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Centralization and decentralization: Theories and Models

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Abstract

The questions of centralization and decentralization arise in every polity. The constitution or the practice or both have to settle how much of policy making is to be decided by the central government and by component bodies. By and large liberalism and decentralization tend to go together while authoritarianism tends to be associated with centralization. The constitutional model which is generally regarded as bringing about the largest amount or decentralization is federalism. This is said to sonstitute a half way house between confederacies (where component units dominate)and unitary states (where the center dominates) In its classical form at least , federalism stipulates that there have to be two independent levels of government (the centre and upper level component bodies (often named states) each of these levels has the right to decide on matters falling within its own sphere. There are difficulties in practice especially with respect to the constituent power and to the fields allocated to each level. Federalism must be based on a rigid constitution there has to be s supreme court protecting the independence of the two levels of government there has to be a second chamber defending the rights of the component bodies at the central level.yet there are variations in the extent to which the component bodies are protected and generally in the extent to which there is decentralization. On the one hand federal states are becoming more centralized on the other centralization cannot go beyond a given point without leading to gross inefficiency and perhaps to a break up of the regime as the communist experience showed. Partly for this reason there is a degree of convergence between federal and unitary states. Federalism is also associated with efforts to bring together independent states but this has occurred in a smell number of polities only. Attempts at achieving closer cooperation between states has led more commonly to confederacies, such as the Unites Nations. The European community or European Union has innovated by forming a type of association labeled supranational which is intermediate between the confederal and the federal models. There is innovation in that developments take place gradually with new fields beings progressively covered new structures being set up and new member states joining. The problems of centralization and decentralization have exercised the minds of many in relation to many types of organization : both efficency and freedom appear to be at stake . federalism succeeded in a number of contexts but it is not the panacea which some suggest it is ; it is also so diverse that one has to refer to federalisms rather than to federalism . what is at stake is the need to find an equilibrium between the two extremes of over centralization and break up. Given the large number of situations in the contemporary world one should look for a variety of solutions and for a continuous evolution of the models which have hitherto been proposed.

Keywords: *Centralization,decentralization,federalism,social forces, ideology*

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Introduction

No government, even the most authoritarian, can ever take all public decisions at the centre. Some power has therefore to be given to authorities below the national level to take decisions which the centre cannot take. From this general remark emerges the idea of decentralization, an idea which can, of course,take many forms and vary markedly in extent. The concepts of centralization and decentralization can be formulated simply: if we list all the decisions taken in a country by all the public bodies, that country tends to be centralized if the proportion of the decision taken by the central authorities is large to very large, and tends, on the country , to be decentralized if the proportion is small to very small(Fleiner Gerster, 1987). While the concept of centralization is relatively simple to define, it is complex to measure. Indicators of the extent to which decisions are taken at the centre or away from the centre are impressionistic and therefore unsatisfactory. The problem of measurement is further complicated by the fact that the questions of centralization and of decentralization, which relate to the extent to which various agencies are responsible for decision making, are confronted as the constitutional answer to the problem of decentralization. If decentralization is difficult to measure, the relationship between federalism and decentralization is also encumbered by many ambiguities. (Trigg, 1985)

This is part because there are many federalisms perhaps as many as there are federal states. The words federalism and federal have also become symbols, sometimes empty of real content and have for this reason attracted both support and criticism. Moreover, since it has many faces, federalism is but one of the formulas which can bring about decentralization. There are other formulas, such as confederacies or supranational arrangements in the context of unions of states and regionalism or semi autonomous local authorities, in the context of single states.

The ideas of centralization and decentralization being truly general should not be considered merely in the context of individual countries. They should be examined by reference to any relationship between bodies which are in some way either above or below each other. This means that, while a country can become decentralized for instance by means of greater powers being devolved to local authorities there may also be some form of centralization above that country if some powers are exercised higher up by a body covering a number of states. Such unions of states can be very loose, but the may be or progressively become tighter, as has been the case with the European community and European Union as well as with other organizations, such as the United Nations.Thus centralization and decentralization have to be viewed as phenomena affecting all the levels of government which exist in the world:

centralization and decentralization within the state are only the best known and most studied forms of these phenomena. The aim of this chapter is therefore to look generally at levels of centralization and decentralization in the contemporary world and assess how far these levels vary as a result of constitutional and other rules.

- We shall first examine what criteria lead to centralization and decentralization, and what forms central periphery relationships can take as a result.
- Second, we shall look at the federal model to see how far it meets criteria of decentralization and how far it raises problems which are difficult to overcome.
- Third, we shall look at concrete differences in the extent of decentralization between states which are federal and states which are not.
- Finally, we shall analyze the ways in which states have come to form closer associations, federalism being one of the formulas by which these closer associations are achieved.

Centralization and decentralization

The analysis of centralization and decentral-

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ization poses two general questions:

▪ Under what conditions does the problem arise? What are the social forces which tend to move countries towards more centralization or towards more decentralization?

▪ How is the problem solved? What are the characteristics by which one can assess whether a state is more or less centralized of decentralized?

It will then be possible to see what rules are most likely to bring about centralization or decentralization, and particular how satisfactory the federal model is if the desired object is a high degree of decentralization.

Patterns of centralization and decentralization

In the contemporary world, at least in the older nations, patterns of centralization and decentralization appear to be a legacy of history. Some countries, such as France or Japan, are regarded as traditionally centralized the same appears to be true of many Latin American countries, if not of all. On the other hand, countries such as the United States, Britain and Germany are regarded as inherently decentralized. Indeed , although in western Europe in recent years pressure for decentralization has increased, long standing traditions persist and seem to continue to account for the fact that some states remain centralized while others are decentralized. Thus French centralization appears to be the consequence of the policy of the kings who wished to extend their hold on the country against the local aristocracy ago. American, British and German decentralization also has a long history: no ruler was able to ensure, or at least to ensure for long, that most major decisions were taken in the capital. History as such however does not explain trends towards centralization or decentralization, it merely suggests that what exists cannot easily be modified, some sociopolitical forces have to account for the existence of these traditions. These forces have usually been regarded as being of two kinds, ideological and structural. In recent years, moreover , centralization and decentralization have been increasingly discussed in terms of a third characteristic, efficiency.

Ideology is powerful in that it helps to justify or forces to reject a particular stance on centralization or decentralization. Thus liberalism can be regarded as leading naturally towards decentralization. Thus liberalism can be regarded as leading naturally towards decentralization and authoritarianism towards centralization. Thus, too, egalitarianism is likely to lead centralization because decentralization means the acceptance of differences of variations from one part of the country to another. Regimes which propose to bring about equality are therefore likely to be uneasy about decentralization, which is why, by large, the left has tended to centralize more than the right. However, to the extent that it advocates political liberalism, the left has tended to be cross pressured in the west at least.

Structural forces to group conflicts in a society and history plays a substantial part in this context because the longer these conflicts last the more difficult they are to overcome. The presence of such conflicts accounts for high levels of centralization in France: the battles between monarchists and republicans and between clericals and anti clericals created such a climate of suspicion in the country that no central government was prepared to allow for a truly large does of local autonomy. Thus liberals can become champions of centralization though perhaps more uneasily than supporters of authoritarian systems when their preferred regime is under attack.

Gradually, however the contradiction between liberalism and centralization accounts for the fact that moves towards decentralization may be made: this was the case in France from the late nineteenth century onwards; it has also been the case in Spain, where in the late 1970s regions were set up and given considerable autonomy. Conversely, while the right can often be comfortable with decentralization, in western democracies at least those conservatives

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who wish to stop the excessive profligacy of left leaning local authorities have been known to increase centralization: this was the case with the British conservatives in the 1980s.

Overall, therefore a relationship exists between ideology, the degree to which the regime is accepted and centralization. Liberal regimes which are well accepted will tend towards decentralization. Authoritarian regimes are likely to promote centralization, except if they are so well accepted and so traditional that they do not propose to put a new on their polity. Most authoritarian systems and those liberal systems which are not well accepted are likely to veer towards centralization, though to a varying degree and with greater or lesser consistency.

The question of efficiency has also come to play a large part in debates over centralization. this is due in particular to the experience of highly centralized economic system such as the communist system, as well as some western mixed economy systems. Preciously, criticisms were more often leveled at the opposite extreme at the inefficiency of decentralized bodies because they breed duplication. The emphasis then changed and came to be placed on avoiding the inefficiency of centralization. As matter of fact, the desire to reduce inefficiency has led not just to the introduction of federal institutions, but to other moves towards decentralization taking place in the context of some unitary states.

Techniques of centralization and decentralization

Assuming that there is a move towards centralization or towards decentralization, some techniques and some instruments must be adopted and implemented to achieve the desired goal. These techniques and instruments are numerous and complex, and it would be difficult to identify them all. But it is possible to survey the domains or areas in which the question of centralization and decentralization occurs. There are seven such domains:

1-There may be more or less centralization wit substantive field of public decision making, such as education and housing.

2-There may be two, three or more levels of decentralization, such as regions, countries, cities and villages.

3-The question of centralization and decentralization pose that of the nature of the authorities in charge of each field. There can be a general authority concerned with the whole of level of government or, on the contrary , specific or ad hoc bodies in charge of a given field each: this is the case with Boards of Education.

4-Decision making in each field may be wholly given to one level of government or there may be power sharing among the government of the different levels.

5-Each authority may be entirely free to appoint decision makers (for instance, elect all its rulers), or other authorities may intervene in these processes.

6-Each authority may be free to set up its own administration or there may be common cervices among authorities at the different levels. The central administration may, for instance collect the taxes for the local authorities and redistribute the sums subsequently.

7-A decision has to be taken on who has constituent power: that is, on who allocates the powers which we just mentioned. This may be done entirely at the central level, at the level of component bodies, or at both jointly.

It is manifestly difficult to assess in every case where a country is to be located with respect to each of these domains, but one can at least have an impression of the extent of centralization of decentralization by taking these question into account. This is also the way which it is possible to assess, first, what federalism aims at and, second whether federal states are truly decentralized.

The federal model

Federalism is widely regarded as the preeminent means of achieving decentralization within a state, as well as a means of unifying states without destroying the identity of each of them. As a result ,as well as in part be-

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cause of the success of the United states as a polity,there has been an aura around federalism, and the word has tended to be used in many different cases to cover different realities.

Federalism was therefore conceived partly through logical reasoning and partly empirically. Its characteristics developed gradually in the course of the nineteenth century as the American model itself developed and was imitated in Latin America, Canada and Australia, while different versions of the same idea developed in Switzerland and Germany.Since the setting up of the United States as a federal government by the constitution of 1789,federalism has been presented by some as the answer to the question of the relationship between center and periphery, on the ground that it maximizes decentralization and yet avoids the break up of the polity: expressions such as unity within diversity have sometimes been used to describe federalism.in practice however there have been disagreements as to which institutional arrangements would best achieve the desired aims and thus be truly federal. To be more realistic discussions should not be so much about whether a given set of arrangements in truly federal or not but about whether these arrangements lead if not to the maximum possible amount of decentralization compatible with a coherent polity, since a maximum cannot be assessed then at least to high level of decentralization.

The basic principle of the classical federal model

What then is the main principle on which federalism is based? as there are many types of federal system no single answer can be given, but one type of federalism, that of the United States, is often regarded as providing the classical model. One should therefore begin by looking at this model and see to what extent it provides satisfactory answer with respect to the various domains of decentralization which were listed earlier. The basic principle of this classical model lies in the idea that in order to optimize the two prerequisites of decentralization and of national unity rule making authorities should be divided into two sets of authorities independent of each other within their own sphere. The concept that each of the two levels should be independent in their own sphere is fundamental (Wheare, 1963: 1-14;Elazar, 1979:13-57; Burgess, 1986). This is not to say that there are no other levels of government such as counties or cities; but only two the central government and the upper level of the component unit, are independent. the names given to these upper level component units vary: they are called states in the United States, Australia, India and some federal Latin American countries; they are called provinces in Canada, cannot in Switzerland, and Lander in Germany and Austria.

If we apply the principle of the classical federal model to the seven domains which we identified earlier, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1-The model gives no precise guidance on the division of the fields of decision making. By and large, however, it is (or, more correctly, was) felt that the central body should deal with foreign affairs and defence, currency and customs, as well as with matters affecting commercial relations among the component units. This list has never been affecting commercial relations among the component units. This list has never been regarded as truly limiting and by a variety of means the powers of the component units in economic and even social matters have been in part reduced.

2-The model states that two levels of government, but two only, should be independent . there might be more , but federalism stops at two levels.

3-The model states that each of these two levels should be organized on the basis of one authority only : federalism is not functional . it is based not on ad boc authorities covering specific fields of government but on general authorities.

4-The model states that each authority has

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to have all the power, or none at all, in each sphere. There is no power sharing between the central government and the component bodies.

5-The model states that each of these two levels should be completely independent in the appointment of its decision makers.

6-The model states that administrative agencies of the two levels should be entirely distinct.

7-Finally, the model gives no clear guidance as to who should have the constituent power to decide how powers are to be allocated between the two levels of authorities.

Thus the classical federal model gives precise answer with respect to five of the seven domains, but , with respect to the other two, there are uncertainties and there is no real guidance. The model is thus partly successful and partly unsuccessful.

It is partly successful in that it articulates a number of clearly defined characteristics which make it possible to give a precise content to a half way house position between the two extremes of the unitary state and of the confederacy. in a unitary state only the central government. In a confederacy, the central government exists only because member states are prepared to keep it in existence. Thus the British Parliament is sovereign and can regulate absolutely the division of labour between authorities within the United Kingdom. On the contrary the United Nations and the organization for African Unity can only do those things which the individual polities are prepared to let them do, and as long as those polities concur in letting them do those things. Historically, the concept of the half way house represented by federalism emerged at a time when earlier confederacies seemed to have been ineffective. This view was exaggerated because not only the Swiss Confederacy but also the Dutch United provinces(which were a confederacy until the French Revolution) were successful arrangements. However the view that confederacies were unsuccessful was apparently strengthened by the fact that the United States was a confederacy before becoming federal and by the fact that the same development occurred in Switzerland (although it remained a confederacy in name) and in Germany.

The classical model is also unsuccessful in part , in that it leaves open two critical questions: the authority which is in charge of the constituent power; and the determination of the fields of government to be given to the federal body and to the component agencies. As a result of the inability of the model to give clear answers in both these domains, substantial differences are likely to exist among federal countries and a ranking will be found among them. There are an almost infinite variety of solutions with respect to the distribution of fields of government between centre and component bodies; there can also be many different formulas with respect to the constituent power.

The federal model and the constituent power

With respect to the constituent power the problems faced by the federal model are particularly serious. Ideally, center and component bodies should be independent of each other: neither should be able to destroy the other . in practice this is a recipe for deadlock, and mechanisms have therefore to be found to overcome the difficulty. These mechanisms, which fall broadly within three areas, are all somewhat unsatisfactory: they leave some problems unsolved; they also result in substantial differences in the power of the centre and of the component bodies. (D.J. Elazar ,1991)

- Constitutional change itself is to be made difficult. the majorities required for amendments are to be large; in particular, there should be a requirement that at least a majority of the component bodies should concur for constitutional amendments to pass. Yet even if there is such a rule the component bodies are not wholly safeguarded, since a minority of them can be overruled.
- The supervision of the decision or powers between the two levels of government is to be given to a supreme court. But this means

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giving enormous powers to judges, who may effectively modify the constitution in a centralizing or decentralizing direction if they are so inclined. the question of who appoints them is therefore crucial: we shall see in chapter 20 the difficulties which have arisen in this respect.

▪ Component bodies are to be represented at the central government level in a second chamber. However the composition of that body can vary sharply : for instance, each component body may or may not have an equal number of representatives in the second chamber the powers of the chamber may also vary.

The federal model and fields of policy making

To these problems with respect to the allocation of the constituent power one must add the difficulties which emerge with respect to the allocation of policy fields between the two levels. In this respect the constitution may be more or less precise. If it is vague the scope for variations in decentralization is large; if it is precise the question of what is to happen to new fields (new forms of communication, environmental problems, etc.) is open. the center is in practice likely to fill the gap. Furthermore the constitution may simply state that the centre or the component bodies, or both will have the right to intervene in some fields or in the fields which are not listed. This is a recipe for conflict and almost certainly a recipe for decentralization.

Federal states and decentralization

The consequence of these difficulties is that it may not be altogether as important in reality as it seems in theory to declare solemnly that each level is independent with respect to appointments or to administrative services. If the central government can take control of large new and important fields if it can play a major part in constitutional amendments or in the customary change of the constitution, it can be far the most influential body and the level of decentralization in the nation can become rather low. This is indeed what occurs in many federal states and is one of the reasons why it has been said of several Latin American federal states that they are not truly federal (Wheare, 1963: 21-3).

There were sixteen federations in the mid 1990s. Nearly (seven)were in the Atlantic area(the United States, Canada, Australia, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany and Austria), one only in eastern Europe (Russia, since Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia had split), four in Latin America (Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina) , two in Asia (India and Malaysia) one in the Middle East (the United Arab Emirates) and one in Africa south of the Sahara (Nigeria). Two of the three most populous countries of the world are federal (the USA and India , the third country of the group being China).

As a result while under 10 percent of the worlds polities are federations over a third of the worlds population live under a federal form of government.

There are marked variations in the extent to which these federal stated are decentralized. Many of these have been classified as quasi federal because they do not apply rigidly the principles which have been stated earlier, such as India, Venezuela, Argentina and Mexico and even Germany and Austria (Wheare, 1963: 21-3; 26-9).

If we look at the three mechanisms relating to constituent powers which we described, and which aim at organizing in practice the relationship between centre and component bodies there are substantial differences from one federal state to another. The procedure by which constitutional amendments are pass is more or less strict: in United States three quarters of the state legislatures must approve a constitutional amendment if it is to become law; in Australia and Switzerland, amendments need the approval by referendum of the majority of the population in a majority of the component units if they are to pass. However such stringent conditions are not in force in all federal states.

Superme courts do not all have the power to intervene in disputes between the two levels of government and among the component

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bodies. Thus the powers of the Swiss constitutional court are more limited than those of a full supreme court.

Finally while second chambers always exist there is not equality in the representation of the component bodies everywhere. it does exist in the United States, Australia and Switzerland, but in Canada, despite the fact that the country is usually regarded as a true federal state the second chamber is not organized on the basis of the idea of representation of the component bodies. Elsewhere there is sometimes a weighting in favour of the larger component units; this is the case in practically all the new federations, in particular in Germany.

Meanwhile in some federal states the constitution itself gives the federal government powers of intervention or of veto. the center may thus interfere in decisions of component bodies and in the election of officials. In some cases it also specifies that there shall not be separate administrative services. If one adds the fact that the area of competence of the component bodies can be gradually reduced on the basis of the legal rule, which exists in some federal states, according to which federal law breaks state law, there are serious doubts about the ability of the federal model to ensure that decentralization is really maintained. (L.C. Mayer ,1972)

Comparison of federal and unitary states

As there are such variations in the extent to which decentralization is achieved through federalism the question arises as to whether unitary states may not be as decentralized as federal states. Is not a unitary state like Britain as decentralized as a federal state like Venezuela? It is difficult to provide a general answer in view of the point made at the outset that measurement of decentralization is complex and has so far not been satisfactorily achieved. however at least a partial answer can be given by considering the following issues.

Centralization and decentralization in unitary and federal states

There is a general tendency for states to be as a group more centralized than federal states. A substantial number of unitary states are very centralized while even the most centralized federal state achieves at least a moderate degree of decentralization. Unitary states are often highly centralized by design. France was highly centralized for centuries as a result of the deliberate policy of monarchs a policy which was maintained even reinforced by Napoleon is replicated in many countries of the contemporary world particularly in the Third World. This is or was also the case in communist states as a result of the dominance of the single party in these countries. Thus in general a substantial number of the nearly 170 states which are not federal are highly centralized often as a result of the very authoritarian character of the regimes under which they are run or simply because there is little or no tradition of local autonomy. There are no decentralized local authorities in many African and Middle Eastern polities, for instance although this is more frequently the case in countries which were dependencies of France or Portugal than in countries which were dependencies of Britain. These states are therefore clearly more centralized than even the least decentralized federal or quasi federal state. Centralization is not always due to authoritarianism and/ or to a colonial past, however. it can also occur naturally where the country is very small in population country with a population of one million or less and in a country which has 50 or 100 million inhabitants.

Conversely federal states tned to be large in both population and area. Only Switzerland and in general the European federal states are geographically small countries and except for Germany their population is also relatively small although not as small as that of the 30 or so states which have fewer than one million inhabitants . the federal state with the smallest population is Switzerland which has sic million found in the Caribbean the Indian ocean and the pacific.

Wealth is also a factor. If as was noted in the

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first section of this chapter, decentralization is somewhat inefficient and wasteful one would expect richer countries to be more decentralized than poorer countries. Indeed by and large western countries as a group whether unitary or federal are more decentralized than Third world countries. Characteristically over two fifths of the federal states (7 out of 16) are to be found among western countries although these constituted only 23 or 12.5 percent of the 182 polities of the world in the mid 1990s. (R.A. Dahl ,1963a)

Overlap between unitary and federal countries

Although as a group unitary states are more centralized than federal states in part because of the existence of a large number of highly centralized states there is also an overlap between federal and unitary states in terms of the extent of decentralization. This overlap is found especially among western and to an extent among Latin American countries. While component bodies are protected in federal states a similar effect is also achieved in some unitary states. The second chamber may thus represent the component bodies in some unitary states as is the case in France and in several non federal Latin American countries. Moreover some courts often administrative courts also guarantee to an extent at least the powers of component bodies in unitary states. The result is that there is in practice a real protection of the existence and powers of component bodies in some typically western but also Latin American unitary states while some federal states often also Latin American do not give greater protection to component bodies. Moreover the appointment of rule makers in the component units of federal states in sometimes subjected of forms of control at least of negative kind by the central government while this may not be the case in some unitary states. In India there is a power of federal intervention in cases of emergency while in some Latin American federal states the centre may veto appointments of governors or other executive agents of federations as well. In Britain, France and the Scandinavian countries on the other hand local bodies have complete autonomy with respect to the appointment of decision makers: the central government has no control over the appointment of the personal.

Finally administrative authorities are combined rather than separates in number of federations while this is not the case in all unitary states. The best known examples is that of Germany. In sharp contrast to the Unites states and Switzerland but also in contrast there is only one administrative structure for both levels of government in Germany this provision having been inserted in the constitution of 1949 in order to avoid duplication. Admittedly this administration is controlled by the component bodies the lander. however as this situation might mean that the German federal government could be in the hands of the Lander authorities if these refused to comply, the constitution gives the central government a power of intervention known as federal execution which were it often used might result in close supervision and detailed control of the action of regional administrations. The separation of authorities is one of the principal ways in which the federal system can be regarded as costly and inefficient as we have seen but this also means that there is overlap between federal and unitary systems of government and that federal systems cannot be regarded as uniformly more decentralized than unitary states.

Partnership and the centralization of powers in federal states:

Federal states are gradually becoming more centralized. The upper level of government has increased its influence and has even come to supervise the activities of component bodies. This is typically achieved by means of a partnership a type of arrangement which goes against the ideas of separation at the root of the federal model. What we just noted about the structure of administrative authorities in Germany constitutes a form of partnership between two sets of authorities. But partnership extends further especially in the area in

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which the federal model is the vaguest namely the allocation of powers precisely because the model is vague in this respect.

First sometimes by constitutional amendment and more often by customary change, including as a result of judicial action the scope of the powers of federal authorities has increased. in the economic field a liberal interpretation of clauses such as those on interstate commerce in the United States enables the federal government to legislate widely. Rearguard battles did take place in this respect especially in the Unites States in the mid 1930s when a number of text were quashed by the American Supreme Court, one of the grounds being that the federal authorities were interfering in matters which came within the jurisdiction of the states. Eventually however these battles were lost. In various social fields changes have also gradually increased the scope of federal activity in all federations so that social security housing and education are covered by federal legislation even in those polities such as the United States where federal legislation is still relatively less developed.

Differences still exist, not so much between all federal states and all unitary countries, but between the older federal states and unitary states even those which are decentralized. however these differences are being reduced to an increasingly narrow front. Less energy is now required on the part of the centralizers in federal states : for example, a constitutional amendment was needed to introduce federal income tax in the United states; but the supreme court later desisted from its role of defender of the states after its effort against the New Deal legislation in the 1930s. as central intervention in socioeconomic affairs is now no longer seriously challenged. Differences are sometimes more pronounced in matters pertaining to private law (especially in the Unites States). Although in this respect too differences have decreased. Systems of private law may be different within unitary states as well: for instance Scottish private law differs from English private law, despite the fact that the United Kingdom is s unitary state.

Second a spirit of partnership has emerged between federal authorities and the authorities of the component bodies as well as in some case between federal authorities and cities or counties with result that the authorities of the component bodies are bypassed. by a number of means whether financial (though grants in aid), administrative (through the issuing of circulars, model by laws and even model laws) or sociopsychological (through meetings of technical experts), federal authorities succeed in inducing component bodies to adopt policies conforming to those of the federal government. The success is not universal authorities of component bodies in federal states may be better placed than those of unitary states to resist central encroachments of this type but these moves have taken place on a wide scale. Federal authorities do what the governments of unitary states do: they cajole press and where they are not obeyed warn or use sanctions. In order to avoid having to use sanctions however they engage in partnership activities whether with decentralized units in a unitary state or with the component bodies of federal polity.

The basic principle of the division between the two types of authority is thus flouted. While the classical model stresses the need for two sets of bureaucracies and two distinct power structures the practice in all federations amounts to a situation which is little different from the one which local authorities are powerful: namely a partnership between authorities (Beer, 1974)

Decentralization in unitary states:

Federal states have therefore moved towards greater centralization in number of ways a process which has also taken place to an extent in unitary states. Centralization can thus be regarded as somewhat characteristic of contemporary societies. Meanwhile, however at least in some unitary states a movement towards decentralization has started to occur. To

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begin with in the west at least the extent of centralization of a number of unitary states has come to be regarded as being above the level which complex societies can tolerate. We noted earlier that the use of sanctions against local authorities is often politically inadequate although more when the authority is large than when it is small . administrative sanctions are also inadequate because the system can be clogged and the machine may then not render the services for which it was created. Centralization cannot therefore go beyond a certain point without considerable costs. The administrative problems of the Soviet Union and other communist states have repeatedly pointed to the difficulties resulting from the centralizing ideology of these regimes; various decentralizing techniques were in many of them before they collapsed. (D. Rustow and K. Erickson ,1991)

However evidence for the existence of such maximum levels centralization can be found not just in communist states but in other polities particularly western. The movement towards regionalism which characterized western Europe after the 1960s.most strikingly in Spain, but also in France and in Italy was not merely ideological; it was also the consequence of the increasing difficulties experienced by central governments in coping with the management of public decision making. One could argue that the regionalism which has been introduced in these countries constitutes an imitation of federalism indeed is federalism in all but name. Such a conclusion would not be valid for the French or Italian cases up to the mid 1990s, but where it was valid as it might be in the Spanish case, it would mean that the difference between federal and unitary states is becoming smaller not only in practice but formally as well.

Unions of states

So far we have discussed federalism in terms of its role within polities; but the idea and the technique were conceived ad means of associating hitherto independent states. In practice as few as four or as many as six polities among the 16 federal states(the United States, Switzerland, Germany, the United Arab Emirates and, arguably, Canada and Australia) were established as a means of bringing together independent countries. Indeed created from independent units included countries which had very strong historical cultural reasons for being closely associated; Switzerland and Canada are the only multicultural countries among them. In four cases a common colonial origin accounts for the setting up of the federal link, and in three of these countries, Australia, Canada and Germany, the federal link was effectively forced on the component units by an outside power (Britain in the first two cases) or by the most powerful component units by an outside power (Britain in the first two cases) pr by the most powerful component unit (Prussia in the German case). Whatever those who had developed the idea of federalism may have wanted to achieve federal states mostly originated from existing states wishing to increase decentralization and not primarily in order to bring together independent states (M. Forsyth, 1981)

In the cases in which independent states form a federal association this association is regarded as a centralizing formula in contrast to what federalism is considered to be when it is introduced to replace a unitary system in an existing polity. This probably explains why associations among independent states have tended to take looser forms than that the federal the European community or European Union being a case in point. despite the fact that federal are described as half way houses and despite the idea expressed for instance by Laski that federalism is transitional and constitutes an intermediate step between the confederacy and the unitary state there have been only three or at most four countries in which the first move to a federal arrangement has taken place(and none where the second move, towards a unitary system, took place). These cases are those of the United States, Switzerland, Germany

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and perhaps Canada(Laski, 1940). Since no such development has taken place anywhere else, the question of the true value of the confederal link needs to be discussed as does the true of models which are intermediate between confederal and federal arrangements.

Confederal arrangements

While the confederal arrangement is often regarded as unsatisfactory , a survey of the contemporary world shows that there are in reality many confederacies, the archetype being the United Nations. The United Nations groups polities their power of decision and which give to the organization as much or as little power as they wish to give. Some aspects of the United Nations have begun to go a little beyond the pure confederal model however particularly inasmuch as many decisions taken by a majority of states or by the security council are at least in practice binding on the other members. Other types of confederal arrangement are constituted by the regional organizations, often of an economic character which have been set up in the last decades of the twentieth century. Many of these are highly specialized but some are not and aim at covering for instance, all the trade relations between the member states. This is the case with the European free trade Area(EFTA), with Mercosur which groups a number of countries of South America and with the North American free trade Area (NAFTA) which groups the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Other regional organizations have primarily a political and/ or a defence dimension, such as the North Atlantic treaty organization (NATO) and the South East Asia treaty organization (SEATO). In both these case the high degree of joint activities among the member states indicates that these organizations are more than conventional alliances: they link together the member states over a wide variety of policy fields. Appreciably weaker and often very divided but none the less aspiring to have a large political role are the Arab league, the organization of African Unity and the commonwealth . the sense of common purpose is rare in these bodies, especially the last two : they can be viewed as binge at an intermediate point between the confederal model and what are little more than forums for discussions.

Suprantionalism and the European community or Union

Largely because many European leaders have been aware of the difficulty of establishing a federal link, the European community or European Union, which has been the most ambitious effort so far at building a permanent link among neighboring states, has also stopped short of becoming a federal state while attempting to be more than a confederacy. Although some at least of its supporters wish to move eventually towards a federal link the steps taken so far are more limited the technique invented having been labeled supranationalism. This consists in moving by stages and in attempting to cover some fields of decision making only. These fields are typically different from those which go to the central government in the classical federal model, since they include primarily economic and social fields . the states belonging to the supranational unit remain independent for other aspects of public decision making. Only a few powers are fully transferred (often slowly) to the central authority and these transfers are accompanied by safeguards for the member states such as the representation of the member states in Councils of Ministers majority requirements and even vetoes in some cases. Supranationalism is therefore a half way house but this time between the confederal and the federal models. (M. Burgess, 1986) London: Groom Helm Meanwhile the European community or European Union has a highly developed set of institutions which in many ways imitate federal institutions although more those of Switzerland than those of the United states.There is a commission which has a consociation character and is in some ways the executive a council of ministers representing the member states a popularly elected parliament and a court of

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Justice; there are also advisory councils representing local authorities and economic and social interests.

Conclusion

The European community of European Union is also innovative in that it is openly and consciously based on the idea that it evolves continually. Both the fields which are covered by the Union and the structures set up to handel these fields are regarded as not being truly fixed. nor is the membership fixed since it increased from the original six states(France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) to nine states(Britain, Denmark, Ireland), then to ten(Greece), to twelve (Portugal and Spain) and fifteen (Austria ,Finland and Sweden); it is also confronted with the matter of the accession of several polities from eastern Europe. The enlargement to new members has a manifest impact on the scope of the Union and on its institutional structure: the more members join the Union, the greater are the decision making problems and the greater also are the differences, cultural, social and economic, between the member states. The examples of the European community and the confederal or near confederal bodies which have multiplied in the second half of the twentieth century shoe that federal arrangements remain exceptional, because the ties are too strong. They also show going as far as a full federal structure. As many such models are being experimented and seem to succeed one can surely conclude that in this respect at least the world and its leaders have shown imagination.

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