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Book Reviews

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Overall, this is excellent value for money, both for individual purchasers (for whom the cost is £50) and for institutions, which buy it with a licence for multiple use. The timing of publication is less satisfactory: although the copyright date is 1999 I first became aware of it in mid-2000 through an advertisement in a journal, three years after the election. Hopefully, having successfully pioneered the technology, it will be possible to bring later editions out very soon after the relevant general election, so that researchers and classes of students can start their analyses relatively quickly. A full new edition will almost certainly involve much change – in the details about MPs, for example – but it may be that an interim edition is possible, perhaps by putting the data about the 2001/2 election result on a web-page which registered purchasers of the CD-ROM can access and down-load from. Of course, the 2001 census data will not be available for some time, so analyses will have to be undertaken using 1991 census data (although a variety of other sources can be tapped for more recent data in respect of certain variables).

In sum, this is a successful pioneering venture which should stimulate many successors.

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Taylor E. Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999. \$37.50, 233 pp. ISBN 0 8014 3576 5.

The decades since J. David Greenstone's *Labor in American Politics* (1969) have seen little comprehensive work by political scientists on the relationship between US labour unions and the Democratic Party. What commentary there is has primarily come from labour historians, whose perspectives are conditioned by a focus on the internal dynamics of US labour and often a deep conviction that America's failure to generate a social democratic party represents a missed opportunity. A conventional wisdom regarding labour's place in the Democratic Party has emerged. It holds that in the course of the 1930s and 1940s the American labour movement foreswore a radical class-based politics, exchanging grassroots vitality for political access; however, the grassroots decay that followed reduced labour's political clout and membership of the Democratic

coalition brought workers steadily diminishing returns. Taylor Dark approaches the subject from a fresh perspective, that of the contemporary literature on American elections and political parties rather than labour history. In *The Unions and the Democrats*, Dark mounts a surprisingly persuasive critique of the conventional wisdom.

The key piece of evidence normally cited to demonstrate the decline of labour's pull within the Democratic Party is the catastrophic fall in union density in the United States. The share of the labour force enrolled in trade unions, which hovered around 30 percent in the two decades following the war, entered a steep decline in the late 1960s to fall below 15 percent today. But as Dark observes, political influence is not merely about the *potential* assets that labour brings to political bargaining (whether in money or numbers) but also about how effectively these assets are used. This can only be discovered by examining political institutions and legislative outcomes.

On the broadest level, Dark shows that the conventional wisdom has exaggerated both labour's political influence in the 1950s and 1960s and its weakness in the 1980s and 1990s. Labour-backed legislation to protect the rights of union members has generally followed a familiar script regardless of union density. Important efforts to amend American labour law in favour of unions in 1964, 1965, 1978 and 1994 all passed the House of Representatives by substantial margins, but were blocked in the Senate by committed minorities using the filibuster to prolong debate endlessly. By the same token, however, neither Ronald Reagan in the 1980s nor the Republican Congresses of the 1990s succeeded in eliminating any of the basic elements of labour law laid down in the New Deal.

This does not mean that there has been no change or development within the labour-Democratic Party alliance. Dark's analysis of the Democratic Party's internal reforms is particularly interesting. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Democratic Party underwent a series of reforms opening up its presidential nomination process to rely more on public primary campaigns than on caucuses of party activists and officials. Critics of these reforms have often argued that displacing the 'machines' of the past with public primaries has benefited middle-class social activists from the environmental, feminist, gay rights and other social movements and well-funded special interests at the expense of core Democratic constituencies like labour.

Dark argues that labour's influence in the Democratic Party was not reduced by the reforms but rather was redistributed from some unions to others. The old craft unions, especially those associated with the building trades, had operated best in the 'smoke-filled room' environment of the caucus, where their ties to local party machines could be deployed to best effect. But the new political environment was an opportunity to be grasped by the large industrial and public employee unions. With the demise of the party machines no other Democratic constituency can mobilize the vast number of volunteers demanded by a primary campaign (as Vice President Al Gore's defeat of Bill Bradley for the 2000 Democratic presidential nomination bears witness).

Although the author makes an excellent point, he is a little too casual when dismissing critics of the social implications of the party reforms. An extensive literature on political participation in America – Verba, Scholzman and Brady's *Voice and Equality* (1995) comes to mind – has established convincingly that participation in American politics is disproportionately clustered in the educated

middle class. This inequality of participation is far more pronounced in the United States than in Europe, and many observers point to the weakening of American political party organizations as a prime culprit. Dark, noting correctly that Walter Reuther's blue-collar United Auto Workers pioneered this new form of union political activity, dismisses concerns of socio-economic bias. But the UAW is a union in decline, and it is those unions with above-average concentrations of educated and professional members, like the teachers' unions, that have benefited the most from the new system.

This, however, is a rather minor point. *The Unions and the Democrats* provides an excellent examination of the dynamics of union-party interaction over the last four decades, and presents a strong case for a new understanding of the modern Democratic coalition.

References

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Takayuki Sakamoto, *Building Policy Legitimacy in Japan*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999. £42.50 (hbk), x + 213 pp. ISBN 0 333 77227X.

This book seeks to define the concept of policy legitimacy while applying it to critical cases of policy-making in Japan from the late 1970s to 1990s. The author asks why politicians often implement unpopular policies that are expected to threaten their electoral fortunes, behaviour which challenges much of the electoral incentives theory presented in the rational choice literature. He compares and contrasts three cases of new consumption tax proposals, two cases of tax increase proposals and three cases of electoral reform proposals. He then argues that a process of constructing policy legitimacy distinguishes those proposals which are successfully implemented from those which are not.

Sakamoto divides the concept of policy legitimacy into three components: the idea component, the democratic component and the decision-norm component (pp. 23–7). The idea component refers to 'the substantive ideas of policy, including dominant values and beliefs, knowledge about cause-effect relationships, world-views, ideologies or a conception of collective goods, justice and appropriateness' (p. 23). The democratic component reflects a number of indicators of popular support, including a government's most recent performance in national legislative elections, its record in elections held during the period in