

The Lee Lecture in Political Science and Government

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A TALE OF THREE CITIES: THE EARLY YEARS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE IN OXFORD, LONDON, AND MANCHESTER

Summary of a lecture given at the Examination Schools, Oxford
on Thursday, 28 January 2010

2010 is the centenary of the appointment of W. G. S. Adams to the first designated post in political science at Oxford. Two years later, Adams was appointed to the Gladstone Chair in Political Theory and Institutions. The years on either side of this date were the occasion for an expansion of university teaching and research in several cities. A comparison of the experiences in their approach to politics of three of them, Oxford, London, and Manchester provides ingredients for three ideal types. Each type has two facets. On one side, a justification of or an ambition for research and teaching in politics and government. On the other side, a constituency for the work of the university. The three constituencies can be summarised as: statesmen, intellectuals and philosophers in Oxford; administrators, experts and managers in London; and citizens or perhaps subjects or civil society in Manchester.

As the assumptions, tacit or overt, about who was being provided with the benefits which a university could confer changed, so did the assumptions about what kind of attention a university should give to politics, and to what kind of politics, if any, that attention should be provided.

In the case of a constituency of potential statesmen, politics as a calling or an art; in the case of potential administrators politics as a profession or science; but in the case of citizens, the role of political education was far more problematic, since government and all that went on around it in the form of politics could be seen, particularly perhaps in Manchester, as a support service rather than an autonomous activity. Politics in general and government in particular were something which, whilst a minority of people were consistently and actively engaged in them, engaged the energies and attention of ordinary citizens only sporadically. Whilst Manchester was of the three the university specifically committed to a practical response to the needs and aspirations of a modern city, it was also the university which did not consider research and teaching in politics of great concern. Whilst Oxford proceeded to develop its teaching and research with the introduction of PPE, and London from

1895 had the London School of Economics and Political Science devoted to the training of experts and administrators, Manchester had to wait until 1948 and the arrival of W. J. M. Mackenzie, and even then the newly introduced subject was justified not in terms of usefulness to citizens, but as satisfying the curiosity of social scientists. Political science for citizens remained an empty box.

There are two grounds for some hope that the vacancy will not be permanent. First, a compromise is provided by the first holder of the Chichele Chair in Social and Political Theory which resulted from a division of the original Gladstone designation into theory on the one hand and government on the other. In his inaugural lecture G D H Cole proposed a trickling down of knowledge from experts to those amongst the citizen body who would or could pay attention. Second, the distance political science has travelled since Adams' appointment, gives grounds for optimism that its future development will contain surprises. This, together with Cole's compromise, mean that the citizen box, whilst currently empty, is not closed.

This lecture was the seventh in a series funded by a generous benefaction from Dr S.T. Lee, who has funded lectures in humanities all over the world – 'the sun never sets on S.T. Lee's projects'