

PERIODICALS

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

| | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| POLITICS & GOVERNMENT 11 | RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY 27 |
| FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE 15 | SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY 28 |
| ECONOMICS, LABOR, & BUSINESS 18 | RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT 32 |
| SOCIETY 21 | ARTS & LETTERS 34 |
| PRESS & TELEVISION 25 | OTHER NATIONS 38 |

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Debating the Democrats' Fate

"Is the Democratic Party Disintegrating?" by Walter Dean Burnham, Paul R. Abramson, Thomas R. Dye, Lee Sigelman, and others, in *Society* (July-Aug. 1984), Box A, Rutgers—The State University, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

Even as the Democratic Party gathers its considerable forces for the November elections, its long-term future is, once again, a matter of debate.

To Burnham, an MIT political scientist (and a key advocate of the theory that U.S. political parties undergo "critical realignments" every 30 years or so), the party's future looks bleak—unless it turns sharply Left. Since the early 1960s, he argues, the American political and economic system has been in a state of more or less continual crisis. The old centrist politics once practiced by both parties no longer works, as evidenced by the growing, disillusioned "party of nonvoters." (Only 53 percent of the voting-age public turned out to vote in 1980.)

The Republicans' answer was to become an ideological party of the Right, Burnham contends, unified behind Ronald Reagan's programs. The Democratic Party, by contrast, remains "a welter of conflicting groups held together by increasingly tenuous historic loyalties." What appears to be a decline of American political parties is, in fact, just the disintegration of the Democratic Party.

"Reaganomics," he believes, is doomed to failure. The likely result: a U.S. economic and political collapse whose rescue might require "some form of dictatorship," or the rise of a socialist movement based on the Democratic Party—if it avails itself of the opportunity.

Few of Burnham's co-contributors share his views. To Abramson, a Michigan State political scientist, the importance of the "party of nonvoters" is frequently exaggerated. Conservative Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater in 1964 and liberal Democrat George McGovern in 1972 both predicted—incorrectly—that erstwhile nonvoters would put them over the top. Public-opinion surveys show that even if nonvoters *were* to vote, they would not vote much differently from their more responsible fellow citizens.

Florida State's Dye writes that the collapse of Reaganomics, far from forcing the Democrats to embrace socialism, would unite them around

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

the need for a federal "industrial policy" devoted in part to restoring corporate profits. He dismisses Burnham's prediction of a severe U.S. political crisis as "fanciful."

The Democrats' seeming disarray obscures the fact that they remain America's majority party, outnumbering registered G.O.P. adherents by two to one. The party, notes Sigelman, who teaches at the University of Kentucky, is "one of the oddest political coalitions ever assembled" and is by nature and tradition given to bickering, turmoil, and more than a dash of excitement. As Will Rogers put it more than half a century ago: "I belong to no organized party. I am a Democrat."

New Checks And Balances

"After the Congressional Veto: Assessing the Alternatives" by Robert S. Gilmour and Barbara Hinkson Craig, in *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (Summer 1984), John Wiley & Sons, 605 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10158.

Between 1932 and 1983, Congress periodically granted itself a "legislative veto" as a check on the power of the White House and the federal bureaucracy. Last year, however, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the congressional veto unconstitutional.

Before the Supreme Court acted, Congress had written its veto power into some 200 pieces of legislation. In each case, either the President or an executive agency was "required to submit proposed orders, regulations, and plans to Congress for review and potential veto by majority vote of one or both houses," note Gilmour and Craig, political scientists at the University of Connecticut and Wesleyan University, respectively.

The Court's ruling dismayed the legislators; but, say the authors, Congress can live without the veto. In fact, the lawmakers have exercised only 125 such vetoes: Of those, 66 overruled presidential "budget impoundments" (refusals to spend money appropriated by the Congress), and 24 halted executive office reorganizations. Only 35 actually dealt with a proposed regulation or project. More important than the veto itself was the leverage that the *threat* of using it gave Congress over the White House. A case in point: The 1976 stipulation that major overseas arms sales be submitted for review on Capitol Hill led to a reshaping of five controversial U.S. arms packages but no actual vetoes.

Congress will retain considerable leverage simply because whenever controversy simmers, the White House still needs support from Capitol Hill. If all else fails, Congress can just pass a law barring any executive activity that displeases it (though this would face a presidential veto requiring a two-thirds Congressional vote to override).

Congress has been known to grant itself the veto power as a way of putting off tough decisions. In 1980, for example, it created the U.S. Synthetic Fuels Corporation but left the new agency to figure out for itself how much its programs would cost—subject to legislative veto. Now, the Congress will have to make such decisions itself and write them into law. That, the authors suggest, is a good thing.