

Comments and Reviews

Morten Egeberg: *Stat og organisasjoner. Flertallsstyre, partistyre og byråkrati i norsk politikk*. Universitetsforlaget: Bergen. 1981. 151 p.

Morten Egeberg defended his doctor's thesis on the relationship between state and organizations in Norway at the University of Oslo on April 23, 1983. The thesis was examined by Professor *Egil Fivelsdal* (Copenhagen) and the undersigned, and this review is an outcome of my commitment to scrutinize Egeberg's well-written and highly stimulating dissertation. The dissertation has three components: (1) a book-length volume, called "Stat og organisasjoner"; (2) two separate papers, one of which has been published in this journal ("The Fourth Level of Government", SPS 1980, No. 3); and (3) a presentation called "Makro-organisasjonsformer og offentlig virksomhet", which is assigned the function of establishing links between the volume and the papers. In the following I will comment on the first-mentioned volume only, which forms the bulk of the dissertation and is a self-contained whole.

There is something of a paradox to this book. It contains a good deal of illuminating and even innovative theory and it presents a wealth of empirical data. In the former respect it stands out well in the Scandinavian literature on the participation of organized interests in policy-making, which, as pointed out by *Martin Heisler* in a paper in this journal some years ago (SPS 1979, No. 3), has largely been devoid of overarching frameworks and concepts. In the latter respect, the book offers its readers a systematic and comprehensive set of observations pertaining to various arenas for collaboration between government and organizations. However, creative theory and rich data do not add up to an impressive whole. The interplay between the theoretical and empirical parts of the book is defective, mainly because the data do not always fit the theory. Egeberg's analyses are based on surveys conducted in the mid-70's (there are some secondary data sources, such as mailing lists for *remiss* hearings and editorials in journals of various organi-

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zations) and there are some shortcomings to these data, the most severe being that the data are cross-sectional and from one point of time only, whereas the theory would require data describing the dynamics of public policy processes. In some instances at least, the theory cries out for observations on trends and developments, and Egeberg must be criticized for not having at more length discussed the discrepancy between theory and data.

When picturing his theoretical frame of reference, Egeberg draws on the works on organizational theory by *J.G. March* and *Johan P. Olsen* which are brought in line with his own macro-level analyses. Egeberg distinguishes between three forms of organization, namely (1) *majority rule and hierarchical control*; (2) *bargaining and consultation*, and (3) *organized anarchy*, and he suggests that form is dependent on a set of factors, including problems, environment and stability. Few and general problems and a homogeneous environment would call for majority rule and hierarchical arrangements, Egeberg suggests, whereas many and selective problems and a heterogeneous environment would call for bargaining and consultation. The reverse of course also holds true; organizational form affects problems and environments as well. "Problem" stands out as a sort of key variable, and it is precisely here that Egeberg makes important theoretical contributions to our understanding of how organizational forms emerge and change. Problems, he argues, are different in nature, and as the political system faces the necessity of legitimating its activities and decisions, legitimacy becomes an important factor relating problems to organizational form. The more collective the problems are, Egeberg argues, the greater the probability that public tasks can be legitimized through majority rule; the more selective the problems are, the greater the probability that the tasks can be legitimized only through consultation systems, assigning rights of consultation and bargaining to such organized interests which are specially affected. However, and this is a key point in Egeberg's line of thought, "problems" are not given in themselves. They can be defined as being more or less collective or more or less individual, and in order for problems to be problems, they must be placed on the political agenda. Problem definition and agenda-building are therefore terminal areas in efforts to grasp and understand how organized interests affect and shape policy and policy implementation.

The framework is applied in five consecutive chapters, in which Egeberg first deals with organizational form in the committee system (chapter 4) and in the *remiss* system (chapter 5), thereafter analyses the relationship between organizations and the political elite (chapter 6) as well as the relationship between types of organizational form (chapter 7), and finally penetrates into problems of agenda-building and problem definition (chapter 8). The general impression is that the relation between state and organizations takes the form of bargaining and consultation, although hierarchical patterns emerge,

for instance in the relation between organizations and certain governmental quarters such as the Ministries for Finance, Foreign Affairs and Justice (who, in full accordance with Egeberg's theoretical propositions, handle matters of a general and collective nature), and although the *remiss* system comes out as an organized anarchy. By and large, the framework serves well as an ordering instrument and as a means for description. A real test of theoretical propositions does not, however, emerge. The data cannot reveal conversion flows between organizational forms; neither can they provide a basis for conclusions concerning the magnitude and direction of change.

The presentation of data is remarkably clear, and Egeberg gives on the whole well-balanced as well as informative interpretations. I have, however, two objections. Firstly, Egeberg does not always observe enough caution when commenting on frequencies. Verification is a problematic enterprise in the social sciences which have to rely on tendency statements. There is always an element of discretion in efforts to determine if a tendency is at hand or not — if we say that A tends to produce B and we find that this holds true in six cases out of ten, have we then confirmed the statement or not? Egeberg has an inclination to make rather generous interpretations in this respect; there are passages in the text (e.g. pp. 94-5, 124) where the reader would have appreciated moderation and reservations. Secondly, Egeberg does not always pay enough attention to the fact that he in many respects relies on *perceptions* of reality rather than on objective observations of reality. This, to my mind, creates some difficulties in assessing the validity of findings, especially those which concern the impact of organizational participation in the committee and *remiss* systems. However, I should add that these are minor shortcomings which do not decisively weaken the basis for general conclusions.

One main result in Egeberg's work is that the two channels for political participation and influence, the constitutional channel on the one hand and the corporate channel on the other, are interlaced to a high degree. This result is perhaps not so surprising as Egeberg seems to suggest (p. 101), but it is well accounted for in his analysis in so far as he is able to demonstrate the existence of various links and connections between the two channels. Egeberg's statement (p. 110) that the organizations have established and expanded a network of contacts to government is, however, not wholly consistent with his theory nor with his findings, and it is of course rather obvious that one meets a two-way movement involving not only organizational efforts to approach government but also efforts on the part of government to incorporate organized interests in the political decision-making. Problems of governability have no doubt formed a release in this respect; Egeberg's analysis would have, in my opinion, gained from more thorough reflections on the significance of governability. The reader is also confronted

with some conceptual difficulties when trying to relate the distinction between a constitutional and a corporate channel to the distinction between hierarchical and consultative arrangements.

There are some rather obvious differences between Norway and the other Nordic countries. For instance, Egeberg points out that the organizations do not play a decisive role in the agenda-building in Norwegian politics; they certainly contribute to the definition of problems and to the choice of problem solutions, but they do not shape the political agenda. By and large, their role is therefore rather passive and defensive; they react on initiatives that are presented by others, but they do not appear as initiators. This is clearly not the case in Finland, where the first five incomes policy agreements in the late 60's and the early 70's produced as many as 160 regulations including 15 fundamental laws and 83 laws; to my knowledge Denmark and Sweden are other examples of systems where the organizations are notable policy initiators. Also, for some arenas at least, the scope of organizational participation is more restricted in Norway than in, say, Finland. Egeberg reports that organizations are represented in some 40% of the committees and that they are consulted in some 30% of all *remiss* cases. Corresponding figures for Finland (1975) are 59% and 85%. There are some other differences as well. They suggest that a comparative study of the interplay between state and organizations in the Nordic countries might prove a fruitful and worthwhile undertaking. The similarities are clearly there. But so are the dissimilarities which form the basis for meaningful comparisons.

Dag Anckar