

A Dictionary of

---

# Modern Politics

---

Political terms  
and references in  
current use

David Robertson

---

A DICTIONARY OF  
**Modern Politics**

---

DAVID ROBERTSON

EUROPA PUBLICATIONS LIMITED

London 1985

!

---

A DICTIONARY OF  
**Modern Politics**

---

**for Jessica, Oliver and Giles**

---

# Preface

---

I was originally asked to be one of three co-authors of this work, but ended up as the sole one. Even more than usual, therefore, I must accept that the good belongs to others, and the blame is mine. In fact the need, with such a work, to have drafts read and re-read by as many, and as different people as possible would in any case require total modesty. My initial enthusiasm for the project arose because of the countless times I have given students an essay topic and wanted to tell them to look up some key word in the title before starting the reading, to ensure they at least started off on the right lines. As I worked on it, I came to see a wide potential usage. All political scientists have to live with the fact that any educated person is sure that he knows as much as they do about politics simply because we are all political animals. Perhaps that is true, but it remains the case that we have a professional vocabulary (which is *not* the same as admitting to writing jargon) which is not part of the word-stock of the educated layman. Yet increasingly these words—*charismatic* is a fine example—are expropriated, usually by the media (another good example) and become, with no clarity, part of general discourse. Furthermore there are 'facts', 'ideas', 'ideologies' (a third example), 'doctrines', 'concepts', about which any informed newspaper reader should be aware, but quite bluntly usually is not.

Sometimes these words are highly technical and specialized but become important to a wide public because of a public policy concern. No one ought really to try to form their view on nuclear weapons for example, if they cannot follow what is meant by saying that Trident II has a much smaller 'circular error probability' than Trident I, or why that matters. Sometimes they are terms of art in another discipline which can have an importance in general public discourse about politics, where the full rigour of the professional definition in the original discipline is not needed, but where merely a general education will not, in fact, equip the political animal to

know what he is talking about. Legal terms are often of this nature—'Civil Law', 'Accusatorial System' are notions that matter, but where intellectual osmosis is inadequate, and a legal dictionary too technical. Economics, even more, produces these—newspapers happily brand this Chancellor a 'Keynesian', that one a 'monetarist'.

Sometimes there is no need, but a high degree of desirability, to know something of the intellectual origin of a belief or concept with which one is adequately familiar in use, but unsure of the reason for its importance—'Polis', for the city state serves as a good example. Appended to this sort of use of the book is the fact that theories often carry a label created by suffixing a person's name with '-ism'—people really do still talk of Augustinianism, Platonism, obviously of Marxism; most of their listeners, for perfectly good reasons, do not know why. Given that I have such entries I have also added brief entries on some thinkers who have been or are highly influential, have given us their '-isms', but without their names actually appearing. There is not, as far as I know, a social theory called 'Nozickianism', but at least in America there are an awful lot of Robert Nozick's ideas floating about in conversations where the interlocutors probably have heard of him—just—but do not realise it is his ideas they are using. Again, there are modern names that ring a bell—Gramsci, for instance, but leave one unsure why.

Finally, and most important, there are the big words; the ones we all use, the ones that are the coinage of political propaganda—'democracy', 'liberty', 'civil rights', 'capitalism'. Here the problem is not that people do not know what they mean when they hear or use the words; the words have too many meanings. When the *Federal Republic of Germany* and the *Democratic Republic* are contrasted with a 'democratic' and 'federal' polity like the USA, whole language-games are being played. Trades Unions want *industrial democracy*; some writers talk of *representative democracy*, others of *liberal democracy*, and Leninists of democratic *centralism*. How many of us can sort these out well enough to know if the four things are compatible? *Participation* is often demanded against an *élite*. It is sometimes granted, too. But one remembers the wall poster in Paris 1968 which conjugated the verb 'to participate'—I participate, you participate . . . we participate, They *control*.

Politics as an art, and political studies as a science are overwhelmingly about words, shades of meaning, ideological linkages often neither grammatically nor logically determined. So this book is for everyone who, picking up a newspaper, doubts his grasp of what a *falangiste* is, or wonders whether anything at all important follows from one country alleging that another is breaking international

law. It is also for students. It is to prevent another student of mine, and I hope anyone's ever again confusing conservatism with classical liberalism, Eurocommunism with socialism, either with social democracy.

The selection of concepts is inevitably partly arbitrary. One starts with a list, conjured up with the help of several people. Writing each entry one uses terms that themselves turn out to require definition, so a chain reaction starts, and it stops when the rate of reaction has slowed down and the sheer length of the book is at a publishing optimum. One really operates with rules for exclusion, not inclusion. No people, unless they gave birth to a creed, belief or ideology. No events—there are many good historical dictionaries. Few institutions—because it is not an almanac. Some political parties are 'defined', initially because many were used as examples in definitions of creeds. It then made sense to add the remaining major parties in the major Western democracies, simply because newspapers are likely, very briefly, to report their electoral successes. Consequently it is not just a dictionary of political ideas. The emphasis is on ideas because those are the enduring elements of political argument. It is 'modern' in the sense that it is meant for those grappling with politics today, but deliberately not contemporary, because there is no point in including an entry for 'wets', for example, because it will probably have dropped out of our political language in another five years. In the end the entry list has to be subjective—based on my sense of what people do not readily recognize but often come across. I have, as best I can, checked these intuitions on my students and non-academic friends, and the publishers have been enormously helpful in pruning unnecessary, and urging necessary, entries.

To end—how objective is it? I have not sought the impossibility of pure value freedom (a term I define) because there are concepts that are inherently evaluative. Where I have not felt it possible to find one, unarguable, and 'correct' definition, I have to the best of my ability tried to give what I think would be a professional consensus on its meaning, rather than my own preference. It is just as inevitable that I have failed sometimes in this as it is inevitable that my preferences and interests have included material others would have excluded, and vice versa. However I have arranged for every entry to be read by others, and have nearly always altered anything that was objected to. I leave anonymous all those who have helped in this and other ways.

Where, in the text of an entry, a topic or person is given in capital letters, the reader might usefully pursue the subject further by referring to the entry under that title.

*Preface*

There remains only two things I wish to say about the book: I have learned a lot in the process of researching it. I have enjoyed writing it far more than anything else I have written, and even if nobody learns anything from it, I hope someone enjoys it.

*David Robertson*  
*Oxford*  
*October 1984*



## **ABM**

Anti-Ballistic Missiles (ABMs) are weapon systems developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s by both the USA and the USSR. (The American system was called Safeguard and the Russian one was known to NATO as 'Galosh'). They were intended to destroy incoming Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), primarily for the defence of either population centres or the country's own ICBM sites. Being essentially defensive, ABMs might seem more innocent than other forms of high technology warfare, but they seriously threatened the balance of power; for if one country could deploy a major ABM system, it might be all the more tempted to take the risk of launching a nuclear first strike. As a result, agreements reached during the early rounds of the SALT (q.v.) talks restricted the USA and USSR to a very limited deployment of ABMs, primarily to defend their national capitals. In any case, there are good reasons to doubt the effectiveness, certainly at any reasonable cost, of these weapon systems.

## **Absolutism**

Absolutism describes a political theory which became popular during the 17th century, its main champions being HOBBS and Bodin. An absolutist system is one in which there is no limitation whatsoever on what a legitimate government may legally do; in which authority is absolute and unchecked. The theory is emphatically concerned with legitimate government and its legal entitlement to do anything whatsoever:—it is not a factual statement (that the powers that be can get away with anything they like), but an assertion that a duly constituted government has a right to absolute authority.

If, as some constitutional experts do, one takes the view that 'the Crown in Parliament' is a single entity, then the UK has an 'absolute'

## *Accountability*

government. The question of absolutism, at any rate in theory, revolves around whether or not there are any powers or constitutional restrictions that can legally prevent a government from taking any action. The United States is not absolutist because Congress and the presidency can check each other, and because the Constitution prohibits certain executive and legislative acts. Britain, however, has no effective Bill of Rights and no separation of powers, and so its government could be described as unlimited and therefore absolutist.

Another approach to absolutism is to ask whether the general ideology or justifying myth to which the government owes its power imposes any limits on its use. One might argue, in the Lockean tradition (see LOCKE), that as all rule is based on the consent of the governed, there cannot be unlimited and therefore absolute government. Other theories, especially some versions of Hobbesianism, would deny that citizens can regulate government, which must therefore be legitimate and absolutist.

In practice, the reasons for justifying absolutism tend to be fear of the instability that might be caused by having more than one source of authority, or the use of a justifying theory (theocratic or Marxist, for example), in which rival views cannot be tolerated and some body or group has the absolute right to determine truth. Absolutism does not refer to the content of the laws, which could, in principle, be few and extremely liberal.

## **Accountability**

Accountability in the modern state has two major meanings which overlap. First there is the strongly normative meaning, common in democracies, that involves the idea that those who exercise power, whether as governments, as elected representatives, or as appointed officials, are in a sense stewards and must be able to show that they have exercised their powers and discharged their duties properly. Second, accountability may refer to the arrangements made for securing conformity between the values of a delegating body and the person or persons to whom powers and responsibilities are delegated. Thus in the United Kingdom the government is said to be accountable to Parliament in the sense that it must answer questions about its policies and may ultimately be repudiated by Parliament. In 1979, for example, the Labour Government headed by James Callaghan was defeated by a majority of one in a vote of no confidence (see CONFIDENCE, QUESTIONS OF) which precipitated

the general election of May 1979. The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (popularly known as the OMBUDSMAN) is thought to have improved the accountability of the administration by his scrutiny of administrative methods and his inquiries into complaints against government departments. Ultimately, of course, governments in democracies are accountable to the people through the mechanism of elections.

Accountability is not confined to democratic forms of government, although it is in democracies that demands for greater accountability are generally heard. Any delegation of power will usually carry with it a requirement to report on how that power is exercised, and any institution seen as having power may be required to justify its operations to a superior authority. Thus it would be possible to speak of a dictatorship or totalitarian regime making the press, the universities or the trade union movement accountable to the government.

## Administration

This term may be used in a number of senses and the meanings are frequently blurred. It may refer simply to the political part of the EXECUTIVE branch and it is frequently so used in the United States ('the Reagan administration'). In some countries where a sharper distinction is drawn between politicians and civil servants, the word may describe the civil service or bureaucracy alone; this is common usage in the United Kingdom. And 'administration' also relates to the process of implementing decisions and organizing the government of a country; for example, one can talk of the administration of quasi-governmental agencies, nationalized industries and local authorities.

In recent years both active politicians and political scientists have become concerned with the problem of governmental overload and the inefficiencies which result from an executive which has too many responsibilities. One solution which seemed possible for a time in the United Kingdom was DEVOLUTION. In the United States the problem has to some extent been tackled by deregulation, which involves strict reviews of government rules and orders, and efforts to reduce or even remove government intervention and control. Other questions which arise in relation to administration are whether the administrative corps is either competent or socially representative enough, and whether the administration can be effectively controlled by the politicians (see ACCOUNTABILITY).

## **Administrative Courts**

Administrative Courts comprise a distinct system of courts which exist to implement and develop public as opposed to private law, and which handle disputes in which the state is a party or has an interest. Many English jurists such as A.V. Dicey once considered administrative courts inimical to traditional ideas of liberty, assuming that they would apply standards unduly favourable to authority. More recently, however, opinion has tended to favour the establishment of such courts, partly because of the rapid extension of governmental activity (for example, the WELFARE STATE) and partly because a need has been felt for distinct principles of law which can be applied to protect the individual when he comes into contact with governmental authority.

## **Affirmative Action**

Affirmative action describes the deliberate policy of giving preferential treatment to some groups in a society on the grounds that such groups have hitherto been disadvantaged either by governmental policies or as a result of popular prejudice. Affirmative action—sometimes also called reverse discrimination—has been used to help ethnic minorities and women (see FEMINISM), and it is sometimes suggested that it should be used to help other kinds of minorities, for example homosexuals or the handicapped. The idea has been most extensively translated into public policy in the United States, where the executive has encouraged the hiring and advancement of minorities by requiring, *inter alia*, that all organizations which have contracts with the federal government employ a given percentage of people belonging to a minority group. A policy of affirmative action has proved extremely controversial in relation to university and graduate school admissions, and one of the most celebrated constitutional cases of recent years (*Bakke v. Regents of the University of California*, 1978) set limits to the extent to which the policy could be used. Although the Reagan administration which came into power in 1981 expressed its general dislike for the policy of affirmative action, the courts have not ruled it unconstitutional *per se* and it seems likely that the idea will continue to influence public policy in the USA.

## **Agrarian Parties**

Agrarian parties are political parties chiefly representing the interests of peasants or, more broadly, the rural sector of society. The

extent to which they are important, or whether they even exist, depends mainly on two factors. One, obviously, is the size of an identifiable peasantry, or the size of the rural relative to the urban population. The other is a matter of social integration: for agrarian parties to be important, the representation of countryside or peasantry must not be integrated with the other major sections of society. Thus a country might possess a sizeable rural population, but have an economic system in which the interests of the voters were predominantly related to their incomes, not to their occupations or location; and in such a country the political system would be unlikely to include an important agrarian party. As agriculture comes to employ a progressively smaller percentage of Western populations, which concurrently become ever more urbanized, this sort of political party tends either to decline in importance or to broaden its appeal by shifts in its policies. Both of these tendencies can be observed most clearly in Scandinavia, where agrarian parties have perhaps been more important than anywhere else in Europe. However, the same tendencies have appeared elsewhere. The politics of the Third Republic in France were to a large extent based on an urban/rural cleavage leading to at least semi-agrarian parties. These declined rapidly in the Fourth and Fifth Republics as the predominantly rural population turned into a predominantly urban one. In some countries, for example the USA, separate agrarian parties do not exist because loose party structures have permitted the existence of identifiably agrarian wings within parties, developed around other cleavages. (However, in the America of the 1880-1910 period some states did have specific farmers' parties.)

## **Alienation**

Alienation is a very widely, and loosely, used concept, which originates in its modern form with MARX, though he took the term from HEGEL, and a similar usage can be found in ROUSSEAU. In modern sociological analysis it has much in common with the Durkheimian concept of ANOMIE. It is helpful to take an etymological approach in trying to define this important but sometimes obscure concept. In legal terms 'alienation' means giving up rights in property; analogously, political philosophers have used 'inalienable rights' to mean those rights which cannot be given up, and cannot ever legitimately be taken away. But the other derivation, from alien, suggesting something other, foreign, distant, is also helpful.

For Marx, alienation is a condition occurring in pre-socialist societies, where the human nature of man is made other than, alien to, what man is really capable of being. This is also the sense in

## *Amendment*

which Rousseau used it, though his view was that contemporary society had made man other, and more corrupt, than he had once been. Marx had a sophisticated theory of alienation, especially as it occurred in capitalist society. Man could be alienated, for example, (1) from himself (i.e. from his true nature); (2) from other men (absence of natural FRATERNITY); (3) from his working life (because it was meaningless and involved 'alienating', in a legal sense, his labour for the benefit of others); (4) from the product of his labour (because, unlike craftsmen, most industrial workers do not have the satisfaction of lovingly designing and creating an entire product through the exercise of their skills). All of these are interconnected, and for Marx they all stem from the capitalist productive system, and especially from its practice of DIVISION OF LABOUR.

This stress on human nature, and on the way in which man is turned into a wage slave, without respect for himself, his fellows, or his daily work, is much weakened in the later and more economics-oriented work of Marx, but it has continued to be of vital interest and importance in social thought generally. It has often been applied far too loosely so that alienation frequently means no more than unhappiness; but some new applications are obviously legitimate extensions of Marx's usage, as when feminists argue that capitalist society, as part of its generally de-humanizing effect, alienates men from women. However, there are serious objections to the concept of alienation. First, though Marx's writing is often highly persuasive in regard to the existence of the phenomenon, many critics hold that alienation is created by the division of labour endemic to any high-technology economy (perhaps even by the very nature of such economies) rather than by a particular system of property rights; and if this is so, alienation will remain a problem even in full-scale communist societies. Second the concept of alienation relies on the unprovable notion that a basic or true human nature exists. From a philosophical point of view the concept would be useful only if it could be shown (a) that man really would have certain characteristics under a different system, and (b) that these are in some sense 'natural'. Yet Marxists, and most others who make use of the concept, are strongly opposed to the idea that any basic human nature exists independently of social reality. Despite such problems, the concept retains its vigour and is widely used in social analysis.

## **Amendment**

An amendment is a change made to a bill, law, constitutional provision or regulation. The process of making such a change is also known as amendment.

The provisions of some constitutions make constitutional amendment especially difficult, and these are known as entrenched constitutions. In some legal systems certain laws are thought to be of peculiar importance and are similarly protected—for example, laws guaranteeing freedom of speech, freedom of religion or other basic liberties. Where a constitution has been altered or supplemented, the amendments may become almost as important as the original text. This is the case in the United States of America, where the first ten amendments to the Constitution are collectively known as the Bill of Rights. They were ratified in 1791 and have since proved a major instrument for the protection of individual freedom in the USA as well as providing models for other countries (see JUDICIAL REVIEW). Of particular note because they have passed into the general political vocabulary are the First Amendment, guaranteeing freedom of speech, religion and thought, and the Fifth Amendment, which granted the individual protection against self-incrimination. In the period of MCCARTHYISM the Fifth Amendment was invoked by a number of witnesses accused of communist sympathies or communist connections, and gave rise to the phrase 'Fifth Amendment communists'. The most important aspects of the Fifth Amendment is its guarantee that no person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without proper legal process (see DUE PROCESS). Since 1954 the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution has been used by the Supreme Court to promote both procedural and substantive equality in the USA in a way which has also served as a model for other jurisdictions (see EQUAL PROTECTION).

Where ordinary rather than constitutional laws are concerned, the general assumption is that the stronger the executive and the weaker the legislature the less likely are amendments offered in the legislature to be successful. Thus in Fifth Republic France it is rare for bills to be changed significantly during their passage through the National Assembly. In Britain, when the government has a working majority, amendments of substance are also rare, although the combined pressure of government backbenchers and opposition parties can sometimes lead to successful amendments.

## **Anarchism**

Anarchism is a political theory based on two propositions: that society does not need government, and that no government is legitimate unless truly, and in detail, consented to by the individuals governed. Its history is long and confused, and the other political attitudes held by anarchists have ranged from far right to far left in the political spectrum.

## *Anomie*

The earliest serious anarchist thinkers were 19th-century writers such as Proudhon and the French theoreticians of SYNDICALISM, who began to develop ideas about founding a society without government. However, anarchist elements can be found in many social theorists. One good example is MARX, whose doctrine that the state will 'wither away' under Communism has clear affinities with anarchist goals.

Theoretically, anarchism rests on the moral assumption that freedom is an absolute value and that no one should ever be obliged to obey authority without having freely consented to do so. Empirically it rests on a set of assumptions about the possibility of organizing genuine voluntary associations dedicated to co-operative work and mutual aid. These assumptions seem more plausible where no great degree of industrial sophistication is involved, and there has often been a rather idealistic aura of peaceful rurality about anarchist theories.

Despite this there are important connections between anarchist theory and the more general theories recommending DIRECT DEMOCRACY and INDUSTRIAL PARTICIPATION. Turn-of-the-century associations between bomb throwing and anarchism are outdated and unhelpful. The sort of commitments to extreme egalitarianism and total liberty that characterize anarchism have been taken over by radical socialist and Marxist groups, or, in more moderate versions by exponents of INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY.

## **Anomie**

Anomie is a sociological concept, originated by DURKHEIM, similar in scope to Marx's concept of ALIENATION. Anomie is held to be present in a society where normative regulation, the common acceptance of value and rules, is weak, and it consists of feelings of individual isolation, loneliness and meaninglessness that manifest themselves in social disorder. Though there are many technical definitions, both by Durkheim and in later works, the basic meaning of *anomie* is contained in one of Durkheim's more poetic descriptions: it is 'the malady of infinite aspiration'. What Durkheim meant was that modern industrial society, which sometimes seems to lack any moral or ethical basis beyond utilitarianism or arguments based on rational expectation, cannot offer anyone a reason for not doing or trying to get anything he wants, although ever-growing personal appetites cannot ultimately be satisfied. To Durkheim this state of affairs was the result of the Industrial Revolution, which broke down the traditional pattern of existence that bound man closely



to his fellows by deeply accepted cultural norms (see *CORPORATISM*). The concept can be used to explain unrest and dissatisfaction in any sort of social system, though it is often used either loosely or even tautologously (for example, to mean no more than a state of lawlessness, despite the fact that the term is actually intended to explain the lawlessness). One may question the validity of Durkheim's contrast between anomic industrial societies and traditional societies where the malady is absent because all know and accept their role; but the concept of anomie itself, if used with care, can be illuminating.

### **Anti-Ballistic Missiles (see ABM)**

### **Anti-Clerical**

Anti-Clerical describes a political outlook strongly opposed to the churches wielding any direct political influence or power. Anti-clerical parties or politicians have had an important role in most Western societies at one time or another. Nowadays a clerical/anti-clerical cleavage still exists in Italy and, to a lesser extent, France. In France during the period 1870-1948 important sections of the electorate would automatically back certain political parties because they could be relied upon to oppose any clerical influence in politics. Other electors (nowadays especially the Christian Democrats in Italy) vote as they do precisely because they feel that the Church should play a significant role in the state.

### **Anti-Semitism**

Anti-Semitism, in political terms the discrimination against or persecution of Jews, is nowadays associated in most people's minds with Hitler's Germany. In fact it has a very much longer history, has had some political importance in most Western societies, and is by no means a spent force. The historical origins of anti-Semitism are complex and date back to the Middle Ages and beyond. Most European nations practised some form of discrimination against Jews, more or less intermittently and with varying degrees of clerical approval, for centuries before 19th-century anti-Semites, and later the Nazi Party, changed the emphasis of anti-Semitism from religious to racial hatred. To Hitler, the Jews constituted an international conspiracy and exercised the real power in all the nations opposed to Germany, whether capitalist or communist.