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CONGRESS: ITS CONTEMPORARY ROLE,  
by Dr. Ernest S. Griffith. New York University Press,  
New York. Pp. vii, 193. \$3.50.

Estes Kefauver

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## Book Reviews

CONGRESS: ITS CONTEMPORARY ROLE, by Dr. Ernest S. Griffith.  
New York University Press, New York. Pp. vii, 193. \$3.50.

What great challenges face Congress today and is the national legislature measuring up to its new burdens and increased responsibilities?

Dr. Ernest S. Griffith, able director of the Legislative Reference Service of Congress, gives his answers in a brief (187 pages) and warmly human study of the role of the legislature in our constitutional system of powers balanced among the three branches of government.

He lists three principal challenges: World communism, the growing power of selfish special interests and—obviously the most serious to him—the danger that the authority of a technically competent bureaucracy “may transform an ostensibly democratic government into a dictatorship of civil service.”

Dr. Griffith concludes that Congress is meeting these challenges “remarkably well” and today is “at an all-time high in the ability and sense of public service and integrity of its membership.”

This book could only have been written by an “insider” who has associated intimately with members of the Senate and House over a long period. I know of no study of the national legislature that places so high a value on the personal, informal understandings that play a large part in its operations. As he puts it, “adaptation and custom frequently come to the rescue where organization is defective.” He seems to feel that this type of adjustment largely overcomes the strictures of outmoded procedures, the defects of the seniority system, the cumbersome channels of executive-legislature cooperation and other road blocks to congressional efficiency.

Perhaps Dr. Griffith’s outstanding contribution is the penetrating historical perspective given to the struggle for power between the executive and Congress: the change in nature and increase in variety of legislation now required to meet the needs of an industrialized democracy; the growth and “dispersiveness” of pressure groups and the growing importance of Congress—especially the House—in the conduct of international affairs.

Now that the Supreme Court "has accepted nationalism," the author sees Congress as the only remaining citadel for safeguarding the rights of the states. Because of the national character of bureaucracy, he says "it is to Congress that one must look largely for recognition of the state and local viewpoint when national legislation is framed and passed."

He is quite philosophical about bureaucracy—not bitter or under any illusions that it will decrease appreciably. He traces with swift strokes the development of a vast array of executive bureaus and agencies and the slowness of Congress in realizing that this condition challenged legislative authority.

His conclusion is that "Congress has mastered, or has provided itself with the tools to master, the problem of recapturing its constitutional role as the independent determiner of policy, a self-respecting co-equal of the bureaucracy, its legal master in policy matters . . . ."

As a tangent development, he coins an apt phrase, "government by whirlpools," to describe how common interest, buttressed by social contacts and personal friendships, create areas of power between blocs in Congress and agencies created by these blocs that can thwart the policies of even a strong president.

In this reviewer's opinion, the great weakness of the book is Dr. Griffith's indulgent view toward the inefficiency of present congressional procedure. He seems to fear that change may bring evils greater than the faults now admitted.

Despite this, the author is forced to admit that in the important areas of over-all fiscal policy, better control of pressure groups and economic planning, Congress is floundering. He tentatively suggests that the new Joint Committee on the Economic Report might be a device for partial solution to the lack of an integrated, national legislative program.

It seems also that the crucial problem of the almost intolerable work load of individual members is too quickly brushed aside with an almost casual "when all is said and done, the problem of the demands on his time remains—unsurmountable and probably insurmountable."

This reviewer believes ways must be found, and immediately, to give senators and representatives more time to concentrate on the ever increasing number of problems requiring congressional

attention and that even mechanical devices, such as electric voting, can help.

Dr. Griffith says that "given things as they are—the nature of the electorate, the size of Congress, the complexity, number and magnitude of the issues—Congressional organization and procedure do not come off badly."

This attitude has contributed to the failure of Congress to get the full benefits of the 1946 Reorganization Act and it is not responsive to the present demands on our national legislature. I feel that with his rich experience, Dr. Griffith could have made a more positive contribution to the improvement of congressional efficiency in this instance, but over all I recommend this book as important reading for those interested in their Congress—and that should include all of us.

*Estes Kefauver\**

GOVERNMENTAL ADMINISTRATION, by James C. Charlesworth. Harper & Brothers, New York, 1951. Pp. x, 713. \$6.00.

General studies in public administration are of relatively recent origin. The first text book on the subject was written by Leonard D. White in 1926, and in the following year W. F. Willoughby published his classic *Principles of Public Administration*. Since that time six other authors or groups of co-authors have published books on the subject, James C. Charlesworth being the most recent.

In the period between the two World Wars the works in this field reflected an effort to discover and enunciate "scientific principles" of administration. Explicitly or implicitly the writers accepted Willoughby's oft-quoted prefatory statement that "in administration there are certain fundamental principles analogous to those of any science." Many of the standards of organization and procedure that were recommended by administrative analysts and other authorities on the subject came to be regarded as fundamental principles that could be violated only at the cost of inadequate service or unnecessarily expensive operation. The several survey reports on state administrative reorganization, and the report of President Roosevelt's Committee on Administrative Management (1937) accepted almost in toto the basic precepts of organization that had been set forth by Willoughby

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