

Martin Shefter. *Political Parties and the State*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994. \$37.50, paper, ISBN 978-0-691-00044-2.



Reviewed by Allan G. Bogue

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1. Political Parties and States

PART I: PARTY AND PATRONAGE IN EUROPE AND AMERICA

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6. Political Incorporation and Political Exclusion: Party Politics and Social Forces in Postwar New York 7. New York City's Fiscal Crisis: Countering the Politics of Mass Mobilization

Shefter explains that this book "analyzes the conditions under which political parties emerge, and the forces that influence the strength and character of party organizations." He advances as "core argument" the proposition "that the central

division in the politics of American cities is between urban political machines and the forces of municipal reform." The machines have tended to control cities where working class, Catholic, ethnic groups predominated and municipal reform has prevailed where Anglo American middle and upper classes have been in the majority. Shefter seeks to explain the nature of urban political parties by examining the origins of political machines. These prosper by distributing patronage but to do so they must extract resources from the state. Thus, Shefter argues, "the relationship between political parties and public bureaucracies is of crucial importance in shaping the behavior of politicians." Both in Europe and America the "relative timing of democratization and bureaucratization has crucially influenced" the nature of political parties. (pp., I, ii)

The essays in this volume were first published during the years, 1977 through 1992, excepting Chapter 1, "Political Parties and States," where Shefter outlines major themes and concepts. His perspective, he explains, is that of the "new institutionalism," a "polity-centered" or "state-cen-

tered' approach." This assumes that "it is less important to chart the views of mass publics than to understand how the strategic behavior of leaders is shaped by and in turn shapes political institutions." (p.3) Shefter distinguishes between externally and internally-mobilized political parties, each involving differing resources and strategic options. America's major parties were internally mobilized by leaders in prevailing regimes, who recruited popular followings. Incumbent elites, however, need not always mobilize widely. Alliances, collusion with proclaimed rivals, or coercion, may suffice. Broad based internally-organized parties have had considerable staying power but disillusioned elite segments, wars, economic crises, religious revivals, foreign policy issues, or technological change, may precipitate reorganization.

Continuing, Shefter considers a number of interesting hypotheses or questions. For example, "the role patronage plays in party politics is a function of the relative timing of democratization and bureaucratization." He also maintains that "changes in relative power of party and bureaucracy in the United States are related to the process of critical realignment in American politics. (pp. 15, 62,63)

The last four chapters describe relations between urban political machines and reform movements, particularly in New York City. Shefter traces the developments that led the trade union movement to renounce efforts to alter the fundamental character of the American regime. In return labor leaders expected that the political parties would not challenge trade unionism's conservative agenda. Shefter notes that the northeastern United States was less receptive to the political reforms of progressivism than the nation's western half. This was because the political machinery of the latter section was developed after the Civil War and was weaker, less encompassing and patronage fortified than was true in the older region. Shefter argues that the incorporation of

hitherto excluded groups in a party coalition, involves conflicts over both the act and the terms under which it is effected. During the process, coalition elements may be extruded as was true of the American Labor party.

Finally Shefter considers New York City's fiscal crises of the Tweed era, the mid 1970's, and the 1990's, arguing that each reflected efforts of the governing coalition to reward newly mobilized constituencies beyond the city's capacity to finance the payoffs. One finds here echoes of the comparative political development literature of the 1960's and 1970's, of corporate analysis, and the quantitative methodology of behavioral approaches. The difference in focus and emphasis between this book and the concerns of many political historians can be appreciated if one compares it to *PARTIES AND POLITICS IN AMERICAN HISTORY: A READER* edited by L. Sandy Maisel and William G. Shade (1994). Shefter's work is particularly impressive in its analyses of the strategic options open to political elements at particular junctures of time and circumstance. Readers, however, should not assume that these alternatives were always understood by the participants. Some will detect in Shefter's approach the danger that policy options may be viewed simply as bargaining ploys rather than expressions of political values as well and that democratic features of the political system are dismissed as charade.

Assessing this book, some may be tempted to recast Sam Bass Warner's famous title to read, "If All the World was New York City." It is doubtful that the mechanics of party making and control in the United States can be classified as tidily as Shefter suggests. But his hypotheses are worthy of serious consideration. In this period of questioning the value of political history, his road should be seriously considered as a rewarding route to the future. However, the American political system is a three-tiered, interlocking structure, linked in myriad ways to the nation's segmented economy, society, and culture, as well as to foreign

economies and cultures. Neither an electoral approach, nor the emphases of the new institutionalism, should be allowed to foreclose either more restricted or more ambitious research agendas.

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