

International Political Science

News from the International Political Science Association

The IPSA Secretariat will be moving to Ireland after the IPSA XVI Congress in Berlin, August 21–25, 1994. John Coakley, Lecturer in Politics at the University of Limerick, has been appointed as the new Secretary General to succeed Franco Kjellberg, who has served since 1988. John Coakley, an active member of the IPSA, was the founding Secretary of the Political Studies Association of Ireland, and was elected as President of the Association in 1990. He was responsible for organizing the extremely successful meetings of the ECPR in 1992. He was joint editor of *Irish Political Studies* from 1988 to 1991 and has published on Irish politics, nationalism and ethnic politics.

Does membership on the IPSA Executive lead to higher things? Recent developments suggest that this is the case. Most notably, following the elections earlier in 1993, Han Sung-Joo is now Foreign Minister of South Korea. Two members of the Executive have also been elected to their national legislatures, Naomi Chazan to the Knesset and Longin Pastusiak to the Sejm. Itzhak Galnoor, Editor of the IPSA Book Series, has been appointed as Head of the Israeli Civil Service Commission.

The preliminary program for the XVI World Congress will be available in the spring. The congress promises to be an exciting event. Political scientists will attend from all around the world, and there will be papers from unaccustomed as well as more familiar intellectual viewpoints. Sessions will be held on all aspects of the main theme, *Democratization*—political theory, institutional, economic, international and cultural bases, political participation and empowerment, and the consequences of democratization—and, as usual, there will be a wide range of sessions organized by IPSA Research Committees and Study Groups. In addition, there will be supplementary sessions on ‘The State of the Discipline,’ with state of the art papers from some of the most prominent U.S. and international scholars; including, Barry Weingast, Kjell Goldman, Iris Young, James Alt, Goran Thernborn, Robert Keohane, Luigi Garcianno, Robert Huckfeldt. Also sessions will be held on ‘The New Europe,’ with papers from colleagues in Germany and other European countries. There will also be stimulating plenary sessions—and plenty of opportunity to network and socialize in the congenial surroundings of the Berlin International Congress Center.

IPSA Research Committees

(RCs) and Study Groups (SGs) continue their activities: the RC on the Structure and Organization of Government (SOG) celebrates its tenth anniversary in 1994 with a conference in Manchester [SOG sponsors the journal, *Governance*]. Recent meetings of RCs and SGs include the RC on Armed Forces and Society in Moscow in July on ‘The New World Order and Armed Forces and Society’; the RC on Political Philosophy met in Budapest in May and discussed Citizenship; the RC on Technology and Development held a conference in March in Chile on ‘Environmentally Sound and Sustainable Economic Development in Latin America’; the RC on Women, Politics and Developing Nations held a roundtable on ‘Women in the Democratization Process: Theory and Practice’ in Chandigarh, India in August. The IPSA Study Group on Welfare States and Developing Societies met in New Delhi in July for a workshop on ‘What Can Developing Societies Learn from the Welfare State?’

The second IPSA Workshop, to be held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, is being planned for late April 1994.

Further information on Research Committees and Study Groups and other IPSA activities can be obtained from the IPSA Secretariat, Institute of Political Science, University of Oslo, P.B. 1097, Blindern, 0317 Oslo 3, Norway.

A Trip to Free Kurdistan

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On August 11 of this year, I practically dropped into a black hole when I journeyed to free (Iraqi) Kurdistan. Once I entered this isolated Middle Eastern country I was cut off from practically all outside contact by the catch-22 double eco-

nomie blockade imposed by the United Nations with U.S. support and by Baghdad under Saddam.

Cellular phones and a theoretical fax are sometimes available, while Turkish television is relayed throughout the country along with

several local Kurdish stations. When I first arrived, however, the electricity in the Dohuk-Zakho area in the northwest had been cut by the Iraqis for over a week. Nothing had changed by the time I left ten days later. Indeed the joke was that

the only thing not banned by Baghdad were its newspapers and bombs.

Although incredibly isolated, I never felt in danger because I was not only guarded at all times by Kurdish *peshmergas* (literally, “those who are willing to die” or guerrillas), but also because Kurds as a nation tend to be among the most honorable and honest of people.

What was I doing in free Kurdistan? For almost a decade I had researched and written about these people. To give me a chance to see at first hand the object of my work, Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, the two main Iraqi Kurdish leaders, invited me to visit their fledgling democracy.

Frankly, I was impressed. Although I had to travel through a southeastern Turkey brimming with Turkish military manning innumerable check points along the road and under the constant threat of PKK (Turkish Kurdish rebels) guerrilla attacks, while once over the border many Iraqi Kurds walked around with AK-47s seized from Saddam’s stocks after the Gulf War, I felt safe at all times. This was because of the Kurdish invitation to visit and resulting protection that came with it. I would not advise others to leave home without them if their destination is Kurdistan.

When I finally arrived at the border of Kurdistan, I was greeted by a sign that in English proclaimed “Welcome to Free Kurdistan.” For a people who have known only bitter oppression throughout most of the twentieth century, it is difficult to describe how heartening and emotional such a message is.

Although the economic problems this island of Kurdish freedom is suffering from are legion, I saw outdoor markets everywhere I went. Nobody seemed to be starving. Individual entrepreneurs doubled as gas station operators by standing along roads with containers of smuggled gasoline. Irbil, the capital, and Sulaymaniya both have over a million people living in them, and there are a number of other smaller cities and towns.

On the surface at least things appeared normal except for the guns so many people carried and the fre-

quent road blocks set up to prevent saboteurs. Anyone of importance seemed to have his own personal armed guard. I could go nowhere without one. In most cases the Kurds seemed to have learned that their unity was a prerequisite for their national survival. I saw no actual violence.

I had the opportunity to visit the two main universities of free Kurdistan located in Irbil and Sulaymaniya. Both had impressive physical plants. At the former I met with the members of the political science department and visited their central and departmental libraries. All owned that they were experiencing a deep feeling of isolation from the academic world abroad, while their libraries were sadly in need of new holdings. I was told that a third university supposedly existed in Dohuk, but that it was just being developed.

I also was informed that there actually is an active Kurdish Political Science Association. It has some 50 members and is headed by Jaafar Khidir, an instructor at the university in Sulaymaniya.

When I journeyed to Halabja near the Iranian border—the site of Saddam’s notorious chemical strike in March 1988 that killed some 5,000 Kurds—I saw the rubble that had once been the local library of the Halabjans. The Iranians had destroyed it during the war. Yet I found at least three functioning bookstores in this rebuilding city and was told that the local population was famous throughout Kurdistan for their love of books and writing.

The official reason for my trip was to attend the 11th congress of Massoud Barzani’s Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) held in a large, hot hall in Irbil. I was one of several foreign guests. Barzani, in his traditional Kurdish costume, and Jalal Talabani, dressed in a Western business suit, sat side by side in the front. Occasionally they talked and smiled at each other.

The contrast between the two became all the more evident when they addressed the approximately 1,500 delegates and guests. Talabani had a definite stage presence, gesturing to the crowd and timing

his comments for the right moment. Barzani, on the other hand, seemed more ill at ease and spoke in a perfunctory manner. Some observers, however, thought they detected a sincerity in his presentation not necessarily present in Talabani’s.

A few days later, while dining with Talabani, his wife Hero told me that, although Barzani had been to their house many times, she had never met his wife. Certainly these two Kurdish leaders represented very different traditions in the Kurdish culture. Yet as Barham Salih, Talabani’s PUK representative in Washington, D.C., told me, it is natural and healthy for a society to be pluralistic. From what I saw the Kurds had made major strides in achieving the unity that in their past had proved so elusive.

The first two days of the KDP Congress were taken up by speeches made by various leaders and guests. I was impressed by the attention the delegates gave them. It was obvious that these people were hungry for a participatory democracy that Saddam’s stupidity had given them a once-in-a-lifetime chance to achieve.

Around the hall I noted that some of the banners had slogans in English: “Halabja Never Again,” “United We Win,” “Federalism Within a United and Democratic Iraq,” “Welcome Our Guests,” “Peace, Freedom, Democracy,” “Realism Not Maximalism,” “The Unity between the KDP and UPK [PUK] Is a Historical Achievement,” and “The INC [the opposition Iraqi National Congress] is a Viable Alternative to Dictatorship.”

Although I had only eight full days to spend in free Kurdistan, I still had the opportunity to meet and talk with a great number of important and knowledgeable people. This was largely through the efforts of my traveling companion, Najmaldin Karim, a prominent neurosurgeon in Washington, D.C., president of the Kurdish National Congress of North America, and perceptive student of the workings of American government.

The Kurdish leaders I met included Massoud Barzani; Jalal Talabani; Jawhar Salim, the Speaker of the Kurdish parliament; Kosrat

Rasul, the Kurdish prime minister since March of this year; Sami Rahman, a prominent leader who had just rejoined the KDP; Rasul Mamand, another important leader who had just rejoined the PUK; Fuad Maasum, the prime minister until March; Nechirvan Barzani, a member of the KDP politburo and responsible for organizational affairs; Hoshyar Zabari, the KDP politburo member heading foreign affairs; Habib Karim, who had been rejected as Iraqi vice president by the Baathists in the 1970s on the grounds that he was of Iranian origin; Omar Fatah, a member of the PUK politburo; and Ayoub Barzani, who filled me in on many details of the Barzani family. Without trying to cite particular individuals, here are some of the points that they made.

The Baathists destroyed some 4,500 out of 5,000 villages, 25 small cities with populations between 25,000 and 100,000, and 95% of the rural area. Reconstruction is occurring as rapidly as the meager materials available allow. The Kurds need training in almost every aspect and are in particular need of technical aid.

The Iraqi Kurdistan Front of then eight political parties was the real authority before the elections of May 1992. The Front had issued some laws concerning governmental administration and elections. These regulations had become obsolete as the elected parliament and government were now functioning. Indeed the government had virtually replaced the Front. Although there was not yet a constitution, the parliament was making de facto, constitutional laws. Barzani and Talabani, however, were still the ones ultimately responsible. I was told that the absence from the government of these two leading figures was a "unique experience."

Fuad Maasum had resigned as prime minister because someone stronger was needed to implement the laws he had helped draft. The new prime minister Kosrat Rasul had been a military hero in the uprising against Saddam and cut a rather impressive figure. When I asked Kak Kosrat about the possibilities of cooperation with Turkey,

he responded that you need more than one hand to clap.

There are 105 members of parliament, seven of whom are women. Their average age is 40, which reflects the relative youth of the population at large. The female total compares favorably with the U.S. Congress. College graduates make up 72% of the total. In addition, 25% are professionals; 17% lawyers; 11% engineers; 8% have a religious background; 5% are from the military; 2% have an economic background; and another 2% are from the medical profession. These MPs receive no salary, but do get 750 dinars for expenses.

General sessions of the parliament are open to the public and press, and TV stations record and then broadcast question time. The parliament meets for eight months out of the year, recessing in January, February, July, and August. There are 14 committees, but when asked if there were a special human rights committee, the Speaker responded that parliament itself was a big human rights committee.

Because a supreme leader was not chosen in the May 1992 elections [Barzani and Talabani ran a virtual dead heat], the Speaker has the power to veto laws of parliament. Such action can be overridden by the legislature, however. The Islamic bloc received only 5.3% of the vote and thus failed to qualify for any seats in parliament. Indeed the 7% cutoff point to receive seats has helped act as a catalyst for some of the smaller parties to join the two main ones. New elections will not be held until the economic problems are solved and a census is taken.

Although it appeared that these Kurdish institutions were operating with reasonable effectiveness, some foreign NGO workers I spoke with from the Dohuk-Zakho area argued that they were all little more than a paper organization and many Kurds did not even know they existed. The real power, they maintained, remained in the hands of the parties and tribes. I could understand what these observers meant when I visited Karim Khan, the hereditary leader of the Baradost tribe in the northeast. Still the vast majority of

the Kurdish people are living now in urban areas where the government's writ is more effective. In addition, Karim Khan himself has a son who is a member of parliament.

Traveling around the country by automobile, I sometimes had the impression I was on a two-lane highway in my native, mountainous Tennessee. Water resources and fertile land seemed plentiful. On other occasions, however, the roads would degenerate into badly scarred stretches, and, once, the vehicle I was in actually drove through the Greater Zab River. Our guards in the following car got stuck, but we soon pulled them out with a chain attached to our automobile.

On a trip to the point where the Iraqi, Iranian, and Turkish borders meet, we passed near Barzan. I was told that this famous home of the Barzanis was being rebuilt after its destruction by Saddam. Some told me that Barzan meant "high place," but Ayoub Barzani told me that it probably meant "learned brother."

On this trip I also noticed little signs along the road to mark land mines that were yet to be removed. One had to be careful in walking around in such areas. I was careful and fortunately returned safely to the United States, somewhat more knowledgeable, but still filled with many questions. My single greatest impression, however, was the viability of Kurdistan. If it were not for the political accidents of having their homeland considered parts of much more powerful neighboring states, this country would now be independent.

About the Author



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