

In Memoriam

Jean Blondel

Jean Blondel, who died unexpectedly but peacefully on Christmas Day was a Napoleonic figure who reshaped European Political Science both structurally and intellectually; and had a general influence on the discipline throughout the world.

Breaking through conventional boundaries, Blondel went to Brazil in the mid-fifties to write his thesis. Instead of then pursuing a conventional career in France, he crossed to the new departments springing up in Britain, becoming the founding Professor of the Department of Politics in the new and innovative University of Essex (1962). Under Albert Sloman, a kindred spirit, the university was strongly research-oriented with only ten large departments to concentrate resources and make an intellectual impact quickly. Building on this Blondel quickly took up the national bursaries for taught graduate courses, announced at short notice in 1965. Departments elsewhere procrastinated but only Blondel had the necessary flexibility to recruit 12 candidates from all quarters and put on impromptu courses for them. Most failed the year but budgetary inertia ensured that the studentships continued as long as there were applicants for them. At one stroke therefore, Essex acquired the largest political graduate school in Britain. Although the initial results were unimpressive, the number and range of courses eventually attracted exceptional candidates.

Blondel himself was the Departmental dynamo, poaching rising heavyweights from elsewhere (Anthony King, Ian Budge, Brian Barry), and using Essex's unique tenure requirements to purge weak performers. Other unusual attributes were his immersion in any project which engaged his attention (usually 3 or 4 at any time): a strategic conception of what the Department should do and where it should go (broadly, a quarter of the way towards the American model): and a determination to exploit every opportunity and resource to achieve these ends, regardless of any hesitations others might have.

His initiatives are best illustrated by the annual Summer School in Quantitative Research Methods (now past its half century). Its start in 1968 was financed by a UNESCO grant for European departments to host a biennial month-long school in social science. Blondel lobbied for the grant, and followed up Budge's radical push of a methodological school based on Essex's own pioneering computer package (ECXP) with great success. He also backed its continuance annually with more external funding and a rapidly expanding number of participants.

The Summer School was crucial to Blondel's defining project, the European Consortium for Political Research, now grouping some 350 institutes and Departments across the continent and around the world. It demonstrated to the Ford Foundation, looking to build up social science in Europe, that its political scientists were capable of organising themselves at continental

level. This was crucially important because in 1970 there were no real links between departments and individuals across countries or even within them. The large grant Ford made to Blondel enabled him to knock heads together and negotiate, cajole and allure individuals and departments to support not only the Summer School (crucially important in socialising younger political scientists to work together across international boundaries), but also conferences, workshops, research groups, journals, grants, Europe-wide directories and course guides, and an ever open and active central office at Essex dedicated to new initiatives. From zero in 1970, European political science emerged as a full-blown entity by 1980. Although he then retired as Director, Blondel's evangelism and activism also spearheaded the rapid expansion of the ECPR across eastern Europe in the 1990s – a real life line for free research and democracy at that time.

Blondel's institutional achievements should not overshadow his intellectual ones. They were intertwined. Voters, Parties and Leaders (1963) introduced survey-based research to British readers in an original synthesis of poll data and community studies, drawing on the traditions of French electoral geography and party organisational studies to fill the gaps polls did not cover. It provided an intellectual context for the research and teaching approach pioneered by the Essex Department. Similarly, his *Introduction to Comparative Government* (1969) innovated with its revolutionary approach to treating each country as one unit in general discussions (and novel statistical analyses) of political processes and institutions across the world, rather than country by country descriptions difficult to compare. Such an approach is now standard but Blondel pioneered it.

In the 1980s a new realisation of the limitations of survey-based research based on individuals stimulated new professional interest in the role of institutions and collective processes in governmental policy-making. As a result, Blondel's continuing research into these areas acquired major relevance in the context of the 'New Institutionalism'. Despite a life-threatening accident in later life, he continued his comparative research on the structure and consequences of different governmental institutions, particularly of presidential government in Africa and Latin America, publishing his last book when he was ninety. An example to us all!

Blondel's achievements remain as his monument, continuing to provide a stimulus and point of entry to political analysis for young researchers. They continue to inspire us and to comfort the family who have done so much to support him.

More information about Jean's life and career achievements can be found in the *Festschrift* edited by Ian Budge and David McKay *Developing Democracy* Sage London 1994–Chapter 2 offers a detailed contextual account. ■

—Ian Budge, University of Essex