Business and Politics

Also by Graham K. Wilson

Interest Groups in the United States
Unions in American National Politics
Special Interests and Policymaking

Business and Politics

A comparative introduction

Graham K. Wilson

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To my wife, Virginia Sapiro

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Preface

One of the few by-products of the economic difficulties which have afflicted the world in the 1970s and 1980s is a revival of interest in political economy. The central place of discussion of the performance of economies in political debate has encouraged many to ask again some of the basic questions about the relationship between government and the economy. Does government dominate business, or does business dominate government? Is the relationship between business and government effectively structured so that such widely shared goals as economic growth and full employment are likely to be attained, or not? How do business and government interact?

Although the relationship between business and government now forms part of almost all university courses on individual political systems, the topic is rarely studied *comparatively*. Courses on the comparative study of legislatures, executives and political parties are far more common than courses which compare the relationship between government and business, in spite of the importance and popularity of the topic. It is my belief, which I hope the following book will substantiate, that there is at least as much variation in the business–government relationship as there is in the character of political parties. Failure to appreciate the variation in this relationship from country to country may result in practical disadvantages for those who wish to make their careers in business; it also enfeebles debate within individual countries about the nature of their own political economy. Failure to appreciate the unique aspects of one's own system leads in political economy – as in the study of political institutions and practices – to an unnecessarily shallow understanding of it; a comparative approach is the only remedy.

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Any attempt to cover as broad a range of countries as concisely as I have attempted in this book is to run a high risk of writing a book which the experts on individual countries will find in their own area to be shallow and incomplete. I hope that they will accept my apologies for trespassing outside my own usual specialisms. I have taught courses on business and politics for several years now in both Britain and the USA, and have been aware of the lack of a short book which would provide students with some picture of the range of relationships between business and government found in the capitalist, industrialised democracies. I have attempted to fill that gap with this book, and hope that the range of countries covered will compensate for my failure to provide more extensive detail on each. As those used to planning long car journeys will know, there are advantages to both detailed and more comprehensive maps. I hope the Bibliography of this book will provide some assistance to students who wish to obtain more detailed 'maps' of the topics covered in outline here.

Inevitably, portions of such a general work as this rest on my reading of secondary sources. I am deeply indebted to the Nuffield Foundation, however, for their generous support in conducting research on aspects of the relationship between business and government which has informed many sections of this book. I am also profoundly grateful for the intellectual companionship of Virginia Sapiro during the writing of this book.

GRAHAM K. WILSON