



Congressional Government: A Study in American Politics

Woodrow Wilson

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From the preface: THE object of these essays is not to exhaust criticism of the government of the United States, but only to point out the most characteristic practical features of the federal system. Taking Congress as the central and predominant power of the system, their object is to illustrate everything Congressional. Everybody has seen, and critics without number have said, that our form of national government is singular, possessing a character altogether its own; but there is abundant evidence that very few have seen just wherein it differs most essentially from the other governments of the world. There have been and are other federal systems quite similar, and scarcely any legislative or administrative principle of our Constitution was young even when that Constitution was framed. It is our legislative and administrative machinery which makes our government essentially different from all other great governmental systems. The most striking contrast in modern politics is not between presidential and monarchical governments, but between Congressional and Parliamentary governments. Congressional government is Committee government; Parliamentary government is government by a responsible Cabinet Ministry. These are the two principal types which present themselves for the instruction of the modern student of the practical in politics: administration by semi-independent executive agents who obey the dictation of a legislature to which they are not responsible, and administration by executive agents who are the accredited leaders and accountable servants of a legislature virtually supreme in all things. My chief aim in these essays has been, therefore, an adequate illustrative contrast of these two types of government, with a view to making as plain as possible the actual conditions of federal administration. In short, I offer, not a commentary, but an outspoken presentation of such cardinal facts as may be sources of practical suggestion.

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