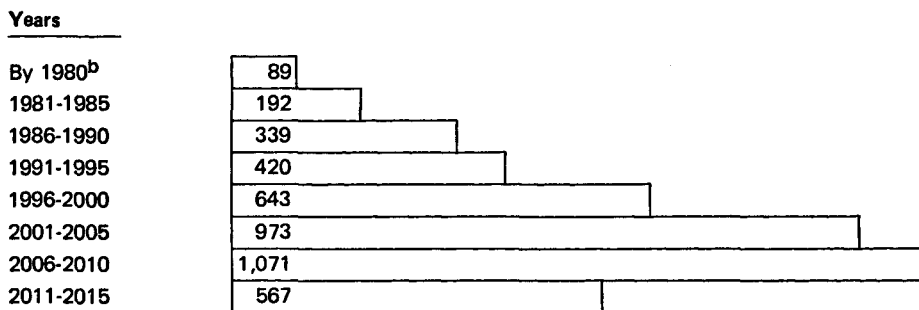


**FIGURE 1**  
**Estimated Retirement Years for Political Scientists**  
**at 272 Political Science Departments in 1980<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>a</sup>The note appended to Table 2 also applies to this figure.

<sup>b</sup>This group of 89 persons can be assumed to have obtained their Ph.D. degrees at ages well below the average of 30, or to be postponing their retirements beyond the age of 65, or both.

or modifications of the tenure system. Yet even with such developments (and assuming no growth in the number of academic positions), we need to recognize that the slow turnover in the political science professoriate will be a significant factor in limiting employment opportunities in the coming decades. The costs—human, collegial, institutional—of the slow graying of our professoriate loom as considerable and painful ones. ■

## Why Political Economy?

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*Editor's Note: Formed in 1977, the ranks of the Conference Group on the Political Economy of Advanced Industrial Societies have swelled. As organizer of the 1981 panels of the Conference Group (held in conjunction with the APSA Annual*

*Meeting in September), Stephen Elkin was asked to write the following article for PS to explain why the group formed, what its scholars study, and how this perspective differs from that of other subfields in political science.*

The Conference Group on the Political Economy of Advanced Industrial Societies is a loose association of scholars concerned with expanding the focus of political studies to take account of the interrelations between economic and political activity. The group was formed in 1977 and its principal activity has been to present a series of panels held simultaneously with the American Political Science Association meetings. The mailing list of the group now numbers over 400. During its existence it has presented some 60 panels, several of which have been among the best attended at the annual meetings.

Formation of the group was prompted by an uneasiness among Conference Group participants with a central assumption underlying much of the post-war study of the politics of advanced industrial societies. Specifically, much of this work assumes that there are two separable realms, broadly, economy and polity. Although for centrally planned societies the idea of such a separation is not

“Can Political Science Develop Alternative Careers for its Graduates?”, *PS*, Fall 1979, pp. 446-450.

honored, for Western societies the usual implication is that the state and the market have their own dynamics. And where necessary, it is implied, separate theories developed to account for these dynamics can somehow be joined.

The conception of separable realms informs not only explanatory efforts of mainstream political science, but normative ones as well. Discussion of various reforms—of administration, policy-making, the legislative process and the like—largely proceed without acknowledgement that the state being reformed operates in a market-oriented society.

What looks desirable, however, from the point of view of, say, administrative efficiency or legislative convenience may look quite different when viewed in terms of the desirability of democratic control to counter-balance power exercised through the marketplace. Such concerns with the implications of governmental reform for the appropriate balance between political authority and market choice, while present, have not been central in the discipline.

What joins together those who present their work under the Conference Group's aegis is the proposition that the whole regime must be studied, both polity and economy in their elaborate connection. Neither can be understood or evaluated on its own.

The interpretation given to this proposition, however, varies considerably. Views similarly differ when consideration shifts from the politics of advanced societies to relations *between* advanced societies, or to relations between advanced societies and the developing world. There is, moreover, little agreement on how and if these various concerns are part of one large theoretical enterprise.

In order to facilitate an understanding of some of the sources of a political economy perspective as well as its promise, it is useful to focus on the politics of Western democratic societies out of the array of subjects just noted. This focus leaves unexamined some of the hardest questions, as well as some of the most interesting political economy

theorizing. But discussion of a single topic will facilitate both understanding of some of the theoretical issues that prompt the study of political economy and will provide sufficient detail to make an initial assessment of its value. We might best start with a brief review of some features of post-war political study that prompted the growth of the political economy perspective.

### Real Problem

Post-war scholarship discusses a variety of facets of political life that are presented as central to understanding the politics of Western societies. Among them are: the recruitment of public officials; the social psychological determinants of voting behavior; the factors shaping interest group tactics and success; the workings of legislative committees; the political socialization of children and adults; and the means by which the public agenda gets formed.

Now in themselves, any of these topics could lead to consideration of the character of the whole regime. Although some subjects are more likely to be highways—interest group success, for examples—and others roundabout routes—the social psychology of voting—none in principle prohibits consideration of larger matters. The real problem is elsewhere, in the manner of analyzing the topics.

Two commonly employed modes of analysis are readily identifiable. One is to construe politics as essentially the play of interest and power, strategy and tactics. There are actors with interests who have a variety of skills and resources, and the game being played is the time-honored one of advancing one's position. The working hypothesis is that where topics other than these are relevant—for example, the "rules of the political game" or some sort of large-scale societal change, such as a long term decline in the rate of growth—the correct theoretical move is to try to assimilate them with a theory built around actors and their power. Alternatively, we are advised to treat such matters as exogenous, as part of a given background, which is to say to

leave them unexplored in any systematic fashion.

A second approach counsels us that interest-driven theories of the kind just noted are not entirely satisfactory. We must look "behind" political activity to its roots, in particular its social-psychological roots. In the first place, it is said much political behavior is not oriented to power and interest but is expressive and perhaps symbolic. And that which is instrumental cannot be adequately understood without studying the psychology of interests, values and preferences, or the social psychological factors which affect the exercise and distribution of power.

### **Detachment**

Both these modes of analysis have the effect of detaching the study of politics from a concern with the impact of the division of labor between market and state. This division is a central feature of Western societies. Ownership of productive assets is largely in private hands. As a result, major social decisions, such as the pattern of work organization and industrial location, are made private exchange relations. Other social decisions are made by public authorities with decision-making typically organized to take citizen preferences into account.

Noticing the market-state division invites scrutiny of its pattern, extent and maintenance, as well as its consequences for political life. The latter would include the manner in which the economic and political realms are mixed and otherwise joined. But practitioners of neither interest-oriented or social psychological approaches seem inclined to engage in such investigations.

Theorists employing both such approaches can and do acknowledge the division of labor between market and state and do register, for example, that public officials spend time trying to facilitate the functioning of markets. However, if actual research and theorizing is any guide, little of major explanatory significance for political life is thought to follow from such observations. (Whether

this is an *inevitable* result, given the suppositions of the types of theories being employed, is too complex a matter to consider here.)

Now, perhaps compelling explanations of central features of political life can indeed be contrived without major reference to the division between market and state. If this seems likely to be accomplished—for example, constructing powerful theories which explain why public officials act as they do—then the claims on our attention of a political economy perspective resting on the presumed significance of a market-state division, would clearly be greatly reduced.

We cannot, however, easily say in advance of any sustained efforts to construct such theories whether they will be successful. What we can do, however, is indicate why the activities of public officials do in fact seem to be markedly shaped by the existence of a market-state division. This discussion will lend credence to a political economy perspective, even if approaches which, in effect, deny its central premise cannot here finally be dismissed.

### **Public Officials' Actions**

A useful way to begin the inquiry is to investigate the pattern of governmental concern with the performance of the economy. How is it to be explained? One plausible line of analysis would rest on efforts by various interests, business most importantly, to insure particular forms of public investment, or to encourage forbearance from what are felt to be burdensome regulations. These efforts in turn might be said to be shaped by swings in the economy. At a minimum, such an argument misses the sense in which public officials are not being pressured to act or forebear, but do so of their own volition.

The explanatory problem seems in fact to be less one of explaining *variation* in public officials' concern with economic performance than in explaining its continuing character. While the activities of business may help us understand the particular form of public involvement, they

## News of the Profession

are unlikely to explain the regular concern of public officials which occurs even when business displays no great interest in promoting a particular governmental stance or indeed when the economy is buoyant.

Instead, two features of Western societies, each noted already, seem central to an explanation of governmental concern. Both are aspects of the division of labor between state and market. First, public officials cannot command economic performance. And second, these officials are elected or serve elected masters. Taken together, these features suggest that officials require "satisfactory" performance from the private holders and managers of productive assets. This is so for at least two reasons: sustained poor performance and thus declining levels of material well-being will mean electoral difficulties or



Paul R. Dommel of the Brookings Institution speaking at the October 28, 1981 Brookings Institution National Issues Seminar on Block Grants: The Continuing Evolution of American Federalism. Future National Issues Seminars will focus on the defense industrial base, Social Security reform, and national budget priorities. (See Summer, 1981 *PS*, "Upcoming Conferences," for further details.)

even rout; and state activities, including the achievement of policy objectives, requires revenues, and production of that revenue is not in the hands of public officials.

The necessary economic performance does not occur as a matter of course, however. As Lindblom has noted, business must be *induced* to perform. The scale of investment and its uncertainty apparently require that risk be modified, rewards great and compensation possible if all goes wrong. Public officials are likely to devote continuing effort to seeing that all this occurs quite apart from any prompting to do so. Their concern with economic performance is likely to be continuous.

Other practices beside the provision of inducements are also likely to grow up as a consequence of the division between state and market. These include the means to prevent popular control from interfering with economic performance, as well as the means to facilitate democratic participation sufficient to prevent business from becoming overweening.

In short, the division of labor between state and market seems likely to have profound effects on the actions of public officials and indeed on politics generally. Nor should this be surprising since we are, after all, talking about societies which are both liberal and democratic; which are, that is, oriented both to promoting individual choice and popular control in the service of mass well-being. How these political principles are embodied and joined together to form liberal democracy should profoundly affect the behavior of public officials.

## Disagreements

The position just outlined is by no means shared by all theorists of political economy. One important source of disagreement is whether democratic arrangements are as significant in explaining political activity as has just been implied. Arguments to the contrary range from the position, which echoes Lenin, that popular control is a useful shell behind which the class interests of property holders can be pursued, to

elaborate statements which see all forms of social life including political activity as a "structure" somehow expressing the capitalist mode of production.

Much of this discussion, including arguments for the genuine significance of popular control, takes place under the rubric of the "relative autonomy of the state." Marxists are ranged on each side of the divide, arguing for both the real, if limited, importance of popular control, as well as for its facade-like qualities. By and large those who attribute little "relative autonomy" to the state ascribe limited significance to the division between state and market in explaining political behavior.

Other points of disagreement among those who share a political economy perspective overlap with the preceding one. These differences give additional credence to the idea that points of view within political economy are diverse and indicate in what directions the analysis of state and market might be (and to some degree already has been) extended. The disagreements of greatest importance concern: trends in the relations between state and market; the extent to which significant reform of liberal democracy is possible; and the degree to which the state must be a means of domination. A few remarks on each will suggest what is at issue.

On the matter of trends, there are at least two major questions. The first concerns the character of the alterations that are occurring in the political economy as a whole. For example, are we witnessing the beginnings of a steady state economy or will public officials and leading business people be able to engineer another major spurt of capital accumulation leading to renewed long-term growth? Again, is the state becoming "over-loaded" or is it being democratized in appropriate ways? The second question follows directly from the first and is in fact inseparable from it: is it possible to say anything significant about the course of change in the political economy?

The question of the extent to which liberal democracies can be reformed raises such issues as: are there limits to

the degree to which political arrangements can be democratized, limits perhaps imposed by the central role of private controllers of productive assets in generating economic performance?; if they exist, are we now anywhere near such limits?; can a state whose principal tasks are increasingly administrative be an important vehicle for democratization?

As complex and divisive as these issues are, however, they cannot be addressed on their own. They quickly lead to some of the classical questions of political theory, in particular the character of mixed regimes compared to highly democratized ones and the respective virtues of such regimes. The study of political economy, then, is likely to lead directly to some of the problems that engendered political theory in the first place and prompted its subsequent development.

### **Political Theory**

The traditional concerns of political theory are also central to the issue of the state as a means of domination. This question arises once we see that the state is neither a neutral arena in which a full array of interests contest, nor a referee. If, as was suggested above, public officials are likely to be deeply interested in promoting business performance, is this a matter of the interests of some being regularly and inevitably pursued at the expense of others? And should this be so, is the state merely an elaborate weapon in a class war, and the state and political life generally, without any normative claim to make on its citizens?

This question, concerning the nature and purpose of political life, is perhaps the most important one of all for political theory. Its centrality for political economy indicates the degree of continuity in the two traditions.

The connection between political theory and political economy is an appropriate note on which to conclude. From one viewpoint at least, political economy is indeed a return to the oldest themes of political thinking. We can trace back to the Greeks an interest in the nature of

political wholes, how they are composed, created and maintained.

These questions about the political whole or regime were not prompted by mere curiosity, but by concern for what is possible and best given human beings as they are. And so it is with political economy. At its core is not only an attempt to understand the character of contemporary regimes (in the present discussion, liberal democracies) but also to consider what measure of justice is possible in them.

Now, not too much should be claimed here. Between Aristotle and Schumpeter there are large enough differences to make us hesitate about easy comparisons. The political economy perspective does share with the oldest tradition of political thought a concern for a good way of life. It is, nevertheless, true that for many advocates of political economy such a way of life cannot be achieved through politics. It is the productive arrangements of the society that are central to any such enterprise. Still, discussion of the types of regimes and their connection to what is valuable, whatever the disagreements, is surely a

more promising path for political study to take than any narrowly construed interest-driven or social psychological theory of politics. ■

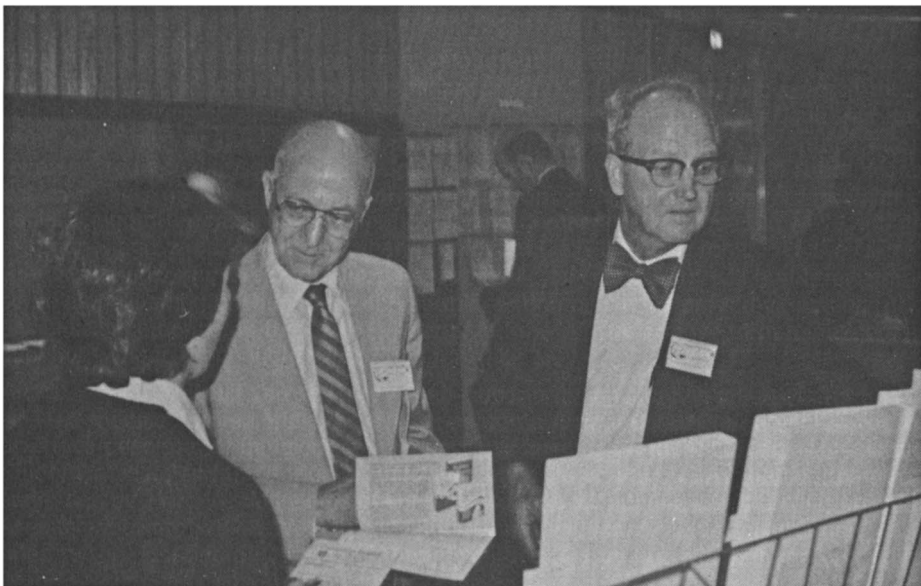
## Reports

### Southern Meeting Features Presidency Panel and Lipset

**Lawrence D. Longley**  
Lawrence University

The 1981 Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association (SPSA) was marked by panels on a wide variety of topics, including The Political Theory of Eric Voegelin, Organizing the Presidency, Book Publishing in the 1980s, Minority Politics and the Influence of Public Policy, The 1980 Presidential Election, and The Politics of Race in the Modern South.

More than 500 political scientists from throughout the South and nation came to Memphis to enjoy the opportunity to see



Abraham Holtzman, North Carolina State, and Clifton McCleskey, University of Virginia, discuss new publications with Susan Sullivan, Congressional Quarterly Press, at the Southern meeting.

Photo by Lawrence Longley