

PERIODICALS

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Tip's Tenure

"O'Neill's Legacy for the House" by Steven S. Smith, in *The Brookings Review* (Winter 1987), 1775 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

"He was nondoctrinaire, grandfatherly, tough-minded, shrewd, an activist, a partisan, a gut liberal, adaptable." That is how Smith, a Brookings Institution Senior Fellow, describes the recently retired Speaker of the House, Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill.

A man with such qualities, it seems, would have made a powerful Speaker of the House. But the Massachusetts Democrat's tenure (1977-87) in that post, Smith says, "was shaped more by the institutional context of the House than by [O'Neill's] personal traits."

Since the late 1960s, the author says, a trend toward egalitarianism has fostered "uncertainty and confusion" in the U.S. House of Representatives. Under the bright but indecisive Speaker Carl Albert (D.-Okla., 1971-77), a group of mostly young, mostly liberal Democrats demanded and won far-reaching procedural reforms that undermined the authority of long-powerful committee chairmen and eroded party leadership.

Nevertheless, Tip O'Neill's future looked bright when he became Speaker in 1977. In that year, House Democrats outnumbered Republicans by more than 2 to 1 (292-143). O'Neill was convinced that the House would enthusiastically endorse the new Democratic administration's programs. "We'll make [Jimmy Carter] a great president," he said.

But due in part to the new Speaker's own "strategy of inclusion," many of the power-diffusing trends that began under Albert continued under O'Neill. During his tenure, O'Neill, for example, allowed the number of seats on the Steering and Policy Committee (which gives Democratic members their committee assignments) to increase from 24 to 31, and often referred House bills to several committees at once.

As one result, O'Neill did not have the power to push President Carter's legislative agenda through Congress. He failed to win support for Carter's tax and consumer protection legislation. And, in 1981, Tip was

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unable to prevent the Democrat-controlled House from approving President Reagan's budget-cutting measures. "I regret to say, Tip is reeling on the ropes," observed Representative Les Aspin (D.-Wisc.).

Smith, however, does not blame O'Neill alone for the Democrats' defeats. The Speaker's political skills, he concludes, "could not overcome weaknesses in party [cohesion]."

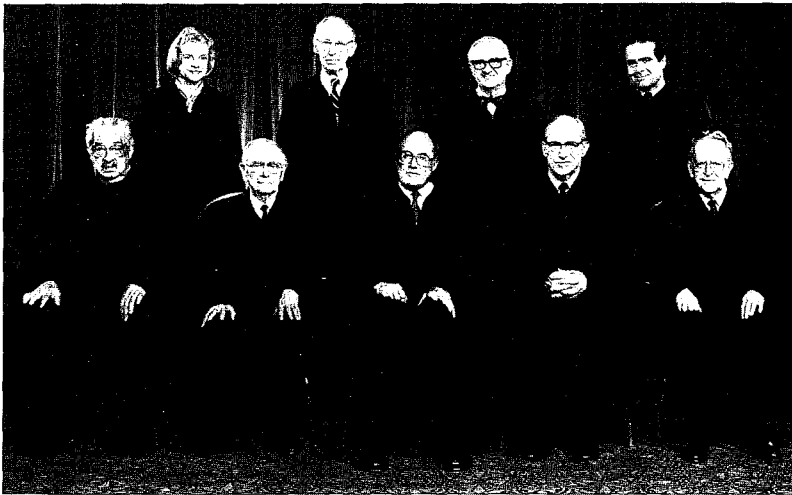
Rehnquist's Choice

"The Supreme Court: What to Expect" by David M. O'Brien, in *PS* (Winter 1987), 1527 New Hampshire Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

The ideological makeup of the nine-member U.S. Supreme Court seemed to change very little when William H. Rehnquist became chief justice last September. Rehnquist had already served on the Court since 1972. And Antonin Scalia, who took Rehnquist's former post as associate justice, was, like departing chief justice Warren E. Burger, a judicial conservative.

But O'Brien, a University of Virginia government professor, predicts that, compared with his predecessor, Rehnquist will exercise far more influence over the *choice* of cases that the Court will consider. That is why the new Court, he says, "holds the potential. . . for greater change than at any other time in the recent past."

Nearly 20 years have elapsed, O'Brien observes, since the Supreme Court acted as a strong force for social change. Under Earl Warren (1953-69), the Court "revolutionized constitutional law and American society" by



The Supreme Court: (l. to r.): Thurgood Marshall (sworn in: 1967), Sandra Day O'Connor (1981), William J. Brennan, Jr. (1956), Lewis F. Powell, Jr. (1972), William H. Rehnquist (1972), John Paul Stevens (1975), Byron R. White (1962), Antonin Scalia (1986), and Harry A. Blackmun (1970).