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THE ASSOCIATION FOR HETERODOX ECONOMICS: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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Heterodoxy involves alternatives to orthodoxy. In economics it embraces diverse alternatives to the dominant neoclassical school, including the works of Post Keynesian, Marxian, Sraffian, Institutional-evolutionary, social, Austrian, and feminist economists.

Formed in 1999 to provide an annual conference where all heterodox economists could gather and hear each other present papers on theoretical, applied, and policy topics and issues that utilized their heterodox economics, the Association for Heterodox Economics (AHE) is the newest heterodox economic association in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Its mere existence upset the comfortable hegemonic world of the Royal Economic Society and its mainstream economists. The story I am going to tell of this heterodox upstart is from a specific advantage point—that as the founder of the Association of Heterodox Economics and a participant in its activities to the present day.

When I started teaching at De Montfort University in Leicester, England, in autumn 1991, there existed in the U.K. two Economics and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded heterodox economics study groups, the Post Keynesian Economics Study Group¹ and the Political Economy

¹ In 1988 Victoria Chick and Philip Arestis established the Post Keynesian Economics Study Group (PKESG). Its ESRC funding continued until the mid-1990s and since then it has been self-funded.

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Study Group.² Although each Group attracted a good following of heterodox economists to their seminars, the overlap of participants was not significant.

There was also the Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE) which had been established in 1970 (see Lee, 2001): it sponsored annual national conferences that attracted until 1996 (when they ceased), a fair number of Marxian economists and increasing number of Post Keynesian economists. However, the themes of the CSE conferences generally covered only a few areas that could be said to be of particular interest to heterodox economists.

Finally, there were the Malvern Political Economy conferences (1987 – 1996) which had a good range of heterodox papers; however, not all British heterodox economists participated.

Having taught in the United States before going to De Montfort, I had attended the Allied Social Sciences Association (ASSA) annual meeting many times. The one thing I found so appealing about that annual meeting was that most American heterodox economists of all tendencies attended. During the day I was able to go to a wide range of sessions put on by the Union for Radical Political Economics, the Association for Evolutionary Economics, and the Association for Social Economics, and in the evening attend the many heterodox economist social events.

The contrast between the open and relatively integrated community of heterodox economists I experienced in the U.S. and the relatively fragmented community of heterodox economists in the U.K. was quite unsettling to me. Thus, soon after I arrived in the U.K. I set out to create a more integrated heterodox community.

2 The Political Economy Seminar Group was established in the early 1980s by Francis Green and Steve Rankin. The themes of its seminars included Marxian and neo-Marxian political economy, Eastern Europe and the economics of transition, and the history and methodology of economics. In 1992 and 1993, the Group's applications to the ESRC for renewed study group funding were unsuccessful with the result that it folded (Green, 1992).

Background

The January 1991 *European Association for Evolutionary Political Economy Newsletter* published a letter from R. D. Davison in which he asked:

Is anyone interested in exploring the possibility of forming a British Chapter of EAEPE? It seems unlikely that the European body will be able to organise more than one Conference a year for obvious reasons but perhaps there are other people like myself who would welcome the opportunity of meeting others who share the conviction that conventional economics must give way to evolutionary economics but find it difficult or impossible to attend the Annual Conference in person. One suggestion is that we should try to organise an informal "Discussion Group"....The emphasis would be on informality rather than the reading of academic papers and the aim would be to provide a way in which we can become better acquainted on the personal level. We might also discuss ways of spreading the ideas of evolutionary economics to younger academic colleagues who are often carelessly shielded from such dangerous ideas.(Davison, 1991a, p. 4)

Desiring to recreate such an open, integrated heterodox community where all British heterodox economists could be involved, I responded to Davison's letter in September 1991. In the letter, I stated that I would be interested in establishing a U.K. chapter of EAEPE as an institutional base on which to establish a study group along the lines he suggested and from which to ask the Royal Economic Society for permission to have sessions at their annual conference. We agreed on this, so a mailing to all seventy-four U.K. members of EAEPE was carried out in December 1991 and January 1992 to see whether there was any support for establishing an EAEPE U.K. chapter for these purposes.³ There were

³ The letter read as follows:
We are testing the waters to see how many U.K. members of the European Association for Evolutionary Political Economy are interested in forming a U.K. chapter for the purpose of furthering evolutionary economics. In particular, the chapter could use its institutional base to request funds from the ESRC for a study group on evolutionary economics and to ask the Royal Economic Society to permit

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fifty-nine positive responses, although two were tempered by concerns that the new group might undermine the ESRC funding for and the current participation in the PKESG and the Political Economy Seminar Group and about the possible lack of emphasis on political economy and the human resource question. With such support, I wrote to the Steering Committee of EAEPE on 19 February 1992 requesting formal recognition of the U.K. chapter; and received a positive response on 9 March 1992:

...the Steering Committee meeting in Paris on 6th March gave enthusiastic and unanimous support to your proposal to form a UK chapter of EAEPE.

With the chapter formed, it was now possible to apply for study group funds from the ESRC. However, after discussions with Chick, Arestis, Green, and Rankin, I decided not to pursue ESRC study group funding; and, in return, Green and Rankin agreed to devote one of the PESG 1992-1993 seminars to papers on evolutionary political economy given by members of the chapter. The next course of action I pursued was to approach the Royal Economic Society (RES) about the chapter being permitted to sponsor papers and sessions at the annual RES conference, much in the same manner that heterodox economic associations sponsors papers and sessions at the annual meetings of the ASSA. Recognizing that the RES had never opened its conference to outside associations and organizations, I advanced two arguments why they might want to. The first was that it would increase attendance and the number of papers given at the conference. My second argument was that the Conference's apparent lack of intellectual and institutional diversity could be redressed through permitting various non-traditional economists, especially those from the polytechnic sector,⁴ to read papers and otherwise actively

it to have sessions at the annual RES conference. The study group would permit members to give papers in a somewhat informal situation and to become better acquainted on a personal level, while sessions at the RES conference would contribute to spreading the ideas of evolutionary economic among the younger academic colleagues who are often shielded from such ideas.

4 This letter was written when the higher education sector in the U.K. was divided into universities and polytechnics, with the latter generally considered second or third-ranked institutions, especially in terms of academic scholarship.

participate in the conference. In looking at the programs of both the 1991 and 1992 RES conferences, I was struck by their theoretical narrowness, with over 90% of the papers at each conference being in the neoclassical tradition, and by the extremely small number of papers being presented by economists from the polytechnic sector. Why this domination of university-based neoclassical economists presently exists is not at issue, but I can certainly say that the result of this domination is that many economists, including those in the EAEPE U.K. chapter, find the conference both elitist and extremely boring and uninteresting. Consequently, they will have nothing to do with it. I would like to think that the RES would like to change this widespread perception of its conference, and one way to do it would be to open it to other economic associations, especially those whose members have become disaffected with the conference (Lee, 1992b).

I concluded the letter with the offer that the chapter could sponsor three or four sessions consisting of six to eight papers at the 1993 RES annual conference. The immediate response from the RES was clear: their conference was closed to any outside organizations, irrespective of their theoretical leanings and that any economist was welcome to submit papers and propose special sessions. The issues of intellectual and institutional diversity were simply ignored.⁵ There was further correspondence resulting in no change in the RES's position.⁶ Thus, the

Polytechnics were not generally considered to be institutions at which good economists from good graduate programs would want to teach.

5 I engaged the RES in further correspondence about the possible discrimination by the 1993 Conference Programme Committee against papers submitted by EAEPE members, "especially those that were of non-neoclassical in substance and that were submitted from members residing in former polytechnics." The letter was perhaps inappropriate and certainly not diplomatic; and the RES's response was equally direct in rejecting the possibility of any discrimination. However, the feeling of discrimination among EAEPE members and broader U.K. heterodox community was still quite real (Lee, 1993; and Dixon, 1993).

6 The RES Conference Programme Committee briefly discussed the issue of having 'subgroups', such as the Post Keynesian and EAEPE UK subgroups, at the RES conferences, but nothing came of it. This may have been, in small part, due to Alistair Dow and Geoff Hodgson (both members of the Programme Committee) believing that subgroup sponsoring would create heterodox ghettos outside the mainstream and the RES and hence hinder the chances of heterodox economics becoming an accepted part of the RES and its conferences. Explicitly confronting

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rejection by the RES meant that there was no reason for the chapter to continue; so by the end of 1993 it ceased to exist (Davison, 1991b; Lee, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c; and Dixon, 1992).

Origins of the AHE: The 1999 One-Day Fringe Conference at Nottingham

Jumping forward five years to the 1998 RES Conference, I overheard Paul Dunne (an economist at Middlesex University) mention something about a fringe conference on 'peace and the economics of arms reductions' he would like to put on at the 1999 RES Conference that was to be held at Nottingham University.⁷ This got me thinking about putting on a heterodox fringe conference. My purpose for the fringe conference was to bring together as many of the U.K. heterodox economists as possible to hear papers that interested them and to socialize and network. So in October 1998 I contacted the Nottingham University Conference Centre about hiring a room for a day-conference during the period of the RES Conference. When asked whom I was representing, I came up with the Association for Heterodox Economics.⁸ Once the room and date (30 March 1999) were agreed upon, I polled a number of colleagues to see if they thought the conference was a good idea and would support it. The feedback was very positive; so I put together a flyer calling for papers

the RES in the cause of heterodox economics was not a tactic that was warmly accepted by heterodox economists whom were involved in the RES. This issue resurfaces again with the formation of the AHE. It should be noted that, while the 1994 RES Conference had two heterodox sessions on evolutionary economics and on value theory in Marshall and Keynes, they were not sustained - the 1998 and 1999 RES Conferences had no such sessions (Hodgson, 1993a, 1993b, and 1993c).

7 The fringe conference that Dunne proposed was never held.

8 I am often asked why I used the term heterodox to modify economics (and economists as well). Prior to 1999, I had used terms such as non-traditional, non-neoclassical, and non-mainstream economics to cover the many different strands of economic analysis, such as Post Keynesian economics, Marxian economics, Sraffian economics, evolutionary economics, Institutional economics, and social economics (see Lee, 1992b, 1993, 1995, and 1996; Harley and Lee, 1997; and Lee and Harley, 1998). However, I did not like the intellectual feel of them. Heterodox economics, while not perfect, has a more positive ring than non-neoclassical, non-traditional, or non-mainstream economics.

and sent it out to virtually all the heterodox economists I knew of in the U.K. (and elsewhere as well). The response to the flyer was better than I expected, which meant that the conference expanded from one to two rooms. To cover the expenses, a conference fee of £5 was charged and I was able to solicit support and contributions from the Open University, CSE, and EAEPE.

The One-Day Fringe Conference at the Nottingham RES Conference on 30 March 1999 was a success. There were eight sessions in which eighteen papers were given on such heterodox topics as financial fragility, whither Post Keynesianism, critical realism and econometrics, the regulation school, dialectics and method, and the non-neutrality of money. There was also a plenary session on the future of heterodox economics with presentations by Chick, Freeman, and Luigi Pasinetti.⁹ Forty-four economists attended (and two others sneaked in for the plenary session) and their affiliations spanned the U.K. heterodox communities. Hence the conference did truly bring together the broad range of heterodox economists in the U.K. At the conclusion of the conference, all the participants said that they would like to have another fringe conference at the RES 2000 Conference at St. Andrews University, either as part of or outside of it.

Aside from the Fringe Conference I also attended the RES Conference where I met by chance the local organizer of the 2000 RES Conference. I told him I was thinking about organizing another fringe conference the following year. He reported this at the meeting of the RES Conference and Programme Committee that took place the day after the Fringe Conference. At the meeting, some Committee members voiced strong views about the Fringe Conference, saying that its existence portrayed the RES as a closed organization not willing to tolerate heterodox views¹⁰ and that they would not like a repeat of the Fringe Conference next year at the 2000 RES Conference.¹¹ After the meeting, I met again

9 Pasinetti's participation at the conference was made possible through the support of Peter Reynolds and the journal *Economic Issues*.

10 When reporting this comment to the Conference participants, their response was "but it is true."

11 This negative feeling was not felt by all economists who attended the RES Conference:

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(by chance) with the local organizer and he hoped that the heterodox economists would become involved in the RES Conference and not hold a separate fringe meeting. I reported my conversation to all those who attended the Fringe Conference and the outcome of the ensuing exchange was that we should try to work with the RES. Thus, I wrote to the chairperson of the RES 2000 Conference and Programme Committee (and sent a copy to the RES president Partha Dasgupta) presenting him with a proposal for how the Fringe Conference could become involved in the RES 2000 Conference, with the expectation of dialogue and compromise.¹² However, the response from Dasgupta was, as with my inquiry six years earlier, outright rejection: "The annual conference of the Society is an annual conference of the Society, and of the Society alone (Dasgupta, 1999)."¹³ Not willing to take no for an answer, I contacted St. Andrews University about rooms for a fringe conference at the time of the RES Conference, but was told that it was University policy not to rent out rooms during the summer to anybody. Refusing to admit defeat and supported by many, such as Chick, Freeman, Hodgson, and Tony Lawson, to hold a second fringe conference in part to keep

...the 1999 RES conference was...a well-run and enjoyable occasion. Moreover, it was the first RES meeting...which had a fringe: the Association for Heterodox Economics one-day conference also took place at Nottingham....This is a most welcome development and it is hoped that it will be repeated in future years. Fringes traditionally add colour and interest to the main event;...Given the huge pressure nowadays to conform to the mainstream in Economics..., the Association for Heterodox Economics provides a welcome vehicle by which pluralism can be promoted. Without pluralism, Economics is doomed to a sterile future....The Nottingham experience was thoroughly enjoyable and I am looking forward to the millennial RES conference up the road at St. Andrews. Let us hope the Heterodox Economists will be in attendance (George, 1999, pp. 479 - 481).

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

13 Dasgupta also noted that the referring process ensured that only good papers were given at the RES Conference, that the special sessions had real intellectual merit, and the intellectual standard of the Conference continued to rise. Moreover, if other associations held their conference alongside the RES Conference, the possibility of free-riding would increase greatly. Thus, Dasgupta concluded "given all this, there is no case for changing the Society's practice." (Dasgupta, 1999).

pressure on the RES Conference to become more like the ASSA meetings, I began looking for an alternative conference site. Andrew Trigg came to my rescue and offered the Open University Conference Centre in London as the site for the conference (Association for Heterodox Economics, 1999 and 2000; Lee, 1999a, 1999b, and 1999c; and Dasgupta, 1999).

Establishing the AHE: the 2000 and 2001 London Conferences

With the site for the second annual AHE fringe conference secured, Freeman, Trigg, and I began to organize it. Freeman came up with the conference title of 'The Other Economics Conference 2000' to signify that there was more to economics than what was found at the RES 2000 Conference. Next, when putting together the call for papers, we felt that we needed to be more specific about what we included under heterodox economics. Drawing upon our collective perspectives, we came up with Post Keynesian economics, Marxian economics, labour process theory, Institutionalist economics, feminist economics, evolutionary economics, history of economic thought, business history, social economics, input-output analysis, economic policy, interdisciplinary economics, Sraffian economics, and economic philosophy.¹⁴ Thus, a call for papers via e-mail and post was sent to individuals in the U.K., Ireland, and overseas. In order to make the RES aware that the AHE was putting on a competing conference, a poster was also sent to all U.K. economics departments. The call for papers resulted in over eighty submissions, about half being international. When selecting papers and organizing them into sessions, there was an initial tendency of grouping papers together representing a specific theoretical perspective, that is for example, all Post Keynesian papers were grouped together separate from Marxist papers. However, Freeman objected to this intellectual

14 This encompassing view of heterodox economics was retained for the 2001 AHE Conference; but for the 2002 AHE Conference it was reduced to a more general statement: 'All economists are encouraged to come together and hear a diversity of papers on topics not well represented in mainstream economics. Papers from a plurality of perspectives and topics are encouraged'.

ghettoization, especially since the purpose of the AHE was to bring heterodox economists together, not to divide them and put them into separate sessions. Hence all the conference sessions were identified by themes, such as 'heterodox political economy: public finance'.¹⁵

The conference was organized into three parallel sessions over two days in order to accommodate the sixty-one papers being presented on the many different facets of heterodox economics. In addition, there were also two plenary sessions at the conference. At the first session, Paul Omerod gave a lecture on "The Death of Economics Revisited" and at the second Chick and John Grahl debated whether the U.K. should join the European single currency. Finally, there was a conference dinner at which Bernard Corry gave the after dinner speech.¹⁶ Ninety-three conference participants came from the U.K., Ireland, Europe, North America, and the Pacific Rim. Because I was returning to the United States to take up a position at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, a meeting was held at the conference to discuss the future of the AHE. At the meeting, a open coordinating committee was formed with Trigg as the coordinator. It was charged with the mandate to put on an annual AHE conference and to engage in any other activities that would promote heterodox economics in the U.K. and Ireland.¹⁷ There was also an extensive discussion at the meeting on whether the AHE should continue to hold fringe conferences at the RES conferences. However, the majority felt that this was being too confrontational and hence it was agreed to hold the AHE conference at a different time and place from the RES conference.

15 This approach has generally been retained for the subsequent AHE conferences. The only exception was the two sessions on Austrian economics at the 2001 AHE Conference. The exception was made in order to get Austrian economists involved in the AHE. The drawback to the approach is that schools of thought or branches of economics are disguised and this has prompted some heterodox economists who are only familiar with a ghettoized heterodox economics to argue that the AHE appears to be closed when it is not.

16 This conference format has been retained for the subsequent AHE conferences.

17 Prior to the Conference, few heterodox economists from Ireland participated in heterodox activities in the U.K. However, given the interest of the two that attended the Conference combined with the AHE's intention to include all 'local' heterodox economists, its mandate was extended to include Ireland as well.

The third AHE conference, which was also held in London at the Open University Conference Centre, was even more of a success than the previous year, with eight-four papers being presented and three plenary sessions. One plenary session dealt with the concerns of the French movement for Post-Autistic Economics and the Cambridge students' proposal on the opening up economics, while a second session was on the future of heterodox economics. At the third plenary, A. W. Coats gave a lecture on the history of heterodox economics, pointing out that ideas quickly switch in status from orthodox to heterodox and *vice versa*. Finally, at the conference dinner, John King, the after-dinner speaker, delighted his audience with spicy anecdotes and derisive tales of journal editors from hell. The success of the conference meant that the AHE was now an established association with a good financial base and a growing body of activists and participants.¹⁸ (AHE, 2000, 2001, and 2002; Lee, 2000; and Trigg, 2001).

Building a Community of Heterodox Economists

Prior to the AHE, there was no integrated community of heterodox economists in the U.K. and Ireland. Instead, what existed was a fragmented community in which the component parts seemed at times to be at war with each other or simply did not acknowledge that others existed. This was particularly the case for the CSE and the PKESG. Thus, to overcome these divisions, the *purpose of the AHE and its annual conference was and is to bring all heterodox economists in the U.K. and Ireland together to hear papers that interest them, to socialize and network, and to build a community where pluralism, not division exists*. Conference participants at the first three conferences included over half of the active economists in the PKESG, CSE, and EAEPE-U.K./Ireland as well as some of the participants in the Cambridge Realist

18 The AHE does not have a subscription; hence it is not a formal organization with a defined membership. Rather than members, it has activists and participants, with the distinction being that the former help organize AHE activities and the latter partake in the activities.

Workshop.¹⁹ In addition, the AHE has been supported by all the heterodox economics groups and associations in the U.K. CSE and EAEPE have provided financial support and advertised the conferences free of charge in *Capital and Class* and the *EAEPE Newsletter* respectively, while the PKESG has included conference announcements in its e-mail newsletter. In addition, AHE has established a web site (<http://www.hetecon.com>) where heterodox economists can find out about its conference and other activities as well as find links to heterodox journals, graduate programs, and associations. Furthermore, recognizing that the future of heterodox economics depends critically on the next generation of economists that emerge from academia, Wendy Olsen and Alfredo Saad Filho obtained funding from the ESRC to organize an AHE advanced training workshop in heterodox research methodologies.²⁰ Finally, the AHE conferences has prompted CSE to become more active in holding conferences; the International Working Group on Value Theory has held conferences in tandem with AHE Conferences; and the Postgraduate Economics Conference²¹ has and is holding its annual conference in conjunction with the advanced training workshop. Thus the AHE has contributed to or is associated with a broad the range of heterodox economics activities in the U.K. and Ireland. Collectively, these activities have generated a more integrated community of British and Irish heterodox economists.

19 The total population of research and scholarly active heterodox economists in the U.K. and Ireland is approximately 120; and fifty percent have participated in AHE conferences. It is of interest to note that some active heterodox economists have not participated in AHE conferences because they do not think that a counter-association to the RES is appropriate and, moreover, think it is counter-productive in that it has made the RES less acceptable to heterodox economics. Those who take this position are generally heavily involved in the RES.

20 The workshop covered causal explanations, modeling, grounded theory, statistical analysis, and qualitative research. There were twenty-six Ph.D. students in attendance from the U.K., Ireland, Germany, Canada, and the U.S.A.

21 Established in 1996 by Ph.D. students at the University of Leeds, the purpose of the Postgraduate Economics Conference was to give graduate students interested in heterodox economics a place to meet and discuss their work. The first conference was a special meeting of the PKESG and in subsequent years remained loosely affiliated with it; it is now also loosely affiliated with the AHE (Petrick, 2002).

Future of the AHE

For the AHE to survive, its future must be different from its past, for repetition, complacency, stagnation, and mere acceptance will eventually kill any organization. Because of its pluralistic perspective, heterodox economists from around the world have participated in the annual conference, helping to make it the largest and most significant heterodox economic activity in the U.K. and Ireland.²² While important, the conferences only go part of the way to satisfy the purpose of the AHE. What is needed are new activities similar to the current research methodology workshop that would bring them together more frequently. Possible activities include half-day seminars on a seasonal basis in Britain and Ireland/Northern Ireland, an electronic newsletter, and a listserv for discussion purposes.²³ In addition, the AHE will need to establish and/or enhance working relationships with the CSE, PKESG, EAEPE and other local heterodox economic groups as a way to continue building an integrated community of heterodox economists. Finally, the AHE needs to augment its recognition efforts in order to ensure its visibility to mainstream economic associations, such as the RES, and to neoclassical departments and economists. This means the AHE will need, at some time in the future, to reconsider the possibility of a fringe conference.

These activities, while preventing complacency and stagnation and supporting the purpose of the AHE, will prove insufficient over the long term in sustaining the community of heterodox economists in the U.K. and Ireland. Thus, the AHE will find it necessary to provide a stronger center in order to sustain the heterodox community. This means the AHE will have to take on functions similar to those associated with mainstream economic societies (such as the RES), the most important being the representation of heterodox economics to the major state

22 The ongoing efforts by the AHE to establish and maintain contacts with international heterodox economic associations have resulted in foreign heterodox economists seeing it along with the CSE as the major heterodox associations in the U.K. and Ireland.

23 The AHE already maintains a large e-mail list of close to a thousand addresses through which it announces its activities as well as other heterodox economic activities. To be included on the list, send an e-mail to leefs@umkc.edu.

research and education funding bodies (such as the ESRC and U.K. Higher Education Funding Council). Other possible functions include establishing a scholarly journal, promoting and supporting the establishment of heterodox graduate programs and the teaching of heterodox economics in undergraduate programs, introducing a subscription/membership fee as a way to finance these activities. Whether the AHE takes on any particular one of the functions is uncertain; but the long term survival and growth of heterodox economics in the U.K. and Ireland will depend on it increasing its functional activities.

Some years ago, I argued that the death of heterodox economics in the U.K. was imminent because heterodox economists did not exhibit the will to live, to challenge the mainstream. The emergence of the AHE and its activists and participants have swept away this prognosis, for its existence and activities explicitly challenge the hegemony of the mainstream. To be sure, in face of the repressive dominance of the mainstream, the future of heterodox economics in the U.K. and Ireland is uncertain. But what is significant is there is now, embodied in the AHE, a will to live, a will to challenge the mainstream—there is now a future to work for.

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