

Ludwig von Mises: 1881-1973

by [Murray N. Rothbard](#)

For those of us who have loved as well as revered Ludwig von Mises, words cannot express our great sense of loss: of this gracious, brilliant and wonderful man; this man of unblemished integrity; this courageous and lifelong fighter for human freedom; this all-encompassing scholar; this noble inspiration to us all. And above all this gentle and charming friend, this man who brought to the rest of us the living embodiment of the culture and the charm of pre-World War I Vienna.

For Mises's death takes away from us not only a deeply revered friend and mentor, but it tolls the bell for the end of an era: the last living mark of that nobler, freer and far more civilized era of pre-1914 Europe.

Mises's friends and students will know instinctively what I mean: for when I think of Ludwig Mises I think first of all of those landmark occasions when I had the privilege of afternoon tea at the Mises's: in a small apartment that virtually breathed the atmosphere of a long lost and far more civilized era. The graciousness of Mises's devoted wife Margit; the precious volumes that were the remains of a superb home library destroyed by the Nazis; but above all Mises himself, spinning in his inimitable way anecdotes of Old Vienna, tales of scholars past and present, brilliant insights into economics, politics and social theory, and astute comments on the current scene.

Readers of Mises's majestic, formidable and uncompromising works must have been often surprised to meet him in person. Perhaps they had formed the image of Ludwig Mises as cold, severe, austere, the logical scholar repelled by lesser mortals, bitter at the follies around him and at the long trail of wrongs and insults that he had suffered.

They couldn't have been more wrong; for what they met was a mind of genius blended harmoniously with a personality of great sweetness and benevolence. Not once has any of us heard a harsh or bitter word escape from Mises' lips. Unfailingly gentle and courteous, Ludwig Mises was always there to encourage even the slightest signs of productivity or intelligence in his friends and students; always there for warmth as well as for the mastery of logic and reason that his works have long proclaimed him.

And always there as an inspiration and as a constant star. For what a life this man lived! Ludwig Mises died soon after his 92nd birthday, and until near the end he led his life very much in the world, pouring forth a mighty stream of great and immortal works, a fountainhead of energy and productivity as he taught continually at a university until the age of 87, as he flew tirelessly around the world to give papers and lectures on behalf of the free market and of sound economic science—a

mighty structure of coherence and logic to which he contributed so much of his own creation.

Ludwig Mises's steadfastness and courage in the face of treatment that would have shattered lesser men, was a never-ending wonder to us all. Once the literal toast of both the economics profession and of the world's leaders, Mises was to find, at the very height of his powers, his world shattered and betrayed. For as the world rushed headlong into the fallacies and evils of Keynesianism and statism, Mises's great insights and contributions were neglected and scorned, and the large majority of his eminent and formerly devoted students decided to bend with the new breeze.

But shamefully neglected though he was, coming to America to a second-rate post and deprived of the opportunity to gather the best students, Ludwig Mises never once complained or wavered. He simply hewed to his great purpose, to carve out and elaborate the mighty structure of economics and social science that he alone had had the genius to see as a coherent whole; and to stand foursquare for the individualism and the freedom that he realized was required if the human race was to survive and prosper. He was indeed a constant star that could not be deflected one iota from the body of truth which he was the first to see and to present to those who would only listen.

And despite the odds, slowly but surely some of us began to gather around him, to learn and listen and derive sustenance from the glow of his person and his work. And in the last few years, as the ideas of liberty and the free market have begun to revive with increasing swiftness in America, his name and his ideas began to strike chords in us all and his greatness to become known to a new generation.

Optimistic as he always was, I am confident that Mises was heartened-by these signs of a new awakening of freedom and of the sound economics which he had carved out and which was for so long forgotten. We could not, alas, recapture the spirit and the breadth and the erudition; the ineffable grace of Old Vienna. But I feverently hope that we were able to sweeten his days by at least a little.

Of all the marvelous anecdotes that Mises used to tell I remember this one the most clearly, and perhaps it will convey a little of the wit and the spirit of Ludwig Mises. Walking down the streets of Vienna with his friend, the great German philosopher Max Scheler, Scheler turned to Mises and asked, with some exasperation: "What is there in the climate of Vienna that breeds all these logical positivists [the dominant school of modern philosophy that Mises combated all his life]?" With his characteristic shrug, Mises gently replied: "Well, after all, there are several million people living in Vienna, and among these there are only about a dozen logical positivists."

But oh, Mises, now you are gone, and we have lost our guide, our Nestor, our friend. How will we carry on without you? But we have to carry on, because anything less would be a shameful betrayal of all that you have taught us, by the example of your noble life as much as by your immortal works. Bless you, Ludwig von Mises, and our deepest love goes with you.
