

The American Political Science Review

Vol. XX

FEBRUARY, 1926

No. 1

PROGRESS IN POLITICAL RESEARCH¹

CHARLES E. MERRIAM

University of Chicago

It is now over twenty-one years since a group of scholastic adventurers meeting in New Orleans established the American Political Science Association, and started the organization upon its uncertain course. Looking back over the days that intervene between our infancy and this, the attainment of our twenty-first meeting, one may trace the lines of advance in our undertaking. As one of the charter members I may be permitted the liberty of reviewing briefly some of the more significant fields in this development.

One of the most striking advances in research during the last twenty-one years has been that centering around the problem of the modern city.] Research centers, some of them within and some of them without university walls, have sprung up all over the country, and municipal research workers have contributed materially to the intelligent analysis of urban phenomena and to the direction of the growth of our municipalities. In no field has there been more scientific and practical political research than here. Goodnow was most conspicuous in this field in the earlier days and Munro in the later.

[The study of political parties has been rescued from neglect and has been made an integral part of instruction and the object

¹ Presidential address delivered before the American Political Science Association at New York City, December 28, 1925.

of many specific studies, notably those of Holcombe, Rice, and Gosnell. Along with parties, public opinion has been made an object of more intensive inquiry, as in the suggestive studies of Lippman and Allport.

Political theory has been embellished by the scholarly treatises of our distinguished presidents, Dunning, Willoughby, Garner, and many other studies in more special fields, both historical and analytical.

Inevitably as a result of the World War, but even before that, attention was directed toward international relations, and a flood of important descriptions and rationalizations center around foreign affairs. Many scholarly efforts have been made to formulate more concise principles of international law and to illuminate international relations, as in the works of Wilson, Moore, and a host of others.

In constitutional law many keen and scholarly observers have appeared, of whom Corwin, Powell, and Dodd are typical. But the observers in this field must struggle hard in the wide variety of decisions that fall upon them. In the broader field of juristic theory the figure of Roscoe Pound looms up large and lambent. On the whole, American jurisprudence remains upon a vocational basis, with little attention to research.

In this period the beginnings were made of the study of public administration. Inquiries into administrative law and organization were already developed by Goodnow and others, but in the more recent period specific attention has been directed to public personnel problems, and progress in this direction may be chronicled.

In the field of legislation significant advances were made by McCarthy, whose untimely death caused irreparable injury. In other directions Freund and Shambaugh moved forward.

In the field of method some stirrings may be observed. Beard struck out into an interesting field of economic interpretation of American political institutions, but unfortunately the task is still incomplete. However, our distinguished colleague, the Connecticut Farmer, as he terms himself, is still young. In the last four years this Association's committee on political research has

undertaken to inquire more closely into the methods of political science. The National Conferences on the Science of Politics have emphasized this, and some progress has been made in that direction, although it is still early for observations in this new field. On the whole, the most striking tendency of method during this period has been that toward actual observations of political processes and toward closer analysis of their meaning,—this in contrast to a more strictly historical, structural, and legalistic method of approach to the problems of politics.

Some important aids to scholars have been developed during the last two decades. Among these are the *American Political Science Review*, the *National Municipal Review*, the *American Journal of International Law*, the *Journal of the American Bar Association*. We are all deeply indebted to the editors and managers of these indispensable journals, as we are to those of the older journals. Unfortunately we must chronicle the sad death of the index and digest of state session laws which was for a period of twenty years an invaluable aid to scholarship.

The number of serious students of politics is obviously increasing in number and training, although the striking fact is that the group is still small and pitifully inadequate to the task they undertake. We must record the loss of two of our most eminent scholars of greatest promise in the field of government, Presidents Goodnow and Lowell, who have both gone to that bourne from which no political research man returns.

It would be interesting to examine the fact-content of these various inquiries and to develop the various principles and conclusions that have been established, but the limits of this discussion will not permit such an appraisal.

A disconcerting loss which must be chronicled is the widespread popular tendency toward political fundamentalism. This takes the form of intolerance toward opposing views, and a dogmatic self-complacency intolerant of challenge or rebuke, resulting in indirect, or even direct, suppression of liberty of speech or inquiry. The Scopes case in Tennessee was startling, but the Lusk law in New York was as bad. Only recently in a great mid-western university a former cabinet member was refused permission to

speak in a university building on the League of Nations because it is a political question. If we lose freedom of speech in the quest for scientific truth, our descendants will find it necessary to retrace some painful steps over a flinty way.

On the whole, these twenty-one years have been a period of substantial progress and solid achievement, more than justifying the expectations of those who aided in launching the Association.

However, we have farther to look ahead than behind, and we must therefore turn toward tendencies in the future development of research in the field of political relations. Here we come upon some of the paradoxes of politics. After all our advances, it sometimes appears that we are not fully appreciated by our colleagues, either in the world of practical politics or in the higher and brighter world of theoretical social science.

I had been some months in the Chicago City Council when an astute friend said to me, "You are making progress. There seems to be no prejudice against you because you are a professor. And that is saying a good deal." However, since then one of our distinguished colleagues has been called (falsely, of course) the boss of a great city, thus indicating progress in a practical direction.

And this summer, in a conference at Dartmouth, I observed that my social science colleagues, when they wished to express the absolute absence of science in any subject, were wont to say, "Well, of course, that is purely political." Evidently the "purely political" has diverse meanings.

We are even solemnly warned that politics is disappearing. I have read with great interest the comments of those who seem to believe that we are about to pass into a world from which the wicked spirit of politics has been exorcised, into a depoliticized, denatured state—no, not state but status—in which nonpolitical rule has taken the place of the outlawed scape-goat once called politics. It is easy to understand what these writers feel and sometimes even what they mean, but I am unable to share their convictions, and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that they are deceiving themselves with euphonious verbalisms. Whether the ruling authority is called economic, or social, or political, or

by some other name hereafter to be determined, a set of relations similar to those of politics seems to be inevitable. Whether the world is righteously pluralised, or unrighteously unified, or otherwise, the astute gentlemen who wield the power will be the last to worry over names. What king cares what his scepter is called? Not only this, but as the complexity of social relations increases there will in all probability be more politics before there is less; more governmental rules and regulations before there are fewer.

It is not unlikely, however, that there may be radical changes in the general character of our study of government. Laws, ordinances, rules and regulations, decisions, dictums, dissents, budgets, taxes and debts, capitol buildings, poor-houses, governmental reports, erudite treatises in imposing bindings—these are politics it is true, but not all of it. Whatever it may become in print, in real life politics is vivid in tone and color. Its flavor is in no sense mild and bland, but meaty, savory, salty. It may be conceded frankly that some political discussions have as little relations to life as some treatises, shall we say, in economics—in the earlier period, of course. But politics itself is full of life and action, of dramatic situations and interesting moments.

It sometimes seems that we political scientists take ourselves and our subject too soberly, although I grant that we have never been called the dismal science. My fellow-townsmen, Mr. Dooley, was one of the greatest teachers in politics in his time, although he was never awarded a doctor's degree, *honoris causa* or otherwise. No one of us has ever even written a dissertation on the important function of humor in political affairs. Even the delightful Leacock is tremendously serious about politics, about imperial politics. I have sometimes thought it would be worthwhile to write a history of political unreason, folly and prejudice, in order to balance sundry discourses on political theory, and to offset the possible conclusion from them that all political action is likely to follow the lines of thought indicated by the great masters of systematic political speculation.

The truth is that we students of politics work under some difficulties. We are expected to be practical, but if we were

actually to expound existing practice, our work, unlike that of the custodians of military science, would necessarily be rearranged materially. I was once asked for my memorandum on grafting by an incoming official whose reputation for the development of what economists sometimes call the acquisitive instinct was somewhat greater than that for scientific objectivity, but felt obliged to refuse. We do not teach all that we have learned and are driven to teach sometimes what we are not so sure of. Otherwise we should have manuals on the art of grafting, urban, rural, state, national and otherwise; or courses in demagogery with special reference to local conditions; or perhaps research in bootlegging with criminal law and chemistry as prerequisites; or seminars in tax dodging, with economics, statistics and accounting required; or on deception and intrigue, with ethics and diplomacy expected.

There is, in sober fact, no reason why courses might not be given in many categories of political action as legitimate as the nine set types of legislative, executive and judicial, or local, national and international, or monarchical, aristocratic and democratic. We might have studies in the use of force in political situations, and its opposites, passive resistance and noncoöperation. We might consider the nature of political interests; we might discuss the use of magic, superstition, and ceremonialism in politics; we might inquire into propaganda; into the actual process involved in conference, so significant a function in modern affairs; or the maintenance of political morale; or leadership, obedience, coöperation; or the causes of war as well as its diplomatic history and law. We might conceivably develop a wide variety of similar types of political situations and processes, quite apart from the established nine categories, and perhaps corresponding more closely to the facts of political life. The interesting thing about such studies is that while they are primarily political, they have an application to many other forms of social organization; and, if they could be further developed, they would tend to throw light upon many types of social processes. These, I concede, are not orthodox windows, but it might be possible to see through them or others like them. All architecture need not be Gothic.

Some day we may take another angle of approach than the formal, as other sciences tend to do, and begin to look at political behavior as one of the essential objects of inquiry. Government, after all, is not made up merely of documents containing laws and rules, or of structures of a particular form, but is fundamentally based upon patterns of action in types of situations. The political artist is entirely familiar with many of these patterns, and develops a form of control based on them. But the student is likely to be so oppressed by the weight of forms and structure, of rules and rulings, that he cannot look behind erudition and sophistication into the forces, rational and otherwise, upon whose interplay any system of order rests, and in whose reorganization intelligence might play a more important part. The selection of problems for scientific analysis is, after all, one of our greatest tasks, and they do not always follow the lines of established institutions. Problems often cluster around institutions, but it is also true that institutions may be built around problems. Variations in social life force us to revise or reconcile old attitudes or conduct with the new; and here we come upon new problems, new theories, new institutions perhaps.

It seems to me that we are on the verge of significant changes in the scope and method of politics, and perhaps in the social sciences as a whole.

The relation of politics to statistics I have discussed elsewhere and perhaps need only pause to indicate my hearty approval of the admirable address of Mitchell before the American Economic Association last year. The quantitative study of economic and other social phenomena holds large possibilities of fruitful inquiry, providing of course that the numbers and measurements are related to significant hypotheses or patterns. Even where categories may not be fundamental, as that of price in economics or the vote in politics (both symbols of situations), or are frankly fictitious or provisional, the statistical analyses may serve a useful purpose.

Whatever other advances are made, two appear to be inevitable. One is toward greater intensity of inquiry, and the other is toward closer integration of scientific knowledge centering around political relations.

Most students of government are spread out so broadly over so wide a field that they are likely to get aëroplane views rather than the high-power microscopic examination of problems that is so essential to penetrating understanding. This is perhaps unavoidable in a transition period where personnel is small, and where desperate situations clamor for emergency action rather than research. But in the longer reach of time, closer concentration will come. Indeed it is now appearing.

Likewise we are likely to see a closer integration of the social sciences themselves, which in the necessary process of differentiation have in many cases become too much isolated. In dealing with basic problems such as those of the punishment and prevention of crime, alcoholism, the vexed question of human migration, the relations of the negro, and a wide variety of industrial and agricultural problems, it becomes evident that neither the facts and the technique of economics alone, nor of politics alone, nor of history alone, are adequate to their analysis and interpretation.

In reality, politics and economics have never been separated, or at least not divorced. There is rarely, if ever, a political movement without an economic interest involved; or an economic system in the maintenance of which the political order is not a vital factor. There was a strong flavor of tea and taxation in our revolutionary bills of rights, and there is a definite relation between investments and political order today. The oft-repeated fallacy that democracy was once concerned only with political forms, neglects the factor of land in early democratic struggles, forms, neglects the factors of land and taxation in early democratic struggles, corresponding somewhat to the industrial factor in our own day.

One of the basic problems of social organization is that of the relation between economic and political units of organization and authority. It affects the character of our urban, state, national, and international organization. But is this economics or politics?

Again, there are many methods of dealing with social deviations—through law, religion, economic and social sanctions. But how are these brought together in a pattern of human conduct? Is this a problem of any one discipline; and are not grievous errors

due to the effort to separate these threads without bringing them together again?

After all, it does not seriously matter what this integration is called, whether sociology or *staatswissenschaft* or anthropology or economics or politics. The essential consideration is that the point of view and the contacts are obtained and sustained in the various fields of social inquiry; that twilight zones are not allowed to lie neglected; that partial treatment does not twist and warp the judgment of social observers and analysts. The problem of social behavior is essentially one problem, and while the angles of approach may and should be different, the scientific result will be imperfect unless these points of view are at times brought together in some effective way, so that the full benefit of the multiple analysis may be realized. There is grave danger, however, that these precautions may be neglected and the special disciplines in the social fields may be ignorant each of the objectives, methods, and results of the other, and that much overlapping and inadequacy will result. Our allies the sociologists have undertaken to remedy this situation by a brave attempt to develop a broader point of view and a wider synthesis, and in many ways they have rendered valuable service. But certainly we have not yet arrived.

Still more serious for the student of politics is the integration of social science with the results of what is called natural science—the reunion of the natural and the “non-natural” sciences. For more and more it appears that the last word in human behavior is to be scientific; more and more clearly it becomes evident that the social and political implications of natural science are of fundamental importance. It even seems at times that this is more evident to the natural scientists than to the social scientists, who at times concede the impossibility of more scientific social control of human conduct.

Biology, psychology, anthropology, psychopathology, medicine, the earth sciences, are now reaching out to consider the application of their conclusions to social situations. Their representatives have arrived in Congress, in the workshop, in the court, in the field of personnel. What shall be the attitude of politics and

social sciences to these new developments and these new challenges? Shall we hold them in contempt of court, these irreverent natural scientists, or shall we ostracize them till they submit to our laws; or shall we outvote them; or shall we merely ignore them, and go our way? No, we cannot leave them, for alas, the natural scientist may be as full of social prejudices as an egg is full of meat; and not a few indeed are compounded of social views now a generation old and the present prejudices of their immediate entourage, economic and social. If they are to govern the world they must and doubtless will learn more of politics and social relations. Perhaps they are more impressed with the significance of the social implications of natural science than we are.

We cannot avoid the question whether there is any relation between the psychological and biological differentials and systems of government. The nature and distribution of human equality has been recently explored by inquiring psychologists, and politics cannot escape the examination of the implications of these studies. The somewhat disorganized state of psychology, and the rashness of some of its champions in flourishing these I. Q.'s need not blind us to the fundamental character of the problems that are being raised.

Have modern scientific doctrines regarding heredity and eugenics any bearing upon the foundations of our political and economic order? Childs, in his physiological foundations of behavior, and Herrick, in his neurological foundations of animal behavior, have raised many interesting problems on the border line of political conduct. What relation have they to our quest for political truth?

What bearing have the earth sciences such as geology and geography on the problems of politics? What rôle does environment play in the complex product of government? At what point shall the geneticist, the environmentalist, and the student of social and political control come together, combine their results, and start anew?

What shall we do with the wide areas of irrelevancy disclosed in the background of much of our social thinking? We are familiar with the economic interpretation of politics, but are there not

other unsurveyed areas of equal importance? Dr. Mayo would say, I suppose, if a man is a violent radical or reactionary, do not argue with him; send him to the clinic. You may relate this obsession or hysteria to spasticity of colon, or a disordered salt balance, or blood pressure, or lack of "relevant synthesis," or a twisted experience, or other medico-psycho-pathological cause of the type so impressively laid before us, and sometimes with such convincing results. What is the effect of fatigue, diet, emotion, upon certain types of political thinking and action? Sooner or later we shall find it necessary to survey these wide reaching areas of irrelevancy in political thinking and determine their relation to political behavior and political control. The process may be delayed, but in the long run it cannot be avoided.

What is the bearing of certain primitive survivals of human political and social nature of the early types found by anthropologists? I am not suggesting any relationship between a nominating convention and an Indian war dance, but there are better cases.

Is it possible to build up a science of political behavior, or in a broader sense a science of social behavior with the aid of these new elements, of these newly developing materials? Perhaps not, in their present ragged form; but looking forward a little, there are many interesting possibilities.

At any rate, it becomes increasingly evident that the basic problems of political organization and conduct must be resurveyed in the light of new discoveries and tendencies; that the nature of mass rule must be reexamined; that the character and range of popular interest in government and the methods of utilizing it must be reexplored; that we must call in science to help end war as well as to make war; that the mechanisms and processes of politics must be subjected to much more minute analysis than they have hitherto received at the hands of students of government, from a much broader point of view, and from different angles.

The whole rationale and method of government is involved in these days of Lenins, Mussolinis and Ghandis on the one hand and Einsteins and Edisons on the other. Out of what material

shall be woven the political fabric of the next era, if not from more intelligent and scientific understanding and appreciation of the processes of social and political control? If scientists cannot help, there are many volunteers who will offer their services, and some may be both pig-headed and rough-handed.

The particular pattern of problem, the special form of technique, whether statistical or anthropological or psychological or other logical, is not important; or what the product is labelled. But this is fundamental—that politics and social science see face to face; that social science and natural science come together in a common effort and unite their forces in the greatest task that humanity has yet faced—the intelligent understanding and control of human behavior.

It may well be urged that greater intensity of inquiry and greater breadth of view are wholly impossible; in short, that the new integration cannot be realized. Alas, this may be true. It may well be said, how can one man know anything useful about law, politics, medicine, psychology, economics, sociology, statistics, and so on? How indeed can he? On the other hand, how can he know about politics and be ignorant of the fundamental factors in human behavior? The dilemma of politics is characteristic of our time, and perhaps our time itself is impossible. One of the great tragedies of our age is the high specialization of knowledge and the lack of unity in central wisdom. The shadow falls over the whole of our thinking and behavior. But this problem is not peculiar to politics; it runs through modern life. I do not know the answer; for either to proceed in ignorance of what we ought to know, or to attain that knowledge seems equally difficult, and necessary.

After all, men trained in one special technique with a broad background of contacts and relations in many others will find their way through what may now seem only a maze. We may find it necessary to begin social training earlier and pursue it longer. Yet if Governor Smith can direct the attention of Tammany Hall to the importance of science in relation to government, as he did in his striking communication of last September, surely the pioneers in the field of political research need not

tremble and twitter for fear they may be regarded as too far ahead of the times.

I am not optimistic of any type of promised land of politics such as that sketched by Plato, or later in the broader field of social relations by Comte. These were complacent philosophical gestures conjuring new worlds from airy hypotheses, unverified and with no verification sought. We may be happy in the comfortable obsession that the startlingly imminent approaches to the penetralia of biological and psychological nature will bring with them immeasurable opportunities for more intimate understanding of the political behavior of men, in forms and ways which not even the hardest forecaster would venture to predict.

A freer spirit, a forward outlook, an emancipation from clinging categories now outgrown, a greater creativeness in technique, a quicker fertility of investigation, a more intimate touch with life, a balanced judgment, a more intense attack upon our problems, closer relations with other social sciences and with natural science,—with these we may go on to the reconstruction of the “purely political” into a more intelligent influence on the progress of the race toward conscious control over its own evolution.

In any case, this is not the task of a day. None of those who formed the Political Science Association twenty-one years ago will see a revolution in political or social science, and perhaps our present dream is only one more of those dominant but deceitful reveries so common in all walks of life. Fundamental readjustment is the problem of another and younger generation, now happily moving forward to take over an unfinished work. We welcome them—those who will celebrate the Association’s next cycle of twenty-one years—as they take their seats in our meetings and councils, with a brooding interest and affection they cannot surmise. We rely confidently on their insight, technique, judgment, and vision to effect the more perfect development of a science on which we labored long but left so much to do.