

1979 German Political Science Association Meeting

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The thirteenth biannual meeting of the German Political Science Association took place October 1-5, 1979 in Augsburg, Bavaria. Of the 900 members of the association, only about 225 came to Augsburg; most of the big names were absent. At a time when political science in Germany (seen by many as a leftist discipline) finds it difficult to maintain its position in universities against the competition from sociology, current history, and economics, it was surprising to see so few members in attendance. Also, German political scientists are finding it difficult to convert their skills into careers. Teacher training, which until recently provided employment opportunities for many graduating political scientists, is no longer a promising outlet as Germany, too, is facing a teacher-glut. While Thomas Ellwein, University of Constance and President of the Association, called attention to this problem, panels to explore new job and career prospects were lacking.

Only one of the general themes of the meeting—the political consequences of reduced economic growth—provided opportunities for an overall assessment of the state of German society after 30 years of postwar development. For the most part the panels, which often seemed to reflect a *Proporz* among the major ideological tendencies, contained papers from neatly carved out subfields and specialties. The theme of reduced growth was examined for its impact on values and expectations, the legal system, the behavior of the major interest groups, international relations, social policy, local governments, and ethics and philosophy. Most would agree that this was probably a most exhaustive treatment.

Two other general themes dealt with the Europeanization of political parties and the influence of the media on elections. Those present at the conference spent most of their time in specialist work groups. At least half of the papers lacked any empirical data or approaches and while the discussion of empirical research showed a growing sophistication in matters of data manipulation and statistics, this was combined with latent skepticism toward their usefulness. Approaches and concepts developed by American political scientists seem to find their way rather quickly into German academic debate. Evaluation research, for example, has already attracted a German following which gathered at a special workshop.

To someone familiar with American social science conventions, the personal hostilities and ideological issues that surfaced in frequent exchanges would be most surprising and perhaps a bit disturbing. German political science, once ideological and overly descriptive, has now moved into the isolation and arrogance of

overspecialization. As Professor Ellwein said, "This lack of cross-fertilization and internal discussion weakens our discipline." It was a warning not only to the young specialists but also to the senior chair-holders at home in their private ivory towers.

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