

## Book Reviews

*Political Geography: A Contemporary Perspective.* R.D. Dikshit, New Delhi: McGraw-Hill, 1982.

*An Introduction to Political Geography.* J.R. Short, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1982.

Reviewer: *David Newman*

The renewed interest in political geography during the past decade has brought in its wake the problem of providing meaningful introductory texts to the discipline that cover the wide range of subject matter. Traditionally, political geography texts have concentrated exclusively on the structure of the state at a national and international level of analysis, with emphasis on description of such phenomena as borders, capital cities, and global strategy. The more recent concerns of political geographers in such issues as the role of the state at the regional and local levels of analysis, the nature of the urban political process, and the search for meaningful social and political theory to understand such spatial patterns have resulted in a number of more specialized texts that concentrate on the multidisciplinary approach to the study of those processes causing local territorial conflict. There has been no one text that has successfully integrated both the different spatial scales of analysis and the various approaches to the study of political process and landscape into an overall introduction for the student.

The volumes by Dikshit and Short present two contrasting approaches to the study of political geography. Dikshit offers a "contemporary perspective" to the discipline, a promising title. Nevertheless, he concentrates exclusively on those same traditional concerns of political geography, emphasizing the structure of nation states, core areas and capitals, and global strategic views. Indeed, Dikshit argues in his introduction that "the field of urban/local politics in geography to date does

not contain enough of an element of universalism to deserve a more detailed discussion" while "the study of the geographical aspects of international disputes . . . has remained neglected." As a study of the traditional political geographical concerns, the volume offers a number of elements additional to those found in other texts. Most specifically, the opening chapter, "History, Development, Nature and Scope of Political Geography," presents an introduction to development of the discipline in thought and time during the past century. Further, at the international level, Dikshit offers two chapters on his own research specialties, the geography of federalism and colonialism, both subjects having been little discussed previously. In the latter case, he offers some important suggestions for research into the way colonialism and neocolonialism have affected the structure of states in the Third World and the way in which the present international system can be understood through the nature of these processes. It is perhaps one of the major research frontiers within the overall national and international levels of traditional political geography.

In contrast, Short attempts to integrate the different spatial scales of analysis into an overall text. The volume contains three sections, dealing respectively with "the political geography of the world order," "the nation state," and "the local state." His discussion of the world order differs greatly in approach from that of Dikshit. Short discusses the two major international divisions of North-South and East-West, noting the processes of colonialism and imperialism that have brought about the former, and the rise of superpowers and their global allies as resulting in the latter. He then discusses the nature of the nation-state within a framework of capitalist and socialist states and their location within a global core-periphery structure. Finally, Short explains the major concerns of political analysis at the local and urban levels, again drawing on a range of social political theory to explain the processes at work. His overall theme is concerned with the nature of those processes in promoting uneven spatial development at all levels from the international to the local.

It is precisely in Short's attempt to present an integrative theme to political geography that the difficulties of such an approach are to be found. Within the confines of a short text, only the headlines may be touched upon, and the student may be left with the feeling that political geography contains numerous subsets, none of which has been fully explained. Short attempts to overcome this problem by offering uneven development as the main concern of the political geographer, in much the same way as Cox offers locational conflict as his central concern (*Location and Public Problems: A Political Geography of the Contemporary World* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1979]). Having been offered the overall

frame, the student would then be required to follow up with more specialized texts to gain a fuller understanding of the processes. Such texts are more common at the local and regional levels because of the inherently multidisciplinary nature of those attempting to understand the role of the local state and the universalism of social and political theory.

Although Dikshit presents us with yet another compilation of the traditional political geographical concerns, albeit with some interesting additional material, he offers little in the way of understanding process, more specifically the roles of ideology, power, and conflict in affecting the use of landscape. But he does furnish a comprehensive review of the material he considers as constituting the structure of the discipline. Short, in attempting to explain the more dynamic, meaningful nature of the social and political process, presents us with a somewhat incomplete volume, that is, one with a number of unfilled gaps. It is not always clear to the reader what spatial forms result from the processes he describes. Nevertheless, taken together, the two texts offer the student important contrasting statements concerning the nature and history of, and approaches to, political geography. Short's volume is important in that it attempts to offer the integrative theme between spatial levels of analysis, of which but one is discussed by Dikshit. It remains for an enterprising scholar to offer the same comprehensive analysis of political geography at the local and regional levels as that offered by Dikshit and others (Pounds, Prescott, De Blij, Juir) at the national and international levels.