

ANU PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES 2009

ANU Trevor Swan Distinguished Lectures in Economics

THE CONSEQUENCES OF RADICAL REFORM: The Economic Consequences of the French Revolution

Professor James Robinson
Harvard University



Monday 3 August 2009, 5.30-7pm

Haydon-Allen Lecture Theatre, The Tank Building 23, ANU
The lecture is free and open to the public.

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Using the French Revolution as a starting point, the presentation examines the economic effects of exogenously-imposed institutional change on countries following invasions by French Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies. Data is used to test whether institutions:

- 1) efficiently adapt to a society's characteristics
- 2) 'evolved' institutions are inherently superior to those rationally designed
- 3) institutions must be 'appropriate' and cannot be 'transplanted'
- 4) the French Civil Code has adverse economic effects.

Both at the country and the city level the evidence suggests that areas that were occupied by the French and that underwent radical institutional reform experienced somewhat more rapid economic growth, urbanisation and industrialisation. The findings are broadly consistent with the view that the institutional reforms brought about by the French Revolution had long-run beneficial effects and is not supportive of the four tested hypotheses.

James Robinson is Professor of Government at Harvard University and a Faculty Associate at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs and the Institute for Quantitative Social Science. Professor Robinson studied economics at the London School of Economics, the University of Warwick and Yale University. He previously taught in the Department of Economics at the University of Melbourne and at the University of Southern California. Before moving to Harvard, he was a Professor in the Departments of Economics and Political Science at the University of California at Berkeley. His main research interests are in comparative economic development and political economy.

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