

## Book Review

Peter Esaiasson & Sören Holmberg: *Representation from Above: Members of Parliament and Representative Democracy in Sweden*. Aldershot, Dartmouth, 1996.

International research on parliaments has long been dominated by American research, though parliamentary governments in Europe were different, as everybody knows. "Iron triangles" have been varied as a topic of research. Interest groups, bureaucracies and "legislators" seemed to dominate the legislative process. All of a sudden, the "legislative Leviathan" was rediscovered, dominated by the parties. American conflicts, whether the legislators were driven by their policy goals or by their prospects for re-election (Fiorina), were never transferable to European parliamentary systems. Parties as the structuring element had no spectacular revival, because they always were dominant in many European countries.

Esaiasson & Holmberg's study of the Swedish members of parliaments is an important contribution to the studies of deviance from the findings of American legislative studies. The data were collected in three surveys (1968, 1985, 1988). The response rate of 97 percent is very impressive and a good proof of the underlying hypothesis that party organization is crucial, because such a result would have been unthinkable without the support of the party leaders in the Swedish Riksdag.

The members of parliament are analyzed in three different capacities: as representatives, as opinion formers, and as decision makers. This third aspect is lacking in most continental studies and makes this investigation particularly important. The authors offer not only the usual social background data on parliamentarians and the aspects of a "political class," but remain close to what legislators do in their capacity of a political elite.

The institutional aspect is integrated in the focus, and especially the committee system is crucial. For German observers this study is so valuable because the committee structure is close to that of the German Bundestag. Many data on the members' perception of the influence of groups and bodies on decision making come close to German findings. The same is true of the lobbyists' preference of lobbyists to meet with top bureaucrats rather than with representatives of parliament. The findings about the proportions of generalists and specialists are also comparable with many other European countries.

Gone are the times when leftist groups tried to push the parties into the direction of a mandate. The representative system is run from above rather than run from below. Populist responsiveness is restricted to certain policy fields, such as immigration. "Representation from above" is therefore the catchword of the book's main title. Swedish MPs rarely take on the role of voter delegates. Social representation in Sweden is more egalitarian than in some continental countries. Women are more frequently represented in the Riksdag – that is the good news. The bad news is that women who make it into the Riksdag are socially more exclusive than their male colleagues.

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this decline is hardly seen. On the contrary, the position of the parties in parliament has become stronger since the 1960s. "Representation from above" does not exclude growing "responsiveness." The self-stabilization of parliamentarians as a political class needs a corollary of growing responsiveness in the capacity of deputies as political elite.

This is a remarkable study in many respects. It is full of comparisons to other countries and exceeds the narrow interests of country specialists. In spite of a sophisticated methodology, the authors do not participate in the methodological arms race in the style of Ann Arbor, but offer – despite so many tables – a rather readable book.

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