

Report of the ‘Third International Conference of the Association for Political History’ (Bielefeld 10-13 June 2015)

This year the honor of hosting the APH (Association for Political History) Conference for PhD researchers in political history befell to the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology. Participants were well prepared with clear directions to the impressively modern X Building that the Institute calls home. Upon entering the building a warm welcome by dr. Miriam Kanne and dr. Thomas Abel awaited the tired travelers, who had come to Bielefeld from all over Europe. After some refreshing drinks and the arrival of the last professors, the director of the Institute, prof. dr. Thomas Welskopp, opened the conference.

Panel discussion: Current Trends and Agendas in Political History

Prof. dr. Willibald Steinmetz (Bielefeld) chaired the panel discussion entitled ‘What’s next? Current Trends and Agendas in Political History’. Prof. dr. Henk te Velde (Leiden) took the floor and started introducing the Association for Political History. The APH has started as a European organization, because the founding members are European institutes and most members study national histories. But the APH aims to be an international association and is not about European history only.

For many APH members however, the European Union is an important point of reference. The political reality surrounding us today shows that the rapid changing politics of the EU increasingly turns European policy into a concern of national policy for all of us. As political historians we are challenged - but also well equipped - to study the still ongoing processes of European integration in all its various manifestations. Political historians have the capacity to take a bird’s eye view on what appear to be exclusive national developments, and to demonstrate how these developments actually originate from the same historical causes and are thus a much more shared international experience. New research shows that topics like “The Left in Europe” are projects of interest to pursue. It is for instance striking to see how all social democratic parties face the same problem today: populism. Populism has uniformly introduced the same political agenda. Populists have accomplished what former European bureaucrats could not: democratize the European Union in such a way that everybody cares about it. For political historians, this political reality provides the (financial) framework guiding our choice of subject matter.

The current political constellation of the European Union makes it difficult not to do anything with comparative and entangled history. Te Velde mentions that political historians have always favored to study the nation state, but it is inevitable that historians will also have to speak about other countries than their home country alone. Comparing is an inherent element in the profession of the historian and as historians we have to accept ‘foreign’ historians working on ‘our’ national history. The argument that the history of a country is too specific to be compared with another country, can no longer win a debate. This does not mean however, that studying national cases is no longer worthwhile. But historians who study national cases should do well to put their work in an international research environment. Participants of the APH conference working on national history could rest assured knowing that they had come to the right place in Bielefeld.

Prof. dr. Marc Lazar (SciencesPo.) opens his contribution by reminiscing the time that all historians, except political historians, transgressed national borders in research designs. This has changed, but he fears that his reflection on the need for practicing contemporary history (*l’histoire du temps présent*) might be too French in focus. When doing contemporary history, historians face problems of restricted access to archival material, but have the advantage of complementing the traditional set of sources with newspapers and oral history. Lazar emphasizes that political contemporary historians should reintegrate their present history into the history of the *longue*

duree. Especially in relation to the longer past, contemporary history shows its uniqueness and enriches our knowledge of history in general.

The second point Lazar mentions is the problematic relation between historians and the development of public policy. Public policy - as a research subject – shows the interaction between the work of institutions and societies. Institutions react to a problem in society through composing a public policy. Society in turn has expectations regarding public policy and historians can study the ensuing reaction. Studying public policy can thus help to study political history in an innovative way that does justice to both the discipline and society's complexities. In the first place, political historians should do well to start studying policies on environment, health and museums. Ironically, in applying for funding, historians are increasingly dependent on public policy that is challenging the self-evidence of the humanities as an academic discipline in general.

To an ever-larger extent historians depend on their ability to convince public policy makers and their executives of their usefulness to society in order to turn an application into a grant. *The History Manifesto* by Jo Guldi and David Armitage has proclaimed the 'bonfire of the humanities' and has diagnosed our society as sickened by short-termism. Populism reigns high in Europe and the traditional ruling class has been rejected. The new rulers suffer from the omission of history in their education programs. The war in Iraq is a clear example of how public policy, formulated without any historical sense, has caused catastrophic consequences. On the other hand, despite historians being well equipped to nuance aggravating populist rhetoric, they seem to have lost their status as society's moral conscience. This is problematic since the world is clearly in need for sensible comments about continuing problems with racism in the US or the European immigration crisis. Political, economic and cultural borders are continuously challenged. Defending or accepting these borders is problematic, as policy makers and society have become increasingly unaware of how legitimacy of these borders has historically grown. In the current discussions on remnants of the past and faults of the present, the profession best able to deal with questions of time is kept out of office. In assigning public money to historical research projects, policymakers acknowledge historians' responsible position that belongs to their profession. Historians spending public money on research are providing a crucial service to society.

Prof. Giovanni Orsina demonstrates how in Italy at least, political history is definitely back on the map as a popular discipline. The absolute majority of applications for the annual conference for contemporary history in Italy can be classified as political history. Orsina noticed however, that New Political History heavily influences the choice of topics and approaches. Studies of representations and memory conflicts have taken center stage. As a consequence, the state, *histoire evenementielle*, and public policy are absent in many project descriptions. Orsina therefore wonders whether it is time to diminish the stress on New Political history and to rehabilitate the state as an object worthy of political historians' attention. The time has come to categorize New Political history as the old way of doing political history.

Orsina believes that it is necessary for historians to rethink their use for society. According to him, it is possible to find an answer to the crisis that historians and their role in society and academia are witnessing at the moment, just like sociologists and political scientists have managed to do. Critical reflection on present history can restore history's function as guidance for the present. While the *History Manifesto* denounces the use of short-termism, Orsina hints at the possibility that exactly this engagement of political history with contemporary history can improve society's appreciation of our profession. Studying the years after 1989, however, has specific difficulties. Interesting government documents are still largely classified for example. Another problem is that our perspective on present history is more subjugated to recent changes in our knowledge (as new sources become available for example), compared to for example Ancient and Medieval history. Despite these problems Orsina believes it is possible for historians to study the years following 1989.

Dr. Hagen Schulz-Forberg (Aarhus) reacts to Orsina and mentions that it is exactly the charm of present history that the historian can add oral history and newspapers to the standard sources of political history. The complications that are inherent to the use of these new sources however, reflect the difficulties of present history as a research theme described by Orsina. The moving capacity of oral history and modern media underlines the ability of these sources to change historians' perspective on the present past they study. Schulz-Forberg continued to soothe when he reassured Lazar that the John F. Kennedy School of Government had recently appointed historians to educate the future ruling elite. This reinstatement of historians in the realm of public policy makers should be translated more to education of historians.

Historians have a reason to crossover to the areas of study usually assigned to law and political sciences, in order to gain a better understanding of the protopolitical implications of their profession. Schulz-Forberg highlights the importance of studying the historical developments of legitimacies in close connection to the spatial tensions between national and international capacities in history. The 1990s invention of the transnational episode in history as separate category from the national histories has to be taken one step further. The national and transnational entities in history have to be studied as mutually constitutive instead of as an egg and hen-question. The emergence of economic thought as a conceptual category establishing legitimacy in processes of decision-making should be studied as a mutual constitutive process with various national and transnational directions of influence. The political historian has to take the categories of temporality and space into account to find out when a concept was able to produce legitimacy in carrying forth a certain policy. Historians' ability to deal with temporality and space leads to their sophisticated understanding of the interaction between actors, concepts and institutions in the past. Historians therefore come highly recommended as commentators on present conflicts on legitimacy in national and transnational environments.

Prof. Willibald Steinmetz calls for historians to take up this part and be irritants. We have to go on myth hunting to debunk existing misunderstandings about how the present has grown from the past. It is the duty of the historian to society to unravel how history has been abused to claim legitimacy in the present, and to prevent it from happening in both presence and future. Te Velde warns however that historians should not limit themselves however to the rule of myth busters. Historians are in the business of story telling, and as such their discipline is a debate between the different stories being told. Every historian should have the courage to tell his or her own story about the past. The work of the historian involves by definition his or her personal interpretation of the past. Rather than focusing on searching for the mistakes made in these interpretations, history is more about inviting the next generation of historians to come up with their own stories, topics and questions.

The next generation in Bielefeld wondered why the panel discussants and *The History Manifesto* were preoccupied with arguing why (political) history is relevant to present society. Why has history lost its relevance as an academic discipline for public policy makers in the first place? Part of the answer to this fascinating question can be found in the changed pace of politics. Everything in our time is urgent and requires politicians to respond immediately to the latest crisis. The time when a crisis was dealt with through extensive deliberations has passed. The more general conclusions of sociological and political science studies fit this political pace better than the in depth analyses of historians. Is it justified that sociologists and political scientists have taken over the position of advisers to policy makers? Especially now, when the civil war in Syria and the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean require a solution that takes both the responsible and affected human beings into account. Marc Bloch's statement that history instead of being a science about the past rather is a science of human beings in the duration has not lost any meaning in underlining the relevance of history for society. Before historians can convince society however, to accept historians in a responsible role again, they must first and foremost answer the question about the loss of their relevance in the first place.

Steinmetz believes an innovative research agenda that studies topics as legitimacy and processes of Europeaness can help in finding the answer to this question. Besides new topics, political history could benefit from lengthening the time frame it studies. Furthermore, Steinmetz sees a possibility for historians' rehabilitation by making sociology and political sciences more historical. Although these disciplines use history for their models and general conclusion, they rarely study the past properly. In that respect, political history could make a stronger case for itself by learning from Medieval and Early Modern historians. The Association for Political History would be enriched if more historians working on these periods could find their way to the annual conferences. The present majority is working on modern and contemporary history, which often regards political institutions as entities closed off from society. Medieval and Early Modern historians regard political institutions as much more open to and ingrained in the surrounding society. The Association for Political History should do well to look into the ways of Medieval and Early Modern political associations; only these know the secret to centurial existence.

So far, the APH is a bright pupil of medieval and early modern customs in associating. Upon arriving in Bielefeld the more prestigious senior delegates on behalf of the participating universities were lodged in the pretty hotel across the train station. The junior delegates had to pass this impressive crisp white building before arriving at their greyish accommodation down town. Between 1645 and 1648 nearby towns Muenster and Osnabruck saw similar public displays of hierarchy in politics made visible in the distribution of lodgings for delegates at the peace negotiations. Sessions were held at the futuristic X-building of the University of Bielefeld. Against the grain of present-day short-termism, each paper was given an hour during sessions. Rich deliberations took place after the oral presentation and the peer-review. Being the third conference of the APH, it is clear to see in Bielefeld that the representatives of the participating universities have come to know each other well. This has a positive effect on the quality of how the sessions are chaired in terms of structure and content.

Another element of corporative culture that the Bielefeld APH conference had taken up well is the beneficial results of sharing fine Westphalia and Bavarian foods and beverages in between official negotiations. During shared coffee breaks and meals – either in a gigantic refectory or a Bavarian style Brauhaus - the formal structure of the assembly was suspended. The organization in Bielefeld gave professors and PhD students plenty of opportunity to talk to each other in a less formal way than discussions during sessions would allow for. There is a tendency among Medieval and Early Modern historians to look at moments where protocol was suspended as opportunities for informal power to do its work and where participants could wield their social capital. There is no doubt that during this conference the participants have met inspiring colleagues from all over Europe. Contacts have been made that enhance the international character of our discipline, and that will improve the quality of the history we write. If political historians have the feeling to be among friends, they shall have the confidence to find their own voice in history and the debate between the stories they write will continue. In a final accordance with a typical element of ancient forms of deliberations, each meeting of the APH is pregnant with the next. This assured continuation of meetings establishes the APH as an institution worth taking into account for political historians in every stage of their career.

Report of the workshop sessions

To signify perhaps the APH's readiness to broaden the research agenda of political history, Michael Humpries (London) started the first session (chair: Thomas Welskopp) with his paper "L'unite d'action est la chose essentielle: The Allied Quest for Unified Command and the Limitations of Informal Political Power, 1914-1918." Discussant Giovanni Orsina argued that - despite Humphries building a case for the importance of the work of Lord Esher through his ability to wield a communicative network of informal power – this is a story of failure. How

important was Esher's lobbying for unified command of the British and French army when it was only established after the May 1918 German spring offensive? Furthermore, Humphries has left out the culture of decision-making and how the men wielding official power reacted to Esher's lobbying efforts. For now, the social network analysis only serves to state the obvious: Esher did have an extensive social network of powerful friends. A warning in general was issued that the use of instruments of the social sciences is useful only when they give more insight than traditional historical analyses could have provided. Henk te Velde thinks it is more interesting to turn the story around: what can the history of Lord Esher tell us about the theory of social networks and social capital? Comments about Lord Esher from contemporaries like Lloyd George demonstrate that Esher was not seen as a threat to formal power, because he did not and could not compete for office. Rather, the position of Esher could be compared to that of women in politics in those days.

Stefan Laffin (Bielefeld) presented a paper on 'The Role of US-War Correspondents in the Italian Campaign: The Case of John Lardner'. For his thesis Laffin studies the informal power at work in the administration established by the US and how the Southern Italian bureaucracy reacted to it. He is mainly interested in how social life was restarted and how society had to go through a process of defascistization. Orsina remarked that the Italian historiography should be taken more into account, because the Second World War meant different kind of wars for different parts of Italy. The existing framework on World War II in Italy does not wholly apply to the situation in the South studied by Laffin. Having advocated a lesser stress on New Political History, Orsina finds it hard to see the distinction between the historical reality and representation of the war efforts in Laffin's paper. As a correspondent Lardner holds first hand knowledge of the US military proceedings. In this paper Laffin seems more interested in what kind of US war correspondent Lardner was: was he an exception or did he comply with the genre? In terms of practicality Laffin has to make a choice between studying Lardner as a US correspondent and how his writings were received in the US, and between studying the US presence in Italy during the Second World War. Steinmetz asks why a strict distinction between reality and representation is necessary. If Laffin can demonstrate how the American soldiers read Lardner's writings, than the multiple constructive capacities of reality and representations make the stories part of the reality.

Lisa Bald opened the session on terror (chair: Margit van der Steen, Den Haag) with a paper titled 'Pubblica sicurezza' in the European context. Italy, securitization and a transnational counterterrorism policy (1972-1982).⁷ In her thesis she investigates the Italian involvement in emerging European networks of counterterrorism. Which knowledge and techniques of counterterrorism politics were transferred between Italy and its partners? How did these transfers affect the conception of internal security in Italy? Discussant Lucia Bonfreschi (Lucca) kept in line with the notion presented in the round-table discussion that historians of contemporary history should not approach the state and its government as black boxes in history. She acknowledges the need for a bilateral or even a transnational approach for Bald's research to succeed. Bald's emphasis on the transnational perspective however should not lead her to overlook the domestic causes of counterterrorism in Italy. Counter terrorism policy touches upon one of the most central roles of the state: homeland security. Political leaders in Italy were deeply divided on what policy to pursue. That Italy ended up internationalizing their counter terrorism policy was also (not exclusively) highly dependent on national causes. This conceptual approach used by Bald to trace developments regarding counterterrorism should not diminish the influence of among others individual actors and secret services. In order to diversify her take on the European context of Italy's security policy Bald should not only pursue the question of how the internationalization of the policy took place, but should also pay attention as to why it happened in the first place?

René Koekkoek (Utrecht) represented the desire of the APH to cover a wider time frame with his paper 'Citizenship on Trial. Rethinking citizenship after the Terror in the American, Dutch, and French Republic, c. 1792-1800'. He has chosen a comparative, transnational approach to answer the question how revolutions shaped the reconceptualization of citizenship in revolutionary vocabulary. Discussant Lucia Bonfreschi remarked that despite the transnational design of Koekkoek's thesis, he does not really execute it on paper. For now, his thesis seems to be divided in three separate chapters, one on each country. It is difficult to see how national events in the three countries intersected, and how this influences each country's interpretation of the Terror in relation to the concept of citizenship. The transnational stage Koekkoek assumes to have existed should be reflected more prominently in the ordering of his thesis. Furthermore, the concept of citizenship belonged to the political community and relates to the relation between the state and the people. Contemporaries however, did not use the word 'citizen' in discussions. How does Koekkoek think about studying a concept that was rarely mentioned? Nicolas Rousselier (SciencesPo.) asked how studying the circulation of ideas by means of mapping the actual circulation of people between the three countries could help Koekkoek. Henk te Velde believes that the reconceptualization of citizenship was not a reaction to the Terror, but more a reaction to the Revolution. The Terror was merely the moment when even revolutionaries became ambiguous about their own project. Te Velde points at the interesting paradox between democracy becoming a viable political system, while at the same time the Terror could be used to confirm the existing notion of democracy as total anarchy.

The papers in the third panel (chair: Henk te Velde) were focusing on the history of political economy. Jarmo Taskinen (Jyväskylä) contributed to the history of European integration with a case study on the Finnish economic elite of the Finnish Forest Industry and their influence on the European identity of Finland. Discussant Hagen Schulz-Forberg (Arhus) agreed with Taskinen that it is wise to start his research in the 1930s, when there was already a European movement. In the execution of his ideas, Taskinen will have to choose between a focus on Europeanization, European identity or European integration. Taskinen calls his economic elite 'normative entrepreneurs', but 'lobbyists' seems a more appropriate term here. A corpus of useful theoretical literature is available for this concept. Schulz-Forberg recommends Taskinen to take a structural constructivist approach towards the activities of the Finnish Forest Industry. Situated prosopographical analyses of this elite can explain how their actions depended on their different contexts. Once Taskinen brings in the source material of the companies involved he can write a very interesting interdisciplinary thesis.

Cleovi Mosuela (Bielefeld) has the honor of representing the sociologists at this meeting. In her paper 'Rendering Political and Technical: Framing the Field of Intervention' she discussed the cross-border circular migration governance between Germany and the Philippines. Up until today the Philippine government trains both male and female nurses to go to work in Germany. The Philippine government supports migrants to be socially and professionally integrated nurses in Germany, in order to minimize the risk for the parties involved. Mosuela explained her topic in a gender-neutral way; whereas the historians were struck by the fact that there is a fifty-fifty division between men and women in this pool of migrant workers. The comments of Schulz-Forberg also underlined differences between historians and sociologists. Mosuela uses the sociological approach of 'technical intervention' which provides her with ready-made theoretical language. But how does this relate to her empirical findings? There must have been sub-level interdisciplinary actors that have influenced policy and practice, but these are hard to find by keeping in line with the categories defined by the theoretical language. Mosuela's critical approach moreover seems to suggest that she has a hidden agenda - explaining the marginalization and exploitation of the migrants - in studying the neo-liberal risk management of the Philippines. But what is wrong with a government teaching nurses German before they leave and arranging a tour

to better understand German culture once they have arrived in Germany? Where is the risk in this management? Who is marginalizing and exploiting the migrants?

After a well-deserved coffee break, the conference was ready for the final session (chair: Pertti Ahonen, Jyväskylä) in which the meaning and functioning of elections was problematized. Carlos Domper (Lucca) opened the session with 'Polls without Democracy. Elections in European Dictatorships during the Cold War. Spain and Portugal in a comparative Framework.' The paper of Domper left discussant Richard Vinen (London) with one big question: if elections did not really change anything, why have them? The regimes could have chosen a less difficult instrument to confirm their power instead of staging non-competitive elections. Was it perhaps the international pressure of the US and NATO that made Spain and Portugal stage elections, as a way of gaining recognition as a legitimate western state? After 1965 elections in both countries experienced the danger of spinning out of control: the voters abstained, protested and expressed irony. Lazar mentions that this comment would restrict Domper's analyses of the elections to a functionalist point of view. Lazar thinks it is important to investigate if there were moments of sacralization in the election process. What have been the consequences of the elections for the people and the regime, he would like to know. What was the effect of the propaganda on the self-perception of the people producing and receiving it? Did returning emigrants who had witnessed democracy elsewhere have an impact? Competitive elections after 1970 carried a completely different meaning, but did people perceive this difference as such?

Anne Heyer had the honor of presenting the final paper of the day with 'The Emergence of Mass Political Parties' in the nineteenth century. Discussant Vinen approves of Heyer's transnational approach, comparing the quintessential national parties the English National Liberal Federation, the Dutch orthodox Protestant Antirevolutionaire Partij, and the German Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei. For Vinen it is necessary to add more mundane detail to her analyses about the rise of these parties and the way they were perceived in their own national context. To what extent were these parties local organizations to begin with? Furthermore, what were the people actually doing when they engaged in this new type of organization at the onset of political mass organization? The idea of mass politics should not be taken for granted, despite the fact that the success of political parties with large numbers of members eventually turned it into the self-evident way of organizing politics in the twentieth century. New Political History tends to overemphasize the importance of political rhetoric, and risks losing sight of the actual past political practice. This has caused the misunderstanding that, for example, conservatives in politics are presented as opponents to mass politics, but in practice tended to be very good at it themselves. In staying close to the actual political practice with a long term approach, it could be possible to dissect the political tendency that enabled certain political ideologies to become mass political parties. Giovanni Orsina remarks that such a longer term political history of the repeated demise of the liberalists in various European countries would provide an insight into liberalists striking ability to (re)organize. Since it is not a given fact and entity in history Mark Lazar asks Heyer about her definition for the mass political party and what her research will contribute to this definition. According to Lazar the term mass is misleading in this concept because it seems to suggest that numbers matter in telling the party history. This is not the case, because the political parties' increasing capacity to discipline their members is more important to the organization than the number of members. Heyer discussed Lazar's question during the delicious Conference Dinner where a special selection of the refined cuisine of Westphalia was served.

The third conference day started with Maggie Scull (London) who presented her paper 'Catholic Church during the Northern Irish Troubles'. She looked at the response of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Ireland and in Wales to the Troubles in Northern Ireland by studying the reactions of two archbishops. In general she approaches her topic from a transnational point of view. Scull is glad to be able to present her paper to a mainly non-British

audience because of the sensitivity of her topic for communities touched by this history up until this very day. This led to discussant Te Velde's surprise at how little this history is treated as a religious conflict, rather than a nationalist conflict. Te Velde therefore points out that Scull could consider focusing more on the aspect of Catholicism in this history rather than studying the catholic hierarchy as a transnational player in this conflict. The religious education of the archbishops, and the meaning of the catholic background for the IRA members and their protestant opponents are all interesting questions to follow-up on. Furthermore, it would be interesting to take the changing relation between the Catholic Church and society in general into account. The clergy's – and especially the pope's - reaction to this particular era of Human Rights and the Second Vatican Council are part of this Irish history. Adding primary written source material from this point of view to the material Scull gathered through interviews, could lead to surprising insights on the history of the Catholicism.

Roxana Eugenia Breazu (Aarhus) discussed in her paper how the cultural elites of Romania engaged with the process of 'modernization' in their country during the Interwar period. She is interested in the link between significant shifts in Romanian economic thought and how this touches on the country's intellectual history. Discussant Rinna Kullaa (Jyväskylä) agrees with Breazu that Romania is an important and interesting country for the study of political history. Nevertheless, the state of Romania still needs an introduction whenever it is discussed among other historians. Romania's history harbors all kinds of deviating developments compared to the various neighboring countries and people it has had over the years. Kullaa therefore suggests that Breazu takes into account which countries surrounded Romania during the Interwar period. How tensions between different groups in rural areas were translated to Romania's elite party politics of 'modernization' could be a fruitful subject to pursue. Suggestions from other participants led to the conclusion that a focus on the divergence or the convergence in the conceptualization of 'modernization' among peasant groups and among the Romanian party leaders enhances the potential scope of Breazu's question. By studying what was considered modern according to different groups, 'modernization' reveals its quality as being essentially a travelling concept dependent on access to the latest knowledge. Breazu's could pay attention to whether democratic elections were associated with modernization, or rather that technocratic forms of government answered better to Romanian conceptualizations of modernization.

Michele Mioni (Lucca) concluded this session on the history of political thought. Mioni's project studies the history of new Social Policies developed during the final three years of the Second World War. His aim is to illustrate how his case studies of Great Britain, France and the Italian Social Republic anticipated the Post War period by rethinking and preparing the policy for the so-called Social Pact in their respective countries. In this sense Mioni's project already answers to Orsina's call for an increased study of public policy by political historians. By adopting a comparative analyses of three different states Mioni hopes to explain the difference in rethinking the Social Pact in fascist and democratic regimes. Kullaa acknowledges the desirability of a comparative analyses of public policy, but she also warns Mioni that for a PhD project this set up leads to the daunting task of coping with source material in three different countries. In terms of feasibility it is also important for Mioni to stay focused on what exact aspect of conceptual change in the different rethinking processes he could argue to be crucial for explaining the new Social Policies it produced.

Thomas Maineult (Paris) engaged the conference in how the French public perceived the Palestinian cause (1967-1987) through television coverage of the conflict. How Trotskyists and Maoists supported the conflict through innovative use of media is the topic under discussion. Was this new type of cause framing linked to a particular type of mobilizing society by these social movements in France? Discussant Nicolas Rousselier (Paris) doubts whether this was the case. Since the Dreyfus affair France has been a country where society's elite has supported many causes. And is the Palestinian cause part of the French elite's intellectual engagements, or is it rather a political commitment linked with the Arab immigrant movement? The role of mass

media in the process of engagement is certainly relevant, but Mainault has to apply a particular kind of source criticism to this source (debates among tv-makers, control of French government on television). Te Velde plays the devil's advocate when he remarks that support for the Palestinian cause could also be seen as an international movement in Europe coinciding with widespread student protests for example.

Carl Rihan talks the conference through 'Husni al-Zaim and the Making of Modern Syria' with a special interest for the difference between decision-making in and for Syria. Rousselier makes clear that Rihan has to take the reality of the Cold War into account, because then he can demonstrate the enormous complexity at play in the decision-making process on for example the issue of an oil pipeline between Syria and Russia. Furthermore, Rihan could learn from political scientists' models for state building. If Rihan looks at primary sources from an interdisciplinary perspective he removes his topic from the realm of classical political history mainly interested in cause and effect. By adding source material not exclusively produced by official political players Rihan can study how modern Syria was also created through civil society and public opinion and consequently he can find his own voice in the historiographical debate.

Silja Pitkänen (Jyväskylä) is equally interested in a decision-making process behind official government policy. Her research focuses on how through Soviet propaganda, pictures from smiling children living in the outskirts of the Soviet Union, were framed as Soviet citizens. The pictures functioned as an instrument to construct the image of the Soviet Union as a happy and caring family of nations. The question remains however whether the smiling children in the remote parts of the USSR were either "othered" from Russian children, or were homogenized to fit the stereotype of happy fruits of being USSR citizens, no matter how far removed from Moscow they lived. Discussant Christine Vodovar (Lucca) thinks this question can be answered if Pitkänen also investigates archival data documenting the editorial decision-making of these magazines. In revealing why and how the USSR used children in their pictorial propaganda Pitkänen could really contribute to the broader historical knowledge on totalitarian propaganda. Lazar however warns that this way of representing children could also be seen in 1930s Sweden, which makes the instrument not an exclusive asset of totalitarian regimes. Orsina thinks that Pitkänen should focus on either "othering" or homogenizing, instead of trying to look for both. Vinen believes that adding simple agency to the decision-making process behind the Soviet magazines would help solve the deadlock between homogenizing and "othering". Te Velde brings up the possibility that the intention was to homogenize the distant children, but that the effect of the pictures was "othering" them. Van der Steen closed this engaging round of questions by highlighting the importance of gender (differences) in these pictures and the value of comparing pictures of smiling children with pictures of crying children.

Wenjun Yu (Utrecht) was the last speaker of the conference with a paper titled 'Human rights and politics: the Chinese case in historical perspective (1949-1976)'. Yu wishes to trace the concept of human rights in China. Because the subject was taboo, Yu has investigated ideas on equality uttered in speeches on the Chinese constitution. Thus she traces a Chinese interpretation of human rights which developed independent from the Western intellectual hemisphere. Vodovar is not really convinced by this approach. Was China's conceptualization of human rights really isolated from the global context during the Cold War? She encourages Yu to be more precise about the aspects of the human rights debate in China she would like to study. Starting from the debate among historians is a first step to test whether China's conceptualization was intended to convince the outside world that it safeguarded human rights. From what kind of practical issue or ideological side did China *feel* the need to protect/represent human rights? Steinmetz wonders how Yu is able to trace the conceptualization of an invisible, tabooed concept in primary sources if the word itself was probably unavailable to them. Downsizing the time scale of the project to just one small political debate clearly linked to an incident related to human rights issues would be a first step in his opinion. Tracing the formation of a tabooed concept benefits from close contact with the historical practice.

The participants of the Third International Conference of the Association for Political History could conclude that after three days of intensive discussion and social gatherings the abstract community of political historians had at least gained a more concrete shape. PhD students had received valuable comments on their research projects from both professors and other students. The collegial and international atmosphere of the conference will improve the quality of the work in progress presented at this conference, and in turn the practice of political history around Europe. The impeccable organization of the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology made this next step for the Association for Political History possible. Well-deserved warm rounds of applause for everyone involved in the conference were definitely in order. In true early modern political fashion the Association for Political History has made every meeting pregnant with the next. Next year the University of Aarhus enjoys the challenge of hosting the fourth International Conference of the Association for Political History.

Lauren Lauret M.A. (Leiden University) is working on a dissertation about the continuity of the early modern practice of meeting of the States General of the Dutch Republic between 1716 and 1848. During these years the Dutch Republic transformed into the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. Despite many constitutional changes the practice of meeting at a national level in The Hague, be it in the States General or its revolutionary replacements, continued. To view early modern elements as continuations of the early modern institutional political culture rather than as mere signs of momentarily relapses to archaic habits or as slips from otherwise correct procedure, makes for an improved understanding of this political world and for an innovative addition to the long history of the Dutch States General.