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STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

published in association with

GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION

a quarterly journal of comparative politics, published by
Government and Opposition Ltd, London School of Economics
and Political Science, Houghton Street, London, W.C.2.

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The Study of Political Science Today

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Macmillan Education

ISBN 978-0-333-13275-3 ISBN 978-1-349-01377-7 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-01377-7

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Reprint of the original edition 1970

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First published by Mouton/UNESCO 1970

First published in Great Britain 1971

Published by

THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD

London and Basingstoke

Associated companies in New York Toronto

Dublin Melbourne Johannesburg and Madras

SBN 333 13275 0

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Preface

I am grateful for the opportunity to explain briefly the context of the chapter here reprinted from Part One of the UNESCO volume on *Main Trends in Research in the Social and Human Sciences*.

This context was important to me in various respects.

First, there had been argument within UNESCO as to whether politics should rank as a social science or as a humanity, and I came rather late, as a not very distinguished new boy, to represent political science within a group of world-famous scholars; it included at the outset (among others) Roman Jakobson, Oscar Lange, Paul Lazarsfeld, Claude Lévi-Strauss, P. C. Mahalanobis, Jean Piaget, Stein Rokkan and E. L. Trist. Oscar Lange died in 1965 and was at first replaced by a group of his pupils; Lévi-Strauss and Mahalanobis withdrew under the pressure of other work. But the 'seminar' remained a formidable one; and this may perhaps excuse me if the chapter seems to some to be too apologetic in tone.

Secondly, the chapter was written within a particular intellectual context and may be hard to understand apart from that context. The book as published has some of the weaknesses that afflict collective enterprises; one of these weaknesses is that most of the authors exceeded their allocation of words. In consequence, the book has 866 pages (the French edition is even longer) and may prove unreadable as a whole. But practically all of it is relevant to the present state of political science, in particular the chapters by Lazarsfeld, Rokkan and E. L. Trist. The Introduction by Samy Friedman gives an overview very skilfully, but cannot do full justice to the interaction between various chapters as they were written.

Thirdly, the production of the book was a political act, carried through against a political background of which we were well aware. My book on *Politics and Social Science* was largely written

in the first half of 1966, and at that stage neo-Marxism rated no more than a bare mention (p. 83). But by 1968 the situation was quite changed. On the one hand, there had been important cracks in the barriers which divide social science, East and West. This was perhaps most marked in economics; but there were noticeable developments both in sociology and in political science – which suggested that (at a reasonably dry technical level) contact between colleagues in these disciplines might eventually become normal.¹

On the other hand, there were in 1968 the days of May in Paris, of August in Czechoslovakia. Neo-Marxist doctrines not accorded the *imprimatur* by any communist regime suddenly became fashionable; they had been there all the time, it seems, and the Anglo-Saxons (even those who knew of them) had discounted them as trivial politically, compared with the possibility of increased mutual exchange with recognised communist academics at the professional level. Clearly we were wrong in this, or at least too slow.

All that needs be added is that the effective date of the final draft was October 1968. It must not be taken that I still think the same on all points; but I have not modified my views about the intricate and changing relationship between academic political science and the real world² of politics.

W. J. M. M.

October 1970