

## **Cartel parties in Western Europe?**

**Changes in organizational structures, political functions and competitive behaviour  
among the major parties in Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.**

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## Introduction

Among the various attempts to pinpoint the changes in West European political parties which have been going on over the last decades, the cartel party model (Katz & Mair 1995) has been one of the most provocative. It thus led to a series of comments on its theoretical plausibility (Koole 1996; von Beyme 1996; Kitschelt 2000) as well as its empirical validity for individual countries (e.g. Young 1998; Wiesendahl 1999). In their article, Katz & Mair (1995) are constructing an evolution of party types from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards to show how parties have changed from being party of society (mass parties) to being part of the state apparatus. The provocation, the cartel party model entails, lies in its claim that the established parties in Western Europe have adapted themselves to declining levels of participation and involvement in party activities by not only turning to resources provided by the state but by doing so in a collusive manner. The inter-penetration of party and state, so the argument goes, has been achieved through co-operation between the major parties - most obviously by unanimously introducing and expanding public subsidies to themselves. The former opponents now run a party cartel which excludes new and smaller parties. These changes on the level of party competition are associated with decisive changes in the internal balance of power among the individual cartel parties, their relationship to society and the quality of the democratic process in Western democracies *per se*. Thus, Katz & Mair (1995) are depicting a fundamental change of party democracy in Western Europe since the 1970s. Precisely because the consequences of the alleged cartellization would be so dramatic - a self-referential political class unremovable from power dominating politics and determining their own infrastructure- it is necessary to empirically review the central hypotheses of the cartel party model.

In my paper I will first try to clarify how Katz & Mair (1995) are conceptualizing party change. I will argue that there are three dimensions of change which characterize cartel parties. In the second part of the paper I will look at these three dimensions more closely by discussing changes among the major parties in Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The comparison of these cases shows similarities and differences across parties in „most different“ political contexts in Western Europe. In the final part of my paper I

will try to show how these empirical findings can contribute to an elaboration of the cartel party model.<sup>1</sup>

### **Three dimensions of party change**

Analytically there are three dimensions on which Katz & Mair (1995) are describing party change since the 1960s and on which they are conceptualizing the cartel type. I will look at them in turn:

- *Political role*: representative vs. governmental functions
- *Party competition*: cartelization and exclusion
- *Organizational structures*: parlamentarization and stratarchy

The *political role* of parties concerns their position between the sphere of society and the sphere of the state. The cartel party model postulates that West European parties have increasingly lost their capacity and their eagerness to fulfil their representative functions for society (interest articulation and -aggregation, goal formulation, political mobilisation), whereas they became more strongly involved in executing governmental functions (elite recruitment, government formation, policy making). The professional party leaders thus became more concerned with the demands of the parliamentary arena than with interpreting party manifestos or discussing politics on party congresses. The near exclusive dominance of parliaments and governments enabled parties to rely on a new source for financing and staffing their organizations which made them relatively independent from party members or donors. Cartel party are therefore characterized by a weak involvement of party members and historically related interest groups (*classe gardée*) in party activities on the one hand, and by an emphasis on governmental functions and state resources on the other hand.

Turning to the level of *party competition*, the mutually shared need for securing the flow of state resources has changed the relationships of the political opponents towards each other. In a process of social learning - facilitated through the daily interaction of professional politicians from different parties in parliament - the party actors realized that there are common interests

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is based on my PhD thesis where I compared the Social Democratic parties and Christian Democratic/ Conservative parties of the four countries in their organisational development from the 1960s onwards. The cartel party model was used as analytical framework (Detterbeck 2001).

among the „political class“ which laid the basis for collective action (von Beyme 1996; Borchert 2001). The process of cartel formation has two facets: cartellization aims at reducing the consequences of electoral competition, basically through granting the losers, the established opposition a certain share of state subventions or patronage appointments. Exclusion aims at securing the position of the established parties against newly mobilized challengers. This can be achieved through setting up certain barriers for newcomers in the electoral competition (e.g. thresholds), excluding them from access to public subventions or media campaigns, or excluding them from access to executive office by declaring them unacceptable coalition partners („pariahs“). However, a cartel doesn't have to be closed completely. The co-optation of new parties which are willing to play according to the established rules of the game may strengthen the viability of a party cartel. Katz & Mair (1995) argue that the formation of a party cartel poses a fundamental problem for the West European party democracies as it denies the voters the possibility of choosing a political alternative - „none of the major parties is ever definitively out“ (ebd.: 22) -, and gives munitions to the rhetorics of neo-populist parties on the political right. In the long run, cartellization will widen the gulf between voters and politicians and make it increasingly difficult to legitimize political decisions..

The *organisational dimension* is concerned with the balance of power inside the parties. The „mechanics“ of internal decision-making are determined by the structural and material resources of the various „faces“ within the organisation. Cartel party are characterised by a further strengthening of the „party in public office“ which can be explained by their direct access to political decisions in parliaments and governments, their access to the mass media as well as by their better access to state resources (e.g. parliamentary staff). The dominance of party executive organs through parliamentarians, the marginalisation of party activists (e.g. through member ballots) or the professionalization of election campaigns are organizational indicators of the cartel type. The second organizational feature of cartel parties consists in the vertical autonomy of different party levels. Whereas the national (parliamentarian) party elite tries to free itself from the demands of regional and local party leaders as far as political and strategic questions on the national level are concerned, the lower strata insist upon their autonomy in their own domains, e.g. the selection of candidates or local politics: „Each side is therefore encouraged to allow the other a free hand. The result is stratarchy“ (ebd.: 21).

Although the causal relationships between these three dimensions are not clearly spelled out by Katz & Mair (1995), it seems to be the logic of the argument that the increase of vulnerability (less party members, more volatile voters) caused party change. Vulnerability brought about a declining capacity of parties to fulfil their representative functions (e.g. interest articulation) which led them

- a.) to concentrate on their governmental functions (e.g. selecting leaders, seeking parliamentary majorities, passing laws) and,
- b.) to collude with their established opponents in order to secure the required resources for organisational maintenance.

The freedom of manoeuvre which party leaders needed to do both led to internal party reforms which strengthened the „party in public office“. As a result of these changes, the linkages between the professionalized party organisations and the citizenry further eroded, which in turn intensified the trend towards the sphere of the state and towards inter-party collusion (see Young 1998).

### **Cartel parties in the four countries?**

The core element of the cartel party type can be seen in the self-interested co-operation between the major parties which aims at securing organizational resources (public subsidies, patronage) and career stability (income, reelection, alternative political jobs) for the individual politician. Measured on this essential feature the parties in Denmark and Germany are cartel parties, whereas the parties in Switzerland and the UK are not.

**Denmark** appears to be one of the paradigmatic cases for the cartel thesis. From operating in a quite „frozen“ party system while organizing a comparatively high number of party members (early 60s: 21,1% of the electorate) until the 60s, Danish parties found themselves in a very vulnerable position from then on: volatility increased significantly (in the 70s  $\varnothing$  15,5%), the number of parties in parliament doubled in 1973 and the fragmentation of the party system remained on a high level (8-11 parties), the number of party members collapsed to 6,5% (late 80s) and 5,1% in the late 90s (Bille 1994; Mair & van Biezen 2001). Especially the biggest party, the Social Democrats (SD), experienced a constant decline of membership (see Table 1), a loss of its traditional role as „natural governing party“ in the 80s and increased conflicts with its traditional ally and sponsor, the trade unions (Bille 1999).

Although the development of the Conservative Party (KF) proceeded more uneven, the electoral downward trends in the 70s and the 90s were perceived as existential crises.

*Table 1: Development of membership in SD and KF*

Year	Electorate (in millions)	Members SD (in thousand)	Members KF (in thousand)
1961	2,8	259	113
1966	3,1	188	141
1971	3,3	165	122
1975	3,4	122	74
1981	3,7	99	52
1984	3,8	97	51
1991	3,9	74	33
1995	3,9	62	30
1999	3,9	58	22

Sources: Bille 1997: 253- 259; personal communication Karina Pedersen (University of Copenhagen), 4.2.2001.

The Danish parties adapted to this crisis by turning to state resources: subsidies to the parliamentary parties, introduced in 1965, were considerably expanded in the 80s; in 1986 parliament passed a law introducing public subsidies to the party organizations (in the form of campaign reimbursement) with the support of all moderate parties. In 1995 these subventions were quadrupled - the oppositional Conservatives supporting the bill of the SD-led government (Pedersen & Bille 1991; Bille 1999).<sup>2</sup>

As a result, the budget of the national headquarters of the Danish parties became increasingly dependent on state subventions. In the late 90s, the national SD was financed to ca. 40% by the public purse. The unions remained their primary sponsor (about 45%) - yet the „divorce“ in 1996 (end of the mutual *ex officio*-representation in the leading bodies) indicates a further separation between the sister organizations. The national Conservative Party was financed primarily by the state in the late 90s (1998: 54%), thus reducing its traditional dependence on private donations. Smaller parties without a mass membership are financed by the state to an even higher degree than the major parties (Pedersen & Bille 1991).

<sup>2</sup> However, the Danish parties also tried to revitalize their member organisations. The SD passed internal reforms in 1969 to strengthen intra-party democracy and introduced plebiscitary elements in 1996. The Conservative Party (KF) tried to attract members by strengthening the (rather weak) position of party organs in several reforms after 1971.

However, the Danish case also shows that operating a party cartel as far as receiving public money is concerned doesn't necessarily mean that all the „symptoms“ of the cartel party must be present. There are at least three deviations from the ideal type in the Danish case:

- *The level of exclusion of new parties is low (dimension of party competition).*

While there is a cartellization with respect to government formation - neither the rightist „Progress Party“ nor the leftist „Socialistisk Folkeparti“ were ever accepted on the cabinet table, in contrast to new moderate parties -, new parties are not handicapped in the electoral competition: the threshold remained relatively low (2%) despite increasing fragmentation of the party system, the access to public subsidies is not restricted and the access to the public media in election campaigns is organised egalitarian („minute democracy“). The established parties thus erected no „protective walls“ against new competitors (Sjöblom 1987: 192).

- *The leading party bodies are characterised by stronger „federalization“ (Koole 1996) instead of stronger „stratarchy“ (dimension of organizational structures).*

There has been an increasing number of representatives of the lower party levels in the national party executives. When we look at the SD executive, the one group which has constantly expanded its share after the reform 1969, are regional representatives, i.e. chairman of the county organisations (Amtsorganisationen). In the 90s they held 8 out of 17 seats. At the same time, the national „party in public office“ was represented by only three or four members in the national executive. The Conservatives kept their traditional strong representation of the lower strata in the national organs (Bille 1992: 236f. and 242f.). Obviously, the need to integrate different party levels in the national executives was more important than the alleged demands of the national elite to increase its autonomy.

- *The marginalization of party members is less marked than expected (dimension of political role).*

While the importance of member fees to party financing declined due to the introduction of state subsidies, there is only little evidence that the position of the delegates with respect to internal party decision-making was markedly weakened. The leading party politicians may control more resources (staff, media access) than before but still have to convince party commissions and congresses to get their policies adopted by the party. Ballots have not replaced the delegatory principle. In the Conservative Party the extra-parliamentary party

actually gained in importance since the 70s and now controls the formerly autonomous parliamentary party to a higher degree than before. With respect to decisions on party personnel the party congress (election of party chairman) respectively the local branches (candidate selection) still remain influential.

**Germany** has been described as one of the pioneers on „the public roads to political money“ (Nassmacher 1989: 237). The parliamentary parties receive subsidies for employing research assistants and secretaries since 1959, the individual MPs can claim an allowance for employing personal assistants since 1969.<sup>3</sup> The party organisations have received state subventions for their general political activities between 1959 and 1966, campaign reimbursement as well as substantial subsidies for their political foundations from 1967 onwards. The Social Democrats (SPD) as a prototypical mass party remained sceptical towards public financing until 1966. Increasing expenditures for election campaigns and party administration as well as their political move towards the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) in the 60s („Grand Coalition“ 1966-69) led the SPD to a change of mind. Only with the emergence of the Green Party in the early 80s a political force emerged which criticised the „Selbstbedienungsmentalität“ (self-service mentality) of the old parties.<sup>4</sup> Since 1994 the parties also receive subventions for their success in attracting member fees and donations („matching funds“). In the 90s, the national party level of both Social Democrats (SPD) and Christian Democrats (CDU) were financed primarily by the state.

However, vulnerability can not be said to be responsible for causing this move towards the state (see Wiesendahl 1999)!

The introduction and expansion of public subsidies coincided with a massive expansion of the membership organisations of the German parties and with a process of de-fragmentation in the party system („triopol“ CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP after 1961). Thus, the established parties looked for further income at a time when they were very successful in mobilizing new members and closing off the political market. Table 1 shows how SPD (until 1976) and CDU (until 1983) expanded their membership organisations. Whereas the SPD could win many young people in the first years in government („dare more democracy“), the CDU mobilised

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<sup>3</sup> The figures are impressive: in the 90s there were over 4.000 personal assistants supporting the 670 MPs; in addition, the five parliamentary parties disposed of a staff of 837 in 1995 (Schindler 1999: 1007 and 3261ff.).

<sup>4</sup> Yet, lacking a solid member base, soon became heavily dependent on state subventions itself. Between 1983 and 1987 the national level of the Green Party received 84% of its financial means out of the campaign reimbursement. In 1989 the Greens created their own political foundation (Ebbighausen et al. 1996: 341ff.).



new supporters in the recruitment drive under Helmut Kohl in opposition. From the 80s onwards both parties lost members, only temporarily stopped by reunification.

*Table 2: Development of membership in SPD and CDU*

Year	Electorate (in millions)	Members SPD (in thousand)	Members CDU (in thousand)
1961	37,4	646	248
1965	38,5	710	287
1972	41,4	954	422
1976	42,0	1,022	652
1980	43,2	986	693
1983	44,0	925	734
1987	45,3	910	705
1990	60,4	919	784
1994	60,4	849	670
1999	60,7	760	638

Sources: Poguntke & Boll 1992: 332; Scarrow 1999: 76; Süddeutsche Zeitung, 02.01.2001.

The important fact, however, as far as the cartel thesis is concerned, is that the German parties voluntarily agreed to rely on the state for securing their resources without being in a state of vulnerability. The national SPD, for example, received membership fees in 1989 (20 Mio. DM) four times the amount of 1970 (5 Mio. DM). In the same period of time, state subventions for the central party office also nearly quadrupled from 12,8 Mio. DM (Ø 1970-74) to 40 Mio. DM (Ø 1985-89).<sup>5</sup>

If one wants to explain this development, one certainly has to take account of the strong party state in Germany which developed after 1949. The parties which after the Second World War were in the historical position to very much shape their own institutional context (strict parliamentarism, constitutional recognition and regulation of parties, federal structure) used the expansion of the state sector in the 50s to become powerful political actors which not only dominate parliaments and governments but are also very present in the public administration and the state-controlled sectors of society (public media, universities, hospitals, etc.). Thus, German parties gained the political power to enact reforms - restricted by the Constitutional Court - which further strengthened their organisational resources and they also had the incentives to share the „goodies“ among themselves (patronage, career positions and „security nets“). The collective self-interests of the parties can be seen as cause of the formation of the

<sup>5</sup> See Poguntke & Boll 1992: 378.

German party cartel.<sup>6</sup> However, there is reason to claim that the success of the German cartel in controlling the political process led to an estrangement from society - i.e. declining levels of participation in parties, emergence of new parties, disillusionment with politics and higher rates of volatility.

As in the Danish case, there are several features which distinguish German parties from the ideal type of the cartel party:

- *The level of exclusion of new parties is moderate (dimension of party competition).*

When the Green Party first entered the Bundestag in 1983 they met with hostile reactions from the established „tripol“. The Greens (and again the East-German post-socialist PDS after 1990) were not accepted as potential coalition partner and excluded from several parliamentary committees. After a period of „socialisation“ where the Greens became more pragmatic, the SPD invited them as junior partner in several coalitions on the regional level (like the PDS in 1998) before they together formed the national government in 1998. The relatively high threshold of 5% which is in force since the 1950s can be understood as effective instrument of exclusion. However, the access to campaign reimbursement is open (0,5% of the votes) and strongly contributed to the consolidation of new parties like the Greens (as well as the right-wing parties in the 90s). State subsidies have therefore rather strengthened the position of new competitors. Although the established parties received a higher proportion of the subventions, the smaller parties with only limited revenues from fees and donations became dependent on public money to a much higher degree. In a similar manner, free broadcasting time on public television and radio is distributed proportionally among all parties. The established parties have not used their influence on the media boards to exclude „outsiders“.

- *The leading party bodies are characterised by stronger „federalization“ (Koole 1996) instead of stronger „stratarchy“ (dimension of organizational structures).*

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<sup>6</sup> There certainly is a party cartel consisting of SPD, CDU/CSU and FDP (and the Greens?) as far as self-interested collusion in matters of public financing is concerned. However – and I think this distinction is somehow lost in the cartel thesis -, they do not necessarily act as a cartel as far as political decision-making is concerned. Thus, the new SPD/Green Party-government enacted reforms (citizenship, „ecological taxes“, ending of nuclear energy) which would have not seen the light of day with the old CDU/CSU and FDP-

The national „party in public office“ dominated the national party executives of SPD and CDU in the 60s very strongly. From the 70s onwards, both parties show a stronger representation of regional politicians, mainly members of the regional governments. The lower strata thus provided about 1/3 of the national party leadership. In the SPD successive party leaders in the 80s and 90s qualified as successful regional politicians (Engholm, Scharping, Lafontaine, Schröder). The CDU has traditionally been characterised by a stronger federal structure although the last years of the „Kohl reign“ showed an increasing centralization. The new leadership of the party tries to revitalize the CDU by again strengthening the input from the regional party level. The federal structure of Germany with its powerful *Länder* executives constitutes an institutional parameter which explains why the national party executives have increasingly become forums for integrating professional politicians from different levels of the political system.

- *The marginalization of party members is less marked than expected (dimension of political role).*

Membership fees now constitute only about 20% (CDU) to 25% (SPD) of the budget of the national parties which are financed primarily by state subsidies. In contrast, the local party organizations are basically financed by their members. Internal decision-making procedures in the SPD have not changed much since the 60s and are still dominated by committees with representation from all political, social and regional segments of the party. In the CDU, the party congress and the party executive have actually gained in importance, especially in the oppositional years in the 70s and early 80s. The parliamentary leaderships of both parties used their resources (access to political decisions, expertise, staff, media presence) to control party policies yet still had to win the support of other party actors. With respect to decision on party personnel, the party congress of the SPD still determines all members of the national executive, whereas the party congress of the CDU has actually been strengthened by the provisions of the party law of 1967 (no more than 20% *ex officio*-members in party bodies). Candidate selection remained very much in the hands of local and regional party executives, although ballots have increasingly been used by the CDU in the 90s.

In both countries, the major parties fulfil the core elements of the cartel thesis (inter-penetration party and state, inter-party collusion) without showing all of the other postulated characteristics in pure form. The „party in public office“ is important but not autonomous or

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government. So there is a difference between „political class“ with respect to mutual self-maintenance and

omnipotent; the ties to society may be eroded but they are not severed. In particular, there seems to be evidence that the use of state resources rather served the organisational self-interests of all parties in the political competition than helped to sustain the barrier between „insiders“ and „outsiders“. <sup>7</sup> Thus, new parties could consolidate, build up a professional party apparatus, bring in new ideas in the political process and force the old parties to adapt politically. Neither Denmark nor Germany could be characterised by an elimination of political competition.

Let us now look rather briefly at Switzerland and the UK, the „negative cases“ for the cartel thesis. In one country a party cartel did prove not to be successful in securing the self-interests of its members, in the other country the cartel did not materialize in the first place.

In **Switzerland**, the Social Democrats (SPS) and the Christian Democrats (CVP) form part of the „Grand Coalition“ which has held power since 1959. Governmental posts are shared among the four political forces according to the „magic formula“ (2 Social Democrats, 2 Christian Democrats, 2 Liberals, 1 Swiss People’s Party); proportional quotas also apply to other state institutions (judiciary, administration, welfare institutions). The Swiss institutional setting with federalism, direct democracy and corporatism representing alternative political channels to the parliamentary arena has been interpreted as causing a permanent incentive for holding on to the Swiss consociational traditions (Sciarini & Hug 1999).

The national party organizations are relatively weak in terms of financial means and staffing. In addition, both the CVP and the SPS have been exposed to membership stagnation (Table 3) and periods of electoral decline.

*Table 3: Development of membership in SPS and CVP*

Year	Electorate (in millions)	Members SPS (in thousand)	Members CVP (in thousand)
1960	1,4	57	n.b.
1965	1,5	57	111
1970	1,6	53	n.b.
1975	3,7	53	90
1980	3,8	52	n.b.
1985	4,0	43	n.b.
1990	4,1	38	60
1995	4,3	39	80
1997	4,5	38	74

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„political elite“ with respect to political decision-making (von Beyme 1996).

<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, the British case shows that an absence of state subventions contributes to the predominance of the established parties and makes it even more difficult for new parties to challenge the „insiders“.

„n.b.“ = not known. While the SPS publishes its membership statistics regularly, the data for the CVP which does not possess a central membership register, has to rely on estimates by Swiss political scientists.

Sources: Ladner & Brändle 1999; Altermatt 2000: 67f.

The Christian Democrats which have traditionally been confined to the Catholics in the rural parts of the country tried to win new supporters by starting a series of internal party reforms in 1970 (direct party membership, smaller and more effective party bodies, etc.). At the same time, the CVP began to set the agenda for a closer co-operation between the government partners (coalition agreements) and for an expansion of the resources of the national parties (see below). Despite these efforts, the CVP could not stop the continuing erosion of its electoral support. After the election of 1999, the CVP has become the smallest of the four government parties.

The Social Democrats remained relatively stable with respect to their membership basis and to their electoral support well into the 80s. The increase of internal conflicts, the success of new left-wing parties (e.g. Green Party) and the minority position within the government bloc dominated by bourgeois parties were then perceived as threatening the position of the SPS. The party reacted by making greater use of the instruments of direct democracy (describing themselves as „oppositional government party“) and demanding a better infrastructure for the national party (see below).

The major Swiss parties tried three times to expand their organisational resources by providing for state subventions. In 1973 the national government (initiated by the CVP) introduced a bill („Parteienartikel“) which contained regulations on campaign reimbursement. Interest groups and regional governments rejected this initiative in the pre-parliamentarian consultations. The government settled for modest subsidies to the parliamentary parties. In 1977 the same proposal was part of a constitutional revision and contributed to the downfall of the whole project. Once again, interest groups and regional governments declared to oppose the national government in the obligatory referendum. In 1989 parliament (initiated by the SPS) called for an expansion of the subsidies to the parliamentary parties (realized in 1990) and the introduction of campaign reimbursement to the party organisations. In addition, a parliamentary reform (including higher allowances and better infrastructure for the MPs) was passed supported by nearly all parties. This reform was rejected in a referendum in 1992 showing the reluctance of the Swiss citizens to accept the professionalization of politics. With the failure of the parliamentary reform, the plan to introduce public subsidies to the party organizations was cancelled for the third time.

This chronology of events demonstrates that the Swiss parties were willing to secure their organisational self-interests by moving towards the state. However, the fact that every parliamentary decision can be brought to a plebiscite necessitates a consensus among the political elite. The failure to convince regional party politicians, leading functionaries of interest groups and the majority of the people that the national parties were in need of state subsidies explains why there is only little public money available to the Swiss parties. The cartel of the „magic formula“ which has proved so successful in maintaining governmental status has not been able to (directly) benefit from this status organisationally. The reason is that there are important channels of political decision-making beyond the parliamentary arena in Switzerland which the national parties can not control that easily.

In the **United Kingdom** both major parties experienced a massive decline in (individual) membership levels over the last decades (Table 4). Given the strict parliamentarism of the British parties and the ability to rely on external sponsors (trade unions/ private donors) neither the Labour Party nor the Conservative Party seemed to be worried about this development until the 90s when both parties intensified their efforts to recruit new members. In addition, both parties benefited from the majority voting system which handicapped third parties. Thus, one can argue that the perception of vulnerability was not very marked in the British case for a long time.

*Table 4: Development of membership in the Labour Party and the Conservative Party*

Year	Electorate (in millions)	Members Labour (in thousand)	Members Conservatives (in thousand)
1960	35,4	790	2,800
1966	35,9	776	n.b.
1970	39,3	690	n.b.
1974	40,0	692	1,500
1979	41,0	666	1,000.
1983	42,1	295	n.b.
1988	43,1	265	1,000
1992	43,2	280	750
1996	43,8	400	400
1998	43,8	391	335

„n.b.“ = not known. The figures only cover individual members in the Labour Party. The figures for both parties must be treated with caution. Internal provisions in the Labour Party caused an overestimation of members prior to 1980. The Conservative Party lacks a central register and information thus rests on estimates of the Conservative Central Office.

Sources: Scarrow 1996: 75; Peele 1998: 144; Guardian vom 14.04.1999.

The Labour Party made some efforts in the 70s to introduce public subsidies. The Wilson government introduced modest grants to the opposition parties in parliament („Short Money“)

in 1974. It also set up the Houghton committee in 1975 to investigate into the advantages and disadvantages of state financing. While Labour and the Liberal Party supported the positive result of the committee report, the Conservatives with their access to wealthy donors opposed it stubbornly. As there was a lack of common interests, inter-party co-operation was not feasible. The Labour Party did not dare to enact the reform against the Conservatives, which after 1979 showed no interest in bringing the issue back on the agenda (Scarrow 1996: 120). The long period in opposition (1979-97) led to fundamental changes within the Labour Party and to the establishment of a „opposition cartel“ (Webb 1999). The reform agenda on which Labour and the Liberal Democrats agreed included the provision of state financing. However, in contrast to other reform projects (devolution, voting system, reform of the House of Lords) the Blair government did not force the issue when in office. The Neill committee (1998) saw no possibility to establish a national consensus on the question of state subsidies.

Inter-party cooperations are not part of the Westminster model of democracy. There is a strict competitive logic within British parliamentarism: the winner takes all and the loser is not encouraged to participate in political decisions. The ideological polarisation which took place in the late 70s and 80s enforced the historical antagonism between Labour and Conservative party. Instead of mutually securing their respective organizational maintenance, as envisaged in the cartel party model, the Conservative government violated vital interests of their opponents (abolition of local councils, weakening of trade unions, unwillingness to share appointments), while the Labour Party ended the implicit consensus on the institutional rules of the game. Obviously, there was no common ground to agree on introducing public subsidies on which both parties could have benefited. The British case demonstrates that agreeing on common organisational interests is a *sine qua non* for forming a party cartel.

### **Back to theory**

What does the analysis of major parties in the four European countries tell us about the capacity of the cartel thesis to explain party change in Western Europe?

While parties within a national context have become more similar over the last decades - for example, Social Democratic parties showing greater autonomy of their „parties in public office“ and losing their ties to the wider workers movement, whereas bourgeois parties (especially Christian Democrats) rather tended to strengthen their extra-parliamentary bodies, the differences between the countries remained. Thus, national configurations have become more important and the belonging to a certain party family mattered less than before.

I would like to conclude by suggesting three modifications of the cartel thesis.

Denmark and Germany represent *alternative roads* to a party cartel. In Denmark, parties perceived an increasing vulnerability of societal resources and adapted by moving towards the state. In Germany, parties realized that they could use their dominance in the political institutions („Parteienstaat“) to expand their organizational resources by acting collectively and sharing the resources provided by the state (i.e. by themselves). Thus, not crisis motivated the formation of the German party cartel but the capacity of the major parties to further their common self-interests. My **first suggestion** therefore is, that we should allow for a „multiple causation“ (Ragin 1987) when explaining cartel tendencies. It may be either vulnerability or political opportunity to enhance mutual self-interests which trigger the development.

My **second suggestion** is to restrict the cartel thesis to its core elements. The cartel thesis elaborates on a significant change in European parties when pointing to the stronger symbiosis between parties and the state as well as to the increased disposition of parties to engage in inter-party co-operation with respect to organizational self-interests. The cartel thesis enables us to understand party change in some European countries much more clearly. However, the „positive cases“ (Denmark, Germany) also throw some doubt on whether all of the characteristics associated with the cartel type form „defining characteristics“ (Koole 1996).

With respect to the organisational dimension of party change, I would argue that there is a parliamentarization of parties - although it has rather decreased in bourgeois parties since the 70s - but that the autonomy of the „party in public office“ remains limited. Stratarchy seems to be counteracted by the growing efforts to integrate different party levels in the national party executives.

With respect to the position of parties between the spheres of society and the state (political role), there is a certain tendency to loosen societal ties within the cartel parties. However, the permanent organisational linkages to society have not been eroded altogether. Party delegates still have some influence on decisions on party personnel and party policies, representatives of interest groups continue to be present on party bodies. Thus, there still is popular input in party politics although it is certainly correct to assume that parties nowadays resemble „partnerships of professionals“ more than „associations of or for the citizens“ (Katz & Mair 1995: 22). Parties moved closer to the sphere of the state but there is no complete estrangement from society.



With respect to the patterns of party competition, in my opinion the change has been less dramatic than postulated in the cartel thesis. First, one should distinguish between institutional reforms (e.g. introduction of state subsidies) and policy decisions. What we can see in Denmark and Germany, is parties securing their organisational resources by colluding on institutional reforms. However, this is not equivalent to parties pursuing the same policies. As far as there are policy differences among the established cartel parties, voters still have political alternatives. Thus, I can not see elections becoming „dignified parts“ of the constitution (Katz & Mair 1995: 22). Again, I would restrict the cartel argument to institutional matters where the „political class“ shares common interests. As a policy-making elite, parties remain competitive (von Beyme 1996: 151). Second, the exclusion of newcomers has not been that pronounced. In Denmark, the established parties refused to change electoral laws to secure their position despite the increased fragmentation of the party system after 1973. In Germany, the Green Party and the post-socialist PDS could claim proportional representation in parliamentary bodies (Bundestag praesidium, select committees) after passing the 5%-threshold. Public subsidies as well as the access to free broadcasting time in the public media contributed to the consolidation of new parties in both countries (see Pierre et al. 2000).

My **third suggestion** rather derives from the „negative cases“, Switzerland and the UK. There are certain favourable respectively unfavourable conditions which facilitates or hinders the development of a party cartel. This line of argument is already present in the original article by Katz & Mair (1995) and I have simply elaborated on this point. I would like to stress three factors.

First, institutional parameters proved to be important. On the one hand, the electoral system either reinforced (e.g. Denmark) or blocked (e.g. UK) tendencies of vulnerability and thereby influenced the perception of crisis and the pressure to adapt. On the other hand, the strength of the party state (e.g. Germany ) furthered the capacities of parties to control their organisational development, whereas a weak party state (e.g. Switzerland) diminished these possibilities. In particular, direct democracy counteracted cartellization in the Swiss case.

Second, political traditions of accommodation facilitate cartel formation. Political actors have learned to cooperate with their political opponents by solving major political issues. Compromises, mutual trust and an enhanced understanding of each others needs came to dominate the political process. Thus, the basis for collective action was laid in the consensual traditions of Denmark and Switzerland. In Germany, the parties after 1945 tried to overcome

the traditional hostilities between the political subcultures or „milieus“ which have characterised the Weimar Republic. The „catch-all party“ CDU/CSU was founded to integrate different political traditions. In contrast, British parties were socialised in an „adversarial“ political culture. When Thatcherism ended the Keynesian „post-war consensus“, the cleavages between the opponents were reinforced.

Third, political professionalization facilitates cartel formation. Full-time politicians planning a long-term political career „come to regard their political opponents as fellow professionals, who are driven by the same desire for job security“ (Katz & Mair 1995: 23). Thus, politicians of different parties not only work together in different settings (coalitions, parliamentary committees) but also share common interests concerning their individual (income, reelection, career ambitions) and organisational (state subsidies, patronage) self-maintenance and are therefore prepared to participate in institutional inter-party co-operation (Borchert 2001). The high level of professionalization in Germany, and the increasing professionalization in Denmark added to the favourable conditions for establishing a party cartel. In contrast, Westminster MPs, especially Conservative members, continued to remain part-time parliamentarians well into the 70s. Again, this contributed to the rather different perception of self-interests on both sides of parliament.

In conclusion, the cartel thesis can tell us a lot about how and why parties in Western Europe change. The rather provocative hypotheses, that Katz & Mair (1995) postulate, allows for very lively discussions, especially as they link party change and the quality of the democratic process. In this paper, I have tried to modify the cartel thesis in order to explain the cases that I have looked at empirically. Whether my suggestions also holds for other parties remains to be seen. However, I hope that they can stimulate lively discussions nearly as well as the original article did.

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