

8. The IPSA Congress at Rome

Several hundred political scientists from different lands gathered at Rome the week of September 15 for the fourth triennial Congress of the International Political Science Association. They held formal discussions on interest groups, public enterprise, executive-legislative relations, war, local government, and theory and practice in Political Science; informal discussions dealt largely with how each had luckily managed to be on hand, with the beauties of Rome and Roman women, and with the relative excellences of the restaurants.

The contrast between formal and informal topics was a little sharper than is usual at American national gatherings because the formal diet was thin and the informal fare was rich. Since a measure of the interest of a meeting is the correlation between formal and informal discussion, changes would have to be introduced in both respects if the next meeting is to register an improvement.

It would be easier to adjust the informal than the formal setting. Both the external and internal milieu of the Congress were aesthetically superb and quite comfortable. Few men have seen enough of Rome to ignore it during a conference. Not only the Americans but many others ventured over the city by day and night; they went into session only to count away the hours like time-servers. But even inside, the murals, draperies, floors, windows, carved chairs, and rugs carried the eye and mind of men from the less profound verbal passages to the creations of the long dead.

Supposing an improved political science to be the object, it would perhaps be better to hold international conferences not at Rome or the several places like it, but at other beautiful places less stimulating to the intellect--Grenoble, Strasbourg, Turin, Edinburgh, Geneva, or Palermo. Why go to Rome to talk about specialized subjects in unfamiliar tongues with strangers, while every fountain, church and statue is ready to speak

on universal topics omnilingually, as a friend?

If political science were to depend upon its international meetings, it would move ahead very slowly. Few men--let us say less than a quarter of the one hundred best political scientists--can follow a paper in a language other than their own. Simultaneous translation helps considerably, and was employed at Rome. Advance mimeographing of formal presentations also helps the one-way flow of formal thought, and this too was done at Rome. However this has a major drawback; when confronted with the full modern effect of rapid reproduction of thought, even professors who have a medieval attachment to the lecture behave logically--at least with respect to others than themselves: they read the advance paper and do not attend, whether in body or in mind alone. Only informal discussion can liberate the academic congress from the appalling thralldom of printed papers combined with formal lectures. The Rome Congress met generally in two, large, simultaneous sessions. Discussants followed the speakers in the order in which their written requests were received. They were not foresworn to relevance, nor were they lined up topically; that is, with good reason, given the undisciplined nature of our colleagues in this respect, a sheer chronological order substituted for the better principle of speaking to a point.

How much more instructive and interesting would have been the meetings if small discussion groups had been the media of communication! Suppose that twenty tables, instead of two halls of desks, were the means of exchange. Perhaps from five to twenty men would cluster around a table at a given time, some sitting, others standing, with a constant movement from the fringes of one group to another. Men of different countries would have numerous chances to become acquainted with one another. They would rub elbows. Nobody would be stuck in a bad session without recourse. Language difficulties could

be adjusted pragmatically: by speaking slowly, by participants interjecting scraps of translation, by the better linguists speaking summaries in another language or two. All the nuances of communication that are lost in a large gathering, such as gestures, smiles, grimaces, expressions of comprehension, can help men understand one another in a small group and help them move from idea to idea: the very poor linguist can risk his halting speech. Points can be repeated. A man may even have his own translating assistant with him to whisper significant passages into his ear. A number of underemployed but willing Italian students were assisting the administration of the Congress. Judging from the cordial interest some of the members displayed toward the fairer of the assistants, they might applaud the occasion for this more functional relationship (and could "rationalize it in terms of public interest.")

The American Political Science Association and other American groups have by no means adapted the logical and psychological conclusions of the science of communication to their own conventions, but generally they have moved further toward achieving the expressed goals of the convocation of the brethren than has IPSA.

The content of the papers at the IPSA Congress was on the whole poor. The best men were not certain what they should give to the audience; the mediocrities were sure they were giving the audience what was best for it. The United States contingent was numerous. Negotiations between James K. Pollock, President of IPSA, and the Carnegie Corporation and SSRC had eventuated in a generous program to bring a number of American scholars to Rome. The Americans were also of high calibre, but with a couple of exceptions, behaved like the Yankees in spring training. They were rusty of language; they were serious, dominating, but a little nonplussed at the formalism and impersonalism of the gathering. They bunted for fear of knocking the pitchers off the box; they were seeking without success the brilliant players on the other teams; they clubbed together

and the other nationalities tended to do the same.

IPSA is a confederational government, built upon national associations, a number of which it helped create following its own birth in 1950. It resembles thus the growth of the United States, where many states were carved out of new lands by the older federated states of the East. The IPSA Council, like the U. S. Senate, overrepresents the underdeveloped and underpopulated areas, but unlike the U. S. A., IPSA's President is elected by the Council. The imbalance would be forbidding if IPSA were of great intellectual or propagandistic importance and if the underdeveloped countries used their representation as a cultural weapon. However, just as some of the new Western states merely added representation to the Eastern interests who owned their resources, the non-Western-European delegations attach themselves to their cultural godfathers from the U. S. A. or Europe. Actually most of the professors who came from the rest of the world could barely cope with the trip and the subject-matter, and so were an audience factor and a voting factor, but not a contributing intellectual element nor a competitive elite. There was little nationalism among the Western nations; a Frenchman was elected President, not because his French colleagues gave him enthusiastic support, but because some English and American members settled upon him as the best candidate present. A Russian made an appearance; some Poles were present. The Russian asked the right, denied to all but the Italian hosts, to speak in Russian, and was refused. Only a handful of members from the non-Western-European and non-North-American world attended.

It appears, therefore, that the structure of IPSA is a little absurd but that it is not politically dangerous. Moreover, the structure of IPSA is not likely to provide much intellectual leadership in political science. It represents, confederationally, the national associations, and the national associations repre-

sent the prevailing hierarchies of academia and therefore the old types of political science (save in the U. S. A.). Besides, in the less developed countries of the world, there is little political science worth mentioning. When and if the Russians and their cohorts move more strongly into IPSA, the mediocre tendencies of the organization will be accentuated, for the communists have no pure political science. (Admittedly the CIA or State Department might well wish to pay some American political scientists to run a kindergarten for these people.)

It should be recognized, of course, that some excellent scholars are active in IPSA. They are principally historians in the old tradition, legists, or mines of structural detail. Conservative by training and temper, installed comfortably in the best positions in their homeland universities, they are little interested in IPSA as an evangelical instrument.

Finally, in enumerating the limitations of IPSA as a vanguard of intellectual advance, one may not ignore the financial factor. IPSA is poor; so is its sponsor UNESCO; so are most of its collective and individual members. Like many of the poor, IPSA will use money as a donor of money may wish; but left to itself (and otherwise slyly or unconsciously), it will use money to expand its organization and its affiliates. This is no more or less than to say that IPSA is primarily a bureaucratic phenomenon with an intellectual superstructure, rather than an intellectual manifestation. No offense is intended, for IPSA is undoubtedly succeeding in organizing scattered groups throughout the world around the lowest common denominator of political studies.

On the other hand, should one have in mind any considerable improvement in the state of political science in the modern world, he might best proceed independently, and naturally, to discover who agree with his views of political science, to gather such people together, and to strive to ease their communications and promote their researches. American

foundations and associations have had much experience in this type of scientific developmental work. The type of conference that might do best might be something like the Conference on Political Behavior sponsored by the Social Science Research Council at Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1949. To the conference might be invited a group of generally known and intellectually compatible writers and researchers on political subjects, each of whom would be asked to invite another unknown, presumably compatible person. From such a conference might come

a greater intimacy and exchange among people who are interested primarily in the substantive knowledge, rather than in the conventional social structure, of the profession. Research ideas, interdisciplinary contacts, and opportunities for international projects would be some of the results to be expected. Perhaps the conference might act also on the growing problem of the translation of articles and books, especially to benefit the unilingual Americans.

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