

C. P. S. A. NEWSLETTER

Vol. 1, no. 1

September, 1971

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

of Gilles Lalonde

delivered at St. John's, Newfoundland

on June 9th, 1971

The tradition is by now well-established in the C.P.S.A. for the President to wait until a few hours before the end of this term to speak up publicly on a subject of his choice. It is by then too late, whatever he is going to say in his valedictory speech, to do him any good personally either before his Executive or before the membership at large.

It is also too late for the C.P.S.A. to derive any real benefit or to suffer any serious damage from it since he will soon be a past President and an ordinary member of the Association. It is nevertheless a tradition which can be put to good use.

My view of a presidential address coincides roughly with that of my immediate predecessor, Professor Doug Verney of York University. As Doug did last year, I intend to seize upon this opportunity to indicate to you my reflections on the major problems now confronting the development of political science in Canada.

It has taken me little time to realize, after my decision was taken, that I may have been presumptuous in choosing the subject of "Whither Canadian political science". In point of fact, I soon came to the conclusion that it was an impossible task to carry out single-handedly, particularly by a man like myself who, in addition to being a French Canadian, has not travelled this year throughout Canada as much as he would have liked to. I needed to consult and I did consult people in the field.

I wrote to every Head of Department of Political Science in English-speaking Canada and to every English-speaking member of the Executive of the C.P.S.A. I did ask everyone to simply identify for me and to list in order of importance what they regard as the major problems facing the development of political science in Canada. I got nearly 20 replies back, which is roughly one out of three. These replies originated from places ranging from Victoria to Halifax. Most carried individual views. A few of them, I was given to understand, had been prepared after discussion with one or more departmental colleagues, and for one or two of them after the problem had been discussed at departmental meetings.

On the French side, I naturally tended to rely more on personal contacts and personal experience as Departmental Chairman at the University of Montreal. I nevertheless solicited and obtained on a personal basis the views of the President of the French counterpart of the C.P.S.A, The Societe canadienne de science politique.

There are obviously many people who did not reply or could not reply because they simply were not reached. Those who are in this audience will therefore be invited to express themselves after having heard my personal assessment of the situation.

I shall deal in succession with English-speaking Canada and French-speaking Canada as if their respective situations could be treated separately in terms of political science.

There appears to be no hesitation on the part of English-speaking Canadian political scientists to identify the major problems facing the development of political science in Canada. Their list is endless: money, geography, productivity, professionalism, Americanization, etc. However, there is much more reluctance on their part to list problems in order of importance. Some made an attempt at it by dividing problems between those related to political science or to the discipline itself, on the one hand, and those related to political scientists or to the profession, on the other hand. But which ones are the most important, which ones come first is usually left unclear.

What is more striking however is the unevenness and at times the contradictory nature of the concerns and perceptions of the Canadian political scientists. In one particular Department of Political Science, which is by no means the smallest in the country, I was told that there were no areas of serious concern, and where there were a few problem areas identified, not everyone agreed upon them. At the other extreme, in another Department, there was serious concern expressed about the low scientific productivity of Canadian political scientists, and more particularly in one sector of international relations. From a third source came the regret that there was too great a reliance on scientific jargon and the view was also expressed that that political scientists should stress the study of politics and of politics of the day. While a fourth correspondent registered a plea in favour of the maintenance of the distinction between political science as a profession and politics of the day as a concern of citizens, in order not to erode the grounds for strengthening professional study.

I do not see why, under such circumstances, I should hesitate to spell out my own views as to what I regard as the major problems confronting the development of political science in Canada.

I personally see two sets of problems which I put in the following order of importance:

- first are those related to the quality of the discipline;
- second are those which I am going to put under the all-inclusive term of communications.

The quality of political science.

There is not enough concern in my view with the quality of political science in Canada: quality of the teaching, quality of the programmes, quality of the students entering the study of politics, and particularly quality of the training of graduate students, quality of the research output.

Only one or two of my respondents touched upon the calibre of younger men coming into the discipline. Two or three only raised the matter of the credentials of graduates in political science, and the degree of professionalism of Canadian political scientists. One respondent stressed the generally low scientific productivity of Canadian political science and the lack of studies in urban and provincial politics. Another questioned or appeared to question the scientific character of the bulk of the Canadian production in international relations.

Truly there was a lot of mention of the low level of financial support for Canadian political science but not enough concern, in my estimation, for the effective organization of the study of politics in Canada, for first-class scholarship, for rigorous training standards, in a word for the quality of Canadian political science.

The problem of communications.

There is, on the other hand, a score of problems related to communications:

a) those problems of communications arising out of the very nature of political science, of its broadening scope as a discipline, of its burgeoning into sub-disciplines in the last fifteen years, of its ever-increasing exchanges with such other disciplines as anthropology, sociology and psychology. The very large borrowing of techniques and methodological tools by political scientists from other disciplines, and the slow advance of political scientists towards new theoretical grounds in large areas of the discipline call, I would think, for the need to think afresh about the specificity of political science, its boundaries, its relationships with other disciplines;

b) those problems of communications arising out of linguistic and cultural affinities or differences:

First, the affinities on linguistic grounds with American political science reinforced by the vitality and mobility of American political scientists across the border. Surprisingly enough, my respondents have not underlined Americanization in the usual sense of the term - that of the increasing number of Americans teaching political science in Canada - as one of the major problems confronting the development of Canadian political science. My impression was that Americanization in that sense is being regarded by and large as a matter for the individual institutions to resolve. I should think personally that this problem can be resolved, provided there is a minimum of sensitivity on the part of American political scientists working here to the national mood or character of Canada, and to the natural concern of Canadians to ensure that the liberal arts education in this country is kept Canadian. As for the general impact of American political science on the teaching of political science in Canada, I for one do not regard this with regret provided that it leaves room for other traditions, other patterns, other approaches to coexist alongside with the behavioural approach.

Second, the differences on linguistic grounds (I am still looking here at situation from the point of view of English-speaking Canada) with French and French-Canadian political science. These differences, by the way, are being reinforced by the current sense of alienation of the younger generation of French-Canadian political scientists towards English-speaking Canada and non-Quebec institutions.

Many of those who responded to my request did advocate staff and students exchanges between French and English-speaking political scientists in order to achieve greater appreciation of each other's understanding of political problems. I am certainly for the principle of such exchanges but I have strong doubts regarding the practicality of such a traffic, except for one single department, the Department of Political Science of Laval University. Such urge as I was able to detect appears to me to be much of a unilateral aspiration on the part of English-speaking Canada;

c) those problems of communications arising out of geography, of sheer distance between the center and both extremes of Canada.

I have been impressed by the sense of frustration on the part of those away from the centre, both in a professional sense for those interested either on policy-oriented problems or in interdisciplinary contacts, and in a financial sense for those in need of funds for teaching and research purposes. Quite a few small and isolated Departments of Political Science appear to lack the stimulation which derive from frequent contacts with better developed institutions. Some are distressingly uninformed of what goes on among the profession, of what has been done, of what is under way, of what is simply available as of now;

d) finally those problems of communications arising out of the existence of at least two generations of political scientists. I was personally impressed by what appears to be a gap between the older generation of Canadian political scientists focusing much on national institutions and altogether may be too much on federal ones, who are said to be insular, on the one hand, and the younger generation of Canadian political scientists who have either fallen under the dominance of American political science, and its basic behavioural approach, or have as their major concern the role of political science in the community. The younger generation clearly thinks that political scientists ought to be the conscience of the nation. They tend to be attracted by the politics of the day and the issues of importance to their contemporaries. The older generation on the contrary stresses the importance of scientific output and the scientific value of the discipline. In such circumstances, I had the distinct impression that there is a fair number of Canadian political scientists who are critical of the Journal as it stands today. Representatives of the younger generation did go as far as describing it as "esoteric" and as a prestige publication for the C.P.S.A., hence limiting the contributions that Canadian political scientists could make to political discussion. Others, of a more moderate tendency, did criticize the Journal for what is called its lack of attention to Canadian publications. I would be of the personal opinion that there is presently a real need in Canada for another vehicle than the Journal for some Canadian political scientists to write about current political issues.

French-Canadian political science

In French-speaking Canada, I would think that the same general diagnosis can be made of the overall situation of political science. If anything there appears to be even more complacency in French-speaking Canada about the quality of the disci-

pline than there is in English-speaking Canada. However, what I am going to say on this chapter does apply much more to the two Departments of Political Science in the city of Montreal than to the one at Laval University.

French-Canadian political science faces in my estimation, only in more acute terms, the gap generation problem of English-speaking Canada. The senior French-Canadian political scientists, on the one hand, have all come to political science with few exceptions from other disciplines such as sociology and law. They generally stress the same values as their counterparts in English-speaking Canada. The younger men, on the contrary, tend to have a looser definition of the scientific value of the discipline, and most of them feel a very distinct attraction towards action-oriented research and teaching.

Contrary to what I believe is the situation in English-speaking Canada, this younger generation of French-Canadian political scientists already constitutes the majority and will soon be in command of the largest departments. They are much more than on the English-speaking side inbred elements, so to speak, and many of them are not yet fully-processed political scientists in the sense of having completed their doctoral dissertation. Furthermore, only a few of them have taken to the behavioural approach of political science.

Needless to say there is no Americanization problem in French-Canadian political science. Not only was the outside help called in to support the rapid build-up of some departments non-American, but the linguistic or cultural barrier seems to have better insulated French Canadian political scientists from the behaviouralization of political science. Even the relatively few French Canadians who have had some or most of their graduate training in the U.S. are by no means dominated as of now by this basic American approach to political science.

Young and fragile as it still is, political science in French-Canada is in addition much affected currently by the impact of our national crisis on Quebec. As younger English-speaking political scientists reflect on the social value of political science, it can probably be said that the younger faculty members and French-speaking students of political science - at least at the under-graduate level - address themselves directly to the political value of political science. Without the counterpoise of American behaviouralism, many of them tend to question the scientific value of political science as a discipline. Their approach to the study of politics, however, is still very much parochial, inward-looking and utilitarian.

It is no surprise in such a climate to register a low research output, "a few results or projects of good quality" as put by Vincent Lemieux in a survey made on French-Canadian political science in 1969. The French co-editor of the Journal, for one, makes no bones about the sterility of the Montreal French-speaking political scientists. As if to respond to the corresponding urge felt in English-speaking Canada for political discussion, political scientists of Montreal are quite often wrapped up in the discussion of the politics of the day in Quebec instead of pursuing academic research in the traditional sense of the term. What is coming out from them in the way of research is very much Quebec-centered for the most part. The rest of the production of French Canadian political science which seldom but sometimes reaches international standard, like Professor Bergeron's outstanding work entitled "Fonctionnement de l'Etat", because it is not translated in English and because it is North American in origin, has little impact outside Quebec.

