

June 2, 2006

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Re: Jiri Pecka thesis, “Dynamics of Development of American Political Parties”

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

A typical thesis or dissertation has a narrow focus, and it usually makes a small incremental contribution to the professional political science literature. Jiri Pecka, on the other hand, writes about a very broad topic in his “Dynamics of Development of American Political Parties,” one easily expanded into a full length book about the development of American political parties. After a brief examination of the historical development of American political parties, Pecka focuses on contemporary (post-1932) party development through the lenses of political realignment theory and the classic triad, party-in-government, party-as-organization, and party-in-the-electorate, both written about by V.O. Key, Jr., and others, e.g., Frank Sorauf.

The thesis brings together an impressive literature on American political parties to examine what John Aldrich labels the Sixth American Party System (1932-1960) and contemporary American politics. Moreover, Walter Dean Burnham and others argue that another political realignment took place in 1994-96 with the Republican Party gaining complete control of the national government—President, House of Representatives, and Senate. Doing this, of course, required a revitalized or strong party-as-organization. A strength of Jiri Pecka’s thesis is its documentation of this realignment, especially in party-in-government and party-as-organization. His examination of party-in-the-electorate, however, is not at the same level of documentation and thoroughness. A critical examination of the partisan identification and split ticket voting literature leading to the conclusion that psychological identification as an independent is a transitional phase between Democratic and Republican party identification begs examination. Doing so would force a conclusion that American political parties (through these three lenses) are in resurgence and that the political system has realigned.

This aside, Jiri Pecka does an impressive job with a broad topic, and he does it well by bringing together and examining an impressive literature on American political institutions, one principally focused on elections and the important political reform that took place in the House of Representatives and in the Democratic and Republican Party rules governing the initial phase, sometimes referred to as the pre-convention phase, of the presidential candidate selection process. Both democratized their respective sphere of party influence, and Pecka does an excellent and thoughtful job documenting it with the appropriate available scholarship.

Pecka’s thesis is well organized and well written (but the use of language can be more direct and

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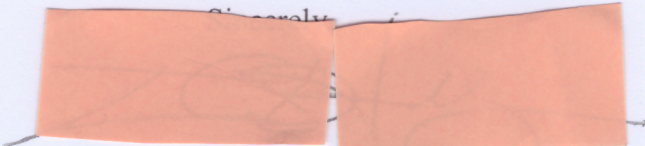
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scholarly at times), and it is pretty comprehensive with respect to the use of the relevant political science literature. Moreover, he has a thoughtful use of graphs and tables to illustrate points, although I, myself, would have re-labeled the lines in Figure 2.1, p. 14, Federalist and Democratic-Republican to capture the correct political party configuration of the time rather than use those of the cited author.

Considering that the topic is such a broad one in light of how well he did with it, I would recommend that Jiri Pecka receive a grade of A.



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