

PREFACE

When a newcomer to the Kingdom of Heaven inquired of St. Peter whether he could be supplied with a copy of the local constitution, he was astonished to be told that this was not possible as no such thing existed, the inhabitants of that celestial region preferring to do without. Bearing this in mind, one may well ask oneself whether constitutions are at all important. Having wrestled with the problem for five years, we have come to the conclusion that constitutions indeed merit all the attention they receive, despite the weighty precedent set by Heaven and England!

Constitutions serve to convey the opinions and ideals of people living in all sorts of political settings and they prove that all states - despite conflicts and ideological differences among themselves - adhere to a number of common politico-legal principles. This book contains the results of a comparative study of 142 constitutional texts; in addition, it includes a number of chapters of a theoretical nature.

Almost any constitutional lawyer hearing the names Blaustein and Flanz will think immediately of a row of fourteen books with black bindings containing all the world's constitutions. These two writers laid the documentary foundation of comparative constitutional science. Without their work, this book would never have been written.

That the book has appeared, however, is also due in no small part to the efforts of Hilde Schonk and Liesbeth Nuyten, both of whom are attached to the Social Sciences Faculty at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam. Besides supervising the tempo of the work and the progress made with the manuscript, Hilde typed more than 5,000 pages, and was responsible for laying-out and compiling the whole book. Liesbeth provided us with the research techniques which we ourselves did not possess and as a specialist in research methods contributed to the parts of the book dealing with methodology. We wish to express our gratitude to them both.

Many other people helped us in our work. Willem Weerdesteyn produced the research design, Nico van Bergeijk assisted in the collection of the research data, Topy Fiorani managed the computer, and Peter Kell translated the manuscript. In addition we had the help of the Erasmus University, Rotterdam whose Faculty of Social Sciences provided the funds and technical assistance that were indispensable to us.

Research in the field of constitutional science depends therefore on the collaboration of many people, the cooperation provided by other institutes

and the availability of funds. While this makes it much more difficult to carry out research, in our view it also means that the results are more rewarding. We have also borrowed from the thoughts and ideas of many of the writers who have concerned themselves with constitutions. This dependence on the work and efforts of others is not in any way unusual, though, since to advance nearly all sciences it is necessary to stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before. We too have been prepared to do this.

And you, the reader? We hope that you find the book interesting and practical. If you do, then we shall consider our efforts to have been worthwhile.

Rotterdam,
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