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'Comparative politics'

by U. Rosenthal

In this article the author discusses some problems in the field of comparative political science. As a starting point he is circumscribing comparative political science as the field within the discipline of political science which, in the methodological sphere, focuses on problems of comparison and, as to the substantial side, concentrates on problems of political change, political development, and political modernization.

The elaboration is accomplished by posing three questions:

- 1 does comparative political science have a method of its own ('the comparative method')?
- 2 does comparative political science have a subject matter of its own?
- 3 if the previous questions would be answered in a negative sense, does comparative political science refer to a particular perspective as regards political life?

Firstly, comparative political science concentrates on some specific methodological problems. One of these problems arises from the crucial requirement of comparative political science for the broadening of the 'empirical range'. But comparative political science has no method of its own.

Secondly, comparative political science is concerned with the politics of the developing areas: in this context, the problems of political change, political development, and political modernization are rather energetically studied. The link between comparative political science and the study of the politics of the developing areas has much to do with the development of political science. Through the study of these political systems an important contribution has in any case been made to the formulation of universal generalizations. The author simultaneously notices some weaknesses in the pioneer studies. He is advocating a reappraisal, consisting in (1) partial theories as against general theories (LaPalombara), (2) a shift from functional to structural analysis (Groth), (3) renewed attention to be paid to the 'black box' of government (Macridis), and/or (4) area studies (Lijphart).

Thirdly, the author concludes that comparative political science, although lacking a method and a subject matter of its own, may be considered a subdiscipline of political science: standing for a relativistic outlook on political life, it seems to have an important task in the context of political science. Its main characteristic will remain the search for universal generalizations.

Comment

R. J. S. Hoetjes

A definition of a field of (political) science should give, as clearly as possible, the characteristics of the substantial problems and concerns within such a field. For a definition of comparative politics as a subfield of political science this implies the rejection of a purely methodological definition, the more because the 'comparative method' does not seem to offer any distinct approach to the study of politics; one should look for a category of empirical political phenomena to characterize the subfield. On this point Rosenthal is not very clear: he mentions the political problems of developing areas as 'the' typical object of comparative politics, but the basic concern, according to him, is the widening of the empirical base of the theories, hypotheses and generalizations. Now since the study of any topic could very well contribute to this purpose, there remains

no typical topic (or a number of them) to characterize the subfield of comparative politics. At the same time the widening of the empirical range of political theories by itself can be considered the typical and legitimate concern of the 'empirical political theorist' as a specialist within the field of political science; it seems useless as well as confusing to double-label this specialist as 'comparative political scientist'.

Still it may be possible to find a category of political phenomena (e.g. general/far-reaching processes like 'the operation of 'democratic systems', 'political change and development') that could legitimately be claimed as the typical object of comparative political science; the problems of this quest, however, are far from solved.

An abortive attempt at democratization

by J. Th. J. van den Berg

From September 1969 to November 1970 the editorial staff of the *Limburgs Dagblad* in Heerlen (a regional daily newspaper in the province of Limburg with approximately 80,000 subscribers) experimented with *democratizations* of the internal decision-making process. From September 1969 to April 1970 this meant a general examination by the editors of the journalistic policy, with respect to both organizational and ideological aspects. Through group discussions a paper was drafted, which was to serve as a guideline for policy-making for the next two years. In April 1970 an editorial board was constituted, chaired by the recently appointed interim editor-in-chief (the author of this article), who would eventually become the editor-in-chief. With exception of personnel management all activities of the editorial office belonged to the domain of that board, which formally only had advisory competence. In November 1970 this experiment was broken off.

In this article the central themes are: the nature of the democratization process, the causes for the failure of the experiment, and the minimum prerequisites for success of this kind of undertaking.

To this end an overview is given of the most important events shortly before and during the period of democratization and of the various positions taken by the actors with regard to these events. It is important to note that the democratization process was accompanied by a re-organization of the editorial office along the lines of the English model of the 'central desk system'; an important psychological result of this was that what was being built up through the one process was being frustrated, in appearance at least, by the other. These frustrations came to a culmination point when the editorial staff was given the opportunity to give its opinion on the definitive appointment of the editor-in-chief: the great majority gave a negative advice.

The attempt at democratization is confronted by the author with the criteria Dahl has used with respect to democratic decision-making (cf. *Preface to Democratic Theory*). The conclusion is that this experiment falls short of these criteria to a high degree.

Finally, six minimum prerequisites for successful democratization attempts are put forward:

- 1 — There must be no ambiguity about the degree of responsibility: how it is allocated and to whom; which decisions have to be taken by whom?
- 2 — An adequate exchange of information and as much openness as possible in decision-making is more important than structural changes in a system of

decision-making.

3 — Democracy has to be learned. Therefore, experiments should be initiated at the level of the daily routine decisions and be accompanied by a gradual breakdown of hierarchical structures, instead of beginning with establishing 'parliamentary' bodies.

4 — Democratization does not appear to be a good mechanism to control already existing and deeplying conflicts.

5 — When democratization is introduced only to a limited degree, identifiable and durable leadership within the group is of decisive importance.

6 — The spreading of responsibilities in only one sector of an organization is possible only when similar experiments take place elsewhere in that organization; or when the experiment is kept apart from its environment so well, that those who are not immediately involved do not get the feeling that they are burdened disproportionately with the drawbacks and mistakes which such an experiment inevitably entails.

Political Science in the International Firm — report on an investigation by I. Th. M. Snellen

To verify the hypothesis — proposed a few years ago — that more and more international firms would tend to employ political scientists, an investigation was made with 275 European and American international firms with the help of a short questionnaire. The response was 45 %. From this relatively high response as well as from the contents of the answers received the conclusion might be drawn that, although almost no firms employ one or more political scientists, there seems to be a growing awareness of the importance of political factors for their multinational decision-making process.

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