

## Book Reviews

S. E. Finer *The History of Government: Volume I Ancient Monarchies and Empires; Volume II The Intermediate Ages; Volume III Empires, Monarchies and the Modern State* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, pp. 1701.

This is political science on the grandest scale: three volumes that provide a history of successive forms of government throughout the world from the earliest times to the present day. Finer starts with the Sumerian city state of the third millennium BC and works systematically through major government forms since with a more or less common format for analysing each. Finer presents material on political systems that most political scientists will be completely unfamiliar with, and gives fresh insights into systems that they might have thought they knew. For example, he forces us to question the tidy account of oriental despotism provided by Wittfogel that is the received wisdom about government in many ancient civilisations. The brief but devastating criticism of Wittfogel (p. 154) is quite characteristic of the general approach Finer takes. His objective is not to discover any overarching pattern of development; he dismisses ‘modernization’ perspectives on political development, and positively eschews any ‘teleology’. Although the modern European state, has ‘become the model for the entire contemporary world’, the history of the state is not the history of the European state alone. One of the main objects of Finer’s three volumes is to ‘show the reader [the] antecedents’ of modern systems of government.

It would be mistaken to view the book simply as a valuable series of tableaux for an elaborate pageant celebrating 4,600 years of government. Finer’s three volumes are far more than this. ‘The History is not meant to be a simple chronological account of the different ways in which men have been governed. It is an exercise in comparative government’ (p. 34). One main purpose of the comparison is to highlight innovations in government. The list of inventions and reinventions includes ideas of Empire (Assyria after the 8th century BC), secularism (Persia 6th century BC), limited monarchy (Jewish kingdoms 11th century BC), bureaucracy (Chinese Empire 3rd century BC), citizenship and democracy (the Greek Polis 5th century BC), limited ‘republican’ government (Roman Republic 6th century BC), the supremacy of law (Roman Empire 1st century BC); a hierarchical church organization and representation (medieval Europe 11th century AD); procedurally limited monarchy (medieval England 13th century AD); constitutionalism and individual rights (the US and France after 1776). Some of these innovations had direct and lasting effects on subsequent government forms. Finer discusses not only the well-understood impact of crucial junctures in European and American government but also the pervasive impact of the Han Empire on subsequent Chinese government ‘up to and including the present day’. Other innovations, such as the supremacy of law and citizenship had an

indirect impact through their rediscovery at different times in different contexts.

The comparative method also enables Finer to look for regularities in forms of government. The *History* seeks to ‘generalise from the entire universe of past polities’ (my emphasis). Finer’s conceptual prologue, 96 pages long, sets out a variety of criteria according to which systems could be classified and examined for their common properties. Central is the classification of political systems according to the nature of their dominant personnel, characteristic political processes, and bases of legitimacy. The pure types produced by this classification are the Palace (an autocratic/monocratic form of government), ‘Forum’ (deriving legitimacy from popular support), ‘Nobility’ and ‘Clergy’ (in which these groups dominate). These four ‘pure’ types and their mixed forms have characteristic governmental features discussed in the prologue as well as in the body of the text. Politics in Palace systems is about commanding; in Forum systems it is about persuading. A mixed Palace/Forum system produces a ‘shotgun marriage of two contradictory principles: the intrigues and arbitrariness of the closed Palace world, and the corruption, falsification and terrorisation of popular opinion’ (p. 58). Broad similarities between, say, the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, medieval Italian states and Napoleon are never pushed too far but are used to develop insights into the logic and character of each.

Finer even develops two ‘laws’ for Palace systems (which includes the US presidential system). The first is the ‘law of proximity’, which states that ‘the more decisive the personal will of the ruler . . . the more influential are those who have close and continuous access to him’ (p. 490). As close advisers seek to increase their influence by excluding others from having access to the ruler, the ruler reacts against the increased restriction on sources of advice by creating a new inner core of trusted advisers. The second is the ‘law of inflated titles’; the old inner core of advisers and servants has grand formal titles, more people seek the prestige of these titles and the numbers holding them expand so they are not an inner core any more, so the ruler relies on those with formerly humble titles, and as these humble titles increase in status more people seek and acquire them ‘and the process begins, *da capo*’ (p. 491).

While Finer avoids ‘teleology’, in the last volume a clear pattern emerges: the progressive dominance of the European state model. He describes this not as the inevitable result of a defined process of development but through the musical analogy of the fugue (an analogy that crops up several times), referring to the integration of a set of themes that are first heard as tentative and sparse suggestions, occasionally echoing each other, and leading to a bold and distinctive flourish. Up until the sixteenth century it is possible to view different political systems of the globe as ‘worlds unto themselves’, but after that ‘interdependency and imitation proceed faster and faster . . . until, in 1750, the world stands on the brink of becoming one single state system: an *oikumene*’ (p. 1067). The distinctive secular, national state of Europe and the United States based upon popular sovereignty with formal guarantees of political and civil rights became the ‘paradigmatic modern state’ for the whole world. The clergy and the nobility were no longer viable as governing classes, pure Palace systems of government have become increasingly rare as the twentieth century has developed and government ‘therefore reduces itself to

two main types only – the Forum and the Palace/Forum’ (p. 1567). With the demise of totalitarian/authoritarian forms of government one might believe we are witnessing the final triumph of the Forum. Finer is rather tantalising on this point. In his prologue to the last section of his work he points us in the direction of such a conclusion, but adds that it ‘will be shown that, contrary to Fukuyama, this is not the ‘end of history’. It promises simply to be the beginning of a new cycle in the conflict between the Forum and Palace forms of polity’ (p. 1484).

What he means by this is not entirely clear because it refers to the two final chapters he had not completed before his death in 1993. One could at first regard the fact that Finer did not complete this later part of his *History* as less of a drawback than it might otherwise have been because this particular period has attracted the most attention from political scientists. Moreover, it was never the central purpose of the book to explain or comment on the present on the basis of the past. But it is precisely in applying his analysis to contemporary political systems that his insights are sorely missed. We can look for clues. Finer emphasises the importance of revolutions in technology on government forms and structures. Communications technologies enabled totalitarianism, but they also permitted the vast expansion of the welfare state. It is possible that in talking about a ‘new cycle’ he was alluding to the development of ‘Palace’ tendencies within modern ‘Forum’ state organizations and political parties. The final sentences of the book deal with Michels’ iron law of oligarchy, the claims for the moral superiority of the state over the individual and the ‘massive and ever-increasing bureaucracy’ of the welfare state. The new conflict between Palace and Forum that he had in mind might have been one that takes place within these bureaucratic organizations. Unfortunately, the clues he gives are not very strong.

If this book were simply a history of government, setting out how things were done in days long gone, it would be a worthwhile addition to any library, and would be borrowed on the odd occasion that anyone wanted to know how systems such as the Mughal Empire or the Ming Dynasty worked. What makes it a great book, and one that deserves to be read by all students of government, is Finer’s remarkable ability to classify and compare across the entire universe of known systems of government. It is not simply the scholarship and erudition that is breathtaking, but also the confident, clear and imaginative use of comparative tools to describe the significance of the systems of government – their similarities, differences, regularities and irregularities. We owe a great debt to Catherine Jones Finer, Jack Hayward and the team of more than two dozen advisers for producing a fluent manuscript which bears no trace of the initially varying state of completion of its different parts.

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W. Russell Newman, Lee McKnight and Richard Jay Solomon *The Gordian Knot: Political Gridlock on the Information Highway*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1997, 264 pp, £16.95.

If this book makes telecommunications and media regulators sleep a little less soundly in their beds it will have achieved its purpose. The book chronicles a long line of consumer and user benefits delayed because the application of

new communications technology, particularly the digital revolution, has been held back by a combination of misdirected regulation and the efforts of producers to maintain and abuse positions of market dominance in their own field. Regulatory capture and the incapacity of politicians to deal with highly complicated and detailed regulatory issues completes the picture.

The story is told almost exclusively in terms of the American experience with a few sideways glances towards Europe and Japan. But the history, the analysis and the policy prescriptions are relevant to all countries including the United Kingdom. Particularly useful in the historical account is the exploration (in chapter 2) of the ‘information highway’ metaphor with its implication that modern communications can be treated in some way analogously to the construction of 19th century railways, where the modern day regulator benignly replaces private armies securing access routes, and spats with regulators replace shoot-outs. The limitations of the highway metaphor, for example, in failing to distinguish between physical networks and logical networks, are made abundantly clear.

The policy prescription is about regulatory exit. The authors make the case for competition and anti-trust law taking over from the regulators. They see this not simply as a long-term objective but one to be targeted immediately with the regulators charged with actively hastening their own demise. The authors prefer the risks attached to immediate reliance on competition law to the risks associated with the halfway house of semi-regulated and semi-competitive markets (p. 24). Will competition do the trick? The answer given is that digital technology has broken down traditional industry and sectoral distinctions so that all communications markets are, in principle, now fiercely contestable in the new electronic market place and even dominant players will be subject to continual pressure from new entrants. Chapter 1 outlines the convergence taking place. And, if abuse of market position occurs, for example in standard setting, the authors suggest that the prospect of a prison sentence will focus the minds of CEO’s in ways that a regulator never can. The authors admit that competition will not be what CEO’s have in mind, but, ‘policy makers must abandon the regulations on entry and exit, on prices, and on mandated services at the outset, and focus on nurturing and protecting meaningful competition’ (p. 25).

Before supporters of the free market and regulatory exit get too excited, the authors tell another story. It is the story of the massive investments made by the American government in bringing about the communications revolution – investments in secure military communications, air defence systems, nuclear power and later in the space race (Chapter 3). Here they suggest a different lesson – the continuing need for government to play a pro-active role in building a national and global information infrastructure, not by government planning or building, but by for example, investments in education and skill levels (p. 152). The other lesson they offer is that market processes alone will not bring about the open architecture and open access they espouse unless the government actively monitors and enforces competition, ‘The role of public policy in defining the nature of the market is critical’ (p. 255).

The analysis in this book is of great interest to all those concerned with regulatory economics, particularly communications and media regulation. In

addition, the policy prescriptions are of great relevance to the current debates about the necessary reforms to Britain's existing structure of regulation as well as to Europe as it ponders the problem of how to ensure compatibility between different approaches to regulation across the Single Market. The risk of the semi-regulated and semi-competitive market place seems particularly pertinent.

If there is a limitation of this book for a European audience it is in its rather too rapid treatment of the case for 'abandoning' public service and public interest arguments for regulation. The public interest is equated mainly with questions relating to universal access, where the authors make a compelling case for saying that regulation is no longer needed (even for example in relation to the set-top box) and should be replaced by their Open Communications Infrastructure (OCI) approach. But such issues as culture, content and privacy receive scant attention – partly because technology makes regulatory enforcement impossible. They agree with the saying that 'the Internet treats censorship as a broken connection and works around it' (p. 43). Even if this is correct, the question of whether there are existing legal remedies available to counter abuses in an open communications market or whether legal instruments need sharpening remains unexplored in this book. The other part of their objection to the politicians' preoccupations with content issues is simply that it distracts from the more important public interest to be served by achieving rapid progress towards the electronic market place.

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André Blais, Donald E. Blake and Stephane Dion *Governments, Parties, and Public Sector Employees: Canada, United States, Britain and France* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), Pp. 189. \$35.00 hardback; \$17.95 paperback.

This book addresses one of the traditional questions of political science – do parties make a difference? Most studies on this topic, for example those of Richard Rose and Frank Castles, have addressed this question in relationship to the services that governments provide to their citizens. Blais, Blake and Dion address the question more in the context of government itself: Does party control of the government matter for the treatment of public employees by their employer, the government of the day? More specifically, are the numbers of public employees, the wages paid in the public sector, and the rights of workers in the public sector affected by partisan control of government? This is an ambitious study that attempts to answer the question of whether party makes a difference in four political systems – Canada, the United States, Britain and France – and whether the effects hold up over most of the post-war period.

There is a great deal to commend this study. It marshals a substantial amount of evidence about the extent and nature of public employment in these four systems. The evidence presented is both quantitative and qualitative, and their discussion of the findings demonstrates a thorough understanding of the public sector in all four countries. In particular, the authors do an outstanding job of explaining within a very constrained space the nature of the party

systems and their likely impact on public employment. The authors also demonstrate the way in which quantitative findings in comparative research must be understood in light of the context in which those findings emerge. Further, they do an excellent job in pointing out that the effects of party in most cases are systematic, with little independent effect of particular chief executives, even seemingly extreme ones such as Thatcher or Mulroney. They also are very sensitive to the peculiarities of the American separation of powers system in dealing with public employment, although not having the Republican Congress of the 1990s in their period of analysis omits a crucial period.

There are, however, some vexing problems in the research reported here. One is in the presentation of the details of public employment. The nature of public employment is a much more difficult definitional problem than they make it appear (see, Richard Rose *et al.*, *Public Employment in Western Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 1985)). In particular, the manner in which the authors define public employment introduces problems for comparison. First the authors exclude defense from their definition of public employment. The justification offered, mainly that it somehow is different from the rest of government, is reasonable but excludes a major portion of the public sector, especially in the United States. In each case the employees, especially civilians are governed by almost exactly the same laws as those affecting other public employees, so why leave them out?

Secondly, by having two federal and two unitary systems the range of positions covered by central government employment tends to be very different, and hence there are real problems of comparability. Surely those differences are greater (and more likely to confound statistical results) than the presumed differences between defense and non-defense employment. In particular, systems with large numbers of industrial and serviceemployees (France and Britain) employed by the central government should be expected to have different patterns of employment change in an era of downsizing than those with many fewer employees of those types (the United States and Canada). Further, they should be expected to have very different patterns of labor relations and even political rights. In some ways these differences make the general finding of a pronounced impact of party on the treatment of public employees all the more compelling. On the other hand, the findings might have been different (especially in the United States, I suspect) if a broader range of public employees were considered.

One can quibble about other aspects of the research design and the manner in which the results are reported, especially the lack of systematic presentation of the impact of control variables. Those quibbles do not undermine the fundamental importance of this study. It is one of the few attempts at the systematic analysis of public employment and its relationship with politics.

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Steven V. Monsma and J. Christopher Soper *The Challenge of Pluralism: Church and State in Five Democracies* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997, hardback, (\$52.50); paper (\$21.95), 208 pp. plus preface and index.

In the comparative study of public policy, the problem of religion and state is among the most neglected of topics. Although religion has received considerable attention in electoral studies and in comparative research about democratization, it has seldom attracted the notice of public policy analysts. For that reason if no other, scholars should welcome the publication of this book. Following an introduction that raises a set of overarching questions and offers a normative standard by which to judge the way polities cope with religious pluralism, the authors provide chapter-length profiles of church-state policy in the United States, Holland, Australia, England and Germany. Facilitating cross-national comparisons, each chapter begins with a capsule history of religion and state, and then explores the present legal status of religion in the polity, the level and protection of the free exercise of religion, the state and religious education, and the role of religion in the nonprofit service sector. The profiles rest primarily upon scholarly materials and government data; the authors have also interviewed some leading authorities in each of the countries other than the United States.

As a sourcebook, this volume is without peer. The authors have done a fine job of assembling a remarkable array of material and fashioning it into a coherent whole. Unlike many authors who promise a framework in chapter 1 and abandon it early in chapter 2, Monsma and Soper deliver on their pledge to evaluate common problems in the five democratic states. For each country, they ask about the degree to which believers are permitted to disregard public law in the name of religious beliefs, the effort by the state to promote consensual religious values that reinforce democratic orientations, and the safeguards by which the state maintains strict neutrality among religious groups and between religious and secular organizations. The lodestone is Monsma's theory of 'positive neutrality.' Under this standard, the state is enjoined to treat religious forces exactly as it does other social formations, neither conferring exclusive benefits on religious institutions nor barring them from any perquisites routinely available to secular institutions. The compelling framework and a dedication to clear prose make the book easy reading. Although the authors occasionally argue beyond their data, the chapters generally stick closely to the facts of each case. I will not hesitate to recommend this volume to students or colleagues who want to know how questions of religion and state are dealt with in different national contexts.

All five nations receive high marks for religious liberty – an ideal easy enough to declare but challenging to implement – and most seem to satisfy the neutrality standard. England's establishment, partial though it is, clearly fails the standard and Germany's use of government agencies to collect a church tax gives religion there the coercive power of the state. In those same countries and the otherwise exemplary Netherlands, the treatment of relatively new religious minorities such as Muslims and Sikhs also falls short of the authors' exacting standards. Australia's excellent record in church-state relations is marred only by the failure to embody religious free exercise in statutory or constitutional form. By contrast, the United States is clearly the



outlier in terms of state neutrality. Even though American politicians treat religion with delicacy and respect and religion plays a vigorous social role, the United States is judged to hinder religious freedom more than the other four countries. The interpretation of the ‘free exercise’ clause of the Constitution by the U.S. Supreme Court has given public authorities considerable latitude to infringe the religious rights of individuals. Worse yet, according to the authors, the radical separationism that guides Court decisions under the ‘no establishment of religion’ principle constitutes state favoritism to secularism. By stripping public schools of all traces of religion, denying state support to denominational education and restricting religious organizations from providing social services, Monsma and Soper contend that American policy actually disadvantages the religious perspectives.

Although the claims are made with care and intelligence, I found the chapter on the United States the least satisfactory. Although I share the authors’ distaste for the Supreme Court’s recent free exercise rulings, we clearly part company when they claim (citing with approval the late Justice Stewart) that rigid devotion to church-state separation by the U.S. Supreme Court amounts to the virtual establishment of ‘the religion of secularism.’ This is not secularism as aggressive anti-clericalism, they concede, but rather its ‘implicit promotion as a latent ethos or force’ (p. 33). If the worst that can be said against the current policy is that it implicitly endorses a latent ethos, then one might ask what religion has to complain about. But I do not think they have made the case even at that level. By minimizing religious exercises in state schools and restricting faith-based agencies from proselytizing when they spend public money, one can argue that the United States conveys the greatest respect for religious tradition by leaving it beyond the reach of the state altogether. Precisely because Americans take their religion so seriously and because the United States is religiously pluralistic to a degree unrivalled by the other nations in the study, virtually any public recognition of religion will amount to taking sides. Given the manifold ways public authorities evince generalized respect for religious tradition – in public rhetoric, generous tax provisions that amount to subsidies, aggressive protection of religious property through ‘hate crime’ laws, and allowance for religious holidays just to mention a few – they can hardly be said to promote secularism even implicitly and as a latent ethos.

The root cause of my disagreement is the suitability of the neutrality standard. In holding the state to a ‘positive’ standard vis-a-vis religion, the authors maintain that it is not sufficient for government authors to avoid interfering with the exercise of religious rights. Rather, they impose upon the state a positive obligation to promote religious vitality and enable people to exercise their religious freedoms. This means that the state should not simply permit parents to choose alternative schooling that reflects their particularistic religious values, the current understanding in the United States. Rather, the government must help make such schooling a reality by directly funding sectarian schools or inviting religious leaders to offer voluntary religion classes on public school premises. These models are borrowed directly from the policies of the other four cases. As the authors recognize, this is a call for the United States to abandon liberal individualism with its ‘negative’ understanding of liberty as the absence of government



intrusion. But they do not admit just how fundamentally this principle challenges American political culture. For example, under their logic a legal right to abortion goes beyond the absence of restriction to entail a state commitment to fund abortion facilities with public money. The state would not guarantee free speech merely by avoiding censorship but would be obliged to subsidize forums where unpopular speech could be heard. Instead of mandating unpaid maternity leave or encouraging child care by tax deductions, their conception of 'positive' liberty would compel the state to pay directly for both. Now there is much to be said for a more expansive definition of freedom beyond the bounds of classic liberalism but it would surely mark a major departure from the distinctive political tradition that has long dominated American public discourse. If the authors want to make such a case, to call on the United States to embrace the communitarian ethos that has prompted the four other countries to offer a much more comprehensive array of social welfare benefits, they owe it to readers to make this position explicit. If they intend to restrict positive liberty solely to religious rights, to borrow selectively from the political culture of the other nations, then it would seem they are violating the very neutrality standard by which they judge the policies of the five nations in this study.

This volume is driven primarily by normative concerns, a decision that accounts for the absence of any systematic effort to explain cross-national variations in public policy toward religion. To the extent they address such concerns, the authors seem to believe that church-state policy reflects the organic evolution of each society and is explained by history. Readers who are looking for theories of the structural or political determinants of church-state policy will not find them in this volume but will need to turn to more theoretically-oriented works such as David Martin's classic *A General Theory of Secularization* (1978). Instead, *The Challenge of Pluralism* offers a series of well-executed portraits of five nations that attempt to harmonize the religious sentiments of their citizens with the demands of public policy. Warts and all, that is no small achievement in a field so bereft of comparative research.

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Jelle Visser and Anton Hemerijck *A Dutch Miracle: Job Growth, Welfare Reform and Corporatism in the Netherlands*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997. 205 pp. ISBN 90 5356 2710

As many European countries began to enter a period of severe unemployment in the mid-1990s, attention came to focus on the Netherlands, a country whose dramatic reduction in unemployment seemed to defy the trend. Popular news media, including *Die Zeit*, *Le Monde* and *The Economist* exhorted policymakers to pay closer attention to the Dutch miracle. Encouraged by the international attention paid to their country, Jelle Visser and Anton Hemerijck set out to bring the story to an international audience.

Unfortunately for the authors, at about the time the book appeared in print the bloom had fallen from the tulip. Closer examination revealed that the Dutch miracle offered less than originally was thought. A carefully researched study published by the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin concluded that the Dutch reforms were nothing more than a shell game, shifting the jobless from

unemployment to the disability rolls. *The Economist* tersely retracted its earlier endorsement of the Dutch miracle and the issue left the public stage. Just as well, if we are to believe the two authors of this volume. According to Visser and Hemerijck, there were many important reforms in the Netherlands, but the real reason for the employment miracle can be traced to a fortunate improvement in the economic climate, not to any conscious set of policy initiatives. Though they adhere to the depiction of the Dutch employment situation as a miracle rather than a shell game, they conclude that the reasons for the miracle offer few lessons for policy makers in other countries.

*A Dutch Miracle* provides a detailed and accurate account of the major reforms of Dutch labor relations and social welfare programs during the past two decades. The study reveals a pattern of reforms familiar in many countries. In the area of labor relations, decentralization of collective bargaining and wage restraint reduced the power of the unions. Decentralization and wage restraint began as the objectives of employers who, with the strong support of a series of bourgeois governments, were able to realize their objectives.

The Dutch labor market has also been transformed in the past two decades. The authors document a rise in part-time employment, a dramatic increase in employment in the service sector, and a rapid entry of women into the workforce. The three developments overlap. Women are taking part-time jobs, and often in service industries. The result, the authors note, is a 'one-and-a-half jobs model' (p. 20), whereby households rely on the income from one full-time and one part-time worker, or where both income earners are employed part-time.

In welfare reform, Dutch policymakers instituted a wide array of reductions in benefits that actually helped to dampen union wage demands. Reductions in sickness, unemployment and survivor benefits became the focus of collective bargaining agreements. Because they were so busy trying to fill the holes the government had poked in the safety net, unions had little time left to make wage demands. The authors offer two interpretations. On the one hand, they accurately recognize that the government's support for the employers *forced* the unions to temper their wage demands (p. 106–7). On the other hand, the authors suggest that wage restraint was voluntarily pursued by the unions in a show of goodwill and industrial consensus (pp. 41 and 108). These conclusions are incompatible and the evidence tends to support the former rather than the latter.

Confusion over the interpretation of the evidence raises doubt about the authors' attempt to provide a theoretical explanation for the Dutch miracle. Borrowing from Peter Hall's framework for understanding policy change, the authors argue that Dutch policymakers succeeded in reforming the welfare state because they thought seriously about problems and how to solve them, and because the actors strove vigorously to break deadlocks in corporatist negotiations. But, rather than give all the credit to virtuous policy leaders, the authors assert that success may often result from simple luck. Borrowing from Machiavelli, Visser and Hemerijck insist that *fortuna* played a substantial role in the success of the Dutch employment machine.

In sum, this is an excellent summary and description of welfare reforms that have been implemented in the Netherlands during the past two decades.

For those interested in the details of this often neglected country, the book will be a valuable reference. But those who wish to understand the contemporary realities of Dutch politics may find the interpretation confusing and contradictory. And those who wish to look to the Netherlands for lessons to borrow would be well-advised to heed the authors' own admonition, '[the Dutch experience] does not add up to a model that can serve as a policy example for others to follow . . . many of the changes made were expedient, short-term responses to immediate crises' (pp. 184–5).

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