

## On the Founding of, and Diversity Within, The Mont Pelerin Society

Jeremy Shearmur, Emeritus Fellow, School of Philosophy,  
Australian National University  
[Jeremy.Shearmur@anu.edu.au](mailto:Jeremy.Shearmur@anu.edu.au)

### Abstract:

Two important works have appeared quite recently on the Mont Pelerin Society: Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (eds), *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, and Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion*. In this paper – which is built on archive research at The Hoover Institution Archive, The University of Chicago, Grove City College, and Yale – I offer a contrasting view.

The paper has two parts. In the first, I take issue with the view that the Colloque Walter Lippmann in 1938 should really be seen as a key precursor to the MPS. While it is certainly true that this meeting brought together some of the people who were at the first meeting of the MPS, and important issues were discussed, I argue that it should be seen as part of the wider activities of Rougier – which were of a rather different character to the narrower and more academic focus of Hayek. Rougier – who developed a much better rapport with Lippmann than did Hayek – lost his role within attempts to organize classical liberals, as a result of his having undertaken some diplomatic activity on behalf of the French Vichy government. This left the field open for Hayek's more narrowly focussed concerns.

In the second part, I take issue with the theme of the Mont Pelerin Society as a 'thought collective'. I discuss four groups within it, with rather different agendas. First, there was Mises and a group of radical non-interventionists (some of whom attended the initial meeting as a quid pro quo for the Volker Fund funding the travel of the American participants). Second, there were the German conservative liberals Rüstow and Röpke who, while economic liberals in much of their approach, championed a distinctive – and interesting – program of intervention for the sake of certain kinds of social stability, linked to a diagnosis of the rootlessness of life in modern market-based societies, something which they contrasted with the French peasantry. Hayek took great pains to develop the MPS in such a way as to include them. Röpke resigned in connection with the disagreement about the administration of the society relating to Hunold – to which in their final stage, Hunold tried to give an ideological interpretation. Third, there was Hayek: I document some ways in which the society as it developed did not

live up to his hopes. Fourth, there were American economists in the mould of Friedman and Stigler. They were strongly professionalized, and I argue that they should be seen as in the mould of Henry Simons, who combined market-based economics with a concern for redistribution. I discuss some of the – ongoing – tensions that all of this produced, and suggest that more recent developments within the society have taken it further from Hayek's aims than it was originally.