

Call for papers: Parliament contested? Rethinking the relationship between national politics, global crises, and pressure from below in the 1970s

Conference organized by the Centre for Parliamentary History, RU Nijmegen, 9 June 2023

Introduction on the topic

How can the 1970s be characterized? For a long time, it were the 1960s with its student revolts and spectacular cultural shifts that attracted most attention among historians. In comparison, the years that followed seemed somewhat dreary and unimportant. In recent years, historians have, however, reversed the original image of the 1970s as a period in which ‘nothing happened’: several authors have in fact come to consider the decade as a ‘main event’¹, or even a ‘turning point’ in contemporary European history.²

This conference aims to explore the political meaning of events and developments of the 1970s and their impact on domestic policy-making and politics in particular. Historians who studied the period have, for instance, stressed the impact of globalization, international economic crises, and the ensuing shift from progressive idealism and Keynesian policies towards new conservatism and neoliberalism. Additionally, the period was marked by a high degree of democratic participation, citizen activism, and the emergence of new social movements.³ These were all crucial developments, which affected political beliefs and convictions as well as power relations and political procedures in and outside parliament.

Moreover, at the crossroads of global developments and pressure from below, national politicians and parliaments had to navigate through a complicated web of challenges: meeting citizens’ demands, attempting to reach highly ambitious political goals to reform society, while in the meantime coping with deepening crises and budgetary restrictions. Sometimes, in the middle of all turbulence, national politicians just seemed unable to control anything. Had the national policy-making level perhaps become irrelevant?

A recently published and in-depth case study of the Dutch parliamentary history of the 1970s has questioned the idea of the national political level rapidly losing its relevance.⁴ With respect to economic policies, this study highlights the crucial role of state actors alongside international organizations in key policy shifts.⁵ It also shows that most extra-parliamentary groups, including those claiming to dissociate themselves from parliamentary methods, continued to focus their efforts on parliament and government to reach their goals.⁶ Can similar conclusions also be drawn with respect to other countries? Or are there other research results that challenge these outcomes?

¹ Cited in: Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened. A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York 2006); Christian Caryl, *Strange Rebels. 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century* (New York 2013) 1.

² Andreas Wirsching, ed, ‘European Responses to the Crisis of the 1970s and 1980s.’ Special Issue, *Journal of Modern European History* 9, no. 1 (2011) 167–283.

³ Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, Daniel J. Sargent, eds., *The Shock of the Global. The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2010); Duco Hellema, *The Global 1970s: Radicalism, Reform and Crisis* (London 2019); Frank Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979. Als die Welt von heute begann* (München 2019).

⁴ Carla van Baalen and Anne Bos, eds, *Grote idealen, smalle marges: Een parlementaire geschiedenis van de lange jaren zeventig 1971-1982* (Amsterdam 2022).

⁵ E.g. Jonne Harmsma, Anne Bos and Hans Rodenburg, ‘De strijd om de collectieve sector’, in Van Baalen and Bos, *Grote idealen, smalle marges*, 439–540.

⁶ E.g. Hilde Reiding and Jan Ramakers, ‘Buitenparlementair activisme in een parlementaire democratie’, in Van Baalen and Bos, *Grote idealen, smalle marges*, 201–282.

Aim of conference

The purpose of this conference is to reassess the role of national parliaments and national policy-making processes in the 1970s in light of the increasing global challenges and extra-parliamentary pressure that occurred. What can be seen as decisive turning points shaping the political history of the era? Were they the same in each country, or did they differ from state to state? And in what way and to what extent were these defining moments and events related to citizen activism, national political factors and cross-border actors or influences respectively? Furthermore, what do our findings tell us about politics in the 1970s, also in relation to the ‘revolutionary’ 1960s and the ‘neoliberal’ 1980s?

In various panels, the conference will focus on challenges to parliamentary policy-making and the interplay of national politics with all kinds of international, national, or local actors and factors. One panel will assess the impact of international crises and crisis-management on domestic policy-making and parliament. Another panel will explore the interaction between parliament and the voice of the people, highlighting the interconnection between citizens, social movements, political parties, and parliament. A third panel will focus on the changing role of parliament during the 1970s in relation to transformations in society, party politics, and parliamentary culture. Sonja Levsen (University of Trier) will deliver a keynote speech. Confirmed contributors also include Giovanni Orsina (Luiss-Guido Carli University, Rome), and Duco Hellema (Utrecht University).

Organization of conference, abstracts, and preliminary papers

With this call for papers, we invite scholars who are interested to participate in this conference to submit an abstract of their paper (400 words). The deadline for submission is **6 January 2023**. We will select according to quality criteria as well as on the basis of the four aspects listed below. Applicants will be informed before 20 January 2022.

Authors are free to propose topics of their personal specialization or preference as long as contributions 1) connect with the overall theme of the conference; 2) focus on a political or policy challenge of the 1970s; 3) explore the role of the national political level *in relation to* global and/or extra-parliamentary forces and actors, and; 4) explicitly highlight how their arguments endorse or challenge existing historiographical views of politics in the 1970s.

To stimulate discussion and foster an atmosphere of collaboration, we will circulate preliminary papers beforehand. Therefore, we kindly ask contributors to submit a draft of their paper (3000-5000 words) before **20 May 2023**. Abstracts and preliminary papers should be in English and can be send to secretariaat.cpg@ru.nl.

We intend to publish (a selection of) conference contributions afterwards.

Organizing committee

This conference is organized by the Dutch Centre for Parliamentary History (CPG) of Radboud University Nijmegen. The Centre’s researchers are the authors of the above-mentioned book on Dutch parliamentary history of the 1970s.

For more information on the Centre for Parliamentary History see: <https://www.ru.nl/cpg/english/>