

in a terrible argument about what to do while the patient sits by, unhelped. He argued that the goal of creating a more efficient and more powerful government led to the Constitutional convention and that restoring some of the patterns of party government and party cohesion that existed most of the time up to World War II hardly constitutes a call for radical restructuring of the political system.

A dialogue between members of the audience and the panel generated a number of interesting points. James MacGregor Burns of Williams College drew a distinction between the constitutional restructuring called for by Cutler and the minor reforms suggested by Cronin. Larry Berman of the University of California, Davis, asked how President Reagan could be expected to govern with a liberal-moderate Democratic House and a moderate Republican Senate. Forty-nine states may have sent Reagan to the White House, but who should the American public hold accountable?

James David Barber of Duke University argued in agreement with Cronin and Conable that Reagan has opted for current popularity over a place in history by choosing not to exercise his power—his capacity for leadership—on the issue of deficit spending during the past year. Cronin similarly argued that Reagan has the power, that he could veto appropriations bills or send a balanced budget to Congress; but that he prefers to live with the deficits, satisfied with having won victories in other areas, like the weakening of environmental and job safety regulation and the lowering of taxes.

Conable also agreed that the deficit problem could be solved, but thinks that action will be postponed until the government becomes crisis-activated. The 1984 presidential election, after all, involved a president who had submitted increasingly unbalanced budgets; the American people simply remain unconvinced that the deficit is a problem right now. Cutler, however, argued that the deficits represent a growing cancer and that any of the plans under consideration would be better than no plan. From his perspective, by the time the deficit issue is perceived as a crisis-laden situation, the problem will be incurable.

Discussion also centered on the advisability of establishing limits on the terms of representatives and senators. Conable supported the idea, while Cutler argued that members of Congress get better, more able to resist interest groups, the longer they are in office. Cutler further suggested that the presidential election be held two-to-four weeks ahead of the congressional election, so the public could weigh whether to respond to a presidential appeal for support. Cronin, however, responded that the public is likely to vote the other way, given popular cynicism toward politicians and the desire to establish informal checks.

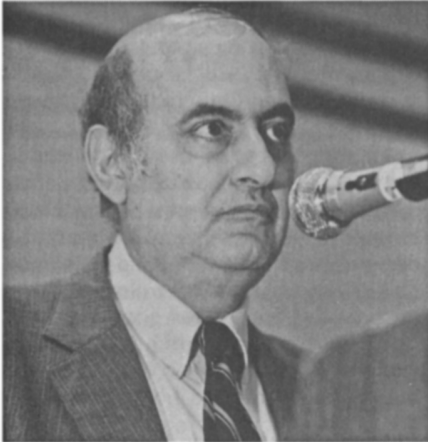
Greenstein probably echoed the musings of many political scientists interested in reform issues, when he noted that "the Almighty should have cloned the political system so we could run experiments." □

Editor's note: The following five reports on roundtables held at the annual meeting were written by the chairpersons of each panel at the request of PS so that non-specialists in these particular subject areas can get a glimpse of developments in parts of the discipline other than their own. In addition, we are attempting to cover more of the substance of the annual meeting especially in those panels where no papers were presented and where there is otherwise no lasting record of the ideas discussed. PS is grateful to the five scholars who accepted the invitation to report on their roundtables, especially given the time constraints posed by an insistent deadline.

The North-South Roundtable

Robert L. Rothstein
Colgate University

Not much more than a decade ago the North-South relationship was widely heralded as a major competitor, or at least a strong supplement, of the East-West relationship as the "relationship of major tension" in the international system. Disagreement with this argument by



Annual Meeting Program Chair Joseph Cooper of Rice University presides at the Thursday evening plenary session.

realists, conservatives, and a few others was generally dismissed as shortsighted or "ideological." In addition, initially there was a good deal of optimism that new concepts or approaches (for example, interdependence or political economy research) would facilitate understanding and explanation of what seemed to be or might be a major shift in the configuration of power—and perhaps even wealth.

One hardly needs to note that both hopes have been badly disappointed. For a variety of reasons, the North-South relationship did not reflect or generate a power shift, its significance did not come to rival the East-West divide, and the prevailing or emerging concepts and approaches in international relations did not provide much understanding of what happened. Indeed, there is now some feeling that the North-South relationship is not only moribund because of current economic difficulties and ideological hostilities but also is or was a passing aberration of a unique and transitory set of developments. In any case, these arguments and uncertainties suggested the need for a period of stocktaking and reconsideration for those concerned with North-South relations. A distinguished panel was asked to comment about what had happened either in terms of the failed power shift or the failed conceptual apparatus. The panelists were David Baldwin of

Columbia, Jeffrey Hart of Indiana, James Rosenau of Southern California, and Ann Tickner of Holy Cross.

That the panel ended inconclusively and without consensus on the questions to be asked, the concepts to employ, or the policies to advocate should not be surprising. The field is vast, perspectives vary, and instructions from the panel chairman about what to focus on were deliberately loose and indicative. Nevertheless, even with these constraints, it must be said that the lack of agreement among the panelists was quite striking. This was especially true not only in the sense that there was conflict over certain concepts and ideas (for example, the meaning of "structural change") but also in the sense that the panelists frequently seemed to be in entirely different disciplines. In short, one panelist's statement of the problem (or *problematique*) could very well seem to another as not merely wrong but also irrelevant or a misreading of what our panel was "really" about. One might also note that for this observer, who found all of the presentations interesting if disconnected, what was not said was as interesting as what was said.

Rosenau's comments (and a paper that he provided) focused on what he described as a global authority crisis, an empirical concept reflecting degrees of compliance with authoritative directives. This attempt to move away from the nation-state perspective and to place the problems of the North and the South—and North-South—within a common and very general conceptual framework was interesting and provocative. Even if one disagreed with the argument, there was some virtue in being forced to explain why. Thus it seemed to me that, apart from the inevitable ambiguities in attempting to define and apply so macroscopic a perspective, Rosenau had missed two key developments within North-South: first, increasing differentiation within the South, which implicitly suggests the need to explain variations in behavior rather than commonalities; second, while many or most authority structures may be eroding, it is also clear that some such structures—for example, the authority of International Monetary

Fund (IMF) policy packages or the pressures from the United States and the World Bank to adopt an export orientation—are becoming more powerful and more salient for poor and weak states.

The lack of agreement among the panelists was quite striking.

Baldwin in his comments did not attempt to provide a new conceptualization of the North-South relationship but he did provide a provocative and controversial analysis of the conceptual and cognitive “half-truths” (his term) of the past. Some of his points seemed debatable or doubtful to me (for example, about how much leverage the debt problem gives to the Third World; in fact only a limited number can really exercise the power of weakness), but other points were important. Thus his emphasis on the ambiguities of the idea of structural change was well taken, especially because it has become so fashionable to use the term for even conventional shifts in the international division of labor. In addition, Baldwin quite rightly emphasized the extent to which normative predispositions have affected interpretations of the North-South arena—a point that was evident in the panel discussions. It has also been evident, unfortunately, in a reluctance to criticize the Third World or some of the Third World’s proposals in the New International Economic Order (NIEO), although this is both patronizing and counterproductive.

Hart in his presentation largely discussed problems of North-North trade, on the assumption that we can learn from this arena something about the problems of North-South relations. In subsequent remarks he criticized the normative implications of the application of neo-Realism to the North-South relationship (especially the notion that the distribution of power favors the North and *should* continue to do so). He also disagreed with Rosenau’s argument that authority structures had disintegrated, arguing that the disappearance of the NIEO and the dominance of the world capitalist system had

in fact increased coherence—if with some unfortunate effects.

Tickner concentrated on the revival of Realism in the international system, attributing it to the Reagan Administration, rising levels of conflict, and the failure of Southern demands. She also argued that, if Realism were indeed a “real” theory, it should be applicable to North-South relations. She then indicated various ways in which Realism failed as an explanation and interpretation of the North-South arena—despite the somewhat contradictory fact that it was becoming more fashionable in Third World foreign policy behavior. This is an interesting argument, although it raises a number of difficult questions. One very important question is whether Realism is indeed an accurate description of Third World policymaking behavior since such behavior has been largely determined by internal factors and in some cases merely reflects *saute qui peut* policies by desperate elites. Still, while the argument that Realism is an increasingly inappropriate conceptual model has been made before, Tickner’s discussion of it in current terms was interesting and provocative—eliciting much controversy in the ensuing discussion.

The international system is offering developing countries fewer and more complex alternatives. . . . Dealing with this environment will require much greater domestic policy skills.

The panel covered a wide range of issues from a wide variety of perspectives. In this sense it reflected the uncertainties and tensions that currently trouble the North-South relationship. To this observer, however, there seemed to be several important issues that were either ignored or discussed only in passing. For example, one might argue that insufficient attention was paid to the domestic dimensions of North-South relations.

North-South obviously involves something more than the structure of the international system. It seems especially important to emphasize this issue at this time, if only because the international system is offering developing countries fewer and more complex alternatives: less aid, more restrictive access to capital and trading markets, a more constraining ideological environment. Dealing with this environment will require much greater domestic policy skills and would of course also diminish the weight of the criticism that problems are primarily due to deficient domestic policy choices.

More attention might also have been devoted by the panel to the changes occurring within the Third World coalition that make unity in the future so problematic. What are the conditions for success of a coalition of the weak? Can they ever be met? Tentative answers might have provided some insight into the question of whether the Third World challenge was merely premature, and thus likely to reemerge again, or whether the challenge was a misguided attempt, reflecting the transitory turbulence of adjusting to the OPEC "shock" and its aftermath, that is unlikely to recur. If the latter, North-South will persist in the decades ahead, but it will likely be a very different kind of North-South relationship. Finally, it might have been useful to speculate about the evolution of the international political economy and its implications for domestic development choices. Put differently, the dialectic between external and internal policy choices is entering a new phase and how to deal with these interacting changes is unclear but crucial. □

Area Studies and Theory-Building in Comparative Politics: A Stocktaking

James A. Bill

University of Texas at Austin

I introduced the roundtable by summarizing two interrelated debates that currently mark much of the discourse about the

state of the field of comparative politics. In the more general debate, one position argues that comparative politics is a field in a state of stagnancy. According to this argument, the field would seem to have lost much of the excitement and momentum that marked its heyday in the 1960s and early 1970s. Important methodological and theoretical work has ground to a halt. The other position challenges this interpretation by indicating that comparative politics is now in the position of institutionalizing its contributions and that new and sophisticated methods and approaches continue to be introduced.

Closely intertwined with this debate is one that focuses upon the role of area studies within the field of comparative theory-building. One side of this controversy has argued that area studies are descriptive, monocontextual, and, as such, have seriously inhibited theory-building. The other position states that area studies are an essential ingredient of the theory-building process since it is here where the reservoir of data about politics is in fact found. The panelists at the roundtable were selected on the basis both of their area experience and their sensitivity to methodology and empirical theory-building. They were also chosen to provide a broad geographic expertise with scholars of Europe, Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and the United States serving as panelists. The six discussants collectively represented over 65 research trips to 45 different countries during careers that spanned an average of 25 years.

Gabriel Almond of Stanford University set the tone for the roundtable by presenting a general overview of where comparative political analysis had come during the past few decades. He analyzed the capacity of concepts to travel across areas and the importance of their formulation and reformulation as they encounter different cultural and political contexts. He used as examples what he termed the interest group, patron-client, and political culture-political participation models. Almond argued that much important theoretical work takes place in the "groping and grubbing" that goes on in the early stages of theory-building. In conclusion, he stated that the field of