

A French-American Episode in the History of Macroeconomics. The Early Years of the “International Seminar on Macroeconomics”

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This article addresses the early years (1978-1985) of the “International Seminar on Macroeconomics” (ISoM), an annual seminar co-organized by the National Bureau of Economic Research and the French Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.

Robert Gordon and Georges de Ménil, the two main organizers of the ISoM over this period, described it as the opportunity for “a more ample dialogue on policy matters between the United States and Europe, and across national and institutional boundaries within Europe”¹. Relying on archives, interviews and the published proceedings of eight meetings, we investigate how the ISoM promoted such a debate between U.S. and European macroeconomists and between academia and policy-making institutions.

Besides uncovering the singular history of the ISoM itself, we analyze the contributions to the seminar and their evolution. We claim that such evolution has three distinctive characteristics—of general interest for the history of recent macroeconomics. First, we illustrate how the rational expectations became less and less controversial among the participants. Second, we show the decline of disequilibrium theory within the ISoM. Third, we suggest that the participants shared a same view and practice of macroeconomics as an “applied science”. Namely, the ISoM promoted research dealing with specific real-world problems (e.g. the international effects of stagflation in the 1970s, the 1980s debt crisis and the building of a European Monetary System), policy-oriented (e.g. monetary, fiscal and exchange rate policies) and based on quantitative methods (e.g. large scale macroeconometric models).

Keywords: *history of macroeconomics; NBER; ISoM; rational expectations; EHESS; Gordon (Robert, J.); de Ménil (Georges); disequilibrium theory; stagflation*

¹ de Ménil, G. and Gordon, R. J. (1980). Beyond Misconceptions: An Introduction. *European Economic Review*, 13(3): 265.