

1-16-1998

The Business of Politics as the Politics of Business

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Recommended Citation

(1998) "The Business of Politics as the Politics of Business," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol4/iss2/2>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: The Business of Politics as the Politics of Business

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Volume: 4

Issue: 2

Date: 1998-01-16

Keywords: Business, Government, Policy

Abstract. This article presents arguments for and against the significant employment of business practices in domestic and foreign policy development and implementation within representative democracies.

Some political observers bemoan the significant employment of business practices in political governance. One example subsumes billboard messages, lapel buttons, theme songs, video clips, and t-shirt logos containing catchy messages and/or eye-catching images to garner support, or lack of it, for some government initiative. Another is the private financing of public initiatives as occurs through graft, bribery, kickbacks, commissions, finder's fees--or genuine contributions to advance a program or perspective. Yet a third example is the movement of ever-increasing privatization of services previously controlled by the government. (As Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, has implied, one may "privatize" governmental values through governing in the spirit of management consultants such as Peter Drucker and W. Edwards Deming.)

What bothers these observers is that the people being represented within a representative democracy are being cut out of the democratic action. It's much more difficult for the government to be "of, by, and for" the people, if these people are psychological victims of marketing techniques, if their tax dollars become less important to the running of government, and if the provision of necessary services is being largely effected by a financial bottom line than by some sense of commonwealth and commonweal. Some observers also complain that government should somehow be more dignified or possess some greater sense of positive dignity and, even, gravitas than is typically manifested by the business of business as usual.

Yet, other observers can make the case that the employment of mass communications techniques can better involve the citizenry in the Issues of today. These techniques can create images that do not ineluctably "cover" inadequate or superficial governance but instead nurture and even elicit altruistic, prosocial, cooperative, and synergistic behavior. In fact, these techniques can be effectively employed to develop the confidence of domestic and international investors in a national economy--currently, a crucial goal of Asian governments dealing with skittish capital markets.

These observers also note that although illegal and immoral political chicanery greased with private money has long been a bane of representative democracies and other governments as well, private contributions for desired political programs--in areas outside of as well as inside charity, the arts, and education--can be encouraged as a responsibility of those with "extra money." This can occur without the class-distasteful notions of noblesse oblige and droit du seigneur.

These observers note as well that privatization can be effected to capture systemic efficiencies without losing a sense of polity. And, to wit, wouldn't the last several points contribute to the dignity of governance--even if direct analyses and poll data concerning the comparative social behavior, sense of self, and moral authority of politicians and the titans of business yielded some significant differences as to decorum, buffoonery, and the heights of the sophomoric?

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A more basic conflict might involve denotations of political governance and business--the one seemingly embracing altruistic, the other egoistic goals. Yet there is significant psychological research to show that the altruistic may well be subsumed within the egoistic. From here, it's a small leap of faith to the notion that governors and business leaders should work hand in hand--a notion that has been a reality throughout the history of representative democracies for good and for ill. The business of politics as the politics of business is neither a newly evolved phenomenon nor, necessarily, one to bemoan. The Issue is how it should occur, not whether. (See Greenwood, R., & Hinings, C.R. (1996). Understanding radical organizational change. *Academy of Management Review*, 21, 1022-1054; Mitchell, A. (January 14, 1997). A Gingrich fund-raising sweep sets an agenda. *The New York Times*, p. A10; Sandel, M.J. (January 19, 1998). Branded. *The New Republic*, 10-11; Theodoulou, S. (1996). Construing economic and political reality. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 17, 499-516.) (Keywords: Business, Government, Policy.)