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A Crisis of Party?*

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The debate about the (future) role of political parties in modern democracies suffers from generally unacknowledged normative preconceptions as well as a tendency to reason in terms of 'inevitable' social processes, rather than precise theoretical reasoning or empirical analysis. At least four distinct bodies of thought affect the discussion about the assumed crisis of party: (1) the view that parties are a danger to the good society, leading to the denial of parties as legitimate actors; (2) the belief that some types of parties are 'good' and others 'bad', causing a selective rejection of parties; (3) the proposition that certain party systems are 'good' and others 'bad', resulting in a selective rejection of party systems; and (4) the affirmation that parties are becoming redundant. The latter suggestion is shown in a variety of approaches – e.g. the idea that parties are transient agents of democratization, the analysis of parties as mere market-forces, the assumption that parties do not matter in policies, and the view, as exemplified by neocorporatism, that parties inevitably lose their functions to other political actors. The pervasive presence of aprioristic views suggests the need for a conceptual house-cleaning, the importance of distinguishing normative from empirical arguments, and the need for more detailed empirical research, giving due weight to differences between countries, party systems, parties and periods instead of postulating inexorable trends.

We all speak about the crisis of party. But are we clear about the meaning of these words? Are we making normative or empirical statements? Given the very considerable confusion which characterizes discussions about the alleged crisis of party, some theoretical and conceptual house-cleaning would seem in order. I shall draw attention notably to a number of aprioristic normative positions which seem to cloud both our diagnoses and prognoses. I shall argue that one must distinguish at least four different bodies of writing in the debate on the crisis of party:

1. The persistent body of thought which denies a legitimate role for party, and sees parties as a threat to the good society. I shall seek to show that such thoughts were nurtured from two sides: lingering authoritarian ideologies on the one hand, and naive democratic beliefs on the other. I shall dub these views *the denial of party*.

* Text of the 1991 Stein Rokkan Lecture, delivered at the University of Bergen, Norway, on 9 April 1992.

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2. The views of those who regard certain parties as 'good' but other parties as 'bad'. These writings I shall label *the selective rejection of party*.
3. The proposition that certain party systems are 'good' and others are 'bad'. I shall deal with that view under the heading *the selective rejection of party systems*.
4. The affirmation by those who regard parties as a transient phenomenon, products of a period of mass mobilization which is now a matter of the past. According to this argument, parties are becoming increasingly irrelevant in democratic politics as other actors and institutions have taken over the major functions which parties once played. That body of literature I shall name *the redundancy of party*.

The Denial of Party

We must first recognize that, comparatively speaking, organized and legitimate political parties are rather a new phenomenon. David Hume, for instance, could still speak of parties of principle as 'the most extraordinary and unaccountable phenomenon that has yet appeared in human affairs'.[1] In the Britain of his day 'factions' and 'parties' were not yet clearly distinguished from one another. 'Factions from interest' and 'factions from affection' were to him and his contemporaries perfectly understood phenomena. But not so parties from principle.

The situation began to change in the 18th century, however. Bolingbroke made the first explicit argument in favour of formal opposition as a political good, and Burke defined parties as 'a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavours, the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed'.[2] Parties thus came to be seen as legitimate actors, and the institutionalized competition of parties as a valuable characteristic of an open polity.

It was no accident that such thoughts developed first in 18th century Britain. For at that period two fundamental conditions for the rise of party were already well understood in that country: first, the acceptance of the inevitability of pluralist forces in any society; and second, the importance of political representation. For parties to become the modern institutions we know today, however, two further conditions had to be fulfilled. First, Burke's argument that people could honestly differ on the common good and might legitimately organize to seek representative office, had to be accepted; and secondly, the basis of representation had to be altered so that instead of the principle of sending 'delegates' on behalf of particular social orders, regions or cities, representatives would depend on recognized bodies of individual voters. Once the latter became increasingly numerous, the modern party became a necessity. First local, and then increasingly

nation-wide, organizations had to be formed if one were to fill the gap between individual representatives and expanding numbers of voters.

The rise of the modern party led to the first articulate analyses of the role of party in modern society. In 1902, the Russian *emigré* M. Ostrogorski published a two-volume book on *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*, which was a detailed, if highly critical, comparative study of the building of 'caucuses' in modern city centres in Britain and the USA. Ostrogorski did not like what he saw. He ended his book with a strong plea for substituting *ad hoc*, single issue associations (which would allow the full play of individual will) for mass parties (which in his view denied individuals their sovereign right to decide).

Ostrogorski influenced that other great, early theorist of party, Robert Michels. The latter's *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie. Untersuchungen über die oligarchischen Tendenzen des Gruppenlebens* (1911) was based on a trenchant analysis of decision-making within the German Social Democratic Party. Starting from the belief that political power of members within organizations should be direct and equal, he in fact showed the inevitability of rule by political elites. Parties were thus seen by both Ostrogorski and Michels as subordinating individuals to organizations, the latter being inevitably dominated by party leaders. Hence Michels's paradox that masses were capable of revolution, but not of self-rule, as all they could achieve was the substitution of new elites for old ones, oligarchy being so inevitable as indeed to represent 'an iron law'. If Ostrogorski was to conclude with a preference for *ad hoc* associations over durable parties, Michels was to turn his diagnosis of unavoidable elitism into a romanticist advocacy of fascism.

On closer analysis, the source of the rejection of party can be found in two, at first sight, very different bodies of thought. On the one hand, there were the proponents of a traditional political order who saw in the rise of party an unwanted invasion of the terrain of the *State*, which as the guardian of long-term transcendental interest threatened to fall victim to private interests of a short-term nature. On the other hand, there were those who cherished a belief in the *'sovereign', free individual* and thus opposed what they regarded as the tyranny of party which would do away with freedom of individual action and thought for the sake of collectivist organizations led by irresponsible elites.

The first of these arguments logically gave rise to the frequent assertion that there was danger in a *Parteienstaat*. To those using this notion, parties (which on closer analysis were nothing but the instruments of political elites covering private interests under a cloak of ideology) encroached on the mainsprings of decision-making in the State which should remain immune from such attempts at 'colonization'. In the second view, parties were regarded not as genuine instruments of representation, but as barriers

between individuals and the general interest. In either case, this led to a wish deliberately to restrict the scope of party. Thus, it was thought necessary to immunize certain sectors of government from the stranglehold of party (notably the judiciary, but also the bureaucracy and to some extent the supreme Executive itself). At the same time, it would be vital to maintain direct links between 'the' people and their leaders, so as to avoid the complete dominance of parties in that relationship. This might be achieved, for instance, by assuring the direct election of Presidents or Prime Ministers, and by maintaining or introducing other plebiscitary instruments, including referenda, which could also be used by government if need be against a Parliament increasingly monopolized by self-seeking parties.

If such reasoning had its origin in older, autocratic traditions, newer beliefs in direct democracy could be turned in the same direction. Did not Rousseau's notion of the general will imply that no special place should be given to partial societies, that anything which would come between individuals and the general will was bound to infringe on the general interest, and that citizens should themselves remain free and autonomous and should not allow their right to decide to fall into the hands of 'parties' which stripped them of their right to decide for themselves?

The two arguments – the older authoritarian one and the one favouring a direct expression of individual will – might at first sight seem to be at opposite poles. Yet, on closer analysis they have certain features in common. In both, one finds the postulate of a pre-existing harmony which should not be jeopardized by the divisive battle of competing parties. In both, there was a clear distaste against modern forms of organization. Both also rejected the idea of a mandate for elected representatives, as likely to impair the formation of genuine will and 'objective' interest, whether residing in the state or in the people.

One can formalize this argument. For parties to exist and to acquire legitimacy, there should be a clear acceptance that men might honestly differ, that all might organize in Burke's words 'upon some particular principle' to promote 'the national interest', that all may vote equally, and that government must rest on what Schumpeter would term the 'competitive struggle for the people's vote'. Modern parties, in other words, presuppose the conditions of a democratic order. Typically, parties are rejected by those who do not accept such underlying principles, either because they believe the State to have legitimate claims beyond electoral expression and democratic representation, or because they see in parties the 'associations partielles' *par excellence* so much rejected by Rousseau as infringing on the formation of a (mythical) general will.

The Selective Rejection of Parties

Unlike those who doubt the legitimacy of organized parties altogether, others reject certain *types* of parties, but not others. In well-known typologies of political parties, such as those of Maurice Duverger or Sigmund Neumann, one finds the assumption that there is an inevitable, but one suspects sometimes regretted transition from what the former called the *partis-comité* or *caucus parties* to the *partis de masse* or mass parties (Duverger 1951, 1954) and the latter saw as a shift from 'parties of individual representation' to 'parties of integration', with the implicit danger of a slide towards 'parties of total integration' characteristic of totalitarian regimes (Neumann 1956).

Amongst many observers there is a definite ambiguity in the appraisal of mass parties. On the one hand, there is widespread recognition of their emancipatory and democratic potential. To the extent that they structure the vote and make for reasonably unified actors, they can be seen to contribute to political stability and to allow for both the exercise of leadership and permit accountable government. One can see the force of such arguments amongst critics of 'fluid politics' as exemplified in the USA, in many of the states of the Third World, and now in Central and Eastern Europe. We have a famous normative statement on the need for coherent mass parties in a seminal report drawn up more than forty years ago by the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association under the title *Towards a More Responsible Two-Party System* (APSA, 1950). And one finds the same line of reasoning amongst those who plead for the need for more structured party systems as a condition of viable democracy in the extensive literature on political development and democracy.

But there is no denying another body of thought which betrays a definite 'distancing' from the notion of the mass party. Mass parties are accused of being heavily ideologized 'fighting machines', seeking to subject both voters and the state to a combination of dogma and elitist self-interest. Their 'party discipline' is held to destroy the conditions of free debate which is regarded as the hallmark of the parliamentary system. Mass parties in particular are thought to 'penetrate' beyond the legitimate terrain of competitive electoral politics into the sanctity of the state, and in another view they are thought to submit the social order to unwanted 'colonization'. Such ideas, I must repeat, are nurtured strongly by idealized views of alternative ways of ordering the body politic: a romanticized traditionalism, beliefs in a monolithic state, a hallowed notion of a 'golden age of parliamentarism' in which unfettered deputies debated until 'du choc des opinions jaillit la vérité', a naive hope in communautarian direct democracy, and views which tend to a denial of parties altogether rather than to a selective acceptance of some parties and a rejection of others.

The Selective Rejection of Party Systems

The literature on party systems is equally replete with normative statements which extol certain party *systems* but damn others. Thus, one often finds, among political scientists as much as among historians and constitutional lawyers, the assumption that 'my own country is best'. But one also finds the reverse position: critics of a given party system seek inspiration in comparing it with the system of another country which is assumed to be better. I shall review such arguments in four successive steps.

The British System as the Once Dominant Model

Until relatively recently, the dominant model for many critics and reformers in other countries was undoubtedly 'the' British party system – the little word 'the' being put between quotes to indicate that they referred to an idealized, stylized version of the British system as much as to the realities of British politics at any particular period of time. I shall not seek to define that all too familiar model, but one should note its pervasive influence in a number of statements, e.g.:

1. The widespread conviction that one can engineer a two-party system by the introduction of the single member plurality system.[3]
2. The idealization of single-party government and its logical opposite – the undesirability of coalition governments.
3. The idea of a 'front benchers constitution',[4] which implies a specific, normative reading about the relationship between elites and followers. Such thinking gives a clear verdict in favour of leadership won in a constant battle among rival contenders seeking to 'climb the slippery pole of politics'. It underlines the merit of 'amateurs' changing from one ministerial post to another and thus exercising a genuine 'political control' over specialized departments and bureaucrats. And it takes an unmistakable position on the need for control by parliamentary leaders over politicians fulfilling roles in the party outside Parliament as presented in the seminal study on *British Political Parties* by R. T. McKenzie (1955).
4. The concept of the political mandate. Even though British voters technically vote not for a government but for a Member of Parliament in the district in which they live, the strength of the two-party system makes voting in practice a matter of direct choice of alternative prime ministers. This endorses both the idea of absolute majority rule and the assumption of clear, accountable government.

The ideal-type British model has not only influenced much of our nor-

mative thinking about the working of party systems, it has also for long determined prevailing typologies and models in comparative politics. It was one reason why German critics of Weimar (e.g. Ferdinand Hermens 1941 and Carl J. Friedrich 1941) originally held up the British system as the best guarantee of ensuring stable democratic government in a larger state. The stark two-party system mesmerized Duverger whose belief in the 'naturalness' of dual forces was so strong as to make him deduce even multiparty systems from a '*superposition des dualismes*'. Even in the more sophisticated writings of Duverger's ardent critic, Giovanni Sartori, one can easily trace the impact of the British type. This appears not so much in his analysis of two-party systems, which he recognizes as being rare in practice, but in his analysis of systems of moderate pluralism, where rival coalitions of parties dance a British minuet around the centre (Sartori 1976; for a critique of Duverger and Sartori, see Daalder 1984). In the rather different typology of Gabriel Almond, it is again the British system which is the prototype of the 'Anglo-Saxon system', which in stark contrast to the 'continental European system' is characterized by a homogeneous political culture and a highly differentiated role structure which permits the political process to function with characteristic moderation and an efficient, non-ideological style of pragmatic bargaining (Almond 1956). Even when the tables were turned, and a new generation of writers began to oppose what they regard as a rather superficial view of 'Europe' – witness the writings of the consociational democracy school still to be treated – the British model was retained as at least one polar type.

The British model was also very much at the basis of the construction of formal models which have played a powerful role in the literature on parties and party systems, and on the functioning of democracy generally. Thus, it served Schumpeter with the material from which to fashion his 'alternative theory of democracy'. Since Schumpeter published his *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942), writings on democracy have been suffused with views about rival elites competing for the people's vote. In practice, rather different assumptions went with such views. Some thought it possible to maintain a confident belief in the sovereignty of the electorate – e.g. through reifying the notion of a 'mandate' as bestowing full power on the majority party for the limited period of one Parliament, and discounting the dangers of that notion by suggesting that governments were really controlled not by the last, but by the next election. Others followed Schumpeter more closely, stressing the fact that electoral will was really the product rather than the source of the political process. In either version, the assumption remained that politics was above all a dualistic conflict between rival groups, a group in power and a group of opposition forces which would seek to replace it.

Schumpeter undoubtedly strongly influenced the later elaboration and

formalization of models of party politics by Anthony Downs. In Downs's influential *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), the 'normal' model of politics is very much that of two actors being forced to compete with one another for the same voters in the centre of a political system, and thus being necessarily drawn to a moderate – and in its logical conclusion identical – position at the centre. In reverse, a multiparty system was depicted by Downs as lacking by definition some of that 'rationality', parties now having the choice not to compete at large irrespective of ideological positions, but on the contrary seeking a special ideological position from which they might 'particularize' their appeal to specific groups of voters.

The Rejection of Multiparty Systems

A logical corollary of the strong normative value of the British two-party system was the wholesale rejection of multiparty systems. Such a rejection is not difficult to document. Three major examples are the traditional treatment of the politics of the French Third and Fourth Republics, Weimar Germany and post - 1945 Italy. Thus, a wholesale rejection of the 'unstable' politics of the French Third (and later Fourth) Republic formed the traditional tune of French as well as British observers. It sounded the theme of the fragmentation of will represented by the French Parliament – thought to be the inevitable consequence of a large number of constantly regrouping parties – which was responsible for executive instability. That view led many in turn to the assumption that such stability as there was was due to the force of the Napoleonic state which provided permanent strength in a system in which the party system was ineffective. This of course meant an acceptance that *la fonction publique* should remain free from the encroachment of parties. In contrast, parties were easily seen as instruments of self-seeking politicians, rising to power in a *République des Camarades* (De Jouvenel 1914). Specific explanations were thought to account for the weakness of parties in France. Some found this in an excessive role for ideology which kept voters apart and the Republic divided. Others emphasized the individualist recruitment of French Members of Parliament which, as long as they nurtured their local constituencies, were really free to do as they wished in the Paris *Assemblée*, which was described as a *Maison sans Fenêtres*.

Such arguments, taken from debates in the early part of the 20th century, were strongly reinforced by events in the 1920s and Vichy, which in turn gave rise to the groping for solutions which were thought to lie in institutional reforms as diverse as introducing an effective right of dissolution to strengthen Cabinets against the 'irresponsible manoeuvrings' of Parliament, the introduction of a special mandate for a Prime Minister relying on a clear *vote d'investiture*, manipulation of the electoral system, or beyond

this the search for an independent electoral mandate for the Executive. Such debates were to reach feverish pitch in 1958 when the Fourth Republic succumbed, and France was to be given a new constitution under the decisive control of that ardent critic of the Third and Fourth Republics alike, General De Gaulle. Parliament, during the last gasp of the Fourth Republic, saw to it that certain conditions were stipulated when it agreed to a wholesale transfer of authority to De Gaulle. Among them were the insistence on the maintenance of free elections and the principle of a parliamentary system. But there is little doubt that the framers of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic intended specifically to reduce the force of parliament, to circumscribe the role of traditional party groups, and instead to rely for good government on a president who in both his personal and constitutional capacities would be very much the arbitrator of political life and institutions. Thus, one finds in French legal and political writings a strong distaste for a multiparty system which entrusted government to constantly shifting, ineffective and immobilist coalitions at the centre – *cet éternel marais* in Duverger's words. As a corollary one finds a strong belief in the need and possibility of institutional tinkering with political systems, rather than a recognition of the value of a stable, functioning party system.

Yet, French writing is as nothing compared to the effect of the even greater *Kladderadatsch* of Weimar. The Weimar Constitution had been hailed as the epitome of democratic politics, but was seen within a decade and a half to be powerless to stop Hitler's *Machtübernahme*. Already before 1933 a vigorous debate had been opened on the appropriate role of parties and party systems. I have already indicated the habitual rejection of a *Parteienstaat* by constitutional thinkers in Germany. One major problem of government under Weimar was the inability of parties to form lasting government coalitions first, and to prevent the rise of a new totalitarian party which was to conquer power later. Again, as in France in both the interwar period and later, the presumed malfunctioning of the political system was attributed to a faulty party system. That argument might be directed against all parties and their tendency to encroach on the mainsprings of government which should remain free from their grip. It could also be turned against specific parties, whether those organized too strongly, as many non-socialists thinking of socialists or communists argued, or not strongly enough, as those were to argue who held the 'democratic' parties of Weimar to have been too timid and too weak to grasp real power, and to subordinate the state apparatus (including the bureaucracy, the military and even the courts) to real democratic control.[5]

It was in this climate that Ferdinand Hermens could formulate his influential indictment of proportional representation as a major cause of the fall of Weimar; it was to that factor that one should ascribe the nefarious ideologization and fragmentation of politics which PR inevitably

engendered. If one were to point to smaller European countries which seemed to be able to work democratic politics more effectively under one kind of proportional representation or other, that argument could easily be discounted with the *riposte* that larger states could not afford the inability to act as the realities of the international world inevitably charged larger states with responsibilities not resting on small countries. Such arguments, brought over to Britain and the USA by influential writers, including Hermens himself, could not but reinforce the conviction that 'Anglo-Saxon' two-party systems were superior, and that 'continental systems of government' suffered a congenital defect in lacking the ability to combine the realities of party politics with the need for unmistakable executive government.

The indictment of excessive multipartism can also be found in the criticism of Italian politics after 1945. The spectre of Weimar hung over much of the political debate about the chances of democracy in Italy. There are undoubted similarities between Sartori's model of extreme or polarized pluralist party systems on the one hand, and Hermens's interpretation of the fall of the Weimar Republic, on the other.[6] Thus, Sartori's notion of 'ideological stretching' resembles Hermens' argument, as does his view that 'centrifugal' forces will benefit 'irresponsible oppositions' which through a 'policy of outbidding' and 'outflanking' threaten the heart of responsible democratic politics. And for all his criticism of Duverger, Sartori's strong disavowal of centre parties – which by occupying the centre ground induces centrifugal forces in the system – is not so different from Duverger's fundamental rejection of the centre. One should note also that among other political science critics of the party system in Italy, the failure of alternation is a constantly recurring theme, taken undoubtedly from the score of Westminster politics.

Of course, one of the major contributions of Sartori's typology of party systems is his deliberate distinction between 'moderate' and 'extreme' pluralism – 'moderate' pluralist systems differing fundamentally from 'extreme' multiparty systems in having a mechanics of 'blocs' of parties in a system with two poles that are not too far apart on an ideological dimension. One does not deny the merit of that model if one cannot help noticing that such a 'moderate' pluralist system apparently has some 'British' virtues, although it presumably remains a poor relation of the Westminster family.

The Re-evaluation of Multiparty Systems

The preceding literature generally shares a dichotomous view of party systems: it opposes, in one form or another, a meritorious two-party system found in the Anglo-Saxon world with a rather less successful multiparty

system characteristic of party systems on 'the' European continent. A reappraisal of this simple dichotomy came about as a result of at least two changes: first, the discovery that not all multiparty systems resembled Weimar, or a Third or Fourth Republic France; and second, a growing, criticism of the archetype of the two-party system as practised at Westminster itself.

Of course, some had always recognized that certain states seemed to have stable politics notwithstanding somewhat 'quaint' institutions and party divisions. Switzerland was generally accorded a special status, and so to a lesser extent were Scandinavian countries. Yet, there is an unmistakable touch of surprise in the discovery in the 1950s or so that not all continental European systems resembled those of France (e.g. Wheare 1963), or that there are such things as 'working multiparty systems' (Rustow 1956). I have already noted the earlier argument which clearly sought to explain away the example of many smaller democracies which apparently could afford the luxury of a 'divided' (not to speak of 'fragmented') system because, unlike larger states, they were not called upon really to act in the world of international politics.

However, a more fundamental re-evaluation took place somewhat later. One factor was the growing tendency to draw up comparative tables, as various new international organizations (notably the OECD and the EEC) came to collect a variety of social indicators to assess the policy performance of different countries. Such tables hardly suggested a better record for Britain than for other European countries. In the process even countries long regarded as the 'sick cases' of Europe began to be seen in a new light. This happened first to the Federal German Republic, then to France and even to Italy. Although there remained considerable room for debate as to whether performance on economic or social indicators should be attributed to governments and their policies or rather to successes scored irrespective, or even notwithstanding these governments or policies, it at least made clear that there was a problem which needed study.

A second factor was the growing internationalization of political studies. Notably through the powerful impact of American political science, younger political scientists in country after country began to have a new look at their own systems. If they learned to reject too narrow historical and institutional approaches which had traditionally dominated the study of their own countries, they also could not help reacting more or less strongly to what to them smacked as often naive, and on closer analysis clearly parochial, theories and typologies framed from the perspective of the USA, or Britain for that matter. If this initially implied little more than an insistence that one's own country was somehow different and did not really fit the place assigned to it on the as yet overly general map of comparative politics, it eventually resulted in the growth of a large body

of monographic literature on which future comparative study could draw, and in certain cases also to the deliberate development of counter-models (see Daalder 1987).

Thirdly, an increasing sophistication of research methodology also led comparative scholars to look for more 'cases' with which to confirm or falsify particular hypotheses. Thus, a growing literature developed that sought to test hunches about a variety of phenomena, including the effect of electoral systems, the salience of particular cleavages in party systems, the measure of fragmentation, the duration of cabinets, and the validity of coalition theories. In such approaches one country might be as 'good' as another for empirical analysis. To some extent the complexity of multiparty systems might serve sophisticated analysts even better than the overly simple, and also somewhat rare, case of two-party politics.

The movement away from the one-time normative dominance of the British two-party system was further strengthened by a growing criticism of the model in Britain itself. One could see this in the growing rejection of adversarial government (in this respect one should note the very considerable influence of the writings of S. E. Finer – e.g. Finer 1975 and Finer 1980), increased protest against a total sovereignty of parliament which allows unrepresentative single-party governments absolute power, a renewed fear of the power of extra-parliamentary party organizations, and so forth.

The consensus multiparty model

The tables were definitely turned in the writings of my one-time compatriot, now an American citizen, but always admirable colleague Arend Lijphart who developed first the so-called 'consociational democracy model' and later the 'consensus model' of politics as a deliberate countermodel to the 'Westminster type politics' or 'majoritarian government'. His analysis started by way of deviant case analysis, using the Netherlands as a special case to criticize the assumptions of Almond and others that there was an unavoidable negative relationship between plural societies (characterized by a fragmented political culture) and democratic stability (Lijphart 1968a, 1968b, 1969). He then generalized the consociational democracy model (systems in which elites consciously chose for cooperation to counter the divisions of countries in different subcultures) to other European countries (notably Belgium, Austria and Switzerland). From there, he went further to distinguish between 'majoritarian' political systems 'logically based on the principle of concentrating as much power as possible in the hands of the majority' from their opposites 'based on the principle of sharing, dispersing, and limiting power in a variety of ways'. In an analysis of 21 countries (actually 22 cases as he treated the French Fourth and Fifth

Republics as separate cases) he found that one major dimension, separating these two models was composed of features clearly related to differences relevant to the party system. (Lijphart 1984). 'Majoritarian' systems differed from 'consensual' systems on each of the following five characteristics:
(1) concentration of executive power versus executive power-sharing;
(2) executive dominance versus executive-legislative balance;
(3) two-party versus multiparty system;
(4) one-dimensional versus multidimensional party system; and
(5) plurality election versus proportional representation.
Lijphart then constructed a nine-cell table formed by three categories on this dimension and three on a second dimension composed of three other variables (unitary and centralized versus federal and decentralized government; unicameralism versus strong bicameralism; and unwritten versus written and rigid constitutions). He found that only one European country (Britain) was clearly majoritarian on both dimensions. But most European countries clearly fell on at least the parties dimension on the consensual end of the continuum, while only a few occupied intermediate places, and only Ireland, Austria and Germany were closer to the ideal type 'majoritarian' case.

Lijphart's analysis went a long way towards confirming earlier views that, far from representing the 'normal' model, the British case was rather the exception in European politics. Moving beyond this he also questioned its value as a 'normative' model, clearly arguing that what he termed the 'consensual' model was in many ways superior also as a prescriptive model, at least for countries which knew many social divisions as so many European countries historically did.

If one surveys this rather considerable shift away from a two-party model to an empirical – and in the case of Lijphart undoubtedly also normative – 'consensus-model', one cannot but feel that we are in the presence of many, insufficiently recognized aprioristic views about the functioning, or non-functioning, of particular types of party *systems*, and hence in the presence of a literature which needs thorough rethinking.

The Redundancy of Parties

Finally, another trend of thought began to emerge which questioned the very function of parties and party systems themselves. Such views were argued from a variety of perspectives:

1. One view stated that parties played a historically specific role in mobilizing new groups of citizens and integrating them into the body politic. But once this historically unique task had been performed, parties would rapidly be proven to be transient phenomena only.

2. Another view – somewhat less deterministic – held that parties which once represented distinct policies and groups – fell increasingly under the working of market-forces. In the process they came to resemble one another as Tweedledee and Tweedledum, losing their virtue with their specificity.
3. A third argument emphasized not so much the role of parties themselves, but the increasing role of other political actors which singly or jointly went far to remove the substance of function and power from parties, and thus caused parties no longer 'to really matter'.

A short review of each of these positions should be enough to indicate their impact and intent.

The first of these schools of thought attributed to parties a historically specific role in the process of democratization. As shown in the seminal writings of Rokkan, parties crystallized around the expansion of the franchise, and played a historical task in incorporating new groups into the body politic (e.g., Rokkan 1970; Rokkan & Svasand 1978). From this starting-point some observers drew certain rather far-reaching conclusions (not drawn, I hasten to say, by Rokkan himself!). One of these conclusions was that parties indeed fulfilled a specific historical task in drawing new citizen groups into the body politic, but having done this, serve no real need any longer, as other actors take over their role of mobilization and articulation. Such a view could be reinforced by those who gave a particular interpretation to Rokkan' famous *freezing proposition* (Rokkan & Lipset 1967). For his emphasis on the crucial role of past political alignments could be read as a proposition that parties which represented such alignments would inevitably lose their relevance in the contemporary world, at some point no longer reflecting the 'new politics' of another era. I am not arguing that this *is* so, for this is an empirical question. I am simply saying that it could be *construed* in this fashion.

But then, such thinking comes unexpectedly close to a second view which holds that parties are giving up their historical function and *raison d'être*, and are instead turning into mere market-forces. To some degree one finds this argument in Schumpeter's theory of democracy, but it is made much more explicitly in Downs (1957), and particularly in Otto Kirchheimer's shaping (but also nostalgic deriding) of the idea of the catch-all party (Kirchheimer 1966). Again, I shall presume their arguments are familiar, emphasizing merely that in this view parties are no longer thought of as representing 'bodies of particular principle', but rather as vote-maximizing agents without any real ideologies of their own, in a time when ideologies come to an end anyhow and a new cynical realism takes over. One may note that we are once again in the presence of a somewhat normative

statement (although Kirchheimer disliked his own creation) rather than a fully proven empirical statement.

Finally, a more definite step in the direction that parties are really redundant was made by those who came to query the role of party in modern society altogether. That view has been argued on the basis of two convergent analyses: studies on whether 'parties really matter', and theories about neocorporatism.

The first of these two theories had its origin in American political science. Students of comparative state politics came to ask the question whether policy outcomes in different American states could be attributed to peculiarities of their party system (e.g., whether Democrats or Republicans were in charge, or whether states were clearly competitive between them), or to the more general social conditions prevailing in any one state which threw up their own problems for whatever party happened to be in charge. This type of analysis was taken over by students of comparative public policy using European data. One major line of analysis concerned the expansion of the welfare state, and of particular policies within it. Such analyses tied in closely with older studies of 'political economy' or 'public finance' which, ever since A. Wagner, held that the increase of state tasks and expenditures was a function not of ideology but of objective social and economic changes accompanying industrialization.

One particular concern for many analysts was the degree to which socialists could have a differential impact in societies which some described as having a 'mixed' economy but others preferred to call essentially 'capitalist'. If some found that the participation of socialists in government did matter, others found the opposite. The latter view was consonant with Marxist and neo-Marxist critics who saw in *Stamokap* (a conjunction of state and monopoly capital) yet another stage in the development of capitalism – explaining through the close linkage between state and economic interests why capitalism had not yet come to its close as a crisis-model would inevitably have it.

The elaboration of more detailed neocorporatist theories took place very much against the background of left-wing hopes destroyed by the harsh realities of social structural developments. Many proponents of the neocorporatist approach did not care to discuss the roles of parties, or tended at most to treat them as surface phenomena.[7] They clearly held that the importance of what Stein Rokkan called 'the partisan-electoral channel' was greatly overwhelmed by the realities of 'corporate pluralism'.[8] Advocates of such a view pointed to the rapid and reciprocal expansion of state agencies and specialized interest groups which settled policies between them in a direct give-and-take without the interference of party actors. Clearly, roles that parties were thought to play (and possibly had once played), such as the articulation of demands, were now fulfilled by other actors – e.g.

institutionalized interest group or *ad hoc* direct action groups, the media, and sections of the bureaucracy. Whereas parties were once thought to have at a minimum the special task of aggregating diverse demands, such processes of aggregation were now said to have become a matter of routine decision-making within the government machinery and bargaining by different interest groups.

An obvious counter-argument to such a view is the prevalence of party in political recruitment. Even there the relevance of party processes was increasingly queried, however. Did not political leaders rely more on plebiscitary processes than on the programmatic role of parties? Whoever might fill the formal positions at the top, moreover, would in practical policy-making remain dependent on the permanence of group politics within the bureaucracy and on corporate networks linking the bureaucracy to special interest groups.

Conclusion

The preceding survey – which is partly an inventory of theoretical propositions, partly a sketch of changing political moods in the wake of far-reaching political and social changes which have taken place in European societies – should make clear that a great many, often aprioristic, arguments enter into any discussion of the role of party in European politics. As we saw, the period began with a denial of party and of lingering doubts about the extent to which parties might properly intrude on government. Once parties came to be more accepted there were still doubts as to which parties were to be preferred: looser parties of representation or mass parties representing groups formed on specific cleavages. In all such cases the spectre of more totalitarian parties (whether fascist, national-socialist, or communist) hovered as a portentous presence.

Parties came to be accepted much more easily in certain societies than in others. They were greeted with most reluctance in states which had a powerful tradition of authoritarian government represented most distinctly by dynasties and their bureaucracies. Wherever more pluralist traditions had prevailed in processes of state-making, older traditions of representation and conceptions of politics in terms of balanced estates or interests were to facilitate the eventual legitimation of parties. Modern parties formed mainly as existing or aspiring elites mobilized an expanding number of voters. As Rokkan taught us, the cleavages which were salient at the time of the advent of universal suffrage, were to have a very strong impact on later divisions, and hence on the format of party systems (Rokkan 1970 *passim*).

Much of the writing on parties and party systems was inspired by indi-

vidual country experiences. Notably, the British system was held up as an enviable model, both in Britain itself but also among critics of existing party systems elsewhere. In contrast, notions about multiparty systems were for a long time heavily coloured by experiences in countries which saw their party system end with their democratic regime, as in Fascist Italy, Weimar Germany and to some extent 1940 or 1958 France. The situation began to change when the British two-party system came increasingly under criticism, while at the same time multiparty systems began to have a more favourable image, first through greater knowledge of the politics of smaller European democracies, then also in the increasingly rehabilitated larger continental European countries. The turn towards more empirical styles of comparative political science research greatly facilitated this development.

But at the same time the political relevance of parties and party competition was increasingly questioned. I have reviewed four lines of argument which contributed to that line of argument: the view of those who hold that past party alignments inevitably become largely irrelevant for present-day political choices; the catch-all proposition which argued that the pull of the market led parties to give up their once distinct functions of articulating and aggregating policy positions; the debate on whether parties really mattered in the elaboration of policies; and the starker version of the latter as exemplified in neocorporatist theories which reduce parties to mere surface phenomena.

This survey should make clear that 'general' statements about parties frequently contain highly aprioristic assumptions. Often, the assumed 'crisis of parties' is mainly a euphemism for a dislike of parties. The debate is shot through with speculative statements about 'inexorable' trends – trends towards mass parties, towards catch-all parties, towards a 'waning' of parties as other political actors took over, and so forth. There is much less in the way of detailed study of the actual role of parties. If we want to do better, what should we do? First, we should seek to query the presence of possible normative biases in the literature, and in our own thought and writings. Some of these have been spelt out in the preceding pages. Secondly, we should attempt to detail the different criteria by which the working of parties and party systems may be judged. Any such attempt is likely to reveal the existence of conflicting criteria. If so, such conflicts should be clearly faced rather than left unanswered. Thirdly, one should carefully specify the particular roles and functions which parties play. It may well be that parties are losing certain functions, but gaining others. The assumed 'crisis of party' may result from a one-sided focusing on some functions to the possible neglect or exclusion of others. This may lead us to write-off parties rather than to analyse their actual functioning and possible changes in them.

Once we have faced possible biases (and hopefully discarded them), once

we have replaced such biases by a clear specification of normative criteria (even though these may be mutually conflicting), and once we have become clear about the manifold functions which parties and party systems fulfill in democratic societies, we must turn towards a full study of the empirical record. This will force us to investigate the actual functioning of parties and party systems in relation to other political actors, most notably voters, interest and action groups, the media, and the various actors within government ranging from Cabinets and Members of Parliament to different levels of the bureaucracy.

In doing so, we are likely to find considerable differences, from time-period to time-period, from country to country, from one possible function of parties or party systems to another. This will probably force us to give up many facile generalizations, and instead to grapple with very complex developments. To do full justice to such developments, we shall have to develop many new 'grids' for comparative analysis, in the manner that Rokkan taught us. For why is Rokkan the great master of us all? Not because he simplified, but rather because he consistently attempted to find parsimonious ways of understanding the complex developments of changing political realities, realities he knew so much more about than all of us.

NOTES

1. The quote is taken from Hume's famous essay 'Of Parties in General', reprinted in Hendel (1953, 81).
2. Burke, Edmund (1770, 1861). *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, reprinted in *Works*. London: Bohn's Edition, Vol. I, 372 ff.
3. I am of course referring to the old debate on whether electoral systems 'make' party systems, or whether, inversely, party systems are likely to 'make' electoral systems to suit their needs – a subject which, one would have thought, Stein Rokkan dealt with conclusively in his famous article on 'Electoral Systems' (1968) for the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, New York: Macmillan/Free Press 5, 7–21.
4. This is the term used by K. C. Wheare (1954) in a review of Herbert Morrison (1954), *Government and Parliament: A Survey from the Inside*, London: Allen & Unwin.
5. This line of reasoning may have been an important factor in the deliberate upgrading of parties in the Federal German Republic after 1949, not least by massive financial support given by the state.
6. One should note that in his younger days Giovanni Sartori was assistant to G. Maranini, Professor of Political Science in Florence. Maranini shared Hermens's belief that proportional representation caused the downfall of democratic politics and thus inexorably paved the way for fascism. See his intervention in the debate about electoral politics in Heckscher (1957).
7. Parties are notably absent, for example, in the writings of the major initiator of the concept of neocorporatism, Philippe Schmitter. They are given greater prominence, however, in the writings of his fellow-editor Gerhard Lehmbruch (cf. Schmitter & Lehmbruch 1979 and Lehmbruch & Schmitter 1982).
8. Rokkan was often uncritically annexed as as precursor of neocorporatism on the basis of this distinction, as well as on that of the title of his contribution: 'Norway: Numerical Democracy and Corporate Pluralism', in Dahl (1966, 70–115).

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