

## POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

### *Who Stunted the Welfare State?*

“Bargaining for Social Rights: Unions and the Reemergence of Welfare Capitalism, 1945–1952” by Michael K. Brown, in *Political Science Quarterly* (Winter 1997–98), Academy of Political Science, 475 Riverside Dr., Ste. 1274, New York, N.Y. 10115–1274.

America’s distinctive system of job-related social benefits has more than once tied reformers in knots—most recently as they struggled to help the 31 million working-age Americans lacking health insurance. Strangely, argues Brown, a political scientist at the University of California, Santa Cruz, it was labor unions and liberals favoring comprehensive government welfare who brought the private job-based system into being.

After World War II, labor unions, actively aided by President Harry Truman and liberal Democrats, pushed for the creation of a universal, cradle-to-grave public welfare state. Yet, Brown points out, the labor movement also proceeded to undermine this campaign by pushing hard for health insurance, pensions, and paid vacations in negotiations with private employers. Why did they do this? Some historians say it was because conservative opposition to an expanded welfare state was too strong, especially after the Republicans gained control of Congress in the 1946 elections. Brown, however, contends that the unions mainly feared for their own survival in the face of a strong anti-union drive by business.

“Organized labor emerged from the war as a formidable social force in American society,” he notes. With their ranks increased by six million since 1939, unionized workers in 1945 made up 30 percent of the nonfarm labor force. Business, however, had not yet accepted this new reality. Though some top executives urged that corporations provide social benefits to employees, most were either openly antiunion or dedicated to confining collective bargaining to wages, hours, and conditions of employment, Brown says. As a result, “the very terms of collective bargaining,” not just the size of paychecks, were

often at issue in labor negotiations and strikes between 1945 and 1950.

The fiery John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers led the way for labor, with a successful demand in 1945–46 for a company-funded union health and welfare fund, and company pensions for miners. Confronted with the prospect of mechanization and job reductions, the union needed such benefits to hold its members. In 1947, both Philip Murray’s United Steel Workers and Walter Reuther’s United Auto Workers then put fringe benefits on the bargaining table.

In 1947, the Republicans’ Taft-Hartley Act banned the closed shop, posing a powerful threat to organized labor. No longer could union membership be made a condition of employment. But unions could cement the loyalty of the rank and file with a health and welfare fund, whose benefits “were typically tied to the firm and hence the union.” Such fringe benefits “provided the virtual equivalent of a closed shop,” Brown notes.

At congressional hearings in 1948, Brown says, businessmen such as Charles Wilson of General Motors “lobbied furiously” to have collective bargaining over health and welfare funds outlawed. But before Republicans could oblige, the National Labor Relations Board ruled in the 1948 *Inland Steel* case that private pensions were equivalent to wages and thus within the scope of collective bargaining. In 1949, when a Truman-appointed fact-finding board charged with settling a crippling national steel strike rejected the union’s wage demands, but accepted its pension and health insurance demands, the last corporate resistance shattered. But labor’s victory came at a price: loss of union locals’ enthusiasm for national reform.

### *Country Club Democrats*

“Party Hoppers” by Paul Starobin, in *National Journal* (Feb. 7, 1998), 1501 M St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

Sighting “limousine liberals” in places such as Manhattan and Los Angeles has long been easy, but now, it seems, their numbers have

multiplied in wealthy enclaves throughout the land. A *National Journal*-commissioned analysis shows that over the last five presidential elec-

tions, increasing numbers of voters in 100 of America's richest communities have been leaving their "natural" Republican home behind and voting Democratic.

From 25 percent of the vote in these mostly suburban communities in 1980, writes Starobin, a staff correspondent for *National Journal*, the Democratic share steadily climbed, reaching 41 percent in 1996. Nationwide, in contrast, the Democratic vote over the same period went up by only eight points (to 49 percent). The new Democratic rich are a diverse lot, he says, taking in not only aging yuppies who work in "creative" fields such as advertising but also corporate executives, wealthy "pro-choicers," affluent Asian Americans, and others.

"The towns where Democrats have improved their performance range from Los Altos Hills in northern California, a new-money haven for the tycoons of Silicon Valley, to Fox Chapel on the outskirts of Pittsburgh, an old-money enclave for the titans of the steel industry and their progeny," Starobin writes. Many of these towns are filled with doctors, lawyers, and other professionals.

The voting analysis was done by the National Committee for an Effective Congress, a 50-year-old Democratic consulting firm founded by Eleanor Roosevelt and other liberals. The 100 communities were randomly chosen from a list of the 261 in the 1990 census that had a per capita income above \$30,000 (which is more than twice the national average).

In some towns, such as Amberly, Ohio, an exclusive suburb of Cincinnati, Starobin notes, "recent Democratic inroads undoubtedly

reflect the return to the party's fold of Jews who in 1980 deserted Jimmy Carter for Ronald Reagan. . . . But Democrats also made strides in towns long known as preserves of polo-shirt Protestantism—such as Darien and New Canaan in southern Connecticut." In Darien, which has a large Episcopalian population, the Democratic vote increased from 18 percent in 1980 to 31 percent in 1996.

"These days, the most reliable GOP voter is a Southern white male" whose drink of choice is beer, not Bordeaux, Starobin points out. Indeed, the party's cultural shift in its "center of gravity . . . from the country club to the stock-car track" has driven some of the rich away. Many wealthy Protestants, especially in the North, "just don't identify with the new, lower-middle-class, culturally conservative Republicans and the kind of leadership that they want to provide," observes James Davison Hunter, a professor of sociology and religious studies at the University of Virginia. The same may also increasingly be true for wealthy Catholics, adds Starobin. In Wilton, Connecticut, with a large Catholic population, the Democratic presidential vote went from only 22 percent in 1980 to 39 percent 16 years later.

Not all Democrats are heartened by their party's inroads among the wealthy. Jeff Faux, president of the liberal Economic Policy Institute in Washington, views it as a reflection of Democrats' neglect of their "natural base": the working class.

Maybe so. But Starobin concludes that the "historic bond" between the GOP and America's upper crust has been severed. "The rich," he says, "are up for grabs."

## A Man's Game?

"Knowing and Caring about Politics: Gender and Political Engagement" by Sidney Verba, Nancy Burns, and Kay Lehman Schlozman, in *The Journal of Politics* (Nov. 1997), Journals Dept., Univ. of Texas Press, 2100 Comal, Austin, Texas 78722.

Is national politics more or less a "guy thing"? Could be. Political scientists Verba, Burns, and Schlozman, of Harvard University, the University of Michigan, and Boston College, respectively, report—with some obvious discomfort—that their research shows that women tend to be less interested than men in national politics, and to know less about it.

In personal interviews conducted in 1990 with 2,517 people, 38 percent of the men, but only 29 percent of the women, said they were "very interested" in national politics. Some 36

percent of the males said they enjoyed political discussion, but only 26 percent of the women did. Of the 59 percent of men and the 55 percent of women who read a daily newspaper, 40 percent of the men, but only 24 percent of the women, said they paid "a great deal of attention" to national politics.

Not surprisingly, given that disparity in interest, the men were better informed about politics—though they hardly qualified as political savants. Out of 10 political questions asked, they got an average of only 5.1 correct,