THE INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHICAL UNION REPORTS

IGU Commission on the World Political Map

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Political Geography at the international level is co-ordinated by the International Geographical Union Commission on the World Political Map. The Commission was created in August 1989 as the successor to the IGU Study group on the WPM. – see article on the Study Group in Political Geography Quarterly, vol. 8, no. 1 (1989), pp. 87–93. The Commission is made up of eleven Members, each from a different country. There are over 400 Corresponding Members from 56 countries. The NEWSLETTER is mailed to Corresponding Members (in return, when possible, of a voluntary contribution of at least $5.00, cheques, checks or international money orders in US$ or sterling, to be made out to David B. Knight, to be held in trust for the Commission in a special bank account). There is a varied programme of research, conferences and publications.

An Apology: This NEWSLETTER was supposed to have been mailed out some months ago but several things prevented that happening. The most serious problem was a computer ‘crash’ which damaged the hard disk with the mailing list and (because the only printout of the full mailing list was lost in mail transit from the UK to Canada last year, when I returned to Canada from a sabbatical leave at the University of Cambridge) a new list had to be compiled. Since there are more than 400 names on the list the recompilation task has taken some time. Sorry! make a back-up! Second, from September 1989 until June 1990 I was the Acting Director of my University’s Press and had little time for anything else but my family. At least I know that the NEWSLETTER was missed for many letters have been received from people asking why they had been dropped from the mailing list! Thanks for the letters. To everyone, sorry for the lateness of this issue. Hopefully the wait was worthwhile.

Self-Determination and the Challenges of Change: We live in momentous times. Changes abound, in many parts of the globe, in what undoubtedly is one of the greatest transition periods of modern history. Great promise but also great danger could result from the many changes that now are affecting numerous peoples in numerous states. Some of the changes hold promise for the peaceful formation of new structures that will provide for renewed societal development and, it is hoped, for the lessening of major world and regionally based tensions. Other changes, however, some already witnessed, have the potential for leading to whirlwinds of destruction within and, potentially, between states.

A root cause of so many of these changes is the notion of ‘self-determination’. The latter term means many things, but it currently is being sought at two main levels. First, peoples within many states are seeking an alteration to their states’ governments, to the way they are governed. In seeking such changes they are questioning, challenging and changing assumptions of ideological orientation and of societal structures. In such movements for ‘self-determination’ there is no question of any group seeking from the state. Rather, it is the people of various states who are (re)deciding for themselves how their lives, and their respective states, are to be controlled. Second, in contrast, in some states, there are sub-state peoples who are seeking not just to achieve change in like-manner but who also are seeking to attain independence with sovereignty. The first form of self-determination, while bringing about significant changes to the societies concerned, will not necessarily bring about changes to the outline of the world political map. The second form of self-determination could lead to territorial changes, if secession is granted, or otherwise is taken.

Inherent in both forms of self-determination are seeds for positive change, but also for conflict and even chaos. These changes, whatever, wherever, and whenever they may be, are of intense interest and concern to political geographers world-wide. Our challenge as scholars is to gain insight into, among such critical issues as:

– the geographical underpinnings of peace and of conflict,
– regional versus national claims on identity and territories,
– the geographical processes and patterns of peaceful and conflictual change,
– administrative-territorial and boundary structures,
– and potential outcomes.

The challenge to understand these issues has been and is being directly addressed by Members and Corresponding Members of the IGU Commission on the World Political Map (through research, conference and publication activities. There have been World Political Map meetings (in UK [1983, 1986, 1989], Spain [1986], USA [1986], Poland [1987], Australia [1988], Israel [1989], Amsterdam [1989] that have directly and indirectly addressed these issues and more are planned – see full list below – including the Glasgow conference in 1991 on “comparative regionalism/secession”, the April 1991 conference on global political change and the conference session on ethnonationalism in the USA in April 1991, the 1991 Praha conference on changes in Europe, and the 1992 pre-IGU Congress Commission of the World Political Map Symposium in the USA). Several WPM books published, in preparation, or planned form a tangible record of the research findings.

The Commission clearly is addressing key issues. In so doing, however, it is aware that there remain other issues and other regions that deserve continuing attention but which might, for a time, 'lose favour' due to the particular focus on the rapid changes – and much attention to 'fallacies of self-determination' – along many places in the USSR and Eastern Europe, and the restructuring of the Germanies and, more generally, of Western Europe. Thus they must be remembered that there are issues of importance in, for instance, various regions of the 'Third World', that demand the attention of political geographers. There are concerns for 'self-
determination' at the 'grass-roots' levels of societies in many rural parts of the Third World, there are issues related to electoral processes, various politics-environment problems, and so on. These issues are some of those which hopefully will be addressed at the forthcoming Commission conference on 'politics and development' in Delhi in 1990, when attention will be placed on how people are seeking to have "development" occur because they want it to happen, not just in the manner wanted or desired by central governments, and the 1991 conference session in the USA on ethnonationalism. And there are many other issues elsewhere too: local political representation, refugees, border conflicts, sovereignty issues, etc., some of which directly or indirectly involve "self-determination".

Self-determination means many things (see, for example, the article on "Geographical Perspectives on Self-Determination" in Taylor and House, editors, Political Geography, and the annotated bibliography on Self-Determination listed below in WPM Publications). Scholarly activities by political and other geographers around the world can help in developing a new understanding of the meanings of this phrase, at the several levels of possible application. Focusing on the concept of 'self-determination' may help in providing a context for understanding the many strands of change now sweeping the globe.

David B. Knight

Forthcoming IGU Commission/World Political Map Conference Activities:

(1) IGU Regional Conference, Beijing, August 1990: a social meeting of people interested in the Commission will be held under the co-chairmanship of Commission Members Dr. Kaddu-Mukasa (Kenya) and Dr. En-Yong Wang (China).

(2) Commission conference in India, on Politics and Development, November 1990. Major focus will be on South and Southeast Asia, but papers on other regions and explicitly theoretical explorations are most welcome. Contact, at once: Dr. C. F. Singh, Department of Geography, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, Delhi, 110007, India. Telephone: (office) 11-2511256, extension 251, or 2521521; extension 251; or (home) 11-7110400

(3) Commission conference, co-sponsored with the AAG Political Geography Specialty Group, on Political Global Change: Assessment of the unprecedented political transformations currently in occurrence and the implications these hold for cultural and economic change. In Tallahassee, Florida, USA, April 10–12 1991, just prior to AAG annual meeting in Miami. Florida State University will help defray transportation costs and additional financial assistance will be available to qualified students. Contact: Dr. Janet Kodras, Department of Geography, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2500. FAX 904-561-1405

(4) Commission conference session on Ethnonationalism during the AAG annual meeting in Miami, April 1991. If interested in giving a paper please immediately Contact: Mr. S. K. Hennayake, Department of Geography, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 13244-160, USA. (Mr. Hennayake is a Corresponding Member from Sri Lanka.)

(5) Commission conference in Glasgow, Scotland, on Comparative Regionalism/Secessionism. 1st week of September 1991. (Immediately following the conference in Prada — see next item.) Themes to be explored include:

- theories of development of regionalism/nationalism;
- peripheral nationalism;
- regionalism in non-ethnic situations;
- regionalism/secessionism in developed and developing countries;
- processes involved in regionalism becoming secession;
- state reactions;
- public policies.

Contact: Dr. Ronan Paddison, Department of Geography and Topographica Science, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, Scotland, G12 8QQ, UK. Telephone: UK 41-339-888, extension 4788. Telex 777070 UNIGLA.

(6) Commission conference in Prada, Czecho-Slovakia. East Europe — Central Europe — Europe, 27 August—2 Sept. 1991 — immediately prior to the Glasgow conference [see item (5) above] so as to ease international transportation costs. Papers to be selected from proposals. Papers must treat Eastern-Central Europe in the wider world system or examine the changing political geography (local, national, regional) of former East Europe. Themes:

I. Geographical Transition and World Political Order:
A) Security, economic and cultural links: history and future.
B) Confederacy and new political forms.
C) Stable peace and order.
D) Changes for hegemonic stability or post-hegemonism.
E) Future of the Soviet Union.
F) The political geography of perestroika.
H) Alternative conceptions of security (e.g. defensive defense).
I) Non-nuclear Europe: buffer, barrier, or new corridor?
J) Foreign new alliances and alignments with East, West, North and South.
K) Redefining cores and peripheries: discarding the Second World.
M) Politics and economics of socialist marxist economies.

II. State-Formation, Civil Society, and Nationalism:
A) Post-totalitarian trajectories.
B) Transformation of sectoral and territorial policies.
C) Local state administrative and regional restructuring.