

International Political Science

Political Science in Belgium

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Structures of political science have existed in Belgium for more than half a century.

For about twenty years, the Schools of Political Science of the two "free" Universities have belonged to Faculties which are independent in authority but which depend to a certain extent upon the Faculties of Philosophy, Letters and Law for their programs. For the last four years there have been very clear signs of scientific autonomy and specific formation. Thus, at the Catholic University of Louvain, the two institutes of political and social sciences — divided into the Department of Political Science and the Department of Social Sciences — were made independent; and, following the example of English and American Universities, the political science department was subdivided into groups:

1. Political Science
2. International Relations
3. Public Administration

The basic courses in the field of political science for undergraduates in the "Political Science" group are:

History of Political and Social Ideas — Political Science: first part: Political Institutions, second part: Political Life — Contemporary Politics — Contemporary Political Thought — Theory of International Relations — Theory of Public Administration — Political Science in depth — Comparative Political Regimes.

Thus the evolution towards an independent discipline appeared clearly at both the French and Flemish Catholic Universities of Louvain, both of which adopted practically the same plan.

It is less apparent at the Free University of Brussels. The differences between Brussels and Louvain — it should not be forgotten — result from the free universities' complete autonomy in developing their curriculum so long as they adhere to the norms required for recognition of university diplomas and scientific titles.

It seems that the maturation of the teaching of political science was retarded at the Free University of Brussels by the preponderance given to the former Solvay Business School when it merged with the School of Political and Social Sciences in 1946. This merger was the basis of the creation of the Faculty of Social, Political and Economic Sciences, which was given unitary structure only in 1964.

The study of political science is oriented differently at Brussels from Louvain, in spite of a certain converging of the end result. At both, the studies are conceived so that graduates in political science may find employment either in public administration, in the diplomatic corps or in private enterprises with large administra-

tive services. But the education which graduates of the Free University of Brussels have received is broader than that at the Catholic University of Louvain, where specialization shows up more clearly.

In research terms, political science seems to have less importance at the Free University of Brussels than at Louvain because it can only take place within the Institute of Sociology.

The predominance of sociologists at Brussels and of jurists at Louvain results from the orientation formerly given to the Schools; it also results from the difficulty of employing university personnel as political scientists only. This is the reason why the entire field of History (Ancient, Medieval, Modern, Economic, Contemporary, Belgian), as well as Sociology, Political Economy, Administrative and Public Law still form the web of the study of political science.

At the State University in Liège, political science is still dependent upon the Faculty of Law; this is also the case at the State University in Gent.

It is true that State Universities are required by law to integrate all new scientific disciplines into the five Faculties of Philosophy and Letters, Law, Science, Medicine, and Applied Sciences.

Even with these reservations, it is undeniable that in the last few years, Belgian political scientists have been able to develop a real formation within the university system.

Unhappily, there are not many people available, not more than thirty or so, further divided by language, French or Flemish, and highly occupied elsewhere.

The Belgian Institute of Political Science and the Socio-Political Research and Information Center were created and developed within this context.

For a long time, these two institutions have existed on the fringes of the universities, the Institute because its primary orientation is towards informing rather than research, and the Center because it has collective work methods and profit motives.

However, neither the Institute nor the Center, separately or together, can go far enough beyond informing and documenting — in themselves, essential conditions for the development of political science — unless the universities agree to increased efforts and unless political circles give sufficient attention to the task of political science. This is a vicious circle. For the moment, political figures and university personnel mutually ignore each other, more from indifference than hostility.

The Belgian Institute of Political Science and the Centers of Research

a) The Belgian Institute of Political Science

Its statutes describe the Belgian Institute of

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Political Science as the organization representing Belgian political scientists. It was created in 1951 through the efforts of Professor Jean Meynaud, then Secretary General of the newly formed International Political Science Association.

Its founders considered the Institute above all as a meeting ground for people of different political and philosophic persuasions. They wanted to create a favorable climate for free discussion of ideas and, if necessary, political problems, in order to promote the study of political science.

Financially limited, the Institute kept its character as a scholarly society, organizing conferences and colloquiums which contributed largely to its reputation, until 1964.

From 1956 to 1959 the Institute published 10 works, essentially summaries of conferences and reports of colloquiums. In general these were not theoretical studies, but rather attempts to clarify certain concrete problems, examined both by specialists and practitioners.

However, one of these works can be considered as an important step in the evolution of political science in Belgium.

The work of W. J. Ganshof van der Meersch, "Pouvoir de fait et règle de droit dans le fonctionnement des institutions politiques" ("De facto power and legal regulation in the functioning of political institutions"), has, in effect, liberated the work of political science from excessive juridic formalism. The author has reconstructed the functioning of different groups within a constitutional regime undergoing transformation: political parties, professional organizations, trade unions, etc.

This confrontation of ideas and opinions has incontestably enlarged the areas of investigation. It has continued since 1959 in the magazine, *Res Publica*, in which more than two hundred studies have been published to date on elections, political parties, government, Parliament, the linguistic question and the balance between the linguistic communities, etc.

Since 1959, each issue of *Res Publica* has also contained documentary special sections, beginning with a "general bibliographic chronical on Belgian life and political questions."

The Institute's program is based on four major activities:

1. Researching, inventorying and analyzing the archives of political parties and figures and those related to them. (In three years, 43 microfilms have been made.)
2. Since 1967, the publication of a "Political Yearbook," the main objective of which relates to government, political party and group meetings and decisions, treated on different levels.
3. Publishing "Documents" relative to Belgian political life.
4. The permanent study of legislative elections, thus continuing the analyses of 1958, 1961, and 1965, which completed those of the Center.

In its present state of development in Belgium, political science must have at its disposal more tools, collectively developed for common use: timetables, specialized bibliographies, general bibliographies, political yearbooks, documents, weekly library newsletters.

b) The Socio-Political Research and Information Center

The Socio-Political Research and Information Center was founded in 1958 by a group that wanted to study the actual socio-political process in Belgium.

In a society traditionally founded on a pluralist system, this ambition implied direct access to diverse ideological and political systems as well as to the different linguistic communities. This necessity explains the founders' care to unite within the Center personalities of different persuasions, having attended different universities and engaged, through research or activities, in related sectors.

The Center's first task was to describe the morphologies of certain groups: social, political and economic, emphasizing their types of intervention and pressure on political decisions. These studies appeared in the "Courrier Hebdomadaire" ("Weekly Courier"). The Center published a basic work on financial groups, "Morphologie des groupes financiers" ("Morphology of Financial Groups"), and developed a "Permanent Répertoire" which allows movements within groups, agreements, fusions, etc. to be followed and defines very precisely the Belgian share in foreign industrial groups.

Subsequently, the Center developed a collective research project.

Besides the study of decisions and the decision makers, the Center is especially concerned with the results of decisions taken, the phenomena of change in political life and the question of certain new problems in a developed society which cross the threshold of politization (technology, regional employment, water supply, the organization of the health-care professions, etc.). The notions of images and role are also considered.

The Center also developed a Congolese section which, from 1959 to 1969, studied ethnopolitical groups, Congolese personalities and the sequence of events. A volume of documents dealing with the facts of Congolese political life, giving special attention to their basis in the current state of affairs, is published annually, thanks to a collective effort and well-developed teamwork.

c) The Interuniversity Center of Public Law

Recently created — (1962) this Center has already published, under the authority of its founder and first president, Professor W. J. Ganshof van der Meersch, several works on political science; works conceived, of course, from the legal viewpoint, but which cannot be ignored when considering political institutions.

Interdisciplinary Relationships

As is obvious, Belgian political science is neither closed nor centralized.

In fact, there are hardly any political scientists in the strict sense of the term. There are historians, jurists, sociologists, economists, philosophers, mathematicians who, by choice or by necessity within the framework of a reform in university curricula, became involved in political science and brought their experience and methods to it.

Belgium is a pluralistic society, split into different linguistic, political, philosophic and religious groups, among which teaching and a fortiori research, diversified as individuals, circumstances and structures dictated.

So that Belgian political science seems to be the juxtaposition — perhaps the superimposition — of heterogeneous works which concern it to a greater or lesser extent.

This diversity has both advantages and disadvantages.

At the present, creating a curriculum specifically in political science would raise the question of the real chances for a career in this field.

This practical necessity maintains political science in a state of relative dependency on sociology, contemporary history and constitutional law. Opinion surveys and mass media studies are done by sociologists; the most important works of electoral sociology are carried out by two commercial engineers and a geographer, acting in this instance as sociologists.

Just after the Second World War, a sociologist, acting as a political scientist, established the political problems needing solutions in Belgium.

Historians, whose courses still dominate the study of political science, have treated all questions of interests.

As for the jurists, they are, with the historians, the most numerous authors of works related to political science. They teach constitutional or administrative law, sometimes general theory of the State. But it would be difficult to ignore their work on public administration, elections in the E.E.C. countries, bicameralism, the political parties in Belgian public law, the state or politics, individual liberties.

In Belgium psychologists, philosophers and statisticians take little interest in political questions; social psychology, behavioral studies, political philosophy, quantitative statements are areas infrequently and inadequately treated by the specialists.

The best representatives of the new generation have certainly received a broad training, but they have developed the habit of concentrating their studies of political science on matters of methods and theory: methods of research and the question of European unification, how ministerial cabinets function, governmental authority, mechanisms of selecting and choosing political leaders, Parliamentary activity as a means of social advancement.

Conclusions

A major part of the work done is dedicated to

the study of Belgian society, either analyzing its structures and institutions, or on the more pragmatic level of specific political questions.

Monographs on this subject proliferate; one could go even further: they risk prejudicing the spirit of synthesis; this is a striking tendency of political science in Belgium.

Groups and individuals have become progressively more specialized, and it is important to establish bridges between them, to avoid the creation of monopolies. For the moment, the field of political theory is neglected.

The study of political structures and institutions — that is, the analysis of the political regime — is carried out from two points of view.

Nevertheless, works executed by “independents” whose only interests and sources of information relate to particularly Belgian questions are numerically the most frequent.

Finally, certain works — highly original — fit into none of the usual classifications; this is true for the work of L. Moulin on the functioning of religious orders, within which can be found “political” and democratic mechanisms of interest to political science.

Should we have to evaluate the state of political science in Belgium, we would find it most difficult and, depending upon our temperament, our opinion would either be of blackest pessimism or of reassuring optimism.

Pessimistic, should we judge by the place accorded to political science in the broad sense of the term within Faculties of Political Science — about 20 percent of the subject matter taught.

In the area of research, the situation is even more serious on a financial level. The institutions and research centers we have cited and which constitute the quasi-totality of research bodies in the field (excluding universities), have never obtained more than four percent of the credits and subsidiaries destined for research in general from the State and public and private financing organisms. The number of research fellowships has never been more than two percent of all fellowships.

And yet political science in Belgium owes much to the efforts of imagination put forth by the large and devoted number in Faculties, State administrations, public enterprises, international institutions, political parties and unions who consecrate their leisure time and sometimes a part of their working time to it.

The state of imposed reticence among interested parties attracts to political science those with convictions for whom this science is second nature and who bring to it the richness of their experience and knowledge.