
Non-Democratic Regimes and Approaches to Their Studies in the 21st Century

Academic Conference: Non-Democratic Regimes and Approaches to Their Studies in the 21st Century

To mark the forty-year anniversary of the 1973 Chilean Coup d'état, the Faculty of Arts hosted expert speakers on the matter of non-democratic regimes. Perspectives from three continents were present as designed to share and discuss examples and research into non-democratic regimes. Each speaker gave an insight into the academic approaches, methodology and successes of research in the field, allowing a reflection and constructive analysis on the study. Each of the invited speakers lectured and informed guests, with an opportunity for open questions after the explanation. This allowed evaluation on the topic, central to contemporary political science and historical research.

The event was organised by Štěpán Drahokoupil, of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts and was designed to bring together a collection of viewpoints on the matter. With both political science and historical inputs, a program of twelve speakers in a mix of both Czech and English were present. Proceedings began promptly in the morning, with an introductory speech from Dr. Radek Buben, a representative of the faculty, welcoming guests and outlining the day's aims. Mei-Yu Hsueh was also invited to say some introductory words – a representative from Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, she gave warm welcome, a brief political history of Taiwan and some flowers as a sign of appreciation.

Following this, James Cheng gave an informative lecture on the future prospects of civil society and liberal democracy in Taiwan; in comparison to the Czech Republic, with focus on the analytical aspects of the research. By paralleling the democratisation of both countries, the room was given an insight into the relevant aspects of respective democratic processes. Visually, mathematic statistics showed the differences in both examples of democratisation such as democratic history and the speed of liberalisation. This comparison underlined the successes of stable democratisation of both countries despite differences. This was followed by a question by Dr. Vladimíra Dvořáková, head of the Department of Political Science, University of Economics in Prague, sparking a debate within the room over the democratic comparison.

To signify the forty-year milestone of Pinochet's Chilean coup d'état, a significant milestone in non-democratic leadership, a lecture central to the matter followed. Perhaps the most significant speaker of the day, Richard Gott, a popular British journalist and historian with a personal experience with the revolutionary event, held the focal lecture. Gott made it clear from the beginning that his academic and professional experience emphasised more on historical research rather than political, dissimilarly to the majority of the other speakers, giving the event a wider range of disciplines.

Speaking with clarity, Gott explained his personal anecdotes of the events of forty years ago, arriving in Santiago as a journalist in September 1973. The significance of the event was its impact on worldwide affairs, as the first overthrow of power broadcasted on multinational television as well as its antagonistic impact towards the bipolar relations of the Cold War period. He began to quote his notebook of memoirs and offered a vivid description of the atmosphere in the Chilean capital on the day of the coup. Gott explained that Pinochet's coup was criticised by left wing media as 'Neo-Liberal', and its subsequent influence over the economics of the continent. He explained that advocates of social democracy took up these values, which have been supplementary to modern governance. This led to his mention of this excess in a contemporary example. Gott claimed that this sort of "free market rhetoric has lost its charm since 2008", elaborating on the issues with the current world economic crisis.

The afternoon session was organised with panel discussions each focusing on different aspects of leadership without democratic legitimacy. The first was focused on the examples and issues with current regimes of lacking democracy. With particular focus on the Chinese model, of evident economic success, questions were posed over the true advantageous nature of democracy within a ruling system, as provoked by Dr. Ondřej Klimeš (Institute of East Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts). The concept of Personalism was also discussed, and led by Jeroen van den Bosch (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan) as to whether the notion is compatible with and without a democratic system. Adéla Jiráňková (Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences) gave an informed perspective on the transformation of non-democratic regimes in North Africa and the effect on which this holds on citizens and civil society. She then linked the democratic history into a modernised example, that of the recent Arab Spring since 2011 which initially began in Tunisia.

The following group of speakers shared an emphasis on deficits in democracy. Two of the key issues were the occurrence of hybrid regimes of limited democracy and greater efficiency, and the phenomenon of state dysfunction. Dr. Karol Derwich (Jagiellonian University, Krakow) spoke about this occurrence of dysfunction in the context of Latin America, and the anti-democratic dangers attached, particularly relevant to the anniversary of the Chilean coup. Uroš Lazarevic

(Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts) followed this discussion with a perspective on the hybrid regimes of the post-Yugoslav region, giving a comparative analysis of the incomplete democratisation and lack of liberal democracy within the recently democratised region. Subsequently, Dr. Radzislawa Gortat (University of Warsaw) then took the hybrid theory example into a different context; similarly as a post socialist example, with the experience of Kyrgyzstan since 2010, allowing a comparison between the two examples and an in depth analysis for the audience.

The final discussion group, presented in Czech language focused on the issues of twenty first century non-democratic regimes, and their contemporary issues. There were knowledgeable speakers present such as Pavla Tichá, Jiří Suchánek, Tereza Grünvaldová and Vincenc Kopeček, who concluded the event by discussing the most modern examples of non-democratic regimes, and their both threat internally and externally.

A thoroughly engaging day with great focus on the inequalities and development of political and historical research; which not only informed the attendees but allowed constructive criticism and improvement on the methods and practices of the issue as an academic matter.

Sam Pepper is interested in meeting and discussing culture between people from other nationalities. This, he says is one of his favourite hobbies, which led him to great personal development during his Erasmus study period in Prague. He also offers simple English lessons to other European students to gain understanding of other cultures and help others improve with their language skills.

By initially learning meeting people of other European cultures at his home University at Essex, whilst living with French, Swedish and Norwegian people, he says that he has become fascinated in European attitudes, comparing similarities and differences in European politics, popular culture and ways of life. He has always taken a firm interest in current affairs and hot topics in world politics, therefore relished the opportunity to write about subjects such as disparity in East Asia, European Union immigration and a European multinational MA programme. These opportunities have not only developed his interest in international affairs, but also it has shown him the value of being a European student in the Czech Republic.