘structural’ features of world market economy. Here Carr was perhaps slightly more impressed by the changes wrought in Soviet Russia, while Mitrany – due in no small part to the time he spent in the United States each year throughout the 1930s at the Institute for Advanced Study – was much more taken by the way in which the New Deal had utterly transformed the capacity of America’s federal institutions. In his view, the New Deal had made a proper national state out of the American federal government, and he believed that this example provided a pathway to the future extension of functional authority internationally.<sup>44</sup> Even if the United States would not always lead the international planning necessary for world market economy to take shape, the example of how it had become a genuinely national state (and economy) provided many lessons for others to follow. It only needs to be added here that Carr too fully appreciated the momentous impact of the New Deal on America’s international behaviour, and he argued in *The New Society* that the relationship between Russia and America on the world stage would undoubtedly be the determinate factor in the evolution of the postwar world.<sup>45</sup>

If Carr and Mitrany in some respects prefigure today’s OEP scholars, Polanyi comes down much more firmly (albeit not unambiguously) on the side of their critics. While he locates the origins of market economy in the history of the English countryside and the emergence there of artificial markets for labour, land, and money (his so-called ‘fictitious commodities’), he is also clear that the self-regulating market is the fount and matrix of nineteenth-century civilisation, which is a market civilisation.<sup>46</sup> It may be that the self-regulating market was an English invention, but it was also a global phenomenon whose trajectory was both inevitable and necessary. Market economy in effect needed to become world market economy in order to survive. Yet its tragic destiny was also to unravel precisely at the point when this was achieved, because for Polanyi world market economy was itself unsustainable socially, politically, and economically.<sup>47</sup>

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safely and effectively organised; see, for example, Carr, *The New Society*, p. 110. Others too have commented on the overlap between Carr and Mitrany on this point. See Hidemi Suganami, *The Domestic Analogy and World Order Proposals* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 100–11; William Scheuerman, ‘The (classical) realist vision of global reform’, *International Theory*, 2:2 (2010), p. 260; and Ashworth, ‘David Mitrany on the international anarchy’, pp. 318–20.

<sup>44</sup>Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*, pp. 57–8; See Steffek, ‘The cosmopolitanism of David Mitrany’, pp. 34–5. This is perhaps one reason why Mitrany was never invited to join any of the organisations formed by those concerned to check and ‘encase’ the authority of nation-states, and who became identified as neoliberal thinkers. He saw the New Deal as a model for the international extension of public administration, whereas neoliberal thinkers, and especially those associated with the ‘Geneva School’, were determined to oppose the internationalisation of the New Deal at all costs. See, for example, Slobodian, *Globalists*, pp. 16–17. Mitrany does not feature in Slobodian’s history of the emergence of neoliberalism.

<sup>45</sup>Carr, *The New Society*, pp. 87–90. He had been deeply impressed by how far the New Deal had affected America during an extended lecture tour during the winter of 1938, where among other activities he visited a TVA site just outside of Knoxville. Moreover, this trip came only months after a lengthy tour of Russia and Germany. Carr was therefore well acquainted with the growing state capacities among the world’s emerging Great Powers. See Carr Papers, Box 29–30, Appointment Diaries and published reviews/interviews/obituaries, entries for April to May 1937 and January to April 1938.

<sup>46</sup>Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, pp. 3–5.

<sup>47</sup>Although not clearly evident in *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi’s critique of market economy was deeply informed by his engagement while in Vienna with the authoritarian impulses often required to secure private property under the political condition of electoral democracy. His thinking here was guided by a twin commitment to a form of Christian political ethics alongside the embrace of socialist ideals concerning work and ownership. See Gareth Dale, *Karl Polanyi: The Limits of the Market* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), ch. 1; Dale, *Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left*, ch. 3.

The key point here is that the scale of market economy is worldwide from the get go. When it failed, no constituent unit could stand on its own; the entire system would need to be refashioned. This is the tragedy of the great transformation, even as it is the promise of the double movement. It is, as Sandra Halperin notes rather critically, a top-down conception of the global political economy.<sup>48</sup>

On the question of the scale of the economic challenge facing the postwar world, our three scholars are united in recognising not only that a fundamental and deep-seated change has taken hold, but that this change derives from the aftershocks of the Industrial Revolution and the collapse of organised capitalism on a world scale. They understand that a great social revolution has accompanied this collapse, and that this revolution has generated new forms of collective political mobilisation that have powered forward a double movement that has made new and unprecedented demands on behalf of workers and citizens around the world, whether they live in old established nations or new or about-to-become independent ones. As Carr put it in *The New Society*, the social and colonial revolutions provided the bedrock for a world transformed, and no feature of nineteenth-century institutions could offer guidance for the future.<sup>49</sup> To chart the way forward required a clear understanding of the problems confronting the world, the scale on which those problems were organised, and a set of prescriptions for how to tackle them. And whatever their prescriptions, Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany were for the most part agreed that the initiative had to come from the state in its new, scaled up capacity.

### ***The international politics of an expanded state***

All three of our thinkers participated in the search for a renewed postwar world that would be sustainable in terms of its political economy and able to meet the complex challenges thrown up by what they considered to be a great transformation. Polanyi, perhaps the purest intellectual among them, had been at work since just before the war on his effort to identify the problem and point towards a solution.<sup>50</sup> Carr, in his capacity as a deputy editor at *The Times*, arguably Britain's most influential newspaper at the time and an organ of elite opinion, was active throughout the war prodding public debate towards a realistic appraisal of what was necessary and possible under postwar conditions.<sup>51</sup> And Mitrany, working during the early years of the war for the Foreign Office on a Chatham House-sponsored research group, and then upon leaving this post as an independent expert, contributed to public debate with his 1943 Chatham House pamphlet, *A Working Peace System*, which ultimately had a print run in excess of 10,000 copies.<sup>52</sup> What united their efforts, when looking forward to the international politics of the postwar world, was the indispensable and powerful role of an expanded state in making world order.

All three were adamant that a liberal system of world market economy was finished, and that something unprecedented and new was taking its place. As noted above, they placed great

<sup>48</sup>Sandra Halperin, 'Dynamics of conflict and system change: The *Great Transformation* revisited', *European Journal of International Relations*, 10:2 (2004), p. 266.

<sup>49</sup>Carr, *The New Society*, pp. 95–6. Polanyi put this same point in the following way: 'Far as mankind is from adapting itself to the use of machines (a key effect of the Industrial Revolution), and great as the pending changes are, the restoration of the past is as impossible as the transferring of our troubles to another planet.' Mitrany sees it thus: 'Hence the argument that opposes democracy to totalitarianism does not call the real issue. It is much too simple. Society is everywhere in transition. Its problem after a century of laissez faire philosophy is to sift anew, in the light of new economic possibilities and of new social aspirations, from what is private from what has to be public, and in the latter sphere, from what is local and national from what is wider.' Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, pp. 250–1; Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*, p. 99.

<sup>50</sup>Dale, 'In search of Karl Polanyi's International Relation's theory', p. 414.

<sup>51</sup>Jones, *E. H. Carr and International Relations*, pp. 72–7; Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity*, ch. 4.

<sup>52</sup>So popular was this pamphlet that US Vice-President Henry Wallace sent a request to Mitrany for a copy. Mitrany Papers, Box 62, Correspondence III 1920s–60s, File: 'Personal Letters', letter from Henry A. Wallace, dated 20 September 1943. On Google Scholar this is Mitrany's most cited publication, with just over 3,050 citations (to the 1966 reissued version). Accessed 28 April 2021.

emphasis on the world historical consequences of Russia's Five Year Plans and America's New Deal, with Polanyi for example calling Russia's turn to 'Socialism in One Country' the beginning of its second revolution and 'the *first* of the great social changes that transformed our world in the thirties ... [It] formed part of a simultaneous universal transformation.'<sup>53</sup> This turn – wherever it occurred – could only be led by states, which each thought necessary in order to preserve and extend the arena of freedom for individual citizens. They all connected the capacity to be free to the extent to which states could provide social security to their citizens.

In this sense all three agreed on the nature of freedom in the modern world. They saw how 'freedom' under liberal political economy had become subject to what Carr called the 'economic whip',<sup>54</sup> and that to make it real required a new degree of social protection that was impossible to achieve in a self-regulating market. To fulfill the demand for social protection required extensive economic and social planning, which could not stop at a country's borders. Mitrany was perhaps the clearest on how extensive international planning would have to become, but both Carr and Polanyi also recognised that international trade and investment would henceforth fall under the purview of some form of planning, whether global or regional in scope.<sup>55</sup> The critical consideration here though was the movement of citizens *qua* workers from being subjects of economic discipline to becoming active determinants of their own freedom, and this movement was made possible through a greater role for the state in the organisation of the market economy, both nationally and globally.

Another area of convergence among our scholars concerns the state and its democratic form. Although this concern is expressed differently by each, the overlap among them points to the injunction that the postwar world would need to become much more democratic if the fruits of moving beyond liberal market economy were to be realised and adequately shared. For Polanyi, the actual achievement of individual freedom required citizens to be protected from material and social deprivation, which could best be accomplished by enabling citizens to work together to repair the bonds of social community without fear of starvation and poverty hovering over them. Because it could only be their common effort acting through government that could achieve this result, the rights of citizens would need to be strengthened so that government could not, as under fascism, arbitrarily strip them away.<sup>56</sup> This to my mind is co-equal with a strengthening of democracy itself, to place it on a sounder and more sustainable footing. Carr concurs with this conclusion, even if his reasoning runs more in terms of how new forms of collective political mobilisation had spurred a deepening of democracy under new social conditions.<sup>57</sup> And for Mitrany, every advance in the provision of the technical necessities of modern life had been accompanied not by a loss of control for citizens over their daily lives, but rather by a strengthening of their sovereign capacities over the organisation of modern life.<sup>58</sup> Ultimately their shared point was that the demand for social protection was drawing the state much deeper into the organisation of the economy, and if the newfound power of the state for control of both national and international activities was not to be exploited and/or abused, stronger democratic ties between citizens and their governments would need to be formed. They each saw the possibility for a new and more democratic era to be part and parcel of the new society.

The final point on which Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany cohere in terms of the international politics of the postwar world lies with the formative role of nationalism on states in relation to their economic organisation. This shared theme is evident in how each considers the evolution of the

<sup>53</sup>Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, p. 247, emphasis in original.

<sup>54</sup>Carr, *The New Society*, pp. 52–60; see also Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, pp. 28–36.

<sup>55</sup>Mitrany, 'The international consequences of national planning'; Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, pp. 90–5, 256–70; Karl Polanyi, 'Universal capitalism or regional planning?', *London Quarterly Review*, 10:3 (1945), pp. 86–91. See also Dale, 'In search of Karl Polanyi's International Relation's theory', pp. 417–20.

<sup>56</sup>Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, p. 255.

<sup>57</sup>Carr, *The New Society*, pp. 78–9.

<sup>58</sup>Mitrany, *The Progress of International Government*, pp. 122–30.

state and the particular way in which state institutions were responding to the multi-pronged pressures of world market economy. In Mitrany's view, while the nationalism of the nineteenth century was cultural insofar as it pertained to identities, the nationalism of the twentieth century had become far more deep-rooted through its concern with society and socialisation.<sup>59</sup> As the ethos of nationalism evolved, it pushed states to more strongly yoke together the arenas of the national and the international, with significant consequences for how they worked to negotiate the common infrastructure of world market economy.<sup>60</sup> This is why, for Mitrany, the functional approach to international administration provided such promise: it stood the best chance of mitigating the high stakes that populations and their governments were investing in international negotiations for common institutions.<sup>61</sup> In other words for Mitrany, precisely because politics was now entwined much more deeply within and across societies, it needed to be tempered and insulated from the delivery of modern life's core social security concerns, and he saw the functional approach as the clearest way to provide this insulation.<sup>62</sup>

Carr and Polanyi also recognised the enormous new power of nationalism, and especially its key role in unleashing fascism on the world. In effect, for them fascism did not represent evil incarnate; rather, it was simply one possible response to the parallel development of nationalism alongside the corrosive effects of an unravelling liberal market economy.<sup>63</sup> Polanyi's analysis of fascism in *The Great Transformation* saw it as the inevitable outgrowth of the utopian tragedy of liberalism; the link between the breakdown of market economy and the fascist scourge was for him direct and universal and not confined to revisionist states.<sup>64</sup> Remedying the tragedy of market economy – international capitalism as he also styled it – promised to shift the track of nationalism from a negative to a positive force in society. A sustainable political response to nationalism might more comprehensively secure the commitment to a welfare state because the social roots of nationalism recognised the societal need for re-embedding the economy into societal interests – for emphasising 'habitation' over 'improvement'.<sup>65</sup> To realign nationalism away from conservative and counter-revolutionary forces and towards progressive, forward-looking elements of society that embraced planning at both the national and global levels was for him the most promising way to secure freedom in the postwar world, precisely because it acknowledged society and its needs as the starting point to freedom.<sup>66</sup>

Carr followed Polanyi in recognising nationalism to be one part of the equation that disassembled liberalism as a social organising principle. The liberal world was not able to withstand the rise of nationalism because the 'discovery' of society allowed nationalism to challenge the myth of the harmony of interests and to arrange an array of powerful forces against it. These

<sup>59</sup>Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*, pp. 41–2; Mitrany, 'The international consequences of national planning', pp. 26–7.

<sup>60</sup>He called the product of the intersection of nationalism with planning 'planned nationalism', which in his view was an unprecedented development in world affairs. Mitrany Papers, Box 46, Essays on International Government, pp. xxx–xxxiii. This essay seems to have been written initially in the early 1960s, but I have been unable to track down where or even if it was actually published. Interestingly, Carr uses a similar term to describe a not dissimilar process: 'socialized nationalism'. Carr, *Nationalism and After*, p. 43.

<sup>61</sup>For a reading of Mitrany's functionalism, which recognises the interplay of his political economy concerns, see several of the contributions to Lucian M. Ashworth and David Long (eds), *New Perspectives on International Functionalism* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 1999).

<sup>62</sup>Steffek, 'The cosmopolitanism of David Mitrany', pp. 29–31; Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism*, pp. 44–5.

<sup>63</sup>Indeed, reading how Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany situate their discussion of fascism in these works as simply one of several alternative forms of political economy can be somewhat unsettling to contemporary sensibilities, for their language here is neutral and analytical. In personal terms, however, Polanyi was much more deeply affected by fascism than Carr, or even Mitrany most likely, who it must be recalled had many acquaintances across central and southeastern Europe. Not only was Polanyi forced to quit Austria on account of fascist politics, but he also lost family members to the Holocaust, including his sister and her husband. See Dale, 'In search of Karl Polanyi's International Relation's theory', pp. 174–8.

<sup>64</sup>Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, pp. 239–42.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 258A.



forces were more naturally aligned with ideas expressing community and sociality, whether of the New Deal or Soviet variety. Nationalism, in a way, was the revenge of society on liberalism, and it was unstoppable once called into being.<sup>67</sup> Planning was also an essential feature of nationalism in the modern world, so for Carr the pertinent question concerned how far the institutions under nationalism's purview would coalesce: whether on some kind of inter-imperial, regional or even universal basis. His answer evolved quite substantially over the decade from the early 1940s to the early 1950s, but eventually settled on a form of state sovereignty overlain by the extensive capacities acquired by the postwar superpowers via their negotiation of the political mobilisation that mass democracy had ushered in.<sup>68</sup> By the time of the *New Society* lectures, however, he clearly saw that nationalism would remain captured by domestic social forces and institutions rather than by universal ones, and this realisation reinforced the conclusions he first reached a decade earlier in the *Twenty Years' Crisis*, concerning the compromised potential of international organisation as an expression of an effectual universal will.<sup>69</sup> Nationalism enhanced the force and durability of national states, leading to a diminution of the 'international' in his account of world politics. It deepened the power of states, and especially the Great Powers, and so would be a potent constituent element of the new world order for as far ahead as he could see.

Considered collectively, the writings of Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany on the problems and prospects of world order from the years of the Great Depression through to the immediate postwar period reflect a nearly modern form of IPE. They agreed on the shape of the problems confronting the world, which, although they were many and varied, intersected around a core set of political economy problems operating on an international scale. In slightly different ways but from within the same intellectual prism, our three scholars identified the unsustainability of the liberal conception of market economy as the wellspring of the problem, brought on by the consequences of the Industrial Revolution as these interacted with the inevitable demand for social protection. The push towards state planning had many political effects, including the recognition that a common global economic infrastructure was required if planning is to operate successfully at the national level. This push, however, deepened the commitment of states towards their international activities, leading to a heightened potential set of tensions in the domain of international politics. And the advent of nationalism and its connection to new forms of mass political mobilisation around certain kinds of societal demands further hardened states in terms of their involvement in international politics. The new political and economic landscape confronting policymakers after the Second World War could not rely on established institutional arrangements for guidance; the world had entered a new era and new thinking was demanded. All of this is about as close to modern IPE as one can get without actually establishing a discipline under that name.

### Insights from mid-century IPE

If the conversation I have assembled above constitutes a nearly modern version of IPE, what kinds of insights might it hold for contemporary IPE scholarship? I highlight three benefits that might come from re-engaging with this debate: (1) it suggests that theoretical barriers to disciplinary conversation might not be as irreconcilable as often portrayed; (2) it reinforces the importance of understanding collective political mobilisation as critical driver of fundamental change; and (3) it renews an appreciation for the utility of adopting a framework of historical sensitivity through which to consider issues connected to the organisation of the global political economy. Each of these insights can enrich contemporary IPE scholarship, and I consider them in turn.

<sup>67</sup>Carr, *Nationalism and After*, pp. 26–34.

<sup>68</sup>Carr, *The New Society*, pp. 81–91.

<sup>69</sup>E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, ed. Michael Cox (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2000 [orig. pub 1946]), pp. 209–13.

The first insight concerns the possibility of dialogue among scholars from very different intellectual traditions. In one respect the conversation I have established should be very surprising, as the theoretical frames of reference of our three scholars diverge quite remarkably. Polanyi was a traditional left intellectual, although not a Marxist.<sup>70</sup> Raised in Budapest in a Westernised, liberal environment in the years before the First World War, he undertook studies in law and statistics and became involved in radical intellectual groups such as the Galileo Circle. He even joined an upstart political party just prior to the war. His activities after the war, however, inclined towards journalism, teaching and scholarship, and it was during the formative period of 1920s 'Red' Vienna that his sensitivity towards the unsustainability of market economy blossomed. It was also where he became aware of the power of mobilisation, and of the ways in which nationalism could roil the work of international institutions such as the League of Nations. This period sowed the seeds which in time produced *The Great Transformation*.<sup>71</sup>

Carr, on the other hand, viewed political economy through a kind of nationalist/realist lens, even though he had acquired an appreciation for many aspects of Marxist thought.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, his training in history and his sensitivity towards the conditioned aspects of thought generated an enduring interest in how states, as the primary vectors of political mobilisation, responded to broader societal developments.<sup>73</sup> This intersects with Polanyi's concern with the organisation of market economy, providing both scholars with a common concern to understand the broad contours of industrial organisation and its multiple effects on social agency. Different intellectual traditions did not prevent a shared focus on the big picture of historical change.

Many consider Mitrany's work (and especially his functional approach) to be anchored broadly within the liberal tradition of international politics and political economy.<sup>74</sup> This also seems to be his own perception, as when he wrote to an American colleague in 1953, 'it is long since I learned that to be a liberal, and I can describe myself only as a "Manchester Guardian" liberal, is a lonely business'.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, there are many passages in Mitrany's writings where he upholds the virtues of an international division of labour, worries about concentrations of public power, and embraces the classic distinction between public and private sources of authority on which so much of the edifice of liberal internationalism rests.<sup>76</sup> And although he was certainly aware of the social conditioning of individuals and their identity, he himself was too much of an intellectual 'loner' to abandon individuality as a critical touchstone of modern political life.<sup>77</sup>

That three scholars from such widely divergent backgrounds could agree on the necessity to understand a set of issues that were central to the future of the world should provide inspiration to modern IPE scholars that we too can entertain a similarly productive conversation despite our

<sup>70</sup>Polanyi's complicated intellectual relationship to Marxism is explored in Dale (*Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left*) and Matthew Watson, 'The *Great Transformation* and progressive possibilities: The political limits of Polanyi's Marxian history of economic ideas', *Economy and Society*, 43:4 (2014), pp. 603–25.

<sup>71</sup>Dale, *Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left*, pp. 82–4.

<sup>72</sup>Jones, E. H. *Carr and International Relations*, pp. 57–9.

<sup>73</sup>E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1967 [orig. pub. 1961]), ch. 1.

<sup>74</sup>See, for example, Roger Tooze, 'The progress of international functionalism', *British Journal of International Studies*, 3:2 (1977), pp. 212–13; Keohane, *After Hegemony*, pp. 7–8; Rosenboim, 'From the private to the public and back again', pp. 20–1.

<sup>75</sup>Mitrany Papers, Box 57, American Academic Activities, File: 'Harvard, Yale – 1930 American Universities', letter to Robert Davis, dated 1 July 1953.

<sup>76</sup>This edifice is considered in some depth in Per Hammarlund, *Liberal Internationalism and the Decline of the State: The Thought of Richard Cobden, David Mitrany and Kenichi Ohmae* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2005).

<sup>77</sup>Perhaps this sense of the ultimate responsibility of the individual in political affairs speaks to his long-standing aversion to what he often perceived as the excesses of centralised, hierarchical bureaucracy, which since Weber, has been recognised as a necessary foundation of modern life. Scattered among his papers, for example, are numerous letters written to leading officials for the organisations in which he served (such as the Carnegie Endowment for World Peace, the Institute of Pacific Relations, the Foreign Research and Press Service, Chatham House, the Institute for Advanced Study, Political and Economic Planning, and Lever Bros and Unilever), complaining of the inanities of bureaucratic decisions which, in his view, simply made no sense because they were too far removed from the practical exigencies of the people involved in their everyday operations. He was by all accounts a rather prickly individual.

many theoretical differences. I suggest that three shared commitments anchored their IPE-inflected contributions. First, they agreed on the broad parameters of the problems confronting them, namely a disjuncture between the institutions of global order bequeathed to their generation and the explosive economic, social and political dynamics unleashed by the collapse of the liberal world market economy. In other words, they held similar views about the scope and scale of the world's fundamental challenges at mid-century. Second, they agreed on the range of questions that had to be asked of contemporary responses to this disjuncture. In Benjamin Cohen's catchy formulation, they all asked a version of the 'Really Big Question'.<sup>78</sup> They may not have asked exactly the same question, but the departure points for their interrogations were recognisable to each other. And finally, they agreed that answers could not come from the past, although they could be informed by a sensitivity to the past. That is to say, while they may have turned to different intellectual traditions for answers to the challenges of the mid-twentieth century, each of their answers intersected over a conception of history that brought coherence to their shared premises. In other words, 'nearly modern IPE' provides a model for engaging in a scholarly conversation that embraces rather than occludes intellectual diversity.

The second insight provided by our authors concerns the significance of political mobilisation as a key driver of change with respect to the structure of the global political economy. All three scholars were not only fascinated by the ways in which forms of political mobilisation were changing, they were also keen to chart how social and economic developments were in turn amplifying such changes. This was part and parcel of the institutional disjuncture they all agreed plagued mid-twentieth-century world politics. And even though each offered somewhat different interpretations of the significance of such developments, they agreed on the need to understand the consequences of mass political mobilisation in order to better align institutional arrangements with the forces that were driving the world forward.

Two important consequences flow from this insight. First, democracy is not displaced as a key institutional arrangement in terms of the organisation of world market economy. This helps in my view to secure the contemporary institutional relevance of their collective view of political economy. Writing after two world wars and years of authoritarian creep across much of the industrialised world, all three were intensely interested in the intersection of democracy and world order, if for no other reason than to comprehend the political consequences generated by the new age of technological innovation and mass production. And while none provided templates for the renewal of democracy, all understood the stakes for interstate conflict and social harmony under conditions where turbo-charged political mobilisation had no legitimate institutional outlet. As the third decade of the twenty-first century gets underway, the intellectual pay-offs of this insight should appear obvious.

The second consequence flowing from a focus on political mobilisation concerns how deeply nationalism continues to impact the shape of world market economy. Here, our nearly modern IPE scholars anticipated to an important degree just how far identity-based politics continues to be a constituent arena through which political economy flows. For them, economic factors alone cannot define the parameters of political mobilisation. To my mind this points to the importance of recent advances in IPE scholarship that consider identity and intersubjectivity to be significant constituent inputs into the formation of world market economy, and invites further examination of how those inputs change over time. It provides for a richer heritage of ideas to stock our intellectual toolkit.

The third insight that mid-century IPE provides us with concerns the utility of adopting an historical sensitivity to frame our understanding of change. We might, following Robert Cox, call this an 'historical mode of thought'.<sup>79</sup> While there is (and can be) no single consensus view on the best 'use' to make of history, I suggest that these three scholars considered history

<sup>78</sup>Cohen, *International Political Economy*, p. 66.

<sup>79</sup>Robert W. Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders: Beyond International Relations theory', *Millennium*, 10:2 (1981), p. 130.

to denote a conjoined but singularly important point of encounter between the present and future needs of society. This conception of history and its close analogue, time, contains methodological implications that do not sit squarely with some versions of modern social science, but neither are they entirely outside its orbit.

Part of the coherence which Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany share over the idea of history stems from their belief that a fundamental rupture had occurred in the organisation of world market economy between the late nineteenth century and the mid-point of the twentieth century. I noted above that all three understood the past was finished as a guide to the future. In this sense they agreed that history is uneven and discontinuous. They would, I am certain, join Mitrany in his quarrel with those who refused to recognise how different parts of society 'did not move at the same pace and in the same direction', preferring instead to attribute the movement of history to what he called 'concentric time epochs'.<sup>80</sup> 'History' does not always affect society uniformly; it is experienced at different speeds in different spheres, such as in the realm of cultural practices versus the arena of economic activity. Accepting the idea that discontinuities emerge sometimes in world history means that methodologically we must be prepared to examine new and novel institutional forms as pathways to the future. This view of history as non-linear I believe informs an important part of Mitrany's embrace of a more functional approach to politics.

Polanyi adds an important element to this conception of history by acknowledging that it is the rate of change that holds the key to determining how significant or impactful change can be for society.<sup>81</sup> One important but often overlooked conclusion he draws from his examination of the origins of market economy pertains to how English society coped with the damage of the enclosure movement, which unleashed the processes that ultimately culminated in the emergence of market economy and the Industrial Revolution. It was the Tudors (and early Stuarts) who slowed down and for a time blocked the consequences of enclosure, thereby providing society with valuable time to adjust to a totally new set of institutional arrangements. This suggests to Polanyi the critical role government can play in negotiating the parameters of market economy.<sup>82</sup> Although time passes unevenly and on occasion discontinuously, it is also amenable to manipulation by collectively mobilised institutions, most importantly and especially the state. Thus is a pathway to agency opened for Polanyi, and a way to begin to de-commodify the 'fictitious commodities' around which market economy had become constructed.

But perhaps the most thorough expression of the idea of history comes from Carr, the best-trained historian of the bunch. While his understanding of history is multilayered and complex, I wish to draw attention to one element that I believe resonates most forcefully with the historical ethos of Polanyi and Mitrany. This is the conviction that the crucial feature of an historical approach to the contemporary period is precisely the effort to understand it in terms of what he calls 'progressively emerging future ends'.<sup>83</sup> Like Polanyi and Mitrany, he is unwavering in his belief that there is direction to history, and that we cannot undertake a search for meaning and understanding in the record of human activity without holding to some kind of vision of where society is heading. It is the future – or more accurately, what the historian imagines the future to become – that unlocks how we are to understand our own time. Here Carr follows the Oxford philosopher R. G. Collingwood in accepting that our access to what the past was, much less how it came about, is in fact an act of imaginative reconstruction, simply because current researchers do not have actual access to past actors' thoughts and the reasons for their actions; they can only interrogate and reconstruct accounts of what they think those actors believed they were doing as they 'made' history.<sup>84</sup> Insofar as our objective is to understand the

<sup>80</sup>Mitrany Papers, Box 78, Misc IX, File 'Quakers', letter to Frank Wallin, dated 10 December 1965.

<sup>81</sup>I wish to thank Ilirjan Shehu for drawing this important facet of Polanyi's thought to my attention.

<sup>82</sup>Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, pp. 38–40.

<sup>83</sup>Carr, *What is History?*, p. 123.

<sup>84</sup>R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 282.

meaning of our own time, whether as historian or social scientist, we are forced to consider what is important to know about the present not in light of the past, but rather in light of where we anticipate going, or in other words the future.<sup>85</sup>

Adopting this kind of a historical sensitivity towards their object of study enables Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany to interrogate the needs of world order at mid-century in terms of the new institutions and forces which they see to be the conjoined drivers of 'the new society'. Their historical approach does not use the raw material of history as if it speaks to them in a singular, objective voice; rather, they are charting the contours of the present in light of a future that they see to be coming into being, a product of what Polanyi famously termed the 'great transformation'. This is in some respects the most controversial aspect of nearly modern IPE's insights for contemporary scholarship, since it sits awkwardly with the methodological tenets of much mainstream IPE.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany would be critical of many behavioural methodological techniques currently employed in IPE research, simply because these techniques often obscure the complexities of history and time as discontinuous and uneven, assuming instead that the future can be projected or modeled as a linear outgrowth of present conditions. Were these techniques, however, to become more open to incorporating the effects of time, to be able to model the discontinuous, as it were (as some historical institutionalists advocate), then I believe this insight from mid-century nearly modern IPE would in fact make an important contribution to contemporary research.<sup>87</sup> It resonates with those who call for scholarship in political economy and IPE to problematise its treatment of history and time in its research. These are complex issues, of course, and my point here is that nearly modern IPE reminds us of their ongoing conceptual importance.<sup>88</sup>

### Silences and gaps in mid-century IPE

To advocate for the insights of nearly modern IPE scholarship is not to overlook important silences and gaps in that research. Not only are certain themes much more visible today than they were at the mid-point of the twentieth century, but new issue areas have suddenly emerged as critical elements in our research. Among the silences I would include themes such as social reproduction and the gendered nature of work, as well as the complicated question of race within the organisation of the global political economy. Among the gaps I would single out the intricate role of knowledge in the creation of value, which has emerged as potential anchor point of contemporary IPE research.

The question of gender, for example, is quite simply absent from nearly modern IPE as construed here. Despite engaging with the idea of how and to what extent an economy is embedded within society, for example, Polanyi nowhere devotes any appreciable attention to its gendered dimensions. And while Carr does touch occasionally on questions of family and the role of women in society and the economy, he only does so in the context of his multi-volume history of Soviet Russia; nowhere among the publications considered here does the issue of gender

<sup>85</sup>I explore this aspect of Carr's thought in more detail in Germain, 'E. H. Carr and IPE', pp. 955–6.

<sup>86</sup>However, for an insightful and provocative argument that considers the methodological complementarities between mainstream and heterodox IPE, see Craig N. Murphy and Douglas Nelson, 'International Political Economy: A tale of two heterodoxies', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 3:3 (2001), pp. 401–04.

<sup>87</sup>Examples of the historical institutionalist call for more attention to be paid to the idea of time can be found in Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions and Social Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Wesley Widmaier, *Economic Ideas in Political Time: The Rise and Fall of Economic Orders from the Progressive Era to the Global Financial Crisis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>88</sup>In previous work I have considered how thinking about time and history at multiple scales can assist our understanding of the political economy of global finance. I am currently completing a manuscript that explores the broader problem of history in IPE, on which this research draws. See Randall Germain, 'The worlds of finance: A Braudelian perspective on IPE', *European Journal of International Relations*, 2:2 (1996), pp. 201–30.



and work, or gender and social reproduction arise, despite its obvious relevance to the sustainability of a reconstructed world market economy. As for Mitrany, who like Polanyi and Carr was intensely concerned with how different kinds of social groups were responding to the ‘great transformation’, he nowhere considers women as one such grouping. He never, for example, asks how childcare might benefit from the kind of international planning that he saw as central to the successful delivery of functional social services for which citizens of all countries were clamouring.

The question of race as a contributing element of world market economy is similarly elided in this version of nearly modern IPE, although not quite as comprehensively as gender. This is because in different ways each of our scholars touches upon race as part of their understanding of how market economy functions, albeit without drawing the conclusions that might seem obvious to contemporary researchers. For example, Polanyi’s discussion of the extension of market economy to a world scale includes observations about its rapacious effects on colonised and otherwise subjugated people, who he notes suffered a fate not dissimilar to English rural and factory workers during the Industrial Revolution.<sup>89</sup> Carr and Mitrany were similarly aware of the relationship of race to the organisation of the world market economy through their close observation over the entire interwar period of what was then called the question of ‘national minorities’, who were often (but not always) non-Western or colonial populations in some kind of dependent relationship to Europe’s Great Powers. They were not alone, for example, in noting how the post-First World War push for national self-determination and the extension of the mandate system had compromised the sustainability of the international economy, which was one more contributing factor to the economic disruption of that period. They were also alert to the processes and consequences of decolonisation, which were adding new and complicated issues to the maelstrom of international politics. It does need to be recognised, however, that the language they used to consider these issues sometimes included phrases such as the term ‘backward peoples’ when assessing the so-called march of civilisation. Although Hobson does not include any of our nearly modern scholars in his assessment of the Eurocentric biases of modern IPE, he would not be remiss to do so.<sup>90</sup>

At the same time, even if the work of these scholars ignores or underplays certain themes that today resonate much more deeply across modern IPE scholarship, we should also consider whether their work could be extended in some way to include such themes. In the case of Polanyi, for example, Nancy Fraser has suggested that one of Polanyi’s key concepts – the double movement – might be extended to embrace emancipatory projects as a third pole around which efforts to respond to neoliberalism have been organised, among which she identifies feminist, anti-racist and anti-imperialist activism.<sup>91</sup> In her extension of Polanyi’s insights, Fraser is searching for ways to retain the potency of his analysis by remedying certain analytical blind spots. She is implying that we can push Polanyi beyond his own initial starting points, to overcome the blinders that they assume.

In a similar vein, although they use a different language, I think it is the case that both Carr and Mitrany were sensitive to the wellsprings of what can be identified as ‘postcolonial’ IPE.<sup>92</sup> Carr saw the ‘colonial revolution’ as much a reaction against racial inequality as against political and economic inequality, and it was inevitably bound up with Europe’s decline as a seat of

<sup>89</sup>As he notes in his discussion of labour as a commodity under market economy: ‘What the white man may still occasionally practice in remote regions today, namely the smashing up of social structures in order to extract the element of labor from them, was done in the eighteenth century to white populations by white men for similar purposes.’ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, p. 166; See also Guminder Bhambra, ‘Colonial global economy: Towards a theoretical reorientation of political economy’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 28:2 (2021), p. 308.

<sup>90</sup>Hobson, ‘Part 1 – Revealing the Eurocentric foundations of IPE’.

<sup>91</sup>Nancy Fraser, ‘A triple movement? Parsing the politics of crisis after Polanyi’, *New Left Review*, 81 (May/June 2013), pp. 127–31.

<sup>92</sup>Bhambra, ‘Colonial global economy’.

international power and authority.<sup>93</sup> It also formed a subtheme in his consideration of the consequences of nationalism for international politics, although he did not provide much beyond this initial observation.<sup>94</sup> For Mitrany, what we would call postcolonial politics involved most importantly the question of how to deliver modern – by which he meant functional – government to the former British empire. He delivered a report to the Hansard Society in 1953 titled ‘The Problem of Parliamentary Government in the Colonies’, where he advocated for a functional form of government as the best option to deliver competent and efficient administration to new states. Such government had the best chance of providing ‘a more real means and measure of self-government’ to these populations, and of avoiding the kind of communal strife such as had emerged in India after Britain’s hurried withdrawal.<sup>95</sup> As with some of Polanyi’s insights, then, the work of Carr and Mitrany is not devoid of tools to address themes that now resonate in modern IPE, even though they themselves did not utilise them extensively in their own work. It does not seem too difficult, in other words, to extend these tools in ways their originators did not.

When we turn our attention to issues that are much more salient now for IPE scholarship than at mid-century, several candidates are possible. We could for example consider how far their work allows us to consider questions related to climate change and the biosphere, or globalised production chains, neither of which they wrote about. But the most important contemporary issue that I think their work ignores concerns the growing weight of knowledge for the generation of wealth within and across economies. Whether styled in terms of high-technology, digital media, platform capitalism, or intellectual property rights, any consideration of wealth creation or value or even capitalism itself must allocate a growing element of analysis to understanding how intangible ideas, practices, and products shape the scale, range, and structure of economic transactions. There is very little in Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany that suggests how these kinds of issues might be incorporated into a fully modern conceptual framework of IPE, in part because they belong to that generation of thinkers who understood the economy to be composed primarily of the production, exchange and consumption of material products, or a ‘goods’ economy. This view no longer holds sway for modern IPE scholarship, so returning to nearly modern IPE carries with it the need to overcome a significant conceptual deficit in order to be utilised productively. Fortunately this is not a hurdle unknown to researchers, who often extend previous frameworks to take account of new issues and themes. But it does need to be done.

### Conclusion: Expanding the common heritage of IPE

I have argued that revisiting the intellectual history of an earlier, nearly modern IPE debate, holds insights for contemporary IPE scholarship. But how do we weigh the utility of their ideas – which include helpful pointers about how to conduct an IPE-inflected conversation that embraces theoretical diversity, the reaffirmation of the centrality of political mobilisation as an important avenue of research, and the injunction to make room within IPE for an historically sensitive form of enquiry – in light of the silences and gaps in their approaches? These are not insignificant, and include eliding the role of gender and race as key themes relevant for our understanding of the organisation of world market economy, while also ignoring certain issues that have now assumed a central importance, such as the role of knowledge and the more intangible aspects of how value and wealth are created today. Making this assessment lies at the heart of establishing how we are able to effectively use the intellectual resources provided by past scholarship.

One way to make this assessment is simply to dismiss the contemporary relevance of nearly modern IPE. We might conclude that the silences and gaps in their work outweigh the insights:

<sup>93</sup>Carr, *The New Society*, p. 92.

<sup>94</sup>Carr, *Nationalism and After*, pp. 51–60.

<sup>95</sup>This essay is included in David Mitrany, *The Functional Theory of Politics* (London, UK: M. Robertson for the London School of Economics and Politics, 1975), p. 215.

to understand the motor dynamics of the contemporary global political economy requires an entirely new frame of reference that speaks more directly to what they failed to account for. Their work might have been a touchstone on the way to modern IPE, but it is nothing more than that: read it and move on. Or we could reject their work because the methods they use do not meet the scientific standards of much contemporary scholarship: again, read it and move on. Or, finally, we could dismiss their analyses because in fact their vision of the ‘progressively emerging future ends’ of the mid-twentieth century proved to be incorrect. The world they thought was coming into being did not materialise, and many of what they believed to be the most unsustainable liberal features of market economy continue to retain their durability, albeit in new and modified forms. Why would we examine nearly modern IPE if its predictive abilities were so poor?

And yet I would caution against making an assessment that dismisses the utility of this work. Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany may have misread the future, but in many ways they asked the kinds of questions about the future that we also need to ask today. The attention they devoted to collective political mobilisation as a driving force that shapes world market economy reinforces many of the concerns our scholarship currently explores. Their focus on the mismatch between the world’s need for a common economic infrastructure and what global institutions are able to provide resonates with contemporary efforts to understand the viability and sustainability of globalisation and global economic governance. Their answers to these questions may have missed the mark in certain respects, but the relevance of their mid-century questions has not diminished, and is still able to add depth and nuance to contemporary research. Thus has nearly modern IPE transitioned to modern IPE.

Reading the work of Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany as part of the common heritage of IPE reinforces the extent to which we are heirs to the evolution of ideas, even if they are encased in their own history. This helps us to be aware of how far we have travelled intellectually, while also providing a touchstone for evaluating where we still need to go. Intellectual history can be a useful point of encounter to help us take stock, and my claim here is that the combined work of Polanyi, Carr, and Mitrany provides one such interesting point of encounter. It reveals that the prehistory of IPE contains a rich set of debates and ideas that remain of value to contemporary scholarship. The intellectual resources of nearly modern IPE are considerable for all of their silences and gaps, and modern IPE scholarship has much to benefit from a closer engagement with it.

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