

**Sharpe, L.J. and Newton, K. *Does Politics Matter? The Determinants of Public Policy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. Pp. XVIII, 249. £19.00**

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Updated tables and diagrams, maps, and a bibliography close the volume. This handbook remains a basic reference for the shelves of scholars of Upper Canadian history.

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Roussopoulos, Dimitrios, ed. *The City and Radical Social Change*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1982. Pp. 352. \$12.95 (paperback). \$22.95 (hardcover).

Nothing dates so quickly as the writing of a failed revolutionary. Half the essays in this book express the revolutionary hopes of the militants associated with the Montreal Citizens Movement in the 1970s. Most of these essays were originally published in *Our Generation*, and they reflect the squabbles and debates of the time — largely from the perspective of the “libertarian socialists.” Despite the theoretical sophistication of some of the contributors — especially Stephen Schecter — their analyses seem unconvincing, because we have to read them now in light of subsequent events. Who can take seriously the hopes of these 1970s radicals when Bourassa is again Premier of Quebec, and the Parti Quebecois has abandoned its ostensible commitment to social democracy?

The most useful papers in this book have nothing to do with Montreal: a nice summation of Manuel Castells early work, by Fred Caloren; a pair of good papers by Mike Goldrick and Bill Freeman on urban reform in Toronto in the 1970s; and a couple of essays on urban development in Hamilton and Ottawa-Hull (the latter an especially meaty case-study of Campeau's Les Terrasses de la Chaudiere). The Toronto articles make a nice contrast with the ones on Montreal, in both style and substance. They reveal the less ideological character of reform politics in Toronto, and they do so in a dispassionate, analytic tone, which is a welcome relief from the polemics about Montreal.

Reflecting on the experience of reform politics in Toronto and Montreal in the 1970s, one is struck by the inverse proportion between political substance and ideological sophistication. Obviously, the Toronto reformers had much more impact on their city than their Montreal counterparts. The latter were voices crying in the wilderness, whose debates (at least as reported here) became increasingly sophisticated as they got further removed from political reality. As abstract theory, some of the analyses are rather persuasive, but they rarely touch ground with the reality in Montreal. One suspects that these people would be saying exactly the same things if they were living in Miami or San Antonio. (Indeed, the “urban crisis” is often identified as a “North American” phenomenon: the specifically Canadian context is virtually

ignored.) It is ironic that analyses emphasizing the importance of *local* struggles should convey so little sense of place and context, and suggest so much the imposition of abstract theories on recalcitrant facts.

There is nothing in this book that sheds much light on urban politics in the 1980s. In that respect, it is hopelessly dated. However, it may be of considerable interest to future historians who want to analyze the radical thinking about urban politics that developed in the 1970s. They may not find it as edifying as it seemed at the time.

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Sharpe, L.J. and Newton, K. *Does Politics Matter? The Determinants of Public Policy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. Pp. XVIII, 249. £19.00.

Over the past twenty years an enormous number of studies have been produced analyzing policy outcomes and attempting to evaluate the importance of different factors in determining these outcomes. The major focus of this debate has been on whether socio-economic factors or political factors can best explain policy outcomes. The major thrust of *Does Politics Matter?* is to argue, both theoretically and on the basis of an empirical analysis of English and Welsh local government expenditures and policies, the importance of politics. The debate has the fascination and irritation of all good academic debates — delight in the imagination and intelligence focussed on very detailed questions but the occasional thought that too much attention is being given to essentially trivial points.

*Does Politics Matter?* has the advantage of not merely presenting statistical material with little discussion or interpretation. Sharpe and Newton do analyze considerable amounts of statistical material but they have clearly tried to keep control of their data. The book is eminently readable — and that's not true for all studies that are based on so much statistical material.

Their main contributions to the overall debate relate to two areas, defining socio-economic factors in terms of the locality as a whole and, secondly, the better definition of political factors. The two are linked, as their redefinition of the way to measure socio-economic factors relates to their understanding of the political process. The traditional method of using socio-economic variables which relate to individual characteristics of the population is flawed because, as Sharpe and Newton argue, “it assumes that government is mainly engaged in reflecting the objective socio-economic characteristics of its citizens” (p. 20). As governments also have

functions to perform that do not necessarily relate to the socio-demographic characteristics of the population, better measures must be found to see how socio-economic factors are translated into policies. In order to do so, Sharpe and Newton make use of two criteria that relate to cities as entities — their position in the urban hierarchy and their social and economic role within the national economic system.

Relating services and expenditures to the city's position in the urban hierarchy is done to take account of the fact that bigger cities offer a wider range of services. The authors' empirical examination bears this out — certain services (libraries, refuse, special education, police) have high levels of spending from cities high in the urban hierarchy. The authors argue two reasons for these links — larger cities do provide certain specialized services and larger cities are used by a wider network of population which, in itself, increases the cost of certain services.

The second criteria used is that of the particular social and economic role played by the city in the national economic system. Cities differ in their economic base and these differences are of importance in determining the kinds of expenditures and service levels that the governments engage in. The authors determine four types of cities — industrial, commercial, residential and, a somewhat special case, cities where tourism is particularly important. The influence of these types on expenditure levels partly relates to demographic considerations (seaside resort towns have the largest retired population and they also spend the least on children and education), but also partly to constraints imposed by the role the city plays in national economic terms. Once again the measurement used is compatible with the authors' understanding of the political process — local governments decide on a package of services to be offered and these decisions are not merely an abstract transmission of the individual characteristics of the population, they imply a decision of the government. The city has therefore a collective identity and this is what Sharpe and Newton have reflected in their measures.

The book also contributes to the debate over the determination of policy outcomes by refining the way in which political variables are measured. Sharpe and Newton distinguish between the influence of the parties and the influence of the party system. The results of their empirical investigation indicate the importance of politics — both parties and the party system influence expenditures. According to the authors' results it does make a difference who governs — “the Left party (Labour) tended to spend more on the ameliorative and redistributive services and the party of the Right (Conservative) tended to spend less on such services and more on the non-distributive services” (p. 214). But when parties have only narrow majorities they tend to be cautious and the link between ideology and spending is less evident. Perhaps not surprising results, but considering the number of studies that have argued that political factors are of little

significance to policy outcomes, it is important to see confirmation of the importance of politics.

It is interesting to reflect on the application of these findings to the Canadian context, particularly given the still existing built-in resistance to considering local government as political in this country. True we don't have Labour and Conservative parties as such at the local level but we do have municipal councils with people on them holding very different views on priority service areas and on the appropriate role for government. Yet the public sees only very vaguely that these differing views translate themselves into differences in what the local government decides to do. Arguments for the introduction of more organized parties at the local level here have often been made in terms of voter clarification. *Does Politics Matter?* reminds us that differing political visions also influence policy outcomes. This is an important conclusion given what looks to be a slow but persistent movement towards the more formal representation of political parties at the local level in the largest Canadian centres.

*Does Politics Matter?* is an important question. Sharpe and Newton do not resolve this question but their book does permit us to see how an analysis of policy outcomes can provide useful material for those of us who prefer to answer in the affirmative.

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Harvey, David. *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Pp. xix, 293. Tables, maps, illustrations, index. \$22.50 (U.S.).

Harvey David. *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Pp. xvii, 239. Tables, maps, index. \$22.50 (U.S.).

“The question of space,” David Harvey declares, “is surely too important to be left exclusively to geographers.” To argue this, Harvey has gathered together, and in some cases revised, a number of his previously published articles; supplementing these are several new studies, including an essay on mid-nineteenth-century Paris adumbrated in his last book, *The Limits to Capital* (Chicago, 1982). Indeed, as a whole, these two volumes follow that recent contribution to Marxist theory, elaborating at greater length upon the operation of capitalism in and across space. Too great a concern for the production process and insufficient for the circulation of capital, especially in consumption, have obscured the signif-