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The Representative Republic, by Ferdinand A. Hermens

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BOOK REVIEWS

THE REPRESENTATIVE REPUBLIC. By Ferdinand A. Hermens. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. 1958. Pp. xiv, 578. \$7.50.

Half a century ago most Americans and many other peoples took it for granted that the world was moving toward our kind of government. Developments since that time have made it hard to hold this faith.

While we entered World War I with an enthusiastic conviction that by winning we would be making the world safe for the spread of democracy, in World War II we fought, by contrast, for little more than the defeat of Hitler and his followers. Even the Four Freedoms of the Atlantic Charter, which were as idealistic as any statement of our aims in that war, said nothing about Freedom of Self-Government. Recent history, including developments of this past year in such areas as Pakistan and Iraq, shows representative government losing rather than gaining ground.

The average preoccupied American may still assume that our system of government is the world's most advanced and that it will be copied by other nations as soon as they pass through the evolutionary process which "leads up to it," but the student of history and government who tries to appraise the situation objectively is hard pressed to generate comparable confidence. The question of whether representative government can survive in the face of multi-pronged challenge from authoritarian alternatives is one which deserves far more study than it has yet been accorded.

In *The Representative Republic*, Notre Dame professor Ferdinand A. Hermens essays this job of analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of various types of representative government. The result is an important book which deserves a wide audience.

Hermens' thesis is that a representative democracy, united under a "government by leadership," can and should be able to withstand any challenge from alternative systems with their "government by rulership." The only requirements are that there be minimal socio-economic foundations and that the governmental machinery be properly designed. In developing his argument the author presents an enormous amount of information about different examples of representative government.

The first part of the book presents a conceptual analysis of various types of government, liberally illustrated with references to particular

historical developments. The last half describes the specific governments, past and present, of a great number of countries. The evidence as presented strongly supports the author's contention that most representative governments which have fallen were burdened with undesirable structural arrangements and that properly designed representative governments have succeeded in withstanding many challenges.

The structural imperfection about which Professor Hermens has been most concerned in his previous writings and to which he devotes much attention in this book is proportional representation. He argues that this device by which legislators are elected from multi-member districts in such a way as to reflect the various groupings and shades of opinion among the electorate has been the key factor in the weakness and downfall of many representative governments over the years. Because proportional representation, or P.R., stresses the things on which citizens disagree rather than those on which they agree, Hermens contends that it makes difficult or impossible the development of the broad consensus on which sound representative government must rest.

Many American political scientists in recent decades have tended to support P.R., both in American city government where parties can play no more than a fraction of the role they play in larger scale government, and in other areas of the world where multiple cleavages within the electorate have worked against the establishment of a two-party system. Most of this country's students of government, however, were never particularly involved with the question of P.R.'s desirability and by now have little or no interest in it. It is unfortunate but true that many people who should read Professor Hermens' new book will refrain from doing so because of a feeling that whatever is in it will be erected on the back of a "dead horse," which is the way they regard the controversy about P.R.

The truth is that Hermens' book deviates sharply and productively from the current focus of American political science, with the analysis of P.R.'s evils being only a minor facet of a broad-gauged effort to reorient our study of government. American political science has shown a long-term tendency to concentrate on studies of such things as political processes, ideologies, and administrative operations while paying little attention to problems of governmental structure and the impact which this structure has on policy. It is Hermens' thoroughly sound thesis that until we understand fully the great influence which structural relationships can have on governmental policy we shall be unprepared to put

representative government in the position of strength it must have to meet the challenges which now confront it. If fault is to be found with Professor Hermens' approach, it is that he has over-shifted in emphasis to the detriment of external pressures on government.

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