

Book Review

Herberts Döring (ed.): *Parliament and Majority Rule in Western Europe*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.

All political scientists agree that parliaments or national assemblies are of utmost importance in politics. But the curious fact is that we do not have general knowledge about how legislative institutions work or how legislative behaviour is to be modelled. The reason for the former is that information about parliaments tends to be highly country specific, accessible only in the national language, while the reason for the latter is that it is not clear what a theory of legislative behaviour is supposed to explain: the variation in the number of laws or in the contents of the laws.

The volume edited by Herbert Döring (Potsdam University) represents a major improvement in the comparative knowledge about Parliaments. It contains some twenty contributions by scholars from various countries at the same time as each single contribution is structured comparatively covering widely different parliamentary practices. This makes the book a handbook on national assemblies.

There is no other volume that contains so much information about the institutions of parliaments in Western Europe. The rules employed in national assemblies in order to arrive at social choices vary considerably and the authors have gone to tremendous effort to cover country details. Thus, Matti Wiberg has been able to collect information on how twenty parliaments in Western Europe handle questioning in various forms – very impressive!

From an institutional point of view, the Döring volume is truly excellent. It must be the best source available for students who wish to learn more about the rules that legislatures in Western Europe employ in order to arrive at social choices. Thus, several of the chapters contain a lot of detailed information that cannot be found elsewhere.

De Winter writes well about how governments are formed by examining the institutions that govern the practices in various countries. Mattson and Strøm examine at great length the institutions that regulate parliamentary committees. The analysis by Jenny and Muller of the rules about how the presidents of parliaments operate is also very thorough. Rasch's overview of decision-making rules in parliaments is helpful, not the least for teaching purposes. The same is true of Alivizatos's analysis of judges as political players, in the form of a judicial review.

The behavioural articles attempting to explain the outcomes of legislative behaviour, for example the production of laws, do not run equally smoothly. This is mainly due to the fact that it is not quite clear what it is that one is trying to explain in these various models. Are the explanations targeting *quantity*, i.e. the number of laws; but why is the mere quantity interesting? Or is the explanation targeting *quality*, i.e. important versus unimportant or trivial laws? But how does one make such a distinction?

Döring formulates a very interesting theory about the demand and supply of laws, which hinges upon the distinction between conflictual laws and non-conflictual laws.

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Döring formulates a very interesting theory about the demand and supply of laws, which hinges upon the distinction between conflictual laws and non-conflictual laws.

Since conflictual laws are more costly to produce, there will be fewer of these, argues Döring. Christian Henning, however, shows that what matters is also the demand for laws, which may be much higher for conflictual laws.

Speaking of law production in terms of the language of economics may be helpful, but it is only a metaphor. If legislative bodies are to be seen as monopolies trading in laws may be discussed, as the economic language does not really fit legislative behaviour. Further work is needed on the theory about legislative behaviour, perhaps in a little less economical fashion, as after all the basic concepts of supply, demand, price and quantity do not run smoothly in relation to law-making.

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