

Careers in politics, politics as a career. Developments in 19th and early 20th century

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Call for Papers

Date:

September 1, 2022

Location:

Czech Republic

Subject Fields:

Biography, Government and Public Service, Modern European History / Studies, Political History / Studies, Social History / Studies

Workshop held as a part of the project Social mobility of elites in the Central European regions (1861-1926), supported by Czech Science Foundation. The research is carried out at the Faculty of Science of Charles University in Prague and Masaryk Institute and Archives of the ASCR.

Date: November 14-15, 2022

Format: hybrid (Masaryk Institute and Archives of the CAS, v.v.i. and online)

Submission deadline: September 1, 2022

During the nineteenth century, the field of European politics witnessed a host of significant changes, prominent among them being the increasing tendency towards its professionalization. Against the backdrop of major social and cultural shifts, politics ceased to be exclusively regarded as the traditional elite's 'duty of honor' and opened its doors, first to the middle class and then, with the extension of the franchise, to lower social and professional strata. It thus became more representative and more accessible to the average citizen, but also grew increasingly polarized and more easily swayed by group interests. These developments, combined with the education of the public's taste for political spectacle, have, among other things, increased electoral spending and accelerated the establishment of political parties, in their initial shape as semi-formal ideological platforms lacking formalized membership and sometimes even clear hierarchical levels.

The increased financial requirements of the political game and the de- or semi-centralized party system worked to boost the role of individual actors at all levels.

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The success of the party as an organization relied on the fortunes (both financial and electoral) of local supporters, of which only a minority were both willing and able to turn politics into a trade. A handful among the latter joined the ranks of the party leadership, epitomizing its ideological commitment, while the bulk of party adherents remained dependent on their home constituencies and local electoral pools for the preservation of their parliamentary seats. Even so, the wide majority of the political representatives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seem to have chosen politics not as a definitive 'career', but rather as a means to elevate their professional track record and prestige. Highest-level politics was not a long-term game for most of its players. The high rate of turnover in the composition of parliaments during the period is complemented by entangled career paths, in which central representative positions usually cover a fairly short time span of a few years, frequently followed by a return to one's original professional field (sometimes to a higher position) and to local politics. Interconnections between the legislative and executive powers have made it possible for supporters of the ruling party to swap or trade political functions for administrative ones, turning politics into a vehicle for professional and sometimes even social mobility for those who had the pecuniary means or the charisma to enter it in the first place, and the ability to successfully navigate failure, corruption and public pressure.

The aim of our workshop is to follow how politics became not only a stand-alone profession, but also part and parcel of careers in other professional fields during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We are interested in the factors underlying this process, in how it manifested in different European spaces and under different historical conditions, as well as in its outcomes and societal impact.

To this end, we invite submissions covering (but not limited to) the following topics:

- Political careers and social mobility
- Entanglements and mutual support between political elites and other professional milieus (civil service, church, intellectuals, business, military)
- Differences in career paths between the Executive and the Legislative branch, or between the Upper and the Lower House
- Careers in national politics vs. careers in local politics
- Political and party functionaries
- Family ties and other personal liaisons as a catalyst for a political career

- Failing and the relevance of failure for one's political career

Proposals of maximum 500 words, accompanied by a short bio (max. 150 words), should be submitted by September 1st, 2022, to one of the following addresses: andreisora@yahoo.com; alice.velkova@natur.cuni.cz. Applicants will be informed by September 5th, 2022, on the acceptance of their proposal.

The workshop proceedings will take place November 14-15, 2022. Due to the lack of certainty on traveling conditions at the time, and in order to make the event more inclusive, we are envisioning a hybrid format. Accommodation in Prague will be provided by the organizers.

The organizers also have in view publication, in a special issue of a leading international journal.

Program committee:

Alice Velková, Faculty of Science, Charles University (alice.velkova@natur.cuni.cz)

Andrei Florin Sora, University of Bucharest/ Masaryk Institute and Archives of the CAS, v. v. i. (andreisora@yahoo.com)

Martin Klečacký, Masaryk Institute and Archives of the CAS, v. v. i. (klecacky@mua.cas.cz)

Contact Info:

Alice Velková, Faculty of Science, Charles University

Andrei Florin Sora, University of Bucharest/ Masaryk Institute and Archives of the CAS, v. v. i.

Contact Email:

andreisora@yahoo.com

URL:

<https://elitesresearch.com/en>