FISCAL POLICY AND BUSINESS CYCLES

FISCAL POLICY

and

BUSINESS CYCLES

By Alvin H. Hansen



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INTRODUCTION

HE twin scourges that afflict the modern world—Depression and War—are not altogether unrelated. Bad as the Treaty of Versailles was, a steady improvement in international political relations could have been expected had we had the vision and courage to stop the Great Depression dead in its tracks and to move forward to higher levels of real income and employment.

The war now afflicting, directly and indirectly, the entire world cannot be explained by overly simplified dogmas running in terms of competitive capitalism and imperialistic rivalries. But it has, nonetheless, an economic basis—the inability of the great industrial nations to provide full employment at rising standards of real income. The disastrous economic breakdown of the thirties let loose forces which have set the world in flames. The ultimate causes of the failure to achieve a world order in the political sphere must be sought in the facts of economic frustration.

It is against the background of the past decade of economic and political futility that this book is written. It deals with the changing role of government, and particularly with fiscal policy as an instrument for regulating the national income and its distribution.

In June, 1939, it was my privilege to present a preliminary report on Fiscal Policy and Business Cycles to a conference of specialists in the fields indicated, called together under the

auspices of the Social Science Research Council at Rye, New York. This conference proved to be extraordinarily stimulating and helpful, and I am deeply in debt to all those who participated. They included Roy Blough, J. M. Clark, Gerhard Colm, Lauchlin Currie, Gottfried Haberler, C. O. Hardy, Simeon E. Leland, Abba P. Lerner, Arthur W. Marget, Lawrence H. Seltzer, Carl Shoup, and John H. Williams.

Especially am I under obligation to Dean Williams and members of the Seminar on Fiscal Policy at the Graduate School of Public Administration, Harvard University, for a thoroughgoing, critical analysis of the report referred to above and of oral presentations of my views. These, together with the discussion at the conference referred to above, have frequently forced me to clarify my thinking and to alter or restate my position. I have, moreover, learned much from conversation with, and from the writings of, my colleagues-Professors Schumpeter, Haberler, and Harris—and from prolonged discussions on many points with graduate fellows and younger faculty members, especially J. Keith Butters, Emile Despres, John T. Dunlop, J. K. Galbraith, R. V. Gilbert, Benjamin H. Higgins, G. G. Johnson, Martin Krost, Richard A. Musgrave, Kenyon E. Poole, Walter Salant, Paul A. Samuelson and Paul M. Sweezy.

In view of the controversial character of many of the issues discussed, it is especially important to say that none of the persons named above are responsible for the arguments presented or the conclusions reached in this book. With respect to the basic underlying philosophy, some are, as I understand them, in substantial agreement, while others are highly skeptical though splendidly sympathetic and open minded to ideas differing from their own.

I wish also to express my deep obligation to the Graduate School of Public Administration, Harvard University, for the seminar and research facilities which it has provided. In the preparation of certain chapters I have had the assistance of Willard D. Arant, Virginia Coughlan, Benjamin H. Higgins, and Mortimer Kaplan. In addition, David W. Lusher and Saul

R. Srole aided in assembling basic data. In a part of Chapter V, I have relied heavily upon the work of George Jászi, published in *Public Policy*, 1940 yearbook of the Graduate School of Public Administration. I am particularly happy to include the Appendix to Chapter XI, on "A Statistical Analysis of the Consumption Function," written by Assistant Professor Paul A. Samuelson, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Permission has kindly been granted to use parts or all of articles or addresses published elsewhere. These include the following: "Economic Progress and Declining Population Growth," American Economic Review, Supplement, March, 1939; "Extensive Expansion and Population Growth," Journal of Political Economy, August, 1940; "The Dynamic versus the Circular Flow Economy," an address delivered September 17, 1940, at the Bicentennial Celebration of the Founding of the University of Pennsylvania; "Price Flexibility and the Full Employment of Resources," The Structure of the American Economy, Part II: Toward Full Use of Resources, National Resources Planning Board, 1940; "Monetary and Fiscal Controls in War Time," Yale Review, Winter, 1940; "Defense Financing and Inflation Potentialities," The Review of Economic Statistics, February, 1941; "Some Aspects, Near-term and Long-term of the International Position of the United States" (joint author with A. R. Upgren), American Economic Review, Papers and Proceedings, February, 1941.

Finally, my sincere thanks and appreciation are due Miss Virginia Coughlan for her highly efficient secretarial work in the preparation of the manuscript and in seeing it through the press.

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