

day life. King doesn't want his readers to forget that beyond poverty, institutional weakness, and ethnic heterogeneity, there are state-like institutions that are responsible for some of the more depressing aspects of political life that persist in the now defunct Soviet world.

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¹ Laitin, David D. 1988. 'Language Games.' *Comparative Politics* 20 (3): 293.

² Ferejohn, John. 1991. 'Rationality and Interpretation: Parliamentary Elections in Early Stuart England.' Pp. 279–305 in *The Economic Approach to Politics*, edited by Kristen Monroe. New York: Harper Collins.

³ Derlugian, Georgi. 2005. *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson:
Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class
New York 2010: Simon & Schuster, 357 pp.

The United States is today one of the most unequal countries in the world in the distribution of income and wealth, and by far the most unequal among the advanced capitalist democracies. The richest 1% of the population take home about 24% of all income, up from about 9% in 1976. By 2001, the CEOs of the largest American companies earned 530 times as much as the average worker, up from 42 times as much in 1980. From 1980 to 2005, more than four-fifths of the total increase in American incomes went to the richest 1%. In fact, the main beneficiaries of the pro-rich redistribution have been not even the top 1% but the top 0.1% of the population, mainly top executives and managers in the financial services. Its share of total

income grew to 12.3%, up from 2.7% in 1974. The highest earners in this tiny group typically take home annual earnings of 50 million USD or more. Hence, America is not only an extremely unequal society, it has become much more unequal during the last three decades or so. Those have been years of massive economic growth, but the produce of that growth has been so distributed that most of it has been absorbed by the super-rich, while no other groups, including the broad middle class, have seen any improvement in their standard of living as a result of better real pay or only as a result of more work, both through longer hours and more two-earner families.

In *Winner-Take-All Politics*, Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson seek to explain this explosion in top-earner income in America. A first possible explanation lies in market effects resulting from globalisation, so that top earners in individual countries, such as America, now earn not only what their national markets pay for their expertise but what it is worth in global markets. This explanation is dismissed. There has been nothing inevitable in the massive shift of income to the top. It is a movement that has been both politically induced and politically allowed, mainly by deregulation, especially of the financial services industry. A second possible explanation, when we move from markets to politics, is in a shift of legislative power from the centre-left to the centre-right on the party political spectrum, in America from the Democrats to the Republicans. This is also dismissed. The shift in the distribution has been long and steady and has occurred under Democratic as well as Republican presidents and Congress majorities.

The authors then look beyond and behind the legislative arena to the underlying political organisation, and it is here that they start to find their own explanation. They first observe a weakening of the position of organised labour. Unionisation has fallen from a level of about 35% of the

workforce in the 1950s to about 10% by 2010. They then see an opposite change in the behaviour of capital. Rather than just relying on their economic power, corporate interests have taken actively to organisation, through the creation of institutions such as think-tanks, political action groups, websites, broadcasting organisations, and so on. And finally, they do see a shift in the relative strength of the two main political parties, but more in organisational than in legislative power. While the Democrats have neglected their organisation, the Republican Party has turned itself into a mighty and well-oiled machine. The political change that lies behind the sociological redistribution of wealth, then, is political more than economic, and in the political arena in organisational more than legislative power. The authors call it 'the politics of organised combat'.

Corporate organised power works in two ways. First, it makes itself dominant in the arena of discourse, where the ideas are formed that condition formal political combat and from where agendas of legislative politics are more or less decided. Second, it works through the mechanism of mega-expensive politics to make candidates for election and re-election dependent on some form of sponsorship, whereby they must pay attention to the interests of potential givers in addition to those of potential voters. All in all, by the time we get to formal legislative politics, much has already been decided elsewhere about what issues are accepted as salient for public policy and about what ideas are the more influential ones in deciding the direction of decision-making on those issues. There is nothing illegal about this, there is no conspiracy and no preponderance of corruption, only what the authors describe as a process of drift resulting from 'systematic, prolonged failures of government to respond to the shifting realities of a dynamic economy'.

What these authors find is, finally, that

the fruits of economic growth have been stolen from the people because their democracy has been stolen from them. If that is correct, one needs to go on and ask how the people can have allowed that to happen and then what should be done about it. On the first question, the answer lies not in any particular acceptance of inequality in American political culture, but in a citizenry that is poorly informed or ignorant about how public policy is made and how the rules of the game have been changing. While legislative politics is easily visible and therefore attracts the anger of the people, informal politicking behind the scenes, where ideas are formed and agendas decided, is less visible and therefore less exposed to popular scrutiny.

Where *Winner-Take-All-Politics* is less satisfying than might have been hoped, is on the question of what to do. Here, the authors draw a blank and stop short of any plan of reform, be it in public policy or in democratic and constitutional arrangements. Although not spelled out explicitly, the message of this utterly despondent book is that American democracy has declined into being dysfunctional and that there is nothing to be done about it.

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Brian Powell, Catherine Bolzendahl, Claudia Geist and Lala Carr Steelman (eds.): *Counted Out: Same-Sex Relations and Americans' Definitions of Family*
A volume in the American Sociological Association's Rose Series in Sociology.
New York 2010: Russell Sage Foundation, 340 pp.

Unexpectedly, same-sex marriage (SSM) has become one of the central issues in American politics during the last two decades. Unexpectedly, because sexuality is-