Plant, Sir Arnold
(1898–1978)

Some extracts from *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* of an article by..


**Plant, Sir Arnold (1898–1978), economist**, was born on 29 April 1898 at 48 Pitfield Street, Hoxton, London, son of William Charles Plant, librarian, and his wife, Thomasine Emily Hollingshead. He attended Strand School, leaving in 1914 to work in an engineering factory. In 1916 he joined up for military service, but soon returned to work in engineering since poor eyesight made him unsuitable for an overseas posting. New regulations in 1918 altered this, however, and he joined the Royal West Kent regiment. On demobilization early in 1920 he returned to work in engineering, but William Piercy suggested to him that he gain a more systematic training in management.

Later in 1920 Plant registered as a full-time student at the London School of Economics (LSE), specializing in economic history. Shortly after graduating he was offered a senior post at the University of Cape Town, where he became founding professor of commerce and dean of the faculty in 1924. He returned to the LSE in 1930 as Sir Ernest Cassel professor of commerce, a post that he held until his retirement in 1965. He had married Edith Rose Render (b. 1898/9) on 13 February 1925, her father Charles being a shopkeeper in Cavendish Street, just a few streets from Plant’s parental home. From the early 1930s they lived in north Hampstead, London, where they brought up their two sons.

Plant’s ability to employ basic principles to great effect is evident in his first paper of 1927 concerned with the economic effects of racial segregation in the South African labour market. In a round-table BBC radio discussion of 1937 entitled *This Planning Business*, Harold Macmillan stated that he had ‘never listened to a more hard-boiled conception of free Capitalism than that which he [Plant] advances’, suggesting that such ideas belonged to the nineteenth, and not the twentieth, century. However, Plant’s insistence on the power of competition, private property, and market forces to produce efficient and equitable outcomes had by the end of the twentieth century become once more conventional wisdom.

From 1940 to 1946 Plant was a temporary civil servant, beginning as the director of the wartime social survey in 1940, subsequently being chiefly concerned with the allocation of wartime materials. He had already become a member of the Cinematograph Films Council in 1938, a position he held until 1969; and during the post-war years he became an increasingly active committee member. Among other appointments he was chairman of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council from 1955 to 1967, and of the Advertising Standards Authority from 1962 to 1965.

Plant was knighted in 1947. He died at the Royal Free Hospital, Camden, London, on 19 April 1978; his wife survived him.
