

Alfred Stepan: Combining Agenda-Setting Scholarship and Innovative Institutional Leadership

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I am often puzzled when I meet social scientists, including leading ones, who don't enjoy being around people very much. Why would you want to be a social scientist if you don't like engaging with people? Al Stepan is the antithesis of this. He thrives on engaging with and learning from all kinds of people. Moreover, his gregarious constitution – and boundless energy and enthusiasm for talking, and arguing, about politics across the globe - helps explain his extraordinary achievement of becoming not only one of the top agenda-setting scholars in comparative politics of the last 75 years, with pioneering contributions to the study of state institutions, democratization, and democracy, but also one of the field's most important institution builders and leaders.

This event at Notre Dame to celebrate Al's contributions will surely focus on his important role as a founder and lifelong supporter of the Kellogg Institute. Last Fall, I attended a similar celebratory event in New York at Columbia University's School for International and Public Affairs (SIPA). Al's impressive institutional leadership at Columbia figured prominently in the collective appreciations. In addition to serving as Dean of SIPA for eight years (1983-91), he also served as the founding Director of Columbia's Center for the Study of Democracy, Toleration, and Religion (CDTR) and also as Director of the Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life. Earlier, at Yale, where Al spent the first 13 years of his academic career, he served as Director of the Concilium on International and Area Studies. On top of all of this service, he was also the founding Rector and President of the Central European University in Budapest, Prague and Warsaw (1993-96). With the exception of the periods he was on leave, Al always ran an institution.

Academics typically see a "zero-sum" trade-off between institutional leadership and research productivity, bemoaning the gaps in publications on their CVs attributed to such service activities. Al's career offers a powerful contrast to this view by providing an excellent example of how service to institutions and the profession can be comfortably and synergistically combined with agenda-setting scholarship. In fact, institutional leadership clearly provided an important base for Al's scholarship, allowing him to surround himself with an array of stimulating colleagues. This can be seen vividly in the case of Al's service as Rector of the Central European University, where many of his colleagues in Budapest, Prague and Warsaw had participated in opposition movements against the old communist regimes. Al was able to

talk with and learn from them, which helps explain how he was able to achieve the remarkable feat of writing the long, path-breaking section on post-communist Europe in his now-classic book with Juan Linz, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (1996) while simultaneously serving as a university Rector!

Fifteen years ago, when Gerardo Munck and I set out to write a book containing in-depth interviews with the leading scholars in comparative politics of the last 75 years, it was a “no-brainer” to invite Al Stepan to be one of the fifteen interviewees, which also included Robert Dahl, Samuel P. Huntington, Juan Linz, Arend Lijphart, Guillermo O’Donnell, James Scott, David Collier, and Theda Skocpol, among others. In addition to being one of the richest and liveliest interviews published in the resulting book, *Passion Craft and Method in Comparative Politics* (Johns Hopkin University Press, 2007), the interview with Al is also the *longest!* I fondly remember driving on a beautiful Fall morning from Providence, RI to Al and Nancy Stepan’s summer cottage by the ocean in Little Compton, RI. I arrived around 10 a.m., and we began the interview, taking short breaks for a walk by the sea, a hearty lunch of broiled fish prepared by Al, and a dose of manual labor carrying the porch and lawn furniture into the cottage for winter storage. Sometime after 3:00 a.m. the next morning, with nearly 15 hours of recorded material, I ran out of tape, and we thus had to finish the interview. The resulting transcript – all 250 pages of it – was carefully edited, annotated, and improved by Al, Nancy, Gerry Munck and myself, resulting in chapter 12 of *Passion, Craft and Method in Comparative Politics*: “Alfred Stepan: Democratic Governance and the Craft of Case-Based Research.” My only regret about the interview with Al is that I did not bring more recording tape with me to Little Compton that day. If I had brought more tape, my conversation with Al would surely have gone on forever....