

## Part I

---

# Reconceptualizing Parties and Party Competition

# Parties: Denied, Dismissed, or Redundant? A Critique

*Hans Daalder*

We all speak about the crisis of party. But are we clear what we mean? *A priori* normative positions often cloud both our diagnoses and prognoses. In the debate on the crisis of party, I will argue, at least four different bodies of writing are intermingled which should be clearly distinguished:

1. The persistent body of thought which denies a legitimate role for party, and sees parties as a threat to the good society. Such thoughts were nurtured from two sides: lingering authoritarian ideologies on the one hand, and naive democratic beliefs on the other. I will call these views *the denial of party*.
2. The views of those who regard certain types of parties as 'good' but other types parties as 'bad'. These writings may be summarized under the label *the selective rejection of party*.
3. The proposition that certain party systems are 'good' and others are 'bad'. This view will be dealt with 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 will be analysed under the rubric *the redundancy of party*.

## THE DENIAL OF PARTY

We must first recognize that, comparatively speaking, organized and legitimate political parties are a relatively 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'. In

the Britain of his day, 'factions' and 'parties' were not yet clearly distinguished from one another; and while 'factions from interest' and 'factions from affection' were to him and his contemporaries perfectly understood phenomena, this was not true of 'parties from principle.' But the situation was changing in the eighteenth century, at the very time Hume wrote. The viscount of Bolingbroke drew up the first explicit argument in favour of formal opposition as a political good, and Edmund Burke (1861 [1770]: 372) defined parties as 'a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors, the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed' (see also Sartori 1976). Parties increasingly came to be understood 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 Britain of those days. For two fundamental conditions for the rise of party were already well understood in that country by the eighteenth century: 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, two further conditions had to be fulfilled, however. First, Burke's argument that people could honestly differ on the common good, and might legitimately organize to seek representative office on that basis, had to be accepted; and secondly, the manner 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 not only legitimate, but a matter of necessity. First local, and then increasingly nationwide, organizations had to be formed to fill the gap between individual representatives and expanding numbers of voters.

The rise of the modern party produced the first articulate analyses of the role of party in modern society. In 1902, the Russian *emigre* Moisei Ostrogorski published his two-volume book on *La Democratie et les parties politiques* which was a detailed, if highly critical, comparative study of the building of 'caucuses' in modern city centres in Britain and the United States.<sup>2</sup> Ostrogorski did not like what he saw. He ended his book with a strong plea to substitute 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. And Ostrogorski influenced that other great, early theorist of party, Robert Michels. The latter's *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie*.<sup>1</sup> *Untersuchungen fiber die oligarchischen Tendenzen des Gruppenlebens*, which appeared in 1911,<sup>3</sup> was based on a trenchant analysis of decision-making within the German Social Democratic Party of his time. Starting from the belief that the political influence 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 to substitute 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 such a 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 preclude 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 be used by government if need be also 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 to 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 rather than

allowing their right to decide to fall in the hands of 'parties' which denuded them off 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 had 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 for 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 to repeat 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 (1942) would term the 'competitive struggle for the people's vote'. Modern parties, in other words, presuppose the conditions of representative democracy. 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 all. 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 Duverger (1954) called the *partis-comite* or caucus parties to the *partis de masse* or mass parties and Neumann (1965) 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. This reflects 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 United States, in many of the states of the Third World, and now in Central and Eastern Europe. A famous normative statement on the need for coherent mass parties was the 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 democracy and political development.

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, or 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 verite*', a naive hope in communitarian direct democracy: views which on closer analysis tend to a denial of parties altogether rather than to a selective acceptance of some parties and a rejection of others.

#### THE SELECTIVE APPRAISALS OF PARTICULAR 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 among historians and constitutional lawyers, the assumption that 'my country is best'. But one also finds the reverse position: critics of a given party system seek inspiration in comparing it with the assumed 'better' system of another country. I shall review such arguments in four successive steps (for a fuller statement, see Daalder 1987).

##### *The Once Dominant Model of the British System*

Until relatively recently, the dominant model for many critics and reformers in other countries was undoubtedly 'the' British party system the little word 'the' is put between quotes to indicate that it 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 ideas:

1. There is a widespread conviction that one can engineer a two-party system by the introduction of the single member district system.<sup>4</sup>
2. There is the idealization of single-party government and its logical opposite: the undesirability of coalition governments.
3. The idea of a 'front benchers' constitution',<sup>5</sup> implies a specific, normative reading of 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 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 normative 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 originally German critics of Weimar (e.g. Hermens 1941; Friedrich 1941) 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 (1954) whose belief in the 'naturalness' of dual forces was so strong as to make him deduce even multi-party 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 both Duverger and Sartori, see Daalder 1984). In the rather different typology of Gabriel Almond (1956), 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. Even when the tables were turned, and a new generation of researchers began to oppose what they regard as a rather superficial

view of 'Europe' witness the writings of the consociational democracy school (e.g. Lijphart 1968a)-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* in 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-for example, 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 (1957). In his book on *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, 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, Downs depicted a multi-party system 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 carving out a special ideological position on which they might 'particularize' their appeal to specific groups of voters.

#### *The Rejection of Multi-Party Systems*

A logical corollary of the strong normative value of the British two-party system was the wholesale rejection of multi-party 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 Republic, Weimar Germany, and post-1945 Italy.

A wholesale rejection of the 'instable' 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 twentieth century, were strongly reinforced by events in the 1930s and the Vichy experience which were to give rise in the Fourth Republic 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 manoeuvres' of Parliament, the introduction of a special mandate for a prime minister relying on a clear *vote d'investiture*, the manipulation of the electoral system, or beyond this the search for an independent electoral mandate for the executive. Such debates were to reach a feverish state 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 Republic alike, General Charles de Gaulle. Parliament during the last gasps of the Fourth Republic put certain conditions 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 power of Parliament, to circumscribe the role of traditional party groups, and to rely for good government instead on a president who in both his personal and constitutional capacities would be very much the arbitrator of political life and institutions. One finds in French legal and political writings a strong distaste for a multi-party 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.

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 *Mach tubernahme*. Already before 1933 a vigorous debate had been opened on the appropriate role of parties and party systems. I have already signalled 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 and to prevent the rise of a new totalitarian party which was to conquer power later. Again, as in France both in 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 argued thinking of socialists or communists, 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.<sup>6</sup> It was in this climate that Hermens (1941) could formulate his influential indictment of proportional representation as a major cause of the fall of Weimar: it was to that factor, so the argument went, that one should ascribe the nefarious ideologization and fragmentation of politics which proportional representation 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 United States 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 has also been a constant feature in the criticism of Italian politics after 1945. Even before the drastic changes in the early 1990s the spectre of Weimar hung over much of the political debate about the chances of democracy in Italy. There were undoubted similarities between Sartori's (1976) model of extreme or polarized pluralist party systems on the one hand, and Hermens's (1941) interpretation of the fall of the Weimar Republic, on the other.' Thus, Sartori's notion of 'ideological stretching' resembles Hermens's 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 induce centrifugal forces in

the system is not so different from Duverger's fundamental rejection of the centre. 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' multi-party 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 need not deny the merit of that model yet to notice that such a 'moderate' pluralist system apparently has some 'British' virtues, although it presumably remains a poor relation of the Westminster family.

The failure of alternation was a constantly recurring theme in the writings also of other Italian political scientists. The impact of such reasoning was so strong that a growing distaste for the ruling system parties could lead to a wholesale overhaul of the electoral system, intended not only to throw the rascals out, but also to secure the blessings of alternating governments, so it was thought. Disappointment with the ensuing polarization would, however, soon make many a one-time proponent of such reforms seek desperately for ways to strengthen moderate forces at the centre.

#### *The Re-evaluation of Multi-Party 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 to a rather less successful multi-party system characteristic of party systems on 'the' European continent. This simple dichotomy has since withered, as a result of at least two changes: first, the discovery that not all multi-party systems resembled Weimar, a Third or Fourth Republic France, or post-1945 Italy; 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 was an unmistakable touch of surprise in discoveries in the 1950s and later that not all continental European systems resembled France (e.g. Wheare 1963), and that there were such things as 'working multiparty systems' (Rustow 1956). I have already noted the earlier argument which clearly sought to explain away the examples of many a smaller democracy which apparently could afford the luxury of a 'divided' (not to speak of 'fragmented') system because unlike larger states they were not called on really to act in the world of international politics. However, a more fundamental re-evaluation was also taking place.

One factor was the growing tendency to draw up comparative tables as various new international organizations (notably the OECD and the EU) 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 for a time even to Italy. Although there remained considerable room for debate whether performance on economic or social indicators should be attributed to governments and their policies, or rather to successes scored irrespective (or even notwithstanding) of 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 parochial, theories and typologies framed from the perspective of the United States, 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 resulted eventually in the growth of a large body of monographic literature on which future comparative study could draw. And in certain cases it led to the deliberate development of counter-models.

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 seeking 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 multi-party 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 systems was further strengthened by increasing 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 Finer [1975, 1980]), the 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 Multi-Party 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 counter-model to the 'Westminster type politics' or 'majoritarian government'." Lijphart (1968a, 1968b, 1969) began 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. He then generalized the consociational democracy model (systems in which elites consciously chose 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 twenty-one countries (actually twenty-two cases as he treated the French Fourth and Fifth Republic as separate cases) Lijphart (1984) found that one major dimension separating these two models was composed by features clearly related to differences relevant to the party system. '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 multi-party 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 fell clearly on the consensual end of the continuum on the parties dimension, while only a few occupied intermediate places, and only Ireland, Austria, and Germany were closer to the ideal-type 'majoritarian' case.<sup>9</sup>

Lijphart's analysis went far to confirm 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 sharp 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 a great many a priori views about the functioning, or not-functioning, of particular type of party *systems*, and hence in the presence of a literature which needs thorough rethinking.

### THE REDUNDANCY OF PARTIES

Finally, another trend of thought emerged which questions the very function of parties and party systems themselves. Such views were argued from a variety of perspectives. 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 be proven to be transient phenomena only. 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. 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.

#### *Political Parties as Passing Agents of Mass Mobilization*

This school of thought attributed to parties a historically specific role in the process of democratization. As shown particularly clearly in the seminal writings of Stein Rokkan (1970), many European parties crystallized around the expansion of the franchise, and played a historical task in incorporating new groups into the body politic (see also Rokkan and Svasand 1978). From this some observers drew certain rather fargoing conclusions (not drawn by Rokkan himself, one should hasten to say). One of these conclusions was that parties indeed fulfilled a specific historical task in drawing new citizen groups into the body politic. Having done this, parties no longer serve a real need, 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 Lipset and Rokkan's famous *freezing proposition* (see also Mair 2001). Rokkan's emphasis on the crucial role of past political alignments could be read as a proposition that parties which represented such alignments no longer reflect the 'new politics' of another era so that they must increasingly

and inevitably lose their relevance in the contemporary world. Whether they do is an empirical question. For the present argument it suffices to state that such a conclusion *could* be construed on the basis of the freezing proposition.

#### *Parties as Market Forces*

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. One finds this argument to some degree in Schumpeter's (1942) theory of democracy, but it is made more explicitly in Downs (1957), and particularly in the work of Otto Kirchheimer (1966), who coined the term catch-all party. I shall take their arguments as read, emphasizing merely that in such views 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 here again we are in the presence of a somewhat normative statement (although Kirchheimer disliked his own creation) rather than of a fully proven empirical statement.

#### *The Waning of Parties*

A more definite step towards the view 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 in a variety of ways: studies on whether 'parties really matter'; theories about neocorporatism; a neopluralist perspective which sees 'action groups' as replacing parties as chief agents of political representation; and a renewed call for the introduction of new direct democracy instruments, c.q. the increased use of such instruments already in place.

Doubts about the extent to which parties really mattered had their 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 (for example, 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 Wagner (1892) held that the increase of state tasks and expenditures was a function not of ideology but of objective social

and economic changes accompanying industrialization. And one particular variant of this kind of analysis centred on 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 in consonance 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 seeing in the close linkage between state and economic interests an explanation 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 a similar background of left-wing hopes being destroyed by the harsh realities of social structural developments. Many proponents of the neocorporatist approach did not care to discuss the role of parties, or tended at most to treat them as surface phenomena.<sup>10</sup> They clearly held that the importance of what Rokkan called 'the partisan-electoral channel' was greatly overwhelmed by the realities of 'corporate pluralism'.<sup>11</sup> Neocorporatist writers 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 party actors interfering. Clearly, roles that parties were thought to play (and possibly had once played) in determining government policy were thus fulfilled by institutionalized interest groups intertwined with sections of officialdom. Being side-stepped in policy-making and policy-implementation, parties also became less functional in their traditional role of articulation and aggregation.

A third school of thought about an inevitable waning of parties based itself on the increased role of ad hoc 'action groups'. If special interests had specific *institutionalized* channels which gave them direct access to government, so other groups learnt that the interest of policy-makers was often secured more easily by direct action tactics and media exposure than by working through the more tortuous channels of party decision-making. Paradoxically, therefore, the traditional role of parties as intermediaries was thought to be eroded by two seemingly opposite processes: the increased institutionalization of sectional interests *and* the attempt by such groups as well as single-interest groups and ad hoc media interests to short-circuit the road to the government agenda through direct action tactics.

Finally, there is the deliberate use of direct democracy instruments to side-step the role of parties. Such tendencies can be seen in a variety of political expedients and reforms. Thus, ever since the adoption at the beginning of the French Fifth Republic of the 1958 Constitution and the ensuing (unconstitutional) 1962 referendum which introduced the direct election of the French president, the wish for a directly elected executive has exercised an unmistakable lure in other European countries as well. In parliamentary elections,

there has been a marked increase in the role of communication specialists who tend to package politicians rather than seek a mandate for party platforms. One can signal an increased call for and use of referenda, precisely to take specific decisions out of the hand of party-controlled parliaments, not to speak of possible regime change. And of late, there has been the new hype of a presumed teledemocracy which should restore the 'democratic city-state' through new electronic media which purportedly would allow its citizens to share directly in political debate and to take binding decisions without having to rely on party intermediaries.

### CONCLUSION

The preceding survey—which is partly an inventory of theoretical propositions, partly a sketch of changing political moods in the wake of fargoeing political and social changes which have taken place in European societies should make clear that a great many often a priori 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 what 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 or national-socialist, or communist) hovered as a portentous presence. Furthermore, 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 was to facilitate the eventual legitimation of parties. Modern parties formed mainly as existing or aspiring elites mobilized an expanding number of voters: as Rokkan (1970: *passim*) 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.

Much of the writing on parties and party systems was inspired by individual country experiences. Notably the British system was long held up as an enviable model, both in Britain itself but also among critics of existing party systems elsewhere. In contrast, notions about multi-party 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 multi-party 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. Some six lines of argument which contributed to that line of argument have been reviewed: the view that parties are by nature the product of a historical period of initial mass mobilization, but have now 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 which in reality are determined by objective structural requirements of modern society; neocorporatist theories which see in the interaction of specialized state agencies and interest groups the real arena of political decision-making, while parties appear to become mere surface phenomena; the view that parties lose out increasingly as the primary channels of articulation and aggregation in favour of 'direct action' groups and media contacts; and the renewed advocacy of direct democracy instruments which would 'free' the citizen from party control. Again, this survey should make clear that 'general' statements about parties frequently contain highly a priori 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: towards mass parties, towards catch-all parties, towards a 'waning' of parties as other political actors take over. 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 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 (notably in political recruitment). The assumed 'crisis of party' may result from a one-sided focusing on some functions to the possible neglect or exclusion of others.<sup>2</sup> 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 realized

fully the manifold functions which parties and party systems fulfil 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 the voters, interest groups 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, from one site of decision-making to another. This should force us to give up many easy generalizations, and instead to grapple with very complex developments. If this will disillusion us of popular certainties, it will undoubtedly make for more realistic comparative insights.

## NOTES

This chapter is a reworked version of my 1991 Stein Rokkan Lecture, published as 'A Crisis of Party?' in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 15(4): 269-88.

1. Excerpts from his famous essay, 'Of Parties in General', reprinted in Hendel (1953: 81).
2. Published in Calman-Levy in Paris. There is a critical introduction to an English trans. in Lipset (1964).
3. Published in Leipzig in Dr. Werner Klinkhardt, *Philosophish-soziologische Bucherei*, 21: 191-401. See the excellent critical introduction written by Linz (1966) to the Italian trans. The English trans. was published by the Free Press in New York in 1962 as *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*.
4. 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 with which, one would have thought, Stein Rokkan (1968) dealt with conclusively in his famous article on 'Electoral Systems'.
5. This is the happy term used by Wheare (1954).
6. 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.
7. 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).
8. For a review of authors who tended to arrive at similar conclusions, often independently from Lijphart, see Daalder (1974).

9. In his most recent book on democracies, Lijphart (1999) enlarged the sample of cases to thirty-six, and included more variables and characteristics.
10. Parties are notably absent, for example, from the writings of the major initiator of the concept of neocorporatism, Philippe Schmitter; they are given greater prominence in the writings of his fellow editor Gerhard Lehmbruch; cf. Schmitter and Lehmbruch (1979); Lehmbruch and Schmitter (1982).
11. Rokkan (1966) was often uncritically annexed as a precursor of neocorporatism on the basis of this distinction, as well as on that of the happy title of his contribution: 'Norway: Numerical Democracy and Corporate Pluralism'.
12. In this regard, see for instance the analyses undertaken by Mair (1997), particularly in ch. 6.