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BOOK REVIEWS

Political Parties in Western Democracies. By KLAUS VON BEYME. Aldershot: Gower, 1985. Pp.vii + 444. £25 (hardback), £12.95 (paperback).

Comparative political parties is one of the classical subjects that a political scientist or sociologist tackles with awe; not because the subject has already been exhausted with final authority but because it is not comforting to be held up to comparison with the likes of Max Weber, Maurice Duverger and other giants of the discipline. In recent years, moreover, the comparative study of parties and party systems has been literally inundated with hundreds of detailed investigations of partial aspects, using new methodologies and novel concepts with little regard for how they all might fit together, and leaving the subject in a more forbidding state than it has ever been. Anyone who teaches graduate seminars on this subject is well aware of the irresolvable contradictions, the discouraging mix of outdated certainties, and the centrifugal pull of methodological and conceptual innovations, not to mention countless studies of electoral and policy-making behaviour. Into this situation now steps a fearless knight errant of comparative party theory, a seasoned veteran of many battles, to be sure, his analytical sword raised high to cut all the Gordian knots. Klaus von Beyme has written a comparative treatise on parties and party systems in the grand tradition, and it is mercifully compact and yet covers most of the important problems of a very important subject.

The author is probably the most accomplished of the students of the late Carl Joachim Friedrich – at least of his comparative politics – and this pedigree of historical institutional sociology cum political theory lends a solid foundation to his enterprise. Once before, in fact, he produced a monumental historical comparison of parliamentary governments in Western Europe, *Die parlamentarischen Regierungssysteme in Westeuropa* (1970), like this book with sufficient information about names, dates, programmes, and institutional problems of all the systems under consideration to be placed in the hands of advanced students as the basis of discussion in a seminar.

Von Beyme makes a point of limiting his comparison to the advanced democratic countries, even though occasional examples refer to parties in communist or developing countries. He also prefers the traditional route of approaching the subject by talking about 'parties' rather than 'party systems' although this strategy seems intended more to lead him into his main chapter on the *familles spirituelles* – one third of the whole book – than to undercut the central role of a systems approach. He also follows the older tradition in stressing the definition of 'parties' in classical party theory and the historical emergence of modern parties, albeit with a pronounced scepticism of a 'general theory of parties' that would be merely a 'blown-up collection of empty formulae' because the 'complexity of the material... [gainsays] the simplicity of theoretical models' (p.8). On the other hand, comprehensive comparison is necessary to 'compensate for the trend-induced, one-sided approach of specialist studies' and to take stock of the disorderly house of party studies which are still suffering from conceptual confusion and many gaps of knowledge (p.5).

If we have given the impression of strong traditional overtones, it is imperative to point out the evidence to the contrary: The account of the ideological *familles spirituelles*, for example, is counterpointed with a discussion of ideological distance and features about 20 tables, graphs, and figures. The chapters on party systems, factionalism, competition, coalition, and elections include well-informed surveys

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and reviews of the latest literature, and there is an appendix of electoral results and the composition of governments since 1945. Throughout the book, there are also strong undercurrents of functionalism even though the author has expressed his scepticism of structural-functional models at the outset. His 'main functions' of parties are 'to achieve power in the state' (p.323), interest articulation and aggregation, socialisation and mobilisation, and elite formation and recruitment (pp.362–3). However, his list of these functions reads more like an outline of issues and variables than a logical grid; there is even a function of ideological 'goal formation' which suggests that parties are there not just to articulate but to generate ideology. Von Beyme also bravely reviews the policy perspective on whether or not parties 'matter' – complete with comparative and historical charts or unemployment and inflation – but he believes less in such quantitative measurements than in the qualitative priorities of the parties themselves (p.370). In the end, he centres these questions on the *problématique* of the 'legitimacy crisis' of modern party governments that has long preoccupied European and especially West German critical discussion. Notwithstanding neo-Marxist critiques, dialectical analysis, and neo-corporatist interpretations, the 'end of parties' is still far from being at hand. To forestall their delegitimation, however, von Beyme proposes that the popular expectations towards the parties be lowered, and assigns parties a mere 'buffer' (rather than party government) function (p.372).

While specialists on parties will undoubtedly want to part company with the author on this or that aspect, there is much that recommends itself. Written intelligibly for a lay audience – which is more than one can say about most of the recent literature – this book lends itself to teaching and discussion at all levels. Some minor slips or misleading translations (for example pp.166, 228) or the traditional ruling out of all one-party systems hardly detract from its usefulness. One can always get a fine discussion out of points where this reviewer for one would disagree, such as that 'revolutionary one-party systems' tend to permit political competition in the long run (p.254), or the analysis of early 'party systems' (as in the French Revolution or British civil wars) as five-party systems. The encouragement of controversy is frequently to be preferred to the boredom of orthodox explanations.

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Powers of Theory: Capitalism, the State and Democracy. By ROBERT R. ALFORD and ROGER FRIEDLAND, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Pp.502. £30 (hardback), £9.95 (paperback).

Many political scientists have proclaimed the need to end the hermetic isolation of their discipline's various sub-schools and kindred social sciences. The comparative evaluation of Marxist, elitist, pluralist, and public choice theories of democratic politics, the state, policy formulation and implementation, and crisis models, has long been on the academic agenda. With considerable expectations one turns to the massive text of Roger Alford and Roger Friedland.

Their *magnum opus*, ten years in the making, does not make light and clear reading to be recommended to undergraduates. However, graduate students and teachers will find it packed full of useful and precise surveys of other books and articles on capitalism, the state and democracy. Academics will be most interested in the logic which binds the compendious survey of literature in political sociology, political science, public policy and comparative history. Some literature is covered more thoroughly: the focus on sociological as opposed to economics literature

reveals the bias of the authors' departmental origins. The book is an extended elaboration of Alford's splendid essay in L. Lindberg *et al.*, *Stress and Contradiction in Modern Capitalism* (1975).

Three major perspectives: *pluralist*, *managerial* and *class*, are contended to compose the theory of the state in liberal democracies. Each perspective has a 'home domain' and a 'world view'. Each is internally divided into political (voluntarist) and functionalist (determinist) variants. Each perspective has preferred levels of analysis: pluralists prefer individuals, managerialists prefer organisations, class theorists prefer societies. None the less, each perspective has implicit or weakly developed suppositions about the levels of analysis which it does not prefer. Each perspective grasps best one of the items in the book's subtitle. Pluralists appreciate the logic of democracy, managerialists the logic of the state (bureaucracy), and class theorists the logic of capitalism.

Three hundred and eighty two Cambridge University Press pages are taken up elucidating the points in the previous paragraph. More editing would have brought the arguments into greater relief. The reader is too frequently put through reams of continuous book reviews in a process which looks like theoretical 'goal displacement'. The reviews themselves are fair and scholarly. However, readers do not need to read several pages summarising another book to be given one line of argument relevant to the authors' synthesis, nor do they need over-citation of dated literature – a prominent flaw in the pluralist survey. The concluding 57 pages are somewhat disappointing. They do not constitute a compelling synthesis, nor a rigorous comparative evaluation. The authors hover around relativism (each perspective is incommensurable with the others because they have different home domains, world views, and levels of analysis). They suggest that each perspective is most compelling in its home domain, and also give future theorists a litany of mistakes to avoid. The latter observations are useful, but do not amount to a positive synthesis. These remarks are critical simply because the length of the text builds up false expectations in the reader.

The overall argument is confusing in at least three ways. First, the pivotal relationship between level of analysis and perspective is uselessly tautological. For instance, only definitional fat (perspective is defined by level of analysis) makes public choice (including the bulk of the New Right) part of the pluralist perspective. Yet Alford and Friedland simultaneously acknowledge that authors from each perspective regularly transgress their own world views and 'home' levels of analysis. Mapping such overlaps between perspectives might have been more fruitful than emphasising their distinctiveness by levels of analysis. Second, the authors use the complex, confusing and contestable notions of 'function', 'functionalist' and 'functional' in a bewildering variety of ways. Sometimes functionalism is determinism, sometimes it is 'consequence explanation', and sometimes it is structuralism, but the preferred meaning always cuts across the 'levels of analysis' cleavage in a way which impairs the distinctiveness of the perspectives. Third, the authors' dalliance with relativism blocks the prospect of synthesis, and makes them too concerned to be pleasant to some of the garbage and flotsam generated within each perspective. These caveats aside, Alford's and Friedland's book should be purchased and read by political scientists. The bibliography and literature surveys on their own make it worth having on your shelf. The book is flawed, but pioneering and stimulating.

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Social Policies in Western Industrial Societies. By CHARLES F. ANDRAIN. University of California, Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1985. Pp. ix + 258. \$12.95

Political Economy in Western Democracies. Edited by NORMAN J. VIG and STEVEN E. SCHIER. London: Holmes & Meier, 1985. Pp. xvii + 328. No price given.

These two volumes are indicative of the extent to which the comparative analysis of public policy outcomes has become a major – perhaps *the* major – growth area in Comparative Politics in the past decade. Although both include substantial research findings, implicitly or explicitly they also have a pedagogic rationale. Whereas until recently the area has been one mainly characterised by the publication of findings in scholarly journals, it is now rapidly becoming an accepted part of the political science syllabus to be taught at undergraduate and post-graduate level.

Although both volumes stress the crucial importance of the interaction between the political and economic sectors of advanced societies, their emphasis is somewhat different. Andrain's concern is primarily with the determination of that range of policies usually grouped together under the heading of the welfare state; in particular, economic, educational and health policies. The scope of the volume edited by Vig and Schier is rather broader in that it attempts to illuminate the character of the so-called *political economy* approach by essays in four areas: theories of state and economy, the crisis of the welfare state, comparative macro-economic policies and the manner in which economic conditions affect electoral behaviour.

Unsurprisingly, because it is a monograph, Andrain's study is the more intellectually coherent of the two, arguing for a particular point of view (which he calls the *institutionalist* approach to policy performance) and illustrating his analysis of policy in different areas with reference to the same group of seven nations: Canada, France, West Germany, Italy, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. When it comes to it, the institutionalist approach does not differ that much from the political economy approach, since the former argues from the premise that 'governments, political parties, business corporations, professional associations, and labor unions exercise the dominant power over the policy process' (Andrain, p.x.), while the latter 'seeks to broaden and deepen the study of public policy by probing its structural and behavioral antecedents' (Vig, p.7.). Andrain's basic theme is that the substantial variation in social policy outcomes manifested by Western industrial societies is substantially a function of institutional differences, and a rather similar conclusion emerges from the majority of contributions to the edited collection.

Both volumes rate very highly from a teaching point of view, although possibly Andrain's avoidance of a quantitative approach (except in his chapter on economic policy) may make it more accessible to certain students. On the other hand, it is fair to point out that I have never encountered an edited collection as excellent as that of Vig and Schier in presenting complex quantitative issues in a comprehensible manner. Moreover, the standard of the contributions to this volume is outstandingly and consistently high, and certainly far taught postgraduate courses in the area of comparative public policy/political economy, this collection should now, I think, be the number one choice.

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