

How do we explain these important institutional changes?

Many of the journalistic and insider accounts of the new power structure in the House stress Gingrich's astute, confident and strong leadership. This provides only part of an explanation. It ignores important contextual factors which provide opportunities and set limits to individual leader's capacity to exercise leadership.

These contextual factors were the new political circumstances, that is, the institutional fluidity caused by the change in partisan control, Gingrich's role in the 1994 elections, and the strong team spirit among Republicans. These factors combined in 1995 to polarise further the congressional parties and to increase Republican party loyalty to levels not seen since the 1890s.

Leaders in the House of Representatives, however, can only be as powerful as their party bases will allow them to become. When support and cohesion decline, their powers contract. A number of events in 1995 have demonstrated that those regarded as being in the vanguard of the Republican 'revolution' - the 73-strong freshmen/women contingent - can take power from central leaders as well as give it. Further, the Speaker's oratorical forays on welfare and other subjects - as well as his low poll ratings and ethics problems - have constrained his power.

On this reading, committee chairs may reappraise their power positions and rein in central leaders' powers at some future date. It seems inconceivable, however, that while there is a Republican majority committees will be as powerful as they were in Democratic congresses in the 1970s and 1980s, let alone in the 1950s and 1960s. Theorists of congressional institutions will need, therefore, to rethink existing models to take much greater account of the apparent significance of a Republican rather than a Democratic majority and its adherence to the principles of party government in what appears to be a new institutional era for the House.

John E. Owens is a CSD member. This is an abbreviated version of a paper presented to the CSD seminar in January 1996.

American Citizenship

by Michael Schudson

The concept of citizenship in the United States should not be understood as a set of historically variable 'rights' or constructed 'virtues'. Rather, the history of citizenship should be seen as a changing set of practices that link citizens to the state.

The history of American political culture or of an American public sphere may be said to fall into three periods (although perhaps we are on the verge of a fourth). These periods can be defined in terms of differing voting practices. In the colonial era, voting was an act of assent that reaffirmed the social hierarchy of a community where no one but a local notable would think of standing for office; where voting was conducted entirely in public view; and where voters were ritually rewarded by the gentlemen they favoured.

In the nineteenth century, mass political parties cultivated a new democratic order, and citizenship practices came symbolically to mark affiliation, not assent. People went to the polls to support their political parties; their affiliation with a given party was more a matter of attachment than choice, reflecting ethnocultural or communal allegiances more than policy preferences. Election day was a boisterous pageant and politics was the best entertainment in town.

Beginning with Progressive Era electoral reforms in the 1880s, American politics moved from the era of affiliation to the era of autonomy. Balloting was now secret. Ballots were supplied by the state rather than by parties. Newspapers grew more independent and reported with greater detachment on the machinations of leading parties and politicians. The act of going to the polls was increasingly a ritual, dedicated not to party solidarity, but to the ideal of an informed citizen and to rationality itself.

This second transformation is generally thought of in terms of 'decline': in voter turnout, and, critics

assert, in civic participation and in the political system's responsiveness to the ordinary citizen. This perception of decline depicts the past with an undeserved nostalgic glow. The politics of the eighteenth century was exclusively elite politics; the politics of the nineteenth century, though much more democratic, at least among white males, was oriented to the distribution of jobs and contracts to party loyalists rather than to any broader view of public policy. In a sense, a full-bodied notion of 'the public' begins to emerge only in the twentieth century.

What is the evidence for this? First, the federal government takes on much broader responsibilities while state and local government expand their welfare services greatly. Secondly, leadership becomes more willing to stand behind its policies, and administrative changes make it much easier for the public to see what those policies are. For example, there was no federal budget until 1921. Measurements of economic well-being on a national scale did not become prominent until the 1930s; the 'Gross National Product' only became a politically significant figure after the Second World War. Colleges and universities, largely provincial and parochial religious institutions in the nineteenth century, increasingly took on public purposes and a rhetoric of public responsibility.

This is not to suggest that the twentieth century has witnessed the fulfilment of the responsibilities to 'the public' that it proclaims, merely that the proclamation in its fullness is a twentieth century phenomenon. The 'informed citizen', whose absence is often bemoaned, is, as a concept, primarily a product of the Progressive Era rather than of 'democracy' itself. Rather than aspire to the ideal of the 1890-1920 period - an ideal not well approximated even then - we should try to describe the anthropology of our own politics and to assess what kinds of ideals for citizenship are possible in our own time.

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CSD SEMINAR PROGRAMME

January

Dr John Owens: Newt Gingrich and the American Congress.
Bridget Cotter: Hannah Arendt and the Rootlessness of Modernity.

February

CSD Workshop: Europe: A Constitutional Revolution for Britain?

Professor Nicolás López Calera: Problems in the Kingdom of Rights.

Keith Taylor: The Local Frontiers of European Integration.

CSD Workshop:

The Transformation of War.

Dr April Carter: Havel's Contribution to Democratic Theory.

Dr Margaret Canovan: Populism: Democracy's Shadow

March

Dr Satvinder Juss: Political Asylum and Refugee Law: Time for an Open-Door Policy?

Professor John Keane: After the Death of God.

Professor Dr Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim: The Normal Chaos of Love.

April

Stanley Cohen: Cultures of Denial: On Knowing about Atrocities.

CSD Lecture: Professor Pierre Hassner: On War and Peace.

May

CSD Lecture and Workshop:

Professor Michael Walzer: On Toleration. (Workshop participants include Margaret Blunden, Barry Buzan, Stuart Hall, Pierre Hassner, Fred Halliday, John Keane, Chantal Mouffe, Joseph Raz, James Tully, Françoise Verges, and Michael Walzer).

Bernard Rorke: Troubled Histories: Three Phases of Irish Nationalism.

Publications

Books

Congress and the Presidency: Institutional Politics in a Separated System, by Michael Foley and John Owens (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996). ISBN: 0 7190 3884 7.

Reflections on Violence, by John Keane (London and New York: Verso, 1996). ISBN: 1 85984 115 5.

CSD Perspectives

Renewing Local Representative Democracy: Councillors, Communities, Communication, by Keith Taylor. (See box for details.)

The central argument of this paper is that the link between councillors and local communities needs to be strengthened in any strategy to enhance local government.

The time has come to reverse the increasing centralization of political power in Britain of the last half-century; such a reversal must focus largely on the renewal of a sense of local councillors as community representatives. Such a view has profound implications for the future recruitment, training and evaluation of councillors as guardians of local democracy.

European Democracy at the Russian Crossroads, by Irene Brennan. (See box for details.)

This paper examines the foreign policy of the European Union towards the Russian Federation. It uses democratic theory to do so. It draws on discussions about political liberalism, communitarianism, civic republicanism, and theories of radical democracy in the work of Skinner, Mouffe, Rawls, and Walzer, though its approach is completely consonant with none of these. It also draws on works in International Theory - particularly those of Cox, Gill, and Strange - which provide a useful reminder of the importance of political economy when discussing democratic theory.

CSD Perspectives

a series of pamphlets published by University of Westminster Press

The Betrayal of Bosnia, by Lee Bryant. No. 1 (Autumn 1993). ISBN: 1 85919 035 9. £3.50.

Nations, Nationalism, and the European Citizen, by John Keane. No. 2 (Autumn 1993). ISBN: 1 85919 040 5. £3.50.

Universal Human Rights? The Rhetoric of International Law, by Jeremy Colwill. No. 3 (Autumn 1994). ISBN: 1 85919 040 5. £3.50.

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The Making of a Weak State: The Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1906, by Mehdi Moslem. No. 6 (Summer 1995). ISBN: 1 85919 071 5. £3.50.

The 1996 Intergovernmental Conference: Perspectives on European Integration, by Richard Whitman. No. 7 (Winter 1995). ISBN: 1 85919 002 2. £3.50.

Renewing Local Representative Democracy: Councillors, Communities, Communication, by Keith Taylor. No. 8 (Spring 1996). ISBN: 1 85919 082 0. £3.50.

European Democracy at the Russian Crossroads, by Irene Brennan. No. 9 (Spring 1996). ISBN: 1 85919 077 4. £3.50.

The End of Religion?, by Marcel Gauchet. No. 10 (Spring 1996). ISBN: 185919 072 3. £3.50.

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