

Changing Patterns in American Politics

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As we approach the threshold of the 1980s, the American political scene is laced with conflicting and contradictory patterns. The public today overwhelmingly wants increased governmental services, yet by equally wide percentages thinks taxes are too high. Proposition 13 has become a worldwide phrase symbolizing popular discontent over taxes. According to a recent Gallup poll, self-described conservatives now outnumber liberals by a record 20 percent margin. Paradoxically, the Democrats, the more liberal of the two major parties, continue to win most of the elections at the national and state levels. What do these developments mean? In an attempt to gain perspective on these and other questions, this address focuses on changing patterns in American politics.

Unfortunately, political terms change their meaning with the passage of time. Today's conservatives are often the liberals of yesterday. Moreover, there is no agreement upon the usage of contemporary political labels. While beset with problems, the course of recent events can best be charted by tracing the evolution of liberalism and conservatism, which are the two major ideological themes in American politics.

Traditional Liberalism and Conservatism

A good point of departure is New Deal liberalism, initiated by the election of Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932. The 30s were turbulent times. In many respects the New Deal was a pragmatic response to the problems of the day. The experimental and rather uncertain nature of the New Deal was explained in poker-playing terms by Thurmond Arnold, a member of Roosevelt's administration. When asked to explain liberalism, Arnold replied, "Liberalism is deuces wild."

Understanding American politics during the 1930s was considerably easier than it is today. Party identification was more solid and evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans. Voting was primarily confined to a single set of issues—those relating to the domestic economy. In an attempt to solve the Great Depression, the New Deal embarked on a course of government intervention in the economy marked by such innovations as large-scale public works, collective bargaining, social security, and unemployment insurance. Many of these changes reflected the notion that the previous lines dividing what the government should or should not do had been drawn in the wrong place.

Liberalism had come full circle from its 18th and 19th century laissez-faire position, for originally liberalism had been a protest against government interference in the economy. Republican president Herbert Hoover, a 20th century laissez-faire advocate, objected to the association of the idea of liberalism with the New Deal. Nonetheless, the meaning of liberalism did change. Those opposed to New Deal liberalism were called conservatives. Primarily identified with the Republican Party, the main features of the conservative position were strong support for the free enterprise economy, opposition to the extension of executive power wielded by Roosevelt, and isolationism in foreign policy.

During the New Deal period, Roosevelt successfully put together a number of groups which produced a majority coalition. These included the urban working class, ethnic minorities, Catholics, Jews, intellectuals and the Solid South. With a

broadened base of support, the Democrats replaced Republicans as the dominant party in voter identification, a position which they retain to this day. A somewhat different interpretation of the Democratic upsurge was explained by an anonymous wit: "Republicans sleep in twin beds-some even in separate rooms. No wonder there are more Democrats."

Immediately following World War II, New Deal issues began to fade. During the 1950s, public opinion polls showed that foreign policy concerns superseded the economy as the most important problem facing the American people. A bipartisan foreign policy, initiated by Democratic President Harry Truman, regarded the containment of international communism as the first priority. The Truman Doctrine, NATO, and the Korean War followed. Most conservatives, adamantly anti-communist, joined ranks with Democrats to extend the number of global security alliances. Isolationism, for a time, was in repose. Consensus in foreign policy prevailed.

Relatively prosperous economic conditions during much of the fifties muted partisan differences between Republicans and Democrats. In the absence of polarizing issues, World War II hero Dwight Eisenhower drew votes away from the Roosevelt coalition. Although voters switched to a popular presidential candidate, the Democrats remained the dominant party both in terms of voter identification and, with the exception of a brief two year period, retained control of Congress. Support for the traditional conservative ideological position gradually eroded as the American public and Republican administrations accepted social security, deficit spending to combat unemployment, and a foreign policy involving global responsibilities.

This shift in Republican orientation led many Republicans to conclude that their party should offer the American public "a choice, not an echo." The Republican decision in 1964 to present Barry Goldwater as a presidential spokesman for traditional conservatism ended in disastrous defeat. A delighted Lyndon Johnson, reflecting on his sweeping victory over Goldwater, quipped: "I think it is very important that we have a two-party country. I am a fellow that [sic] likes small parties and the Republican party is about the size I like."

The 60s: Rise of the New Liberalism

The dramatic changes of the 60s, however, were soon to challenge the strength and unity of the Democratic Party. Race, along with civil disorder, crime, drugs and other moral concerns such as pornography, abortion and the death penalty became important domestic issues. Concurrently, American foreign policy was dominated by increased involvement in Vietnam. Thus, the pattern of American politics shifted from one dominated solely by economics or foreign policy to a new pattern characterized by multiple issues which evoked a strong emotional response. As a consequence, the body politic became fragmented. Symptomatic of this pattern was a decline in party identification and the rise of independent voters.

Divisions within the Democratic Party actually began soon after World War II when the Democrats, led by Hubert Humphrey, incorporated a strong civil rights plank in their 1948 party platform. Southern defection from the Democratic fold in the 1948, 1952 and 1956 presidential elections marked the initial crack in the New Deal coalition. The days of the Solid Democratic South ended abruptly.

By 1963, spurred on by the civil rights movement, the racial issue replaced economics and foreign policy as the most important problem facing the American public. In response, the Democratic administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson sponsored a series of civil rights proposals which were enacted into law and then were expanded by administrative and judicial interpretation. In time, busing and affirmative action appeared as divisive issues. Support for these ideas gave liberalism a new dimension. George Wallace emerged on the scene and became a political force in the 1968 and 1972 elections. Cracks in the FDR coalition became wider as increasing numbers of New Deal liberals, both in and outside the South, stopped supporting Democratic presidential candidates.

Public opinion studies indicate that working classes are liberal mainly on traditional economic issues associated with the New Deal. Many years before the rise of contemporary social issues, polls showed that the less affluent had a low level of tolerance for unconventional ideas. Recent examples of this pattern include negative attitudes towards the protests of the 60s and opposition to life-style changes associated with the counter-culture. Workers may be economic liberals, but they are often conservative on social issues. Many of the "hard-hat" defenders of American policy in Vietnam are today often opposed to affirmative action and quotas in job recruitment and promotion. As recent members of the middle class, workers seek to protect their newly obtained gains. These developments help explain why support for Democratic candidates from the working classes, an important element of the Roosevelt coalition, is no longer as certain as it was in the past.

Along with other items on the new political agenda, Vietnam also had a great polarizing effect on the voters, especially among Democrats. Opposition to the expansion of the American effort in Southeast Asia during the Johnson and Nixon administrations produced a strong anti-interventionist, neo-isolationist faction within the Democratic Party. To Senators Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, and others representing this new liberal viewpoint, the watchword became "No more Vietnams." The post-World War II consensus on American foreign policy had ended.

From the changing political patterns of the 60s there emerged a new ideological outlook which today is variously described as Reform Liberalism, Radical Liberalism or the New Liberalism. In foreign policy, this view reflects a retrenchment from the strong internationalist stance of traditional liberalism. Fear of another Vietnam has led many New Liberals toward an unwillingness to commit U.S. troops anywhere abroad. Some of the current domestic positions taken by the new breed of liberals include insistence on affirmative action and quota programs for minority groups and women, support for abortion and gay rights, legalization of marijuana, an avid concern for the environment, and an attack upon corporate power.

Thus, on a variety of issues New and Radical Liberals often take stands at variance with traditional supporters of the New Deal coalition. New Deal liberalism, then, has become the Old Liberalism. Consequently, the Democrats are today a divided party which encompasses, somewhat uncomfortably, both the Old and the New Liberals.

Divided Parties: Democrats and Republicans

Although the New Liberals are a clear minority in the nation as a whole, they are very active in Democratic Party politics and have a disproportionate influence in relation to their numbers. Their power was demonstrated in the nomination of George McGovern in 1972. McGovern's overwhelming rejection was due not only to his economic and foreign policy positions but also because he and his supporters were perceived to be out of touch with the American public on the social issues. McGovern was successfully portrayed, although somewhat inaccurately, as the candidate of the 3 A's, "abortion, amnesty, and acid."

The division between the Old and New Liberals within the Democratic Party and the shift of voting allegiances appeared to give the Republican Party an excellent opportunity to develop a new majority coalition. This possibility was outlined by conservative writer Kevin Phillips in his book, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969). In 1972, Republicans did sweep the traditionally Democratic South, and there was some middle class voter protest over social questions, but the Republicans made no permanent inroads into the Roosevelt coalition. Presidential election victories by Richard Nixon in 1968 and 1972 did not bring about a grass-roots resurgence of the Republican Party, which has increasingly become dependent on the support of Northern white Protestants. In recent years the percentage of people identifying with the Republican Party has actually dropped below 20 percent.

Although more homogeneous than the Democrats, the Republican Party also has had its own divisions. President Nixon, for example, angered many traditional conservatives by adopting policies such as deficit financing, price and wage controls, detente with the Soviet Union and the beginnings of the normalization of relations with Communist China. After Watergate, there was serious talk among conservatives about establishing a new party to replace the Republicans, but a Gallup poll in 1975 indicated that only 25 percent of the general population would vote for a new party favoring policies more conservative than those of the present Republican Party. Apparently only a small percentage share Archie Bunker's lament: "Mister, we could use a man like Herbert Hoover again."

The Democrats are also in trouble. At first glance, President Jimmy Carter's 1976 victory might be interpreted as a reaffirmation of the FDR coalition. After all, Carter did carry the South, the Black, Jewish and Catholic vote and significant segments of other groups that have traditionally supported the Democratic Party. A closer look at the election results, however, suggests that all is not well for the Democrats, especially in presidential politics.

For example, two elements of the coalition which continue to identify themselves as Democrats and vote for Democratic congressional candidates are Southern whites and Northern urban Catholics. In presidential elections, however, these groups are no longer dependably within the Democratic fold. Although Carter did win the South, partially as a result of regional pride, he failed to win a majority of the Southern white vote. The new South, which includes a large number of Black voters, is not the same South of the New Deal days. Carter actually ran behind Roosevelt in every Southern state, including Georgia. Among urban Catholics a reason for diminished support for Democratic presidential candidates is the increasing importance of abortion as an issue. It is noteworthy that the Republican platform in 1976 called for constitutional amendments to ban both forced busing and abortion.

Adding to the problems of the Democrats, the Carter presidency has alienated some of his major 1976 support groups, including Blacks, Jews and organized labor. Carter's moderate conservative economic stance, for example, has helped to curtail economic spending programs favored by Blacks and organized labor. Tensions between the Black and Jewish communities, which earlier emerged over affirmative action and quotas programs, have been recently heightened by questions involving the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). This is illustrated by the emotional departure of U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young and failure by the Carter administration to criticize overtures to the P.L.O. by other Black leaders such as the Reverend Jesse Jackson. The New Deal coalition may not yet be dead, but it is no longer strong and healthy.

Neoconservatism: A New Political Force?

Another challenge to the FDR coalition has been mounted by a group of intellectuals who earlier endorsed the New Deal. It is a paradox that the 1960s gave birth to new versions of both liberalism and conservatism. The term "Neoconservatism," which gained popular usage only in 1976, is in many ways inadequate. This new intellectual persuasion represents a diversity of viewpoints reflected by such writers as Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell, founders of the magazine, *The Public Interest*. Kristol would as readily accept Neoliberal as a description of his position. Bell, who rejects the new category; proclaims in his book, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976): "I am a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture." The purpose of the final chapter of this recent book, according to Bell, is to affirm liberalism as a political philosophy.

Bell's commentary suggests that some labelled Neoconservatives have held steadfast to their convictions in a period when New Liberals have shaded to the Left. Herbert Hoover must be smiling. Many leading Neoconservatives have been "referred to as refugees from the political left." It is therefore not surprising that this amalgam of old liberals and ex-socialists, more often than not, retains ties with the Democratic Party. A good example of a Democratic politician who falls neatly under this new label is Senator Patrick Moynihan of New York.

Neoconservatives should be differentiated from traditional conservatives such as columnist William F. Buckley Jr., economist Milton Friedman, and politician Ronald Reagan, for these men advocate an unfettered free market economy. In sharp contrast, Neoconservatives accept the social and economic programs of the New Deal and even some of President Johnson's Great Society initiatives, such as Medicare. Both Bell and Kristol call for some form of national health insurance, and even Kristol, the more conservative of the two, favors the idea of guaranteeing every family a minimum annual income. Thus, to a degree, neoconservatism represents an extension of New Deal liberalism.

The ideal of equality historically has been defined by liberals in political terms such as equality before the law. During the 1960s, with the passage of national voting rights laws, legislation mandating access to public accommodations, and the Warren court decisions embodying the principle of one-person, one-vote, the United States moved closer toward the reality of legal equality. Neoconservatives applaud these changes as another acceptable extension of the Old Liberalism.

In contrast to the New Liberals, however, Neo-conservatives reject the idea that government should guarantee the equality of outcome or result. It is appropriate, say the Neoconservatives, that differences in talent, motivation and productivity lead to inequalities in status and income. They object, therefore, to affirmative action programs and welfare policies that reduce incentives to work. Another Neoconservative theme contends that recent attempts to redistribute society's resources have led to a government overload-an increasing demand for services which cannot be matched by tax resources. The Neo-conservative cautions that increased moves toward redistribution of wealth will hinder the rate of economic growth upon which taxes depend. In summary, Neoconservatives have doubts that government can or should try to resolve all of our economic and social problems.

Pre-eminently, Neoconservatives see the current crisis in America as cultural-a matter of values and morals. Over the centuries conservatives have stressed the importance of the moral order and have placed an emphasis on the preservation of traditional values embodied in the family, neighborhood, and church. The contemporary crisis of authority in the United States is attributed chiefly to the rise of an "adversary culture" with its contempt for convention and its focus on the exploration of new experiences. Neoconservatives criticize a hedonistic lifestyle and point to the dangers of liberating individuals from the restraints imposed by traditional social institutions. One is reminded of Ambrose Bierce's astute observation that a conservative is "a statesman who is enamored of existing evils, as distinguished from the liberal, who wishes to replace them with others."

There are also important differences between the New Liberals and Neoconservatives on foreign policy matters. Vietnam itself was not the critical dividing issue for there was no consensus among the new conservatives on the war. What bothers the new conservatives is the neo-isolationist spirit that followed the war, for they feel that the United States should stand fast with those nations committed to Western democratic values. This posture is reflected in strong support of our European allies and Israel. Conversely, Neoconservatives are skeptical of Soviet foreign policy designs and therefore have reservations about detente and Salt II.

Some members of the Left are prone to place the entire blame for Vietnam's contemporary problems on our intervention there. Columnist Max Lerner recently recounted (8/79) how one New Liberal member of a congressional team investigating the Vietnam refugee problem stated that it was the presence of the U.S. Fleet that "encourages people to run." The Neoconservative is much more comfortable with Lerner's retort, "The heart of the matter is communist rule."

How important is neoconservatism? Peter Steinfels, executive editor of Commonwealth magazine and author of The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America (1979), maintains neoconservative influence derives its strength from the fact that it is congenial to powerful forces in American life. The American Enterprise Institute has in a short period of time become the conservative "think-tank" counterpart to the long established and liberally oriented Brookings Institution.

The new institute is a welcome addition to the pro-business forces who historically have been on the short end of the academic input.

Some Leftist critics think Steinfels has exaggerated the influence of the neoconservatives. Christopher Jencks, for example, regards them merely as "a creation of magazine journalism." Ideas, however, do count. The noted British economist John Maynard Keynes put it aptly some years ago when he said, "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back..." Almost without exception, leading Neoconservatives have or now hold positions at important universities, including a good number at Harvard. It was once popular to say that the road to political power in the United States was to go to Harvard and turn Left. Today some of the students who go to Harvard may take a different turn.

Ideological and Operational Spectrums

Does the rise of new varieties of liberalism and conservatism reflect a basic change in public opinion? Surprisingly, popular identification with a conservative orientation is not new. In 1939, at the height of New Deal Liberalism, a majority (52 percent) of the public regarded itself as conservative. There is an obvious paradox here because New Deal programs were liberal for that era. How is this paradox to be explained? Hadley Cantril and Lloyd Free in *The Political Beliefs of Americans* (1967) draw a distinction between the operational and ideological spectrums. Operationally, on specific government programs which touched the daily lives of individuals, Cantril and Free found that well over a majority of Americans were liberal. According to these authors, Americans are ideological conservatives only in a broad sense that they believe government interference should be kept to a minimum.

Recent surveys reaffirm these conclusions. Americans, who are conservative in a general sense, also overwhelmingly say that today there are not enough public services for improving education, national health, the environment, or the condition of Blacks. The only public service which lacks general popular support is welfare. Welfare has become a pejorative term that applies almost exclusively to those poor who are on public assistance programs.

New and Radical Liberals are quick to point out that there is no similar negative stigma towards special tax breaks for the rich, subsidies and guaranteed loans to business, or even social security benefits. What accounts for the apparent contradiction in public attitudes which frown upon government aid to the poor but not to other members of society? Although socialist writer Michael Harrington wrote some years ago about the poor in the United States as being "invisible," the fact is that welfare grants administered by state and local governments are more visible than the more hidden national subsidies.

Besides welfare, disenchantment with the New Liberal programs of the 60s also stems from resentment by the general taxpayer about new programs that aid only a selective part of society. Social security, unemployment insurance and Medicare are accepted because they are universal and therefore do not set one group against another. Surveys demonstrate that middle income groups now find themselves more in the role of a contributor than a beneficiary of domestic spending programs. Given the tax advantages to people at the top, an increasing proportion of the funds necessary to pay for the expansion of public services has been shouldered by the middle class. Herein lie the seeds of a tax rebellion, exemplified by Proposition 13.

What did Proposition 13 signify? Was it, as Howard Jarvis asserted, a statement against large government and taxes of all kinds? Proposition 13 was indeed a tax revolt, but it was specifically directed against increased property taxes in a state with a huge financial surplus. Inaction in Sacramento on property tax relief and the budget surplus represented a failure by state

politicians to read the public mood. An analysis of polls taken before the June, 1978 vote revealed that whereas Californians thought property taxes were too high, there was little concern about other types of taxes. Contrary to Jarvis, the polls indicated that, except for a few items such as welfare, a large majority of Californians was satisfied with the extent of most state services. Of those satisfied with state services, a majority voted in favor of 13. It follows that the voters, still operational liberals, wanted a reduction in a specific tax without a reduction of public services.

Proposition 13 had some unintended consequences that relate to conservative and liberal perspectives. It is rather ironic that 13 resulted in a traditional liberal objective to have the state assume greater financial responsibility for health, education and welfare. Local control of governmental services, long a conservative stance, has been eroded by the state funded bail-out measures which have followed in the aftermath of 13. Failure by landlords to pass on tax reductions to renters has led to passage of rent control measures in several California communities, a position which is anathema to conservatives. The California political climate at present is a mixture of conservative and liberal sentiments.

Political attitudes on the national level are also ambivalent. Public opinion is now in agreement with a long established conservative stance that inflation is the most serious economic problem facing the country. Americans, however, do not necessarily agree with conservative proposals of how to deal with economic problems. For example, during the 1978 congressional campaign, the Republicans attempted to make the Roth-Kemp massive tax-cut proposal the centerpiece of their economic program. The lack of Republican success can be partially explained by a 1978 poll which indicated that about 90 percent of Americans subscribed to the idea that "controlling inflation is more important than cutting taxes." But how would the public control inflation? Polls have consistently shown that most Americans favor price and wage controls, which is clearly a non-conservative position. Thus far, Americans remain ideological conservatives and operational liberals.

Political Reforms and Single Issue Politics

Another changing pattern in American politics over the past decade has been political party reform. Historically, reformers in both parties have sought to open the presidential selection process so that the nomination not be determined by "bosses" in "smoke-filled" rooms. Presidential primaries, initiated around the turn of the century, doubled from 15 in 1968 to 30 by 1976. By 1972, for the first time in American history, over half the convention delegates were selected as a result of a popular vote, instead of by party leaders. In 1976, federal funding of presidential politics was introduced. Reforms in the Democratic Party now provide for a delegate selection process which encourages greater rank-and-file participation as well as rules to ensure proportional representation of minorities, young people and women. All of these changes, designed to make the presidential nomination more democratic, served to weaken the role played by party organization and leaders.

A critical insight into the dynamics of American politics is offered by political scientist James MacGregor Burns. Writing prior to recent party reforms, Burns observed, in *The Deadlock of Democracy* (1963), that we actually have a four-party system in the United States in which both Republicans and Democrats are split into presidential and congressional parties. As presidential candidates now go their individual ways in raising funds to be matched by federal subsidies, the separation between presidential and congressional parties has grown. Party structures no longer play the integrating role they once did when they raised and distributed most campaign funds.

Given the new nominating and funding processes, Democratic members of Congress had little to do with the selection of Jimmy Carter. Carter added to the strain between the presidency and Congress when he ran as an "outsider," an anti-Washington candidate. Furthermore, in a post-Vietnam, post-Watergate era, candidates for the House and Senate now find it expedient to disassociate themselves from presidential candidates of their parties. Little wonder that President Carter has had difficulty in dealing with a Congress nominally controlled by the Democrats.

The lack of unity between the executive and legislative branches is compounded by an increased lack of cohesion within Congress. Recent congressional reforms have led to a proliferation of subcommittees. This year, for example, 142 subcommittees operate in the House of Representatives alone. What have been the consequences of this decentralization of authority? Jurisdictional confusion not only makes it difficult for Congress to unite behind a common program but also complicates the task of presidential leadership. Imagine the coordination difficulties faced by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in gaining approval of its programs from about 40 different committees and subcommittees. Further, the fragmentation of congressional committee power offers the special interests a better chance to control legislation on their behalf.

The number of interest groups operating on Capitol Hill is staggering. On Carter's 1977 energy proposal, which was severely amended, 117 separate interest groups were in action. President Carter, explaining his difficulties in securing the passage of energy legislation, stated: "You see a Congress twisted and pulled in every direction by hundreds of well-financed and powerful special interests. You see every extreme position defended to the last vote, almost to the last breath, by one unyielding group or another."

Unyielding and moralizing postures have become the hallmark of single issue politics. Groups uncompromisingly dedicated to one cause are rampant, whether the issue be abortion, gun control, nuclear power or defense. Divergent groups often lay claim to a monopoly of truth and virtue which impedes the compromises necessary to make a political system work.

Campaign finance reform has brought about some unintended results. A study of the 1976 presidential election, released earlier this month (10/79) by political scientist Herbert E. Alexander, confirms that public financing of campaigns caused a decline of party fund raising and the reduction of grass-root volunteer activity. Labor union, corporate and other special interest groups, funded by their political action committees (PACs), have filled the void. The number of PACs has increased from approximately 500 in 1976 to nearly 2,000 in 1978, and they now contribute eight times as much to congressional elections as do the two major political parties.

A weakened party organization and a fragmented congressional structure mean that special interest groups dedicated to a single issue constituency often prevail over the views favored by a majority of public opinion. Gun control is an obvious example. The pattern of influence is not new, but it has been exacerbated. The danger is generally recognized and crosses party lines. In an interview last month (9/79), former Republican President Gerald Ford concluded that "the most serious threat to traditional political parties is the rapidly growing single issue faction."

Conclusion

James Madison, regarded as the principal author of the United States constitution, wrote extensively about the danger of faction in a democratic society. The chief danger of popular government, according to Madison, was the tendency for the majority to turn to a single leader for solutions to problems in times of crisis. Democracy often ended in despotism. Therefore, in order to prevent majority tyranny, a system of separation of powers and checks and balances was established. The experiences of the Johnson and Nixon administrations on Vietnam and Watergate point to the dangers of an imperial presidency in modern times.

Important as it is to establish a political framework which can check the abuse of power, the separation of powers should not be viewed as an end in itself. The purpose of government is to govern. Today we have separated political institutions being influenced by powerful interest groups generally committed to a single objective. For government to perform effectively the separation of powers must be bridged.

To build this bridge it is necessary to recognize the vital role of political parties and the necessity of strong presidential leadership. There will be little coherence in public policy until presidential leadership fashions an effective governing coalition which looks beyond the narrow range of single issue politics. Columnist Meg Greenfield identified the essence of the problem in a recent Newsweek editorial (8/79) when she stated that our "larger interests are meant to transcend that atomized world of me-first particular groupings."

Private interest groups play an important and necessary role in a democracy. The present fragmentation of American society dominated by single issue politics, however, makes it infinitely more difficult for political parties and other political institutions to play their historical integrating role in representative government. Some of the recent party and congressional reforms, which have made the task of governing more difficult, should be re-assessed. Political reforms are to little avail if they result in a political world where powerful interest groups have an unwritten, extra-legal veto over the decisions of public bodies.

An encouraging development took place a week ago (10/17/79) when the House of Representatives narrowly voted for new limitations on political action committee contributions. During the debate on the measure, Speaker "Tip" O'Neill reminded his colleagues that the PACs were a threat to the two party system. When his remarks were met with jeering laughter, O'Neill countered: "You, with the smiles on your faces, do you want to get up and tell me how much you got from the special interests?" No one got up.

Does Neoconservatism, however inadequate the term, offer a new synthesis in the dialectical clash of ideas? Richard Bolling, a prominent Democratic leader of the House of Representatives, thinks so. There are some promising signs that a new American ideological consensus may be developing. Neoconservatism reaches to the Right in its support for cost-efficient decentralized government and its commitment to the importance of incentives embodied in the idea of equality of opportunity. On the Left, the new conservatives accept the necessity of collective society both to ensure basic human needs and to eliminate all vestiges of legal discrimination.

Today voices on both sides of the political spectrum express concern about what basic values are important in life. Many on the Left are what James McGregor Burns calls qualitative liberals—those who are deeply concerned about the moral, aesthetic and ecological aspects of life. Neoconservative Daniel Bell urges thoughtful Americans "to reject the hedonistic emphasis on the satisfaction of private appetites, which is involved in so much of the pursuit of goods." There are, then, increasing numbers who question whether the priority of consumer wants, characteristic of modern society, is either necessary or desirable, especially in an era of diminishing resources.

Critics on the Left, including Steinfels, wonder whether the restraints applied in an era of declining expectations may apply mainly to the poor and powerless. With the impact of inflation pressing on the middle classes, there is indeed a present danger that those on the lower-end of the socio-economic ladder may be treated with what Senator Moynihan once referred to as "benign neglect." Any new coalition of forces which shuns the disadvantaged may well produce a majority consensus, but it is one fraught with danger.

Clearly, more attention must be given to a definition of the public good which takes into account the needs of the underprivileged. It is, however, not in the public interest to increase the role of government to the point where economic inefficiencies are encouraged and the individual is suffocated by a maze of regulations. In a democratic society there must always be a balance between the public and private sectors.

Given the changing institutional and ideological patterns of American politics, Americans would do well to reexamine what Madison said nearly two hundred years ago: "To secure both the public and private rights against the danger of . . . faction, and at the same time to preserve the form of popular government, is then the great object to which our inquiries are directed."