Passions and Interests

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Political parties and democracy comprise the interwoven strands of this book. Their coupling exists on three levels: personal, empirical, and theoretical.

Least important to the reader is the personal connection, but it does exist. Political parties and democracy have stirred both my intellectual interests and my emotional passions since I first became aware of the larger world of politics. Tammany Hall bordered my New York elementary school, which also served as the local voting precinct. The connection between political parties and democracy was overtly physical to me, even before it became theoretical.

On the empirical level, history and political science draw a more scientific connection. From James Madison’s creation of the first popular-based political party to yesterday’s newspaper, we see the relationship. The growth of political parties and the extension of democracy proceed along parallel tracks. Competitive political parties facilitate, although they do not guarantee, a considerable measure of popular involvement, control, and policy determination. Without them, government is more likely to evidence authoritarianism, violence, and repression. Rajiv Gandhi once said that India’s greatest political need was a strong opposition party; his subsequent assassination underlined the point in blood.

Most important is the theoretical connection, and this book is intended to bridge two areas within the discipline of political science: the study of political philosophy and the study of parties. Perhaps that bridge cannot be built or is poorly constructed here, and I will only cause dissatisfaction among two diverse groups of academic specialists. But I hope that the ideas here will be useful for both theorists and empiricists.

Exploring the relationship between political parties and democracy can enrich each of these subjects. Such a relationship has been the focus of some of the most insightful works in political science, beginning with the classic books of Michels and Ostrogorski, but it has been neglected for most of the second half of the twentieth century. Alan Ware suggests some explanations for the decline: “There was a fragmenting of research from about the 1950s onwards, so that those scholars who were concerned with
the nature of the concept of democracy . . . were no longer the same people
who had great expertise in the working of political institutions. Moreover,
interest in the empirical study of politics moved sharply away from insti­
tutions like parties to focus on other aspects of the political process."

As the troubled twentieth century nears its end, democracy and com­petitive parties are receiving renewed attention, and I believe this is an
appropriate time to again consider their relationship. This volume is my
contribution to that major task.

In writing this book, I have received much help. I am particularly
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continued to teach me about politics and political theory; and Carolyn Nes­
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this book.

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Scholarship, like all of life, requires love to flourish. If there is merit in this work, it has been nourished most of all by three family generations: my parents, Moe and Celia Pomper, and my second parents, Emanuel and Lillian Michels; my wife, Marlene, and my brother, Isidor; my sons, David, Marc, and Miles, and my new daughters, Rayna and Erika. Their love, I confidently hope, will nurture our continuing family. I dedicate this book to the passions and interests of the next generation.

G.M.P.
Canberra, 1991
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