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The rhetoric of political science in parliament. A study of Westminster debates after the Second World War

Kari Palonen 

Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

ABSTRACT

A parliamentary perspective on the politics of the academic political science connects my former interest in the history of the discipline with parliamentary studies. This article continues the discussion in a previous article of mine on the German *Bundestag*.¹ The conceptual point lies in a mutual suspicion between parliamentarians and academics regarding politics. In this present study I analyse Westminster debates on the concept of 'political science'. Possible similarities between British and (West-)German debates appear in how this applies to academic authorities, in the increasing number of parliamentarians having studied political science at university, as well as in the distance towards academic political scientists. However, in the *Bundestag* political science is understood in academic and disciplinary terms and references to it serve for the members' politicking. In Westminster a concept of political science frequently refers to an intellectual tradition persisting also in the late twentieth century and it emphasizes analysing political changes as challenged to political science.

This case study offers a perspective on the history and range of varieties in the parliamentary reception of 'political science'. Although universities have generally been autonomous in the founding of disciplines and professorships, in Germany, the federal states (*Länder*) were responsible for the disciplinary profile, and in Britain, recent governments have attempted to commercialize universities (which has been severely criticized by Stefan Collini, among others).² The founding of new departments and professorships is not dealt with in parliaments, but some speeches do raise objections about the legitimacy of disciplines or single departments.

CONTACT Kari Palonen  kari.i.palonen@jyu.fi  Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

¹K. Palonen, 'Political science as a topic in the post-war German Bundestag debates', *History of European Ideas* 46, (2020), pp. 360–73.

²S. Collini, *What Are Universities for?* (London, 2012) and *Speaking of Universities* (London, 2017).

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A parliamentary perspective on political science

Political science professors have never gained the same degree of public respect as have their academic colleagues in medicine or economics, for example. In common with other academics, political scientists tend to look at acting politicians *von oben*, or as ‘mere practitioners’, who nevertheless fail to follow the implications of political science scholarship. Professional politicians, for their part, claim to already know parliamentary practice quite well and have good grounds for rejecting the patronising attitude of academics. One of the grounds is that the questions and debates on parliamentary agenda always relate to specific items, which seldom if ever can be resolved in terms of general principles.

As a background for this study on Westminster, the main points of the article on the *Bundestag* debates will firstly be summarized.³ The West German political science chairs were initially founded as a part of the allied programme for democratization and re-education. Suspicion towards the discipline of political science arose in the *Bundestag*, as it was one of the new academic fields that was fashionable after the student movement and became associated with radicalism. Christian Democrats (CDU) in late 1969 opposed the Social Democrats (SPD) and Free Democrats (FDP) coalition of Willy Brandt, later of Helmut Schmidt, and a real campaign to de-legitimise *Politologie* and *Politologen* arose. When the Free Democrats ‘crossed the floor’, enabling the CDU to regain power with Helmut Kohl in 1982, the campaign was tacitly terminated, although occasional interjections against *Politologen* could still be found. On several occasions, political science professors, especially their popular articles, were quoted in the *Bundestag*. A common tactic when disagreeing with a speaker was to quote professors also politically opposed to the speaker.

In the *Bundestag*, the number of parliamentarians with a PhD in political science has remained limited and professors have been extremely rare. In Britain, in contrast, mentioning in parliament one’s experience in studying and teaching political science at university may have contributed to the reputation and profile of several members.

This study on Westminster debates begins with remarks on the figure of ‘political science’ in parliament from 1900 onwards, but the focus lies on the post-war debates, when a full academisation of British (and West German) political science took place. For practical reasons, I have divided the period under analysis from the ‘post-war’ years until the end of 1979, and the ‘contemporary period’ until the 2019 elections.

While I have limited my searches to *political science*, in West Germany the discipline and its professionals had a broader spectrum in the naming of alternatives. In Britain *political studies* is used, for example, in the oldest disciplinary journal, but I shall discuss below how *political science* does not have the narrow, scientific connotations in Westminster that it does in the United States (see Anna Kronlund’s article).

Remarks on the Westminster debates before 1945

Political science as an established academic discipline with its own institutions in teaching, research, journals and scholarly associations is a rather recent phenomenon, in many European countries a post-Second World War novelty in academia (see Marion Löffler’s

³Palonen, ‘Political science as a topic in the post-war German *Bundestag* debates’.

article on Austria). However, as University of Helsinki professor Jan-Magnus Jansson wrote in his textbook *Politisk teori* from 1969, political science is both ‘a new university discipline’ and an ‘old research field’.⁴

The old sense of ‘political science’ as a research field has a long history in Britain. Stefan Collini, Donald Winch and John Burrow have identified several attempts to introduce teaching and research in political science in the early nineteenth century.⁵ One of their chapters deals with Cambridge, where regular teaching in ‘political science’ was held at least since J.R. Seeley’s inaugural lecture⁶ (1869). However, the authors are ‘tempted to say’ that what ‘the political science taught at Cambridge did not do was to study politics’.⁷ This concerned especially the contemporary politics (a ‘nebulous province’, as they named a chapter on the field as it existed in the early twentieth century) in its different facets. One such ‘political scientist’ was Ernst Barker, a professor specialized in ancient Greek political thought. A ‘political science’ chair was established at the London School of Economics and Political Science (founded by Sidney and Beatrice Webb in 1895) in 1914, with Graham Wallas the first professor, followed by Harold J. Laski in 1926.⁸

Among the other British pre-Second World War scholars whom we regard today as having contributed to ‘political science’ were: James Bryce, with his *The American Commonwealth*⁹ and *Modern Democracies*;¹⁰ George Catlin,¹¹ who became a political science professor in the United States; and Ivor Jennings, whose *Parliament* was first published in 1939.¹² With the exception of one remark on Bryce (see below), these scholars do not appear in parliamentary records in the context of ‘political science’.

In the 49 mentions in the Westminster debates from 1900 to the end of the Second World War in 1945, ‘political science’ is often regarded as being a research field. The former Conservative Prime Minister A.J. Balfour mentions, in a Commons debate on the Lords’ refusal to pass a finance bill, Bryce’s view in support of a bicameral parliament:

He lays it down that the need of two Chambers is an axiom of political science based upon the belief of an innate tendency of one Assembly to become hasty, tyrannical, and corrupt, a tendency which can only be checked by the co-existence of another House of equal authority.¹³

This is an example of how a Conservative politician may use a Liberal’s view on ‘political science’ as an authoritative support for his own partisan position.

In the Commons debate on ‘the international situation’, Archibald Southby (Conservative) mentions Barker’s support for the notorious Munich agreement of 1938:

⁴J.-M. Jansson, *Politiken teori* (Borgå, 1969).

⁵S. Collini, D. Winch and J. Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A study of nineteenth century intellectual history* (Cambridge, 1983).

⁶For more on Seeley, see J.R. Seeley, *Introduction to Political Science*. Preface H. Sidgwick (1896) (London, 1923).

⁷Collini, Winch and Burrow, *That Noble Science*, p. 360.

⁸See R. Wokler, ‘The Professoriate of Political Thought in England since 1914: A tale of three chairs’, in D. Castiglione and I. Hampsher-Monk (eds), *The History of Political Thought in National Context* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 134–58, and J. Stapleton, *Political Intellectual and Public Identities in Britain since 1850* (Manchester, 2001).

⁹J. Bryce, *The American Commonwealth I–II* (1888/1914) (Indianapolis, 1995).

¹⁰J. Bryce, *Modern Democracies I–II* (London, 1921).

¹¹G.E.G. Catlin, *The Science and Method of Politics* (London, 1927) and *A Study on the Principles of Politics* (London, 1929).

¹²I. Jennings, *Parliament* (Cambridge, 1939).

¹³House of Commons, 2 December 1909.

- Sir Archibald Southby: The Leader of the Liberal Opposition criticizes the Prime Minister about Munich, but he has in his own party those who take a different view. Here is what a very distinguished Member of the Liberal party said: Mr. Chamberlain stands for the name and ideal of peace all over the Continent – effective peace, achieved by hard work and sweat and not the mere name of peace.
- Mr Frank Griffith: Whose opinion is the hon. and gallant Member quoting?
- Sir A. Southby: Professor Ernest Barker, Professor of political science at Cambridge, a very distinguished member of the Liberal party.¹⁴

Another early case of parliament–academia connections is Liberal minister (Postmaster General) Herbert Samuel’s remark that his ‘book on the law and customs of our Constitution’, which he states is ‘acknowledged as an authority by all students of political science’.¹⁵ ‘Student’ here refers to anyone knowledgeable and interested in the topic. In a similar sense, Lord Derwent (George Harcourt Vandenberg-Johnstone) speaks on ‘all the numerous courses of lectures on political science and sociology and kindred subjects’,¹⁶ and Philip Noel-Baker (Labour) points out: ‘In our schools and universities we have had a good deal of teaching of citizenship, constitutional history, political science and other such subjects’.¹⁷ The members of the House of Commons are themselves put in the role of the student audience, when Conservative member Brendan Bracken said of Eustace Percy: ‘The Noble Lord has given us a little lecture on political science’.¹⁸

In these examples, a deferential use of the term ‘political science’ for supporting one’s own stand in debate can be identified. There is hardly any sign yet of the academisation of the discipline or of a reaction against the ‘teaching’ of politics to parliamentarians.

Westminster post-war debates until the 1970s

My analysis of post-war debates deals with the time extending from the installation of Clement Attlee’s Labour government, in June 1945, to the first months of Margaret Thatcher’s government, at the end of 1979. A search of Hansard gives 86 matches for *political science* for this time range. I have discarded those matching only *The London School of Economics and Political Science*.

The period marks the academisation of British political science in numerous universities across the country, with the establishment of political science disciplinary institutions, associations and journals. Parliamentary debate has not made particular note of this academisation, and its speaking of the subject as a vague research area persists. An example is Stephan Swingler’s (Labour) speech on reforming parliamentary procedure during the Churchill government:

We say that when an opportunity presents itself, as it does in this case, those who are serious students of political science should pay attention to the subject immediately. In particular, if

¹⁴House of Commons, 31 July 1939. On Barker’s support for appeasement, see Stapleton, *Political intellectual*, pp. 132–34.

¹⁵House of Commons, 5 April 1911.

¹⁶House of Lords, 4 May 1938.

¹⁷House of Commons, 5 November 1940.

¹⁸House of Commons, 9 March 1931.

there are any students of political science in the House, especially on the Front Benches, they should immediately pay attention to the urgent question of reforming this procedure.¹⁹

He invokes the authority of ‘political science’ and regards members of the House of Commons as ‘students of political science’, as if the purpose of parliamentary politics were to learn to understand politics. The opposition leader Clement Attlee (Labour) uses the same *topos* when commenting on Winston Churchill’s (Conservative) ‘contribution to political science’: ‘I recall how often, when standing at this Box, the Prime Minister emphasized the importance of thinking not only of the numbers of the Members in the House but of the number of votes supporting them. It was, indeed, his only contribution to political science’.²⁰ The point concerned the influence of plurality in the British electoral system to enable a majority in parliament even for a minority of votes.

In the *Bundestag*, expressions such as *political judgement* or *political literacy* might have been used when evaluating a member’s understanding of politics. Herbert Morrison (Labour) seems to have made such an attempt, expressing his judgment of another member in a detached way: ‘If the hon. Member would approach these matters in less of the atmosphere of fierceness and partisan prejudice and more in the atmosphere of enlightened political science, he would do much better’.²¹

Morrison (1888–1965) was, indeed, a politician who ‘contributed to political science’ as a by-product of his career. He was a self-made man with a long Labour career, serving as a minister in the wartime coalition and in the Attlee government.²² Morrison referred to political science in six speeches and praised the ‘British genius to political science and administration’.²³ He mentions his cooperation with Oxford University in ‘political science, upon which I am engaged in another capacity at Oxford at this time on a book’.²⁴ His book *Government and Parliament* is a rare example of this genre.²⁵

Barbara Castle (Labour) quoted the LSE scholar and later professor Bernard Crick: ‘I quote the recent pamphlet by Dr. Bernard Crick, lecturer in Political Science at the London School of Economics, who produced a searching pamphlet on the reform of Parliament’.²⁶ Morrison, when elevated to the House of Lords as Lord Morrison of Lambeth, also commented on the LSE: ‘This organization has not a terribly high reputation in the university world’.²⁷

A couple of months before Sir Keith Joseph (Conservative), later a major Thatcherite ideologist, said in a debate on the London boroughs: ‘We have had an academic study from that admirable group at the London School of Economics and Political Science, to whom we are all indebted for their work on the subjects of this Bill’.²⁸ Among the critics of the LSE was the leading Conservative politician Iain Macleod. During Harold Wilson’s Labour government, Macleod mentions a letter in *The Times* ‘from three members of – of all places – the London School of Economics and Political Science,

¹⁹House of Commons, 16 February 1954.

²⁰House of Commons, 6 November 1951.

²¹House of Commons, 5 April 1950.

²²See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Morrison

²³House of Commons, 21 August 1945.

²⁴House of Commons, 3 July 1953.

²⁵H. Morrison, *Government and Parliament: A survey from the inside* (Oxford, 1954).

²⁶House of Commons, 31 March 1960.

²⁷House of Lords, 23 April 1963.

²⁸House of Commons, 24 January 1963.

and it said this: ‘We feel that these two awards once again demonstrate the absurdity of the claim that the present Government’s incomes policy has anything to do with social justice’.²⁹ As in Germany, professors from a bastion of the opposing side were quoted when their stand supported the member’s side.

In 1968, two Conservative lords denounced ‘student violence in the universities’. Patrick Boyle (Earl of Cork and Earl of Orrery) said: ‘The most spectacular instance of all so far, involving revolutionary and even anarchical behaviour, is, I suppose, that of the London School of Political Science. I use the second half of the full name of the London School of Economics in order to remind your Lordships of just what it is that is supposed to be learnt in this now sadly humiliated and discredited institution’.³⁰ Lord Reginald Wells-Bestell spoke against student representation at the universities:

the full title ... is the London School of Economics and Political Science, and it is not surprising that the students there are concerned with political matters. The trouble is not, if the noble Earl will allow me to say so, that Dr. Adams is considered by some to be a racist. The real problem is that the students want extensive representation on committees and to play an essential part in the running of the school.³¹

Here some parallels with West German critiques of political science can be found, although there the legitimacy and utility of the very discipline was put under question. No similar critique of the discipline, as in the 1970s in the *Bundestag*, can be found in Westminster.

The Queen’s University in Belfast was referred to by David Howell (Conservative), state minister in Edward Heath’s government, Merlyn Rees (Labour) and the Northern Ireland minister David Hennesy (Lord Windlesham) in the House of Lords as the university had a research project related to parliament’s Northern Ireland (Border Poll) Bill.³² The University of Wales was mentioned by Donald Anderson (Labour): ‘The expertise available in the University of Wales in the Political Science department’.³³

The names of several political science scholars appear also in the 1970s debates. David Howell alludes to ‘Professor Lawrence, Dr. Elliott and Mr. Laver’ of Queen’s University,³⁴ Fred Evans (Labour) refers to ‘[a] letter in *The Times* this morning from Ivor Gowan, Professor of Political Science at Aberystwyth’,³⁵ and Lord Davies of Leek (Harold Davies) (Labour) mentions the *New Society Pamphlet* of Bryan Keith-Lucas, Professor of Political Science, University of Kent at Canterbury.³⁶ The two latter references resemble the *Bundestag* practice of alluding to the broader public writings of authors rather than to their academic publications.

John Mackintosh, Professor of Politics at the University of Strathclyde³⁷ in Scotland, seems to have been the only political science professor in the House of Commons (a member for Labour) in the 1960s. In a budget debate he referred to his scholarly competencies:

²⁹House of Commons 1 March 1966.

³⁰House of Lords, 12 February 1969.

³¹House of Lords, 12 February 1969.

³²House of Commons, House of Lords, 23 January 1973.

³³House of Commons, 15 October 1968.

³⁴House of Commons, 23 January 1973.

³⁵House of Commons, 15 January 1976.

³⁶House of Lords, 29 March 1971.

³⁷See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Mackintosh_\(Scottish_politician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Mackintosh_(Scottish_politician)).

What frightens me is that we will have another rash of *ad hoc* bodies, what we in the study of political science call ‘intermediate government’ – scrambled-together agencies, consultative committees, bodies here, consultants there, who will replan, rethink a bit here and there, who will work hard, but who will not organise the crash programme which we require to halt depopulation, to provide jobs in the declining mining and agricultural industries.³⁸

Mackintosh speaks of ‘we in political science’, having been elected to parliament only the same year. In a debate, Maurice Macmillan (Conservative) refers to him: ‘If the hon. Member for Berwick and East Lothian (Mr. Mackintosh) is a student of political science, he is certainly no mean exponent of the art of political oratory’ (9 May 1966). The tone towards both political science and oratory is clearly ironic.

The reputation of LSE political science professor Harold Laski (1893–1950) was a special case.³⁹ He never accepted the offer of a Labour seat in the Commons in the 1920s. In early 1930s, he broke with the party and supported more militant socialism but was accepted back later and even served in the ceremonial position of ‘chairman’ of the Labour Party in 1945–1946.

Laski’s position was controversial above all at the beginning of Clement Attlee’s Labour government. In the August 1946 Debate on the Address, on the programme of the government, Winston Churchill (Conservative) as opposition leader asked the Prime Minister about Laski’s chairmanship in relation to the government:

There is one question which I hope the Prime Minister will be able to answer. What precisely is Mr Laski’s authority for all the statements he is making about our foreign policy? How far do his statements involve the agreement or responsibility of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs? We know that Mr. Laski is the Chairman of the Labour Party Executive Committee – [Hon. Members: ‘Gestapo’.] Everybody has a right to describe their own party machine as they choose. This is a very important body. I have been told – I am willing to be contradicted and to learn – that it has the power to summon Ministers before it. Let us find out whether it is true or not. Evidently it has got great power, and it has, even more evidently, a keen inclination to assert it. The House, the country and the world at large are entitled to know who are the authoritative spokesmen of His Majesty’s Government.⁴⁰

Churchill alludes to Laski’s statements on Greece, France, Spain and United States. He was especially concerned whether the government supported Laski’s political stand towards the Franco regime:

It would, however, be wrong to intervene in Spain in a forcible manner or to attempt to relight the civil war in that country which has already and quite recently lost between one and two millions of its none too numerous population in a horrible internal struggle. However, if that is the policy of His Majesty’s Government, it is they who ought to say so, and then we can debate the matter here in full freedom. Let me point out in leaving this unpleasant subject that I make no suggestion to the Government that they should endeavour to muzzle Mr. Laski. Anybody in a free country can say anything, however pernicious and nonsensical it may be, but it is necessary for the Government to let us know exactly where they stand with regard to him. Otherwise, I assure hon. Gentlemen opposite that their affairs will suffer and our affairs, which are mixed up inseparably with their affairs, will also suffer.

³⁸House of Commons, 9 May 1966.

³⁹See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Laski.

⁴⁰House of Commons, 16 August 1946.

Prime Minister Attlee answers by playing down Churchill's fears, though he does not mention anything about the powers of the party chair:

Perhaps this would be a convenient point for me to deal with a matter that is still troubling my right hon. Friend opposite, and that is the question of Professor Laski. My right hon. Friend has known Professor Laski for many years, although I am afraid he has not sat under him in the school of political science; but he knows that in common with himself Professor Laski has a somewhat ebullient phraseology and at times is apt to be a little impulsive. He claims for himself, as my right hon. Friend so eloquently claimed just now for all people, the right of individual action, and as a citizen of this country he has the right to express his views. Whether or not he is expressing the views of some particular outside body is another matter; it is a matter between him and any body to which he may belong; but I am glad of the opportunity, if it is necessary at all, to say that Government policy is laid down by Ministers, and therefore any newspaper or any foreign Power or any politician who thinks that the policy of this Government is laid down by anybody but the Labour Ministers is making a great mistake.⁴¹

Attlee not only dismissed Laski's private views on British foreign policy but also questioned his authority as a political science professor. This distancing did not suffice for the opposition. David Gammans (Conservative), on the contrary, claimed that the domestic programme of the government may have been the work of Laski:

I would like to say one word on the Prime Minister's statement with regard to Professor Laski. I do not want to waste much time on it, because I do not think it is worthwhile wasting much time on Professor Laski. When, yesterday afternoon, I had the opportunity of reading for the first time the Gracious Speech, I said to myself: 'I have read this all before'. I think we had all read it before, because, as far as the domestic programme of the Government was concerned, the whole of that programme had already been broadcast by Professor Laski to the USA. I would like to ask the Prime Minister what is the explanation of that. Was it that he went and saw Professor Laski first, or was Professor Laski revealing Government secrets and Cabinet discussions? It was either one thing or the other, or he could not have got it word for word as it was in the broadcast to the USA. If Professor Laski is to be used as the mouthpiece for the Cabinet, at least his remarks might be broadcast over the Home Service, so that we may have the pleasure of listening to them.⁴²

The two first sentences mark as a typical politician's attitude to political science professors. The rest of the paragraph strangely says the opposite – as if Laski were the grey eminence of the government. This resembles the polemics hurled on nebulous grounds against leftist political scientists in the *Bundestag* in the 1970s. In the Commons, the Independent Labour member Campbell Stephen regarded the polemic against Laski as an attempt to discredit the government.

I have no objection whatever to his Laski it is. Let him keep on with it. I am sure there are a lot of people sitting on the Government benches now because of Laski, it is during the Election. I know that wiser Members among the party now on the Opposition side of the House agree with me on that point. I want to complain about that part of the hon. and gallant Member's speech in which he seemed to indicate that he and others in the Tory Party are going to follow the same line of criticism as they did from 1929 to 1931 of discrediting the Labour Government.⁴³

⁴¹House of Commons, 16 August 1946.

⁴²House of Commons, 16 August 1946.

⁴³House of Commons, 16 August 1946.

Minister Reginald Prentice (Labour) commented on controversial scholars in a way that would surely apply to Laski: ‘Many of the greatest teachers and researchers in economics, political science and the social sciences have been controversial figures, but the quality of their research has not been spoiled by their having a case to make and being partisan in support of it’.⁴⁴ Rafael Tuck (Labour), in a polemic against the Heath government, referred to Laski’s teaching: ‘My great teacher in political science, Harold Laski, once said that men who live differently think differently. The Prime Minister and his colleagues live differently and therefore they think differently; they cannot project themselves on to the plane of the workers’.⁴⁵

Laski has been alluded to in Westminster debates from the 1930s almost to the present. He seems to have been a *bête noire* of the British right wing from the 1930s well beyond his death in 1950. In this sense, his position is somewhat analogical to that of Carl Schmitt in the *Bundestag*.⁴⁶

The contemporary period

For the period from 1980 to November 2019, I identified (excluding mere LSE mentions) 59 matches for ‘political science’, and they were divided evenly between the two Houses. The high number among the lords might partly be due to Tony Blair’s Labour government’s reform of that house, which increased the number of life peers selected by personal merits. They included the appointment of political science professors Bhikhu Parekh, Philip Norton and Paul Bew. Two political science professionals elected to the House of Commons, namely Austin Mitchell (Labour) and Tony Wright (Labour), played a noteworthy part in the debates. Such a presence of political scientists was missing from the *Bundestag*.⁴⁷

In the Lords James Younger of Leckie (Conservative) (19 December 2018) mentioned ‘Lord Parekh’ in connection with political science, to which Donald Anderson of Swansea (Labour) responded: ‘I wonder whether political science professors such as the noble Lord, Lord Norton, will ever again ask their first-year students to write on fixed-term Parliaments’.⁴⁸ Younger and Anderson here also illustrated the practice of quoting professors from the opposing political side when the quotations favour their own cause (Norton identifies himself as a Conservative, Parekh is a Labour member).

In the Commons, Tony Wright mentions academic journals, asserting that there are ambiguities in the way their research is evaluated: ‘*The Political Quarterly* scored highly when people were asked about its impact, but much less highly when it was evaluated for research content’. He arrives at a pessimistic conclusion regarding the journals: ‘One has only to pick up a copy of a political science journal to find oneself immediately in the linguistic world of prefabricated henhouses. The Orwell mission of turning political writing into an art has no chance at all in this kind of academic environment’.⁴⁹

⁴⁴House of Commons, 22 November 1965.

⁴⁵15 November 1972/15 November 1972.

⁴⁶See K. Palonen, *Political science*.

⁴⁷See K. Palonen, *Politik als parlamentarischer Begriff. Perspektiven aus dem Deutschen Bundestag*. (Leverkusen, 2021).

⁴⁸House of Lords, 1 March 2011.

⁴⁹Both quotes, House of Commons, 13 December 2006.

Austin Mitchell (Labour), one of the more self-reflective political science professionals, refers to his own teaching experience in connection with his opposition to the practice of referendums:

When I used to teach political science – when I was concerned with the theory, before coming here to fail the practicals – I opposed referendums, for two basic reasons. First, I thought that the system as it was worked well and that party government gave us the power to change. I thought that a majority, a mandate, would give a Labour party the power to change the system in this country and make it a fairer society. Secondly, I believed that a referendum, as a conservative device that was opposed to change, would deny us that power. We have to face the fact that a referendum is a conservative device.⁵⁰

Mitchell also mentions his academic background when criticizing a policy of the fisheries' industry in the EU's constitutional draft. 'I read several constitutions during my days as a political science lecturer, but I never found one that included the marine biological resources of the sea and fish'. The common fisheries policy 'would have to be damaging to our national fishing interests. That is only one aspect of the constitution that worries me'.⁵¹ In a debate over David Cameron coalition government's motion on fixed-term parliaments, Mitchell again refers to his teaching experience: 'I have spent a long time in New Zealand lecturing in political science and praising the three-year term, which works very well. The virtue of a three-year term is that it keeps Parliament in close touch with the people',⁵² as opposed to the British practice of five years term.

New among Westminster's references to academia are allusions to political science studies at university. Iain Luke (Labour): 'When I was a student studying political science and the nature of the British constitution and its institutions, of which this House forms the beating heart, one of my standard texts was written by John P. Mackintosh, a distinguished Edinburgh university professor and, until his death, the Member of Parliament for East Lothian'.⁵³ Andrea Leadsom (Conservative) tells how she 'went on to jump out of my political science degree and into the City with huge enthusiasm',⁵⁴ whereas Lord Peter Hain (Labour) draws an ironic conclusion: 'In fact, I started studying engineering and then switched to political science and economics. It has been downhill for me ever since'.⁵⁵

As in the *Bundestag*, Westminster has quoted political scientists as 'authorities' in ongoing debates. In a Lords debate on terminating the Falklands War, John Wodehouse (Earl of Kimberley) first quotes an 'Argentinian expert', who expected that negotiations with Britain would go best with an '[Argentinian] civilian government, if one were to come into being'. In contrast, 'Dr [Peter] Calvert ... from the University of Southampton' judged this 'an incorrect assumption'.⁵⁶ Wodehouse rather trusts the domestic scholar rather than one from Argentina.

⁵⁰House of Commons, 19 April 1993.

⁵¹House of Commons, 16 June 2004.

⁵²House of Commons, 13 September 2010.

⁵³House of Commons, 29 October 2002.

⁵⁴House of Commons, 22 March 2011.

⁵⁵House of Lords, 13 June 2019.

⁵⁶House of Lords, 6 December 1983.

In a debate on the Labour government's Scotland Bill, Michael Ancram (Conservative) quotes the entry 'Cabinet' in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Science* and concludes: 'If I read that right, one either has a cabinet structure or not', which the 'new clause 23' does not achieve.⁵⁷ Paul Bew, the Northern Irish political scientist and a cross-bench member of Lords, invoked the views of political scientists to oppose New Labour's ideas about Britishness:

Now, when new Labour wants to define positive Britishness and turns to its natural historical intelligentsia, it does not receive much help. In fact, the most relevant academic interventions may now come from the community of political science – the noble Lord, Lord Parekh, being a striking example in his fine speech earlier today, the work of the Constitution Unit, Professor Arthur Aughey's important work in Belfast, and even old hands such as Professor Sir Bernard Crick.⁵⁸

Bew suggests that government and parliament should learn from political scientists, from the Ulster Unionist Aughey to the Labour member Crick. John Cartwright (Social Democratic Party), for his part, emphasized that legislation should be understandable without a political science degree: 'What is the ordinary citizen of London ... to make of this confusing patchwork quilt of quangos, joint boards and ministerial power? He simply will not understand it, unless, of course, he has a PhD in political science'.⁵⁹ Alan Duncan (Conservative) made a similar argument about voting systems: 'They almost need a PhD in political science to get to grips with all the different systems of voting, counting, and casting their vote. Voters cannot be expected to know their STV from their SV from their FPTP, and they are becoming increasingly confused about their preference'.⁶⁰ Both argue that the technical improvements brought about by political scientists might go astray unless they are addressed to an audience of not only parliamentarians, but also other citizens.

A certain contempt for political science is implicit in Jeremy Corbyn's (Labour) remark from the 1980s:

This is not a debate on political science. If the hon. Gentleman does not know what fascism or racism are, their basis or what they thrive on, he has no right to represent anyone. If he cannot recognise the evil of fascism, I fail to understand what he is doing here. He knows perfectly well what it is. Far too many people in Europe died because of fascism and the lack of opposition to what went on before the last war in Germany and other countries.⁶¹

The argument takes issue with political science's tendency towards ever more detailed definitions as something missing the point. Still, we can detect in Corbyn's old leftist language a tendency to stamp everything undesirable as 'fascism'. The old Marxist practice of counting National Socialism under the rubric of 'fascism' fails to identify its singularity as the most extreme form of right-wing totalitarian regime.

A self-ironical affirmation of a political science principle is contained in Edward Leigh's (Conservative) view on his actions as a minister: 'That shows an elementary fact of political science: that when one becomes a Minister one does the opposite of what one previously promised'.⁶²

⁵⁷House of Commons, 25 March 1998.

⁵⁸House of Lords, 19 June 2008.

⁵⁹House of Commons, 3 December 1984.

⁶⁰House of Commons, 22 June 2004.

⁶¹House of Commons, 20 June 1985.

⁶²House of Commons, 12 February 1992.

Political realities transcend political science

The idea that parliamentarians contribute to ‘political science’ has also disappeared from Westminster in the recent decades. We can instead identify the more interesting idea that politics has led to results that challenge political science.

A neologism meriting our attention is ‘political science fiction’. Grey Ruthven (Earl of Gowrie) (Conservative) spoke of it in the Lords in the context of employment training.⁶³ ‘Political science fiction’ is also included in this exchange in the House of Lords:

Lord Smith of Clifton (Trevor Arthus Smith, Lib Dem):

I wrote that it had been found prudent to repeal the House of Commons (Clergy Disqualification) Act, so I claim some intellectual property rights in respect of today’s Bill. What started as part of a piece of political science fiction is now about to become reality.

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Steve Bassam, Lab)

The noble Lord, Lord Smith of Clifton, persuaded me that we were living in a form of science fiction, otherwise known as political science. I thought that that was a very entertaining contribution.⁶⁴

For Smith, parliamentarians need political science fiction for putting issues onto the agenda, issues which may be realized after long and thorough debates. Bassam parodies the move in the sense of characterizing political science itself as a form of science fiction.

The expression was used in a more literal sense in the context of the East European transformation in 1989/90. George Robertson (Labour) first quotes John Roper (Liberal Democrat): ‘My friend John Roper said the other day that the eastern Europeans have turned science fiction into political science in only a few weeks. The impossible dream has become the commonplace reality as day follows day’.⁶⁵ Here the old view that ‘political science’ precedes political action persists in a context in which a merely imagined possibility has turned to political reality. In the following year Robertson uses the same *topos*: ‘We should also pay tribute in the debate to some others who transformed science fiction into political science during the last 12 momentous months’.⁶⁶ He praises the political imagination of several East European actors behind this change, but now the fiction preceding the action is attributed to politicians.

There are also less dramatic examples ‘hitherto unknown to political science’, as Morrice James (Lord Saint Brides) said of the Hong Kong treaty with the ‘one country, two systems’ principle.⁶⁷ The economist Robert Skidelsky offered the Lords a thought experiment: ‘Why should we not construct a modern St Helena ... as a place of exile for deposed tyrants?’, and continued ironically: ‘The conditions of such a retirement home could be made reasonably pleasant, with courses of lectures in political science and healthy outdoor activities’.⁶⁸ He does not say whether political science should be a substitute for politics for the tyrant, or a medium helping them to understand why tyrannies fail.

⁶³House of Lords, 15 July 1981.

⁶⁴House of Lords, 27 March 2001.

⁶⁵House of Commons, 1 December 1989.

⁶⁶House of Commons, 19 October 1990.

⁶⁷House of Lords, 16 May 1986.

⁶⁸House of Lords, 29 March 2004.

Opposite views as lessons from political science were also drawn concerning European integration. David Philip Amory (Conservative) declares: ‘A solution does exist: we simply need to apply a little political science. Where do people feel democratically represented? At the level of their nation state, surely’.⁶⁹ A decade earlier, two Labour lords would have strongly opposed such a view. Maurice Peston regards Europeanisation as a new subject for political science: ‘Whatever else we have done, we have produced a gold mine for future PhD students of government and political science, some of whom, I hope, will be British’.⁷⁰ Alun Gwynne Jones (Lord Chalfont) anticipated the end of nation states: ‘We are moving into a very important period of transformation and transition of political science and political philosophy. We are moving from the world of the nation state, in which national interests are paramount and always have been, to what I might call, for the sake of shorthand, globalism’.⁷¹

Political science as a parliamentary argument

In West Germany, political science was institutionalized as part of the re-education programme after the Nazi catastrophe, while in Britain, the older language that dealt with politics in a scholarly way persisted. The disciplinary academisation was more rapid in West Germany than in Britain, which retained much of the older usage of political science as an intellectual tradition. In Britain in the post-war years, the activities of parliamentarians themselves could still be presented as a contribution to political science, an idea which would have been unthinkable in West Germany.

Deferential appeals to political scientists or to their academic ‘results’ have also been made by British parliamentarians. In Westminster, unlike the *Bundestag*, some political science professionals, especially from the 1990s onwards, played a noteworthy role in both Houses. Parliamentarians’ reports of studying and teaching political science are more prominent in the British than in the German debates.

In the *Bundestag*, political science remains adapted to the purpose of ongoing political debates, whereas British parliamentarians seem to be more sensitive to the insight that world events or even the parliament’s own politics might recast the agenda of political science debates. In the *Bundestag*, a member’s own politics are discussed in terms of ‘political judgement’ or ‘political competence’: nothing is worse for a member than to be accused of *Politikunfähigkeit*.⁷²

A suspicion towards political science can be identified in both parliaments, although the rhetorical tone is different.⁷³ With only a bit of caricature, the German Christian Democratic post-1968 polemic against political science differs little from the rhetoric of ridicule, targeting political science as a discipline created at the initiative of the allied powers as well as its then dubious academic standing of its professional representatives and students. In Westminster, the tone was more a rhetoric of irony, of a

⁶⁹House of Commons, 18 June 2002.

⁷⁰House of Commons, 8 June 1993.

⁷¹House of Lords, 25 September 1992.

⁷²See Palonen, *Politik als parlamentarischer Begriff*, pp. 80–81.

⁷³On laughing and ridicule in British politics see Q. Skinner, ‘Why Laughing Mattered in the Renaissance’, *History of Political Thought* 22, (2001), pp. 418–47 and ‘Political Rhetoric and the Role of the Ridicule’, in K. Palonen, T. Pulkkinen and J. M. Rosales (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Politics of Democratization in Europe: Concepts and Histories* (Farnham, 2008), pp. 137–49.

detached judgment of the practising politician towards certain over-pretentious claims of political scientists. The examples noted above of ‘political science fiction’ well illustrate this aspect.

Max Weber’s distinction between a working *Arbeitsparlament* and a talking *Redeparlament* has frequently been misunderstood: he only denounced the powerless versions of the latter, but he admired the British parliament’s way of combining both aspects.⁷⁴ The *Bundestag* has an identity closer to the *Arbeitsparlament*, whereas Westminster is above all a *Redeparlament*: rhetoric as such is at the very core of the Westminster-style of parliamentary politics, but it is regarded with suspicion in the *Bundestag*.

This is also clearly visible in the ways that political science is used as a resource in the respective debates of the two parliaments. Quentin Skinner seems never to have been quoted in Westminster plenary debates, but British parliamentarians have understood better his thesis from the acclaimed *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, of which still no German translation exists: ‘The political life itself sets the main problems for the political theorist’.⁷⁵

In neither of the parliaments does ‘political science’ refer to a scientific view. Although there was some hope in the *Bundestag* that scholarship (*Wissenschaft*) would reduce the politicians’ workload and of responsibilities,⁷⁶ this was not the case with political science scholarship. Such a hope was not present in Westminster, but we may identify in the British talk the idea that, as political changes bring ever new items onto the political-science debate agenda, this only highlights the Westminster tradition. It sees such burdens as opportunities to practise its true calling, namely, debating the issues in line with what I have called the Weberian ‘parliamentary rethinking of objectivity’ and the ‘parliamentary theory of knowledge’.⁷⁷

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ORCID

Kari Palonen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7274-1690>

⁷⁴M. Weber, ‘Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland’ (1918), in *Max-Weber-Studienausgabe* 1/15, W. J. Mommsen and G. Hübinger (eds), (Tübingen 1984, pp. 202–302), on the interpretation see K. Palonen, ‘Was Max Weber Wrong about Westminster?’, *History of Political Thought* 35, (2014), pp. 519–35.

⁷⁵Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1978), vol. I, xi.

⁷⁶Palonen, *Politik als parlamentarischer Begriff*, pp.134–36.

⁷⁷See K. Palonen, *The Parliamentary Model of Rhetorical Political Theory*, in N. Gutenberg and R. Fiordo (eds), *Rhetoric in Europe: Philosophical Issues* (Berlin, 2017), pp. 157–78.