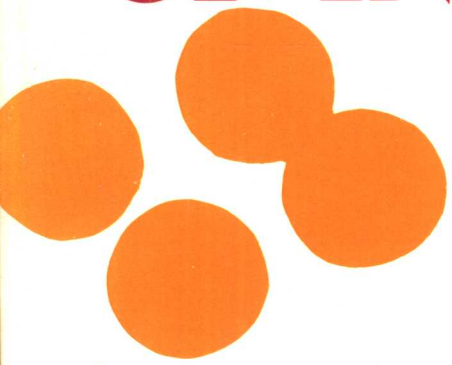
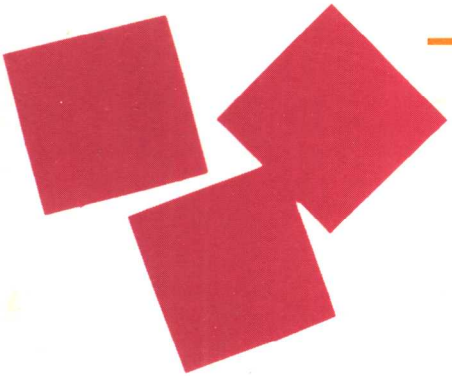
THE POLITICS OF INTERESTS

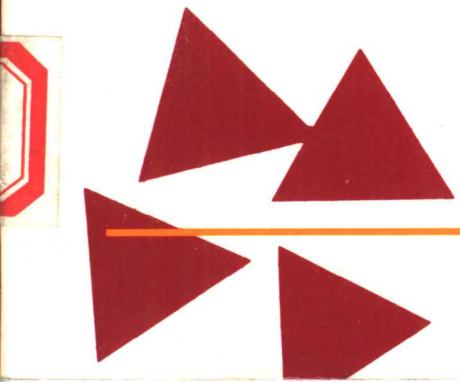


Interest Groups Transformed



edited by

Mark P. Petracca



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The Politics of Interests

INTEREST GROUPS TRANSFORMED

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Preface

The initial idea for an edited volume on the transformation of interest group politics grew out of a panel on interest groups and the presidency that I arranged for the Midwest Political Science Association and a chance meeting with Jennifer Knerr, political science editor at Westview Press. For some time I had been studying the representation of organized interests on federal advisory committees and was beginning to think and write about the changes that had taken place in the advisory committee system courtesy of the Reagan administration (see Petracca 1986, 1988). Little is known about the ways in which advisory committees connect organized interests to the administrative state or about the influence these interests have as a result on national policymaking. Scholars of European politics are familiar with advisory committees as part of societal corporatism; Americanists are rarely familiar with them, if at all. Having previously coauthored a text on the American presidency with Benjamin I. Page, I was also aware of just how little the discipline seemed to know about the general relationship between interest groups and the presidency (see Page and Petracca 1983). With the panel I organized, I hoped to bring together a few scholars working on the various ways in which interest groups are connected to the presidency.

My original intent was to edit a volume focused narrowly on the changes that had taken place in the relationship between interest groups and the presidency during the Reagan era. *The Politics of Interests* is a far more ambitious undertaking, in large measure because of the intellectual stimulation and encouragement of Jennifer Knerr, the vision of Larry Dodd, and the sound advice of the anonymous reviewers for Westview Press. This is how *The Politics of Interests* came to join *Remaking American Politics*, edited by Richard A. Harris and Sidney M. Milkis, and *The Parties Respond*, edited by L. Sandy Maisel, in the Westview series Transforming American Politics, under the general editorship of Lawrence C. Dodd.

As I was convinced by my own research (Petracca 1988) and a growing body of literature that President Reagan had changed the relationship between interest groups and the White House (see Peterson and Walker 1986; Ginsberg and Shefter 1988; and Peterson and Rom 1988), I was also

predisposed, if not determined, to edit a volume hailing the transformation of the U.S. interest group system. Indeed, once I saw the title of Maisel's excellent volume, *The Parties Respond,* which was reminiscent of a Star Wars movie, I was gearing up to title my own volume *Interest Groups Strike Back.* As it turned out, my intended companion to Maisel's volume on political parties had to be filed in the "books-to-be-written" box. Although there have been very important changes in the interest group system and changes in the way scholars study interest group politics, there hasn't been anything near the definitive transformation necessary to merit such a snappy title.

Many of the changes that originally stimulated my interest are carefully explored below, but *The Politics of Interests* is now a far more ambitious exploration of interest group politics than I had initially envisioned. This aptly reflects my intellectual transformation during the writing and editing of this volume as well as the variety and scope of changes that characterize the past twenty years of interest group politics in the United States.

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Acknowledgments

It has been my privilege to incur a great many intellectual debts to a number of individuals who have motivated, guided, trained, and sustained my interest in American politics. Theodore J. Lowi, Martin Shefter, Ira Katznelson, Kenneth Prewitt, Theodore Marmor, Lloyd Rudolph, Philippe C. Schmitter, Paul E. Peterson, and the late J. David Greenstone have all contributed indirectly to this volume. I am also grateful to Jack Peltason, who even as chancellor of a growing university has never been too busy to give generously of his time and good counsel. Benjamin I. Page and David Easton, teachers, colleagues, and friends, have been a constant source of support and guidance throughout my professional development. I have knowingly not always followed their advice but am deeply appreciative of their sincere interest in my work and well-being.

The preparation of this manuscript was aided by the careful editorial attention of Michelle Head and the word-processing skills of Ziggy Bates and most recently Roz Holler. Research assistance and substantive commentary from beginning to end was provided by Catheryn Kidd Markline.

My most enduring debts are to the supportive, professional, and responsive contributors to this volume; to the much-appreciated guidance and understanding of Larry Dodd, editor of this series; the skillful copy-editing of Alice A. Colwell; the production assistance of Jane Raese; and, most of all, to Westview's Jennifer Knerr. Without Jennifer Knerr, there would never have been a *Politics of Interests*. Her vision, encouragement, and confidence made this project possible from beginning to end. "Thank you" is insufficient to capture her contribution to this volume and to my involvement with it, but it will have to do. Our reward, I hope, is contained in the pages that follow.

M.P.P.

Introduction

The Politics of Interests identifies and analyzes the continuities and changes that have taken place in the American interest group system and in scholarly research on interest groups during the past two decades.

The challenge of discovering, documenting, and analyzing political change is a mainstay of contemporary political science. A disciplinary inclination to focus on the subject of political change is evident in the titles of many popular and influential books about American politics. *The End of Liberalism* by Theodore J. Lowi (1969); *The Changing American Voter* by Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik (1976); *Building a New American State* by Stephen Skowronek (1982); and *Politics by Other Means* by Benjamin Ginsberg and Martin Shefter (1990) (to name but a few of my favorites) beckon the reader to explore the changes detailed within. These books join a plethora of works that have in their titles the words *decline, renewal, development, decay, rise, transformation, resurgence,* or *collapse*—all pronouncements of change—modifying the standard array of American political processes and institutions, such as Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, parties, the law, and the courts, to identify some of the usual suspects.

Edited volumes are probably even more prone to trumpet the arrival of political change as a means to intellectual distinctiveness and market promotion. In the first edition of *The New American Political System,* Anthony King (1978) considered "the profound changes" in the American political system that had taken place since the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961. A dozen years later, King edited a "genuinely new" second edition of *The New American Political System* that contrasted the "new" system of the 1970s with the developments that had taken place in the ensuing decade. The "transformation of American politics" by the Reagan administration was the subject of *The New Direction in American Politics,* edited by John E. Chubb and Paul E. Peterson (1985b). *Remaking American Politics,* edited by Richard A. Harris and Sidney M. Milkis (1989), focused on "the massive and profoundly important institutional developments of the past two decades" in order to understand the "major realignment" of the U.S. political system that occurred during the 1970s.

There are many reasons political scientists are drawn to the discovery and explanation of political change. Professional reputations are more easily built by discovering and explaining political change than they are by tiresome proclamations of similarity. Because political scientists have "an impetus to do good," as Samuel P. Huntington (1988:4) put it, they frequently become advocates of political reform, which by definition necessitates change. Additionally, the intellectual roots of Western political science, as represented by the writings of Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Hobbes, Locke, Madison, Mill, Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, commend broad historical or system comparisons through which scholars strive to explain political developments or differences. In any case, the analysis of change is always a necessary part of the research agenda. Finally, in political life, as Machiavelli realized, "*fortuna*, the bitch goddess of unpredictability, has never been dethroned" (MacIntyre 1973:228). Unlike physicists and chemists, political scientists are privileged (or condemned, depending upon how you look at it) to study a subject that transforms individuals and the communities within which they live. As a result, the study of political change is a staple on the research menu of political science.

During the past decade, political scientists had rediscovered interest groups as a suitable subject for study resulting in an avalanche of new empirical data on various aspects of the interest group system. A number of studies conducted during the 1980s transformed what we know about the origin and maintenance, activities and techniques, organization, structure of interaction, and influence of interest groups in the United States. Surely now that we knew so much more about the American interest group system and at a level of precision and detail unprecedented in the analysis of interest groups, charting the transformation of that system would be a relatively easy task. At least this is what I thought. I was mistaken.

Unlike political parties, interest groups are too diffuse and numerous to respond, as Sandy Maisel has characterized changes in the American party system. Indeed, what would interest groups respond to? Neither have interest groups experienced the morbidity afflicting political parties during the past three decades, permitting (or necessitating) a response even if one were possible. To the contrary, as I argue in Chapter 1, American interest groups are quite robust and healthy, Ronald Reagan's efforts notwithstanding. After laboriously reviewing the historical and contemporary literature on interest groups and pondering the splendid contributions made to this volume, I've concluded that the American interest group system of the 1990s is characterized by about equal parts of consistency and change compared to the system of the late 1960s and 1970s.

This conclusion may strike some as cowardly, resembling a buffet at which the host offers a little bit of this and a little bit of that and everyone

usually goes home happy. Nevertheless, it makes the most sense to me given the available evidence. To be sure, it is not necessarily a conclusion all the contributors to this volume share, neither will it be the one every reader reaches.

The extent to which the interest group system has changed is largely a function of the baseline date used for such an assessment. There have been significant, possibly even profound, changes in the interest group system during the past twenty years, as detailed in Chapter 1 and throughout the volume. Many of these changes are the direct or indirect result of larger institutional and behavioral developments taking place during the same period in American politics. The transformation of interest group politics in the United States, to the extent that it's accurate to describe it as such, did not occur in isolation. The processes of political transformation identified in *Remaking American Politics* are at work in the interest group system as well.

When I take a broader look at the interest group system, however, I am less inclined to view the past two decades as a uniquely transformative period for the interest group system. To begin with, a number of the most notable changes have important historical analogues, as occasionally noted in Chapter 1. Political scientists and pundits of yesteryear observed, described, and lamented in their times many of the same changes attributed to the period under study in this volume. Second, the essential structure of the interest group system is much as it was at the beginning of the "modern" system of interest representation back in 1946 (see Salisbury 1986:148–149). In addition, the kinds of groups mobilized and their activities have also remained the same. In their influential study of organized interests, Kay Lehman Schlozman and John T. Tierney (1986:389) conclude that "in terms of both the kinds of interests represented and the kinds of techniques of influence mobilized, what we have found is more of the same." Of course the sheer quantitative impact of "more of the same" may have a significant qualitative effect on the character of contemporary politics. Such consistency deserves careful description precisely because it occurred in the face of so many compelling institutional changes during the 1970s and the Reagan-Bush 1980s.

Americans have always had mixed feelings about interest groups, variously referred to as factions, vested interests, pressure groups, the lobby, the "snake doctors of politics," the third chamber, the "despair of patriots," special interests, and by many other terms of disapproval. On the one hand, Americans have long accepted the inevitability of interest groups and on most occasions have celebrated the positive functions they serve in a representative democracy. On the other hand, since the nation's founding (if not before), Americans have been wary of the dangers that interest groups pose to the fairness and governability of the political

system. This triple tension among the inevitability, indispensability, and dangers of interest groups tends to further confuse our assessments of change and continuity in the interest group system.

Thus after we finish documenting and explaining the changes that have taken place and the continuities that have endured, we are still left to ponder if what we have is good or bad for the polity. Perhaps it is obvious, but even when there is agreement about a change in the interest group system, there is considerable disagreement about its political consequences. Two distinguished social scientists, David Knoke (1990) and Peter Drucker (1989), for example, agree that the so-called advocacy explosion of the past two decades has led to a "new pluralism" of interest group competition in the United States. Knoke (1990:231) praises this "cacophony of voices" as "our best hope for fate control in a society whose state is increasingly dominated by powerful institutions that are unaccountable to the citizenry." Conversely, Drucker (1989:102–103) views the new pluralism that dominates politics as parasitic and paralyzing. Such normative disagreements further diminish the certainty and clarity of our evaluations of the interest group system.

In the face of similar findings, in *Remaking American Politics* Hugh Heclo (1989:293) offered this rather comforting observation: "We should be open to the idea that trends in our political life appear contradictory and confused because they really are contradictory and confused." Thus in my bookend contributions to this volume—the first and last chapters—I am obliged to sort out change from consistency but feel less of an obligation to square all of this with some as yet unknown unified theory of interest group politics.

My introductory chapter focuses on the changes and continuities that have occurred in the interest group system and in Americans' attitudes toward it during the past two decades. The concluding chapter discusses the role that interest groups play in the American political system, assesses interest group influence, summarizes the changes and continuities in the interest group system that are revealed in the other fifteen chapters, identifies a set of paradoxes that spring forth from the contemporary politics of interests, and offers a few predictions about the future of interest group politics. A separate appendix gives a background essay on the changing state of interest group research.

Between my two chapters rests an array of distinctive and distinguished scholarship reflecting some of the most creative empirical, theoretical, and normative research on interest groups in the discipline. In the first part of the volume, three different approaches to the study of interest groups are advanced. What role do and should interest groups play in the processes of democratic governance? Jane J. Mansbridge argues that in addition to exerting pressure or adding a new force to the search for equilibrium

among interests, interest groups make an important contribution to deliberative processes—competitive, collaborative, and corporatist—by bringing to bear additional information and new perspectives and thus changing the preferences of individuals involved in political governance. Mansbridge devotes a healthy portion of Chapter 2 to a consideration of reform proposals designed to maximize the deliberative benefits of interest groups while minimizing their rent-seeking costs.

Is political power in the United States divided among competing interest groups, as the pluralism of David Truman and Robert A. Dahl forcefully maintained? Or is the policymaking process captured by organized interests, as Theodore J. Lowi, Mancur Olson, and other plural elitists contend? In Chapter 3 Andrew S. McFarland responds to this classic debate over the distribution of political power by arguing that new sources of countervailing power have emerged in the interest group system that help resist the decline to interest group stasis predicted by prominent critics of pluralism.

How do American interest groups stack up against interest groups in other representative democracies? American political scientists have a tendency either to dismiss comparisons to other polities, given claims of American exceptionalism, or to ignore as uninstructive such comparisons. In Chapter 4 Graham K. Wilson shows that there is much to learn by comparing American interest groups with their counterparts in Western Europe. Wilson finds that economic groups in the United States are less powerful than those in Western Europe, whereas noneconomic interests, such as the women's movement, are more successful than those in Western Europe. Wilson links the cause of these differences to the weakness of class and ideological variation as forces in American politics.

Part 2 focuses attention on the organization of interests. Why do people join and organize interest groups in the first place? In Chapter 5 Paul A. Sabatier compares the effectiveness of five different theories at explaining why people join interest groups in light of new data from one economic and one noneconomic interest group involved in a regional land-use controversy of national significance. Rejecting a number of these theories as flawed as complete explanations, Sabatier concludes that the best interpretation comes from an expanded exchange theory that relies on a variety of incentives for joining and organizing groups but views political beliefs and information costs as more important than traditionally thought.

How are groups organized in relationship to one another in various policy domains? Conventional wisdom describes such relationships in terms of spatial metaphors, such as the classic "iron triangle" or the now popular "issue network." Drawing on data generated from one of the largest studies ever completed of Washington-based interest groups, Robert H. Salisbury, John P. Heinz, Robert L. Nelson, and Edward O. Laumann explore the differences that exist in the policy domains of labor, agriculture,

energy, and health when it comes to interest representatives and government officials who participate, the effects of partisanship, the degree of specialization, and the specific tasks of interest group activists. The data they present in Chapter 6 reveals that the overall pattern of American politics and public policy is characterized by "concatenations" of groups and officials "too large, too heterogeneous, and too unstable" to resemble either issue networks or iron triangles.

One major change in the interest group system during the last twenty years points to the growing significance of states as new locations for interest group activity. Why has this happened? Do states vary in the extent of interest group activity? With what consequences for political governance? Based on an exhaustive study of interest groups in all fifty states, Chapter 7 contains responses to many of the questions raised by the heightened importance of state-level interest group activity. Clive S. Thomas and Ronald J. Hrebenar make a strong case for the significance of interest group activity at the state level, explain the explosion of interest group activity that has taken place there, and discover important regional differences in the organization and influence of interest groups at the state and regional levels.

Although the political mobilization of business during the 1970s and 1980s is a widely acknowledged change in the interest group system, less is known about why the mobilization took place. Finding rationalistic accounts of business mobilization inadequate, David Plotke develops an innovative explanation centered on the discursive development of a new growth model for business by business elites. In Chapter 8 Plotke shows that "political processes among business elites," as opposed to "given business interests," "were crucial to overcome collective action problems and provide a concrete definition of interests to guide strategic choices" during the decade.

The third part of this volume offers four assessments of interest group activity in three national political institutions: the presidency, Congress, and the courts. Chapter 9 is an analysis of the relationship between organized interests and the U.S. Congress, one of the traditional focal points for research on interest group politics. Drawing on the voluminous survey and interview work he completed with Kay Lehman Schlozman, John T. Tierney outlines the various techniques utilized by organized interests to influence congressional decisionmaking, assesses the differences in these techniques over time, and identifies the essential conditions under which interest groups are likely to exercise the most influence in the Capitol.

Political scientists have recently discovered the methods available to interest groups intent on influencing the presidency, but we are just beginning to fully comprehend the strategies presidents utilize in their policy-

making struggles with Congress. Mark A. Peterson's study of interest mobilization systematically evaluates "three group-directed strategies presidents have pursued to advance their political and programmatic interests." Peterson concludes Chapter 10 with the provocative observation that connections between the presidency and interest groups do not pose the threat to the rejuvenation of political parties other analysts frequently assume. The threat to governability in the United States, as Peterson would have it, is not the proliferation of interest groups but rather the increasing role of presidentially led mass politics.

In Chapter 11 Joan Lucco also treats the presidency as a venue for interaction with interest groups, evaluating the struggle and success of consumer groups in gaining access to the presidency as a means of achieving the goals of the consumer movement. Lucco examines the tenuous and often troubled relationship between consumer groups and the presidency from Kennedy through the first years of the Bush administration. Except during the Carter presidency, Lucco discovers, consumer groups were not very effective at gaining the advantages of access to the White House. The value of a president as a champion of group causes, it seems, turns on a president's general effectiveness—a conclusion relevant to the entire universe of citizen and public interest groups clamoring for attention from the Oval Office.

During the Reagan era it was widely supposed that conservative public interest groups would gain greater and greater political clout by using the liberal litigation strategy to further their political agenda. In the final chapter in Part 3 Karen O'Connor and Bryant Scott McFall dispute this contention by examining sponsored litigation and the submission of amicus briefs by conservative and liberal public interest groups from 1981 to 1987. In their analysis, supplemented by extensive personal interviews with key participants in the conservative public interest movement, O'Connor and McFall conclude that there was simply not as much conservative litigation during the Reagan era as previously thought, and what did occur was not always successful. After explaining why expected litigation did not take place, O'Connor and McFall predict that the Reagan era may yet be a boon for conservative legal talent and the long-term success of conservative litigation.

The fourth part of this volume brings together examinations of recent changes in the activities and influence of contemporary interest groups. How do we explain the success of the women's movement? Basing her ideas on a new study of legislation addressing women as a group and the degree of agitation on behalf of women's rights in the United States, Anne N. Costain compares two theories—the traditional resource mobilization theory and the political process theory—to answer this question. In Chapter 13 Costain argues that movement success is a function of the opportu-

nities and inducements provided by the government more than the mobilization of resources or traditional assertions of interest group power.

There is little question that the development of direct-marketing techniques has significantly enhanced the ability of organized groups to raise funds in pursuit of political goals. Much less is known about the effects of direct marketing on group membership and group influence. R. Kenneth Godwin investigates both of these issues in Chapter 14. His study of direct marketing shows that it brings more, but not significantly different, participants into interest group politics, solidifying the socioeconomic bias of the interest group system. Direct marketing also increases public attention on social and moral issues and radically changes the lobbying and electoral behavior of elites who depend on direct marketing for resources.

To what extent are interest groups influential in the determination of national public policy? Frequently based on collections of anecdotal evidence, speculative responses to this key question abound among political scientists and journalists alike. Paul E. Peterson's examination of special interest influence on government programs during the past twenty years moves beyond the speculative by examining the extent to which special interests have influenced government spending in residual categories of the federal budget. Peterson shows in Chapter 15 that after a decade of considerable success, the influence of special interests declined precipitously during the Reagan years. Noting that a complete reversal of this trend is unlikely in the near future, Peterson finds that special interests have influence on government programs only if fiscal opportunities are available and the structures of government decisionmaking are conducive to their goals.

At the risk of overstating the impact of Peterson's analysis, we might conclude that more interest groups are engaging in more activity and yet are receiving less of the government's largesse than ever before. I discuss this and other paradoxes and predictions pertinent to the American interest group system in Chapter 16.

This volume has been organized and written to appeal to undergraduates and, by necessity, their teachers; we also intend it to be valuable to research scholars and others interested in the politics of interests. This is not, to be sure, an edited textbook, although it fits well with many of the themes raised by available texts in the field. I willingly concede that as a presentation of original research along with a good deal of creative and exciting thinking, this volume is not comprehensive. It was not intended to be a wide-ranging compendium of articles on interest groups, nor do I think there are many good intellectual reasons for pursuing a subject matter in such a fashion.

As a consequence, certain important topics are not treated at length or, in a few cases, at all in this volume. Political action committees (PACs), for

example, are discussed in a number of places but have not earned treatment in a separate chapter. The literature on PACs is so voluminous that it should be relatively easy to locate the latest word about them from the research community by consulting the references in Chapter 1. There are other subjects, such as the impact of interest groups on local politics and the growing significance of transnational lobbies, about which much more needs to be said and discovered. That may be the purpose of a second edition. It's certainly one of the intentions of this volume to further research about the interest group system, to stimulate exploration at the boundaries of our current knowledge. Once we've accomplished this, it will be easier to bring you an update of *The Politics of Interests* a few years hence. Let us and the good people at Westview Press know how we're doing!

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