

THE FRENCH TRANSLATION OF KEYNES'S *GENERAL THEORY*: TERMINOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND ANALYTICAL DIFFICULTIES

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Abstract

Keynes's General Theory was published in English in February 1936. Implemented in April 1938 by Jean de Largentaye for Payot publishing house, the French translation was completed by June 1939 and its publication was planned for 15 September of that year. The outbreak of the war stopped the process and the book finally came out in September 1942, after gaining an approval from the German-occupation censorship. By the end of the year the 2000 copies were sold out. The paper aims at inquiring into the preparation and sequel of that French edition. It will focus on four issues. First its story, from the delay imposed by the war to a revised translation at the end of the 1960s. Second the tensions between Keynes and the translator about some terminological problems, in particular the introduction at the end of the volume of a "lexicon" substituted for the English index. Third the analytical difficulties raised by de Largentaye, particularly in "the most difficult" chapter 17; the written discussion between the author and his translator went beyond what is usually expected and led to new formulations accepted by Keynes, which would have probably been incorporated in a new English edition of General Theory, had it ever existed. Last by not least, the paper will try to investigate about the contribution of a third character to that story: Piero Sraffa, who was embarked in it by Keynes at the beginning of the process, met de Largentaye in Paris, and was again approached by the latter in the 1960s about the prospect of a new French edition and of... a commodity standard!