editorial comment

The articles in this issue of EPS all address a number of key questions concerning the problems and issues that are, or arguably should be, at the top of the agenda of politics teaching and research in Europe. One of these concerns curriculum development and what good political science curricula ought to look like. As higher education has increasingly become mass education, so there has been a growing debate in recent years about the nature and characteristics of political science and other programmes. Readers familiar with the processes of 'quality assurance' in the UK, for example, will be aware of the existence of 'subject benchmark statements' – while discussion of the content and desirability of similar such statements has taken place in a variety of fora at European level in the wake of the Bologna declaration (see for example, Goldsmith and Berndtson in EPS 1:3). In the Spring 2003 issue we published a piece by Gaby Umbach and Bruno Scholl on the notion of a core curriculum in EU studies and how such a curriculum might be developed. In this issue, Chris Rumford and Philomena Murray contest the claimed desirability of a core curriculum in this field, arguing that it provides 'a recipe for stultifying debate, boredom and sameness'.

Part of the drive towards uniformity induced by the 'massification' of higher education has to do with the concomitant growth in pressures for qualifications to be recognised, and thus for degree programmes to be 'comparable', across national boundaries. Partly – and relatedly – it has to do with the commodification of higher education – with students increasingly viewed as 'customers' and the providers of that education under increasing pressure to demonstrate that they are offering 'value for money' through conformity to externally imposed criteria and procedures. In a hard-hitting critique of the resulting managerialism in higher education, Paul Taylor argues that not only is managerialism misguided and ineffective even in its own terms, but that it has gained the upper hand largely because of the complicity of academics themselves, who have declined to challenge the linguistic subterfuges used to promote it or the premises on which it is based. Paul Hirst, in his contribution, sees these premises as being essentially those of economics, which has promoted an obsession with 'transparency' and 'accountability', at the expense of 'solidarity, community, loyalty and belief'. He argues provocatively that, linked with the 'new managerialism', this obsession 'is slowly destroying our public institutions and many firms too.'

While economics has been the hegemonic discipline in the social sciences for the last fifty years, it lacks, Hirst argues, 'models of action that are broad enough to account for social life – even for markets.' Consequently, '[w]ith sociology dead, and economics

https://doi.org/10.1057/eps.2003.25 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reduced to dogma, political studies is left with the broader job of re-building our account of social solidarity, social action and the institutional foundations for community.' If political studies is to rise to this challenge, then, according to Hirst, it needs to pay attention to at least five theoretical and methodological issues as part of its core agenda: the danger of re-ideologisation; the hegemony of 'American-style' political science; the development of a credible theory of social action; the re-integration of its sub-disciplines; the re-integration of history. A combination of reflection, analysis and polemic, his address to the discipline will, we hope, provoke a debate on these matters in the pages of future issues of this journal.

Sadly, Paul Hirst submitted his piece just a few weeks before his untimely death on 16 June at the age of fifty-seven. In her tribute to him and to his work, Samantha Ashenden points out that, against both ideological and apolitical understandings of work in political studies, 'Paul took seriously the task of thinking both realistically and imaginatively about contemporary problems.' In setting out his agenda for 'the future of political studies', Paul Hirst leaves us with a piece that exemplifies this approach admirably.

Of course, providing a forum for debate and discussion about research agendas broad and narrow is one of the central purposes that a journal of this kind ought to fulfil. We are therefore delighted to publish, in addition to Paul Hirst's wide-ranging contribution, the more specifically focused contribution of Maarten Vink who describes the new research agenda of Europeanisation – explaining what it is, what it is not, what its sources and implications are. In relating Europeanisation to the traditional integration literature and its implications for two-level theories ('where national executives are simultaneously involved in international negotiations and bargaining with domestic interest groups'), Vink touches on one of the themes taken up in our symposium which, in this issue, is devoted to the Iraq crisis. For, besides presenting a range of perspectives on the origins and development of the crisis, the symposium, guest-edited by Raj S. Chari, also shows how alternative frameworks for understanding the international system can shed light on the stances taken by individual states in relation to the crisis. In offering this symposium we seek to fulfil another of the journal's central remits, namely, to offer theoretically informed discussion of important current events. In so doing we seek to adhere to that ideal advocated by Paul Hirst – the attempt to hold together both objectivity and engagement – mindful of his stricture: 'Political studies should offer solutions to real political questions based on its knowledge, and push the new questions that it identifies onto the political agenda – questions of which publics and politicians alike are either ignorant or fearful, and thus eager to avoid.'

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