

Review Article

Ma. LOURDES G. GENATO

Geraint Parry. *POLITICAL ELITES*. New York: Praeger Publishers Incorporated, 1969. 169 pp.

Political Elites by Geraint Parry is a cursory introduction to the major and significant theories on the elites. The book cogently summarizes the contents of the works of representative classical-elitist and pluralist-elitist theorists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

In this volume, Geraint Parry presents a survey of a wide range of works and studies on elites and discusses the quintessence of these works, compares and contrasts the views therein, and places these works within the context of the evolution of elite thought.

At the outset, the book may be described as something more than a mere outline of significant elite theories or an annotated bibliography or review of various books, were it not for the author's scholarly presentation of the subject matter. A clear and substantial summarization of elite theories, the choice of variables for comparison, the selection of what can be considered as significant or insignificant theories, and the assertions on the contribution of such theories to the field of elite studies require thorough knowledge of the literature on the subject.

Geraint Parry appears to have met this criterion of knowledgeability to qualify him for this kind of work. He had been a professor on Political Elites at the University of Manchester and has written an article on "Elites and Polyarchies."¹

The author does not claim any ambitious aim in writing this volume on political elites other than that of "providing a critical account of both elitist theories, beginning with Mosca's *Ruling Class* and ending with Bachrach's *Democratic Elitism*."² The book does not begin with a definition of the concept elite but traces the usage of the word and such related terms as power elite, social elite, oligarchy and ruling class. He justifies the publication of the volume on the basis of the significance of elite studies — "political institutions, political behaviour, political power and political ideology all find a

¹The reviewer is instructor of political science at the University of the Philippines in Manila.

place in controversies surrounding the elites." It is, therefore, a study of "elites in politics."

It is in the same breadth that one can judge the significance of Parry's *Political Elites*. It is a book on books about elites. As such, one benefits from the information on significant studies on the subject, ranging from the earliest major works of Mosca and Pareto to those written till about 1965. By itself, it is neither an original theory on the elites nor a behavioral and empirical study. It is a survey of substantial material on the nature of the elites, presenting the mainstreams of thought, the conclusions and the methodologies of studies on the elites. As such, it provides a comprehensive background on the subject, which is necessary in the understanding of the direction of current studies on it. More contemporary materials (1966-75) have not been included, but this does not overshadow the value of the book as an incisive background on theories on elites.

The book is divided into six chapters representing the trend of thought of elite theorists.

The first chapter, "The Context of Elite Theorizing," introduces the reader to the matrix of social circumstances, which saw the beginning of elitist theories.³ Chapter II, "Classical Elitist Theories," is an exposition of the general features of what Parry considers to be classical texts, namely: Pareto's *The Mind and Society*, Mosca's *The Ruling Class*, and Michel's *Political Parties*. To these he adds Burnham's *The Power Elite*.⁴ Chapter III, "Elitism and Pluralism," brings to light the pluralist version of the nature of elitism.⁵ Chapter IV, "Empirical Tests of Elitist Theories," is a survey of empirical studies which have been conducted to test the validity of elite theories.⁶ Chapter V, "Criticism of Elite Concept," examines the attempts of both classical elitists and pluralists to provide more precise accounts of central terms in political science.⁷ Finally, Chapter VI, "Elites and Democratic Theory," reconciles the existence of the elites within the framework of democracy.⁸

Geraint Parry identifies the major issues around which elite theories revolve, namely, the nature and qualifications of the persons described as elites, the method of replacement and recruitment, the social matrix in which they are found, the types and classification of elites, and the approaches of the respective theorists.

In summarizing the contents of their works, Parry observes that the classical elitists view 'elites' as a minority in the population making the major decisions in society. However, the classical elitists

hold varying views as to the qualities needed to gain an elite position. Mosca and Michels believe that the elite's capacity to weld themselves as a cohesive force accounts for their power. Parry identifies this as the organizational approach, as distinguished from Pareto's psychological approach, Burnham's economic approach, and Mills' institutional approach. Pareto attributes the existence of elites to certain psychological and human attributes while Mills views the power of certain persons in society not as a personal attribute but from the significance of the institution to which they belong in society. Burnham is described by Parry as Marxist in his understanding that economic power is the basis of elite power.

The pluralists do not negate the existence of elites, but Parry observes that while the classical elitists see the social structure as analogous in shape to a single pyramid, the pluralist-elitists see it as a range of pyramids. Interest groups emerge as a result of the division of labor and each of them competes in politics; this accounts for the emergence of different types of elites — church elites, military elites, social elites, business and bureaucratic elites. The thread that connects all pluralist thought is the notion that the term "elite" now applies to the top persons in any group, club or activity so that it is more apt to speak of "elites in politics" than of "political elites."

Geraint Parry proceeds to cite a number of empirical studies which have tested the validity of classical and pluralist thought. The approaches that have been used in these studies are categorized into three: (1) the reputational approach, (2) the decision-making approach, and (3) the synthesis approach. Some of these empirical studies show concrete community situations where the elites may be found, i.e., their institutional positions. Some studies examine the social background and recruitment patterns of the elites. Representative of these types of studies are Sampon's *The Anatomy of Britain* and Paul Ferris' *The City*⁹ which looks at the city of London as the locus where the elites could be identified as those found in business and financial centers. These studies of the background of the elite tell more about the society in which the elite exists than the policies or politics which the elite will pursue. Jean Blondel's *Voters, Parties, and Leaders* is an exponent of studies on how far the elite is a microcosm of society in its social composition, its social structure, social classes and status groups.¹⁰ Other researches have dealt more on community power, using the reputational and decision-making approaches. Floyd Hunter's *Community Power Structure* shows a stage-by-stage selection of elites based on their

"reputation" for leadership in the eyes of those who nominated them. Robert A. Dahl's work on *Who Governs* tests the view that (1) power is concentrated as a result of the inequalities in the distribution of resources of influence in the community; and (2) power will be held by those who hold the greatest wealth. *Who Governs* describes the decision-making process in large part through the eyes of the major participants — how the problems appeared to them, what they believed to be the attitudes of supporters and opponents, and what they saw as alternatives.¹¹ Succeeding studies took off from Dahl and Hunter's studies incorporating various approaches.¹² The methodology and thrusts of these synthesis types of studies give an insight to citizens of the power structure which affects the nature and extent of their participation.

From his survey of empirical researches, Parry was consequently able to identify the conflicting issues in substantive conclusions about elites. He suggests an examination of assertions and initially gives the impression that he will make the analysis himself. But instead, Parry lifts the criticisms the authors have of each other around the issues he has identified. This provides an insight into the gaps in theory and empirical research on the issues of scope of influence of the elites, the appearance and reality of political influence, the nature of decision-making, cost of influence, and boundary problems within the system.¹³ According to Parry, the works, particularly of Agger and Presthus, suggest two trends — that the system be studied over time and that the leadership be examined in relation to the mass.

It is difficult to argue for or against any of the assumptions or assertions raised in the book without running the risk of reviewing the original classical works of the elitists, pluralists, or eclecticists included in the survey. This is because the author did not contribute his own views on elitism or pluralism. The entire volume is an exposition of the contents of the texts chosen by Parry to represent the mainstream of elite ideas. Even his criticisms and evaluation, if at all, are scanty, timid, and unpursued.

For instance, Chapter IV, "Empirical Tests of Elitists Theories," is not Parry's research to test the theories but a condensation of representative empirical researches. Chapter V, "Criticism of Elite Concept," is not Parry's critique but the criticisms of authors of each other's works.

It is in the last chapter, "Elites and Democratic Theory," where Parry seems assertive. Here, elite theory is reconciled with democ-

racy. Parry presents the streams of thought of the democratic elitists and radical democrats. Both are pluralists but the radicals introduce and emphasize the idea of citizen participation. The democratic elitists have, on the contrary, redefined democracy so as to accommodate an elitist situation where individual interest groups acquire power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.¹⁴

Parry is inclined to favor the position of the radical democrats which allows citizen participation in decision-making. But he refuses to bring the discussion towards a concrete proposition on the reconciliation of elitism, pluralism and democracy. This could have been the crowning glory of the volume. His familiarity with the literature on elites should enable him to come up with a critical evaluation of the theories which can be added as a final chapter to a subsequent edition. Or, better still, Parry could make a more original contribution to the study of elites.¹⁵

On the whole, the volume *Political Elites* is a summary of the essentials of the texts, pointing out the issues of convergence, similarity, parallelism or opposition of ideas. The capacity to do so is to Parry's credit. After all, this has been his express objective. If one is stimulated to disagree with the contentions of Parry, it would be well to do so on the basis of the original texts. The interested reader can check whether the summaries of Parry are accurate condensations of the original work. The danger that the volume offers is that it can discourage a lazier reader from having to go to the original.¹⁶

The volume offers the neophyte in elite studies, as well as the political or social science researcher, with a range of assertions and substantive conclusions on the nature of elites. On the theoretical level, the presentation of the thrusts of classical elitist thought, pluralism, democratic elitism and radical democracy can be useful in setting the framework of the research. The assertions of the exponents can very well be subjected to empirical verification. The methodology of the empirical researches of the studies surveyed can likewise be tested for its utility in given communities.

The scope of material surveyed by Parry is wide enough to enable the identification of areas for future research on elites. However, Parry has missed on some other studies which are just as significant and which are of current interest.

For instance, Lasswell's *Who Gets What, When and How*¹⁷ pinpoints who the elites are and the methods used by them as well as

the results thereof in political processes. Gerhard Lenski's *Power and Privilege*¹⁸ explains the emergence of the elites within the context of the stratification and distributive systems in given societies. Lenski uses historical, anthropological and sociological data to prove his assertions.

Also, the concept 'elite' has taken on a greater significance in relation to the issue of modernization and development. Recent studies have focused on the role of specialized or functional elites in political development and in political and social changes. Lipset and Solari's *Elites in Latin America*¹⁹ is a significant empirical study dealing with diverse aspects or types of elites — the religious, military, intellectual, bureaucratic elites — and their relation to the process of change in Latin America. Other contemporary studies assume the existence of specialized types of elites and consider their background, recruitment and base of power in regard to their role in nation building and in the development of specific economic, social or political systems.²⁰

With the continued and sustained interest in the study of "elites in politics" and "political elites," Geraint Parry's *Political Elites* stands as a critical review of what had been accomplished and sets off an understanding of current studies on elites.

NOTES

¹ Geraint Parry, "Elites and Polyarchies," *Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (November, 1966).

² *Times Literary Supplement*, June 26, 1969, p. 678.

³ This chapter takes into account the works of Italian sociologists Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca and the lectures of A.V. Dicey, Max Weber, Walter Bagehot and Marx.

⁴ Mosca, *The Ruling Class* (New York, McGraw Hill, 1939); S. E. Finer, *Vilfredo Pareto: Sociological Writings* (London: Pall Mall Press); Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (London: Putnam, 1942); Michel, *Political Parties* (Free Press, 1958); Mills, *Power Elite* (New York: Oxford Press).

⁵ The chapter surveys the works of A. F. Bently, *The Process of Government* (1908); Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); Robert Scott in: Lipset and Solari, *Elites in Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Allen Potter, *Organized Groups in British National Politics* (London: Faber, 1961); Nadel, "The Concept of Social Elites," *International Social Science Bulletin*, 8: 1956, 413-24. Parry also reviews works on specific types of elites and of military, business, and bureaucratic elites.

⁶ In addition to the studies of Mills and Dahl, Parry surveyed Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure* (New York: Anchor Books, 1963); Robert Agger, *The Rulers and The Ruled* (New York, Wiley, 1964); Robert Presthus, *Men at the Top* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); and Blondel, *Voters, Parties, Leaders*.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ This chapter includes a considerable number of contemporary studies among which are W. Kornhauser, "The Politics of Mass Society" (London: Routledge, 1960); Bachrach, *Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique*; Bottomore, *Elites and Society* (London: Watts, 1964); and Sartori, *Democratic Theory* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1962).

⁹Paul Ferris, *The City*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962.

¹⁰Some works cited are L. J. Edengir and D. D. Searing, "Social Background in Elite Analysis," *American Political Science Review*, LXI, 2, 1967; J. Blondel, *Voters, Parties, and Leaders*; John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic*, (a book on Canadian Elite); and Parry, pp. 105-106.

¹¹Parry, 109-114.

¹²See Robert Agger's *The Ruler and The Ruled*, a study of two communities in Western and Southern U.S.A.; and Robert Presthus' *Men at the Top*, which is a study of two small communities in New York.

¹³Dahl's *Modern Political Analysis*; C. Wright Mills' *Power Elite and The Sociological Imagination* look into the issue of scope of influence; Hunter's *Community Power Structure* and Agger's *The Ruler and The Ruled*, for appearance and reality of political influence.

¹⁴Books surveyed by Parry include Bachrach., *The Theory of Democratic Elitism*; T. Bottomore, *Elites and Society*; Sartori, *Democratic Theory*; and Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society*.

¹⁵*Times Literary Supplement*, June 26, 1969.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Harold Lasswell, *Who Gets What, When and How* (Ohio: World Publishing Company, 1958, 1965).

¹⁸Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1966).

¹⁹Lipset and Solari, *Elites in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

²⁰Some studies are: Finkle and Gable, *Political Development and Social Change* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966); and R. Agpalo, *The Political Elite and The People: A Study of Politics in Occidental Mindoro* (Manila: U.P. College of Public Administration, 1972).