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## The Ascendancy of the Party in Public Office:

### Party Organizational Change in Twentieth-Century Democracies

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This chapter is concerned with the development of party organizations in twentieth-century democracies, and deals specifically with the shifting balance of power between what we have earlier (Katz and Mair 1993) termed the three organizational 'faces' of party: the party on the ground, the party in central office, and the party in public office. We evaluate the changing balance among these three faces in the context of four models of party organization: the cadre (or elite) party, which was the dominant form of party organization prior to mass suffrage; the mass party, which emerged with, or in anticipation of and to militate for, mass suffrage, and which was widely regarded, particularly in Europe, as the 'normal' or 'ideal' form of party organization for most of the twentieth century; the catch-all party, development towards which was first commented upon in the literature in the 1960s (Kirchheimer 1966), and which has come to rival the mass party not only in prominence (which some have regarded as a bad thing), but also in the affections of many analysts, particularly in North America; and finally, what we have called the cartel party (Katz and Mair 1995; see also Koole 1996; Katz and Mair 1996), a new and emerging model of party organization which we believe to be increasingly evident among the established democracies in recent years. In tracing the shifting balance of power among the three faces and across the four models of party organization, we contend that the most recent stage of development has resulted in the ascendancy of the party in public office, and the concomitant 'relegation' or subordination of the other two faces. Moreover, while parties on the ground sometimes continue to flourish, we suggest that the ostensible empowerment of party memberships, or even their greater autonomy, may nevertheless be compatible with an increased privileging of the party in public office. Finally, we also briefly discuss both the sources and implications of party organizational change, suggesting an association

between the most recent shifts in the internal balance of intra-party power, on the one hand, and the apparent growth in popular feelings of alienation from parties, on the other.

Although, as we shall argue, this general pattern of organizational development reflects a dynamic of stimulus and response, and so, in some ways, is a natural sequence, its actual form is largely specific to Western Europe, and even within Western Europe, it does not necessarily characterize the developmental trajectory of every specific party. Rather, each model represents one of a series of organizational 'inventions' which then becomes part of an available repertoire from which political actors may draw directly. Moreover, since many of the contextual factors (for example, the extent of enfranchisement, systems of mass communication, consensus regarding the desirability and necessity of the welfare state) that were among the stimuli to which earlier parties responded, and which conditioned their responses to other stimuli, were themselves temporally ordered and specific, it is not to be expected that this developmental sequence will be (have been) repeated elsewhere. None the less, these four party types both illustrate the problems that are generic to all parties and form the currently available body of experience on which the building of new parties is likely to be based, and so the relevance and utility of this treatment extend beyond its roots in the political history of Europe.

### THREE MODELS OF PARTY ORGANIZATION

#### *The Elite Party*

Early parliaments in the liberal and proto-liberal states of Northern Europe were composed of representatives of local communities. Organization, to the extent that it existed at all, evolved on two levels. If there were division within the community (generally meaning if there were division within the local elite), there might be organization within an individual constituency to contest its seat(s).<sup>1</sup> To the extent that there were regular patterns of conflict within the Parliament, those who found themselves generally in agreement might organize to coordinate their efforts or demands. At the point when these two forms of proto-organization began to interact, with local competition for seats at least in part structured by the same divisions that structured cooperation and competition in the Parliament, and at least in part conducted for the purpose of altering the balance in Parliament, it becomes reasonable to talk about parties in something approaching the modern sense.

Given the highly restrictive suffrage of most pre-twentieth-century European elections, and the often even more restrictive requirements for parliamentary membership, Members of Parliament (and also, therefore, the members of the party in public office) of these elite parties generally were not

simply representatives, but rather were themselves the leaders, or the direct agents of the leaders, of the communities nominally represented. Real local organization would only be necessary in the event of electoral challenge, and thus would be temporary in nature; to the extent that one could speak of an enduring party on the ground, it would be virtually indistinguishable from the personal network of friends and clients of the member or his principals (Ware 1987b: 120-1).

The second key feature of the liberal elite party, along with the high 'quality' and small number of the members of the party on the ground, is that the party on the ground and the party in public office were so intimately related as to be essentially indistinguishable. Moreover, where the party in public office and the party on the ground were not simply the same people, the connection between the two was focused at the constituency level. The essence of the elite party is a small core of individuals with independent and personal access to resources able to place either one of their number or their surrogate in Parliament as their representative (Duverger 1954: 62-7; Ostrogorski 1902: i).

This local focus leads to the third key feature of the elite party: the weakness, if not the literal absence, of the party in central office. This has several roots. Most importantly, because the members of the party in public office can rely either on their own resources or else on the resources of the individual members of the party on the ground, they have no dependence on central resources, and hence no need to defer to a central authority. While they may create some central office as an aid to coordinating their activities in Parliament, it will remain purely a service organization, completely subordinate to the party in public office. Further, so long as the primary functions of the state are administrative rather than directive (or so long as the members of the party in public office would prefer such a state), there is little need for reliable majorities, and hence little need for party discipline. Because the party on the ground in each constituency is fundamentally independent, these bodies as well have little need for a party in central office and no desire to subordinate themselves to any central authority. Additionally, the philosophical and social underpinnings of the elite party are incompatible with the idea that the local elite who comprise the party on the ground would be subordinated to such an authority. Another way of saying this is that the elite party is an agglomeration of local parties more than it is a single national organization (Beer 1982: ch. 2).

Even allowing for the continued prominence of a number of members who owed their seats to the patronage of some 'duke or lord or baronet' after the beginning of suffrage expansion, it is probably fair to say that the party in public office was the dominant face of the elite party, at least with regard to decisions taken in the Parliament. This is so for two reasons, both of which cast some doubt on the utility of talking about a dominant face at all. First, the party in public office tends to be the only group in the party that has either

the need or the opportunity to make collective decisions; when one looks for the locus of party decision-making at the national level, there is nowhere else to look. Second, the individual members of the party in public office tend to appear unconstrained with regard to policy by the party on the ground, but this is largely the result of the indifference of party on the ground to most policy, coupled with the identity of the party in public office and the party on the ground.

The elite party model as just described reflects both the social and institutional structures of Northern Europe in the nineteenth century. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, an alternative version of the elite party arose in Southern Europe. The resulting system, identified as *caciquismo* in Spain, or *trasformismo* in Italy, made a sham of electoral politics, relying more on centrally orchestrated corruption than on the local standing of parochial elites.<sup>2</sup> In organizational terms, however, the resulting parties were quite similar. The central organizers comprised the party in public office, which, even more than in Northern Europe, clearly dominated.

Distilling the organizational essence of the elite party model (a small party on the ground in each constituency able to provide its own resources, close and locally based ties between the individual members of the party in public office and their individual parties on the ground, a weak or entirely absent party in central office), however, suggests that parties quite similar to the European model might emerge elsewhere as well. Indeed, Duverger (1954) suggests that this is precisely what happened in the United States (see also Epstein 1967: ch. 5). There a local cadre of politicians (the caucus or machine) played the role of Europe's local notables while graft took the place of private fortunes in providing resources. Similarly, Hoskin (1995) suggests that the elite party model predominated in Colombia between the 1850s and 1930s (see also Kern 1973), while one might expect to find parties that closely fit the elite model emerging particularly in the more traditional areas of the new democracies of the late twentieth century.

### *The Mass Party*

Even before suffrage expansion, some of the conditions that favoured the elite party in nineteenth-century Europe began to change. The expansion of the role of government (Ery 1979) and the development of notions of government responsibility to Parliament (Jennings 1969: 17-18) increased the value of reliable party cohesion within the party in public office. It also increased the national relevance of local elections, stimulating greater communication and coordination across the local parties on the ground. Coupled with a decline in the number and significance of 'pocket boroughs', this shifted the balance of power within European elite parties even more in favour of the party in public office over the party on the ground. But so long as active participation in

electoral politics remained the preserve of a narrow stratum of society (or in cases such as the United States, in which voters could be mobilized through patronage or other personalistic ties), the divergence of class, interest, and personnel between the party in public office and the party on the ground that would be necessary before one could speak meaningfully of dominance remained minimal and the basic fusion of these two faces of party remained as well.

With the expansion of the electorate from thousands to hundreds of thousands, raw numbers became a valuable political resource, and at the same time more elaborate organization became a necessity. For those interests whose potential strength lay in numbers of supporters rather than in the 'quality' of their individual supporters, notably the working class and fundamentalist Protestants, the elite party model clearly was inappropriate. Archetypically, the parties that developed to represent and advance these groups initially had no party in public office, because they were excluded from electoral participation. Even if their core organizers included a few Members of Parliament elected through one of the 'bourgeois' parties, they perceived one primary task to be the formation of independent organizations that would mobilize their supporters, first to win the right to vote, and then to provide both the votes and the other resources required to win elections under the new conditions of mass suffrage.

Because these resources had to be amassed on the basis of many small contributions from ordinary people rather than coming from a few wealthy or powerful individuals, this effort required a substantial party on the ground. And because the demands of these groups involved fundamental changes in national policy, it also required organization and coordination across constituencies, that is to say, a substantial party in central office. Both of these requirements were heightened by the strategy of encapsulation, which required the maintenance of a panoply of ancillary organizations, and by the fusion of electoral mobilization with additional activities such as the provision of proto-welfare services (e.g. Roth 1963). The organizational form that evolved to meet these needs is the mass party.

Whether the party in central office was formed first for the purpose of creating a party on the ground or was formed as an umbrella for the political/electoral activities of previously existing organizations (for example, churches or trade unions) is less significant than the symbiotic relationship between the two. The party in central office provides support for the expansion of the party on the ground and central co-ordination for its activities, while the party on the ground provides the resources that are necessary for the existence and success of the party in central office. As in any symbiotic relationship, it is difficult to say whether the party in central office or the party on the ground will be dominant, or even what dominance would mean.

In the ideology and formal structure of the mass party, the party in central office is the agent of the party on the ground (Beer 1982: ch. 3). Its leading

officials are elected at a party congress as the representatives of the mass membership. But having been elected by the members, and therefore occupying a position presumably subservient to the party on the ground, the leaders of the party in central office also have been given a mandate to manage the party, and presumably to make rules for and give directives to the party on the ground (McKenzie 1955). It is particularly in this nexus that questions about party democracy and the iron law of oligarchy are raised.

While the power relationship between the party in central office and the party on the ground is somewhat ambiguous, the fact that these two faces are separate is perfectly clear. The party in central office is staffed by full-time professionals; the party on the ground is overwhelmingly made up of part-time volunteers. People in the party in central office are paid to be members; people in the party on the ground generally must pay in order to be members. The party in central office and the party on the ground are likely to be motivated by different varieties of incentives, and to measure success by different standards (Panbianco 1988: 9–11, 24–5, 30–2). None the less, their relationship can be fundamentally harmonious. Even where the party in central office is clearly dominant, it claims to exercise this dominance in the name of the party on the ground, while to the degree that the party becomes a single national entity, dominance by the party on the ground can be exercised only through a strong party in central office.

The mass party model also clearly separates the party on the ground from the party in public office. No longer an informal caucus of a few individuals, the party on the ground grows to include hundreds, if not thousands, of members. The Member of Parliament can no longer be seen as simply one of the party elite taking/serving his turn, but rather Member of Parliament has become a distinct organizational role. Moreover, within the ideology of the mass party, the role of Member of Parliament, and hence the party in public office, is clearly to be subordinate to the membership organization. In the elite party, party organization is instrumental to the achievement of the goals of the individual members of the party in public office. In the mass party, the party in public office is instrumental to the achievement of the goals of the party organization. In this respect, the party in central office has another function, that of supervising and controlling the party in public office on behalf of the party on the ground.

The idea that Member of Parliament is a party role conflicts, however, with the previous idea that Member of Parliament is a public role. Even if the elite party did represent particular interests within society, it claimed to represent the interests of the nation as a whole, and the members of the party in public office claimed to be the leaders of the communities they represented taken as wholes.<sup>3</sup> (The latter claim is, of course, less true of the elite parties of *caciquismo* or *transformismo*, where conflict is avoided by conceding that the role of MP is a 'private' one.) To the extent that this were true, the party and

public roles of members of the party in public office could not be in conflict. The mass party, on the other hand, is explicitly the representative of only one segment of society. This, coupled with the idea that the member of the party in public office is in the first instance the agent of his or her party organization (whether the party on the ground or the party in central office as the agent of the party on the ground), sets up a potential conflict, which is only partially mitigated when the introduction of proportional representation allows the idea that each constituency is represented by its parliamentary delegation as a whole, rather than by each MP as an individual, partially to reconcile loyalty to party with loyalty to constituency. Each member of the party in public office has two groups to whom he or she is responsible (the party organization and the electorate as a whole); two sets of incentives and constraints (those stemming from the desire to maintain and enhance a position within the party and those stemming from the need to win elections); two sources of legitimacy (as the agent of the party and as the holder of a public mandate). Coupled with the difference in perspective between those in office, with both the responsibilities of power and direct evidence of the limitations of that power, and those in the party on the ground for whom the simple answers of ideology are not directly confronted with the hard realities of practical politics, this leads to the substantial possibility of conflict between the party in public office and the party in central office/party on the ground, and thus to the increased importance of the question of relative influence or power.

The mass party model is the first to involve a clear distinction among the three faces of party at the empirical level (distinct and separate organizational presences; made up of different types of people; different and potentially conflicting incentive structures) and not just at the theoretical/conceptual level. It implies a particular organizational form (local membership branches supplemented by ancillary organizations; a representative party congress electing a central party executive; etc.), but it also depends on a particular balance among the three faces. In the early days of the mass party model, and generally in the early days of any party organized in this fashion, the party in central office, whether acting independently or as the real agent of the party on the ground, is likely to be the dominant face, as required. It controls the resources. The party in public office will not have experienced either the demands or the rewards of control over the government. Particularly once the party in public office gains access to the resources of government, however, it is likely to assert greater independence, and thus to threaten the 'mass party'ness' of the organization.

As with elite parties, there were significant differences in the evolution of mass parties in different parts of Europe, and these could have a substantial impact on this process. Where the powers of the *régime censitaire* were effective in managing elections and suppressing real competition (for example,

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Italy and Spain), demands for effective participation were more likely to be met with suppression than with incorporation. One result tended to be the radicalization of the left, in particular with communist rather than social democratic parties predominating. Their organization tended to reflect their circumstances, with strong centralization in the party central office. While this increased the subordination of the party in public office to the central office, it also minimized the internal influence of the party on the ground. By contrast, where liberal regimes already tolerated trade unions before the effective extension of suffrage to the working class (for example, the United Kingdom), the unions often became the basis for party organization. One organizational consequence might be that corporate members (those who became 'members' of the party through their union membership), although numerically predominant, would be represented in party circles by their unions rather than as individuals. And while this too might result in a weaker (because less necessary) party on the ground vis-à-vis a party central office both paid for and controlled by the unions, it would also serve to weaken the legitimacy of the parliamentary party's claim on the loyalties of MPs, leading to a somewhat more independent party in public office.

#### *The Catch-All Party*

This alteration of the balance of power within an established mass party is one source of evolution towards the catch-all model of party organization. A second source is change in the structure of the societies in which the elite and mass parties arose (see also below). The elite party is the party of a securely dominant upper class; the mass party is the party of an excluded subculture. As the mass parties succeeded in achieving their political objectives of universal suffrage and the welfare state, both the class dominance that underlay the elite party and the subcultural exclusion that underlay the mass party were eroded.

From the perspective of the elite party, the problem for party leaders was to mobilize mass electoral support, and to secure provision of the greater resources required for electoral competition with mass electorates, without giving up the independence that they previously had enjoyed. In order to do this, they organized membership branches like those of the mass parties. This in turn required a party in central office to coordinate those newly organized and expanded parties on the ground. The end result was three clearly articulated faces, just as in the mass party. But where in the mass party the archetypical sequence was party in central office organizes parties on the ground in order ultimately to create a party in public office, in these cases the sequence was party in public office creates a party in central office in order to organize supporters in the form of parties on the ground. The intention may have been that the parties on the ground be no more than organized cheer leaders for the

professional politicians in the party in public office, but once recruited, party members start to make demands, abetted by the principle first articulated as part of the ideology of the mass party that the party in public office should be responsible to the party's members. The result is that, although the party in public office may be the dominant face of the party, its dominance is constantly under challenge.

This challenge is furthered by changes in modern societies. Reduced working hours, increased, and increasingly standardized, education, the political eclipse of the traditional upper class, and indeed a general weakening of class divisions have made expectations of deference to party leaders more problematic. Rather than owing their positions as party leaders to their positions at the top of a general and natural social hierarchy, party leaders, like leaders in other areas of community life, increasingly have to justify their leadership positions with reference to their capacity to satisfy the needs of their followers, and the followers increasingly have the capacity and the inclination to define and articulate those needs for themselves.

The mass party tends to arrive at a similar result from the other direction (see also Svåsand 1994), that is, through the increased assertiveness of the party in public office rather than the increased assertiveness of the party on the ground. Once significant influence over government policy and entry into government office were perceived to be realistic possibilities, the leaders of mass parties (particularly those in the party in public office, but often those in the party in central office as well) tended increasingly to orient themselves toward the requirements of electoral victory, and increasingly to be constrained by the realities of governing. Whether this is properly seen as 'selling out' the party and its programme to self-interest, as was often charged by more doctrinaire leaders of the party on the ground, or a realistic settling for half or three-quarters of a loaf rather than none at all, is not important. The result from either perspective was to exacerbate tension between the party in public office and the party on the ground.

Again, these tendencies were furthered for both the old elite parties and the old mass parties by a variety of changes in society, many of which were the result of the success of the mass parties in pursuing their agenda of social provision in areas such as education and the gradual erosion of subcultural barriers. On one side, these made a strategy of encapsulation more difficult; social, occupational, and geographic mobility, the weakening of religious ties, the common denominator appeal of mass media, all helped blur the divisions between classes, religions, and regions. On the other, increased education, reduced working hours, the political eclipse of the upper class, and the gradual weakening of class divisions, made expectations of deference to party leaders more problematic. A further development of the later twentieth century is the organization of citizens into a panoply of independent interest groups. This is relevant to the internal workings of political parties because it

provides the citizens with alternative channels of access to government, and party leaders with alternative (to their parties on the ground) access to resources, thus weakening the symbiotic relationship between the party in public office and the party on the ground.

In contrast to the elite party model, in which the party in public office is clearly dominant (albeit in part because the party in public office and party on the ground are fused), and the mass party model in which the party on the ground/party in central office nexus is clearly dominant, the essence of the catch-all party with regard to the relationships among the three internal faces of party is conflict. The place in which this conflict is played out is the party in central office. The question is whether the party in central office will be the agent of the party on the ground in controlling the party in public office, or rather the agent of the party in public office in organizing and directing their (compliant) supporters in the party on the ground. Concretely, is the real leader of the party the chairman/secretary of the central committee or the leader of the parliamentary party? Are inter-party negotiations over policy and government formation conducted by the party in central office or the party in public office? To what extent is membership of the party central committee controlled by or reserved for members of the party in public office? And how much control over the party programme is exercised by the party congress?

#### CONTEMPORARY PARTY ORGANIZATIONS

In contemporary party organizations, however, these conflicts seem to have been settled, in that what we now appear to witness is the ascendancy of the party in public office, which assumes a more or less undisputed position of privilege within the party organization. In other words, we suggest that the development of party organizations in Europe has gone beyond the catch-all period and has entered a new phase, in which parties become increasingly dominated by, as well as most clearly epitomized by, the party in public office. We also suggest that this new balance is evident almost regardless of how these modern party organizations might be more generally typified. In other words, even though we would argue that many of the factors which have facilitated the eventual primacy of the party in public office can also be associated with the emergence of what we define as the cartel party (Katz and Mair 1995), an emphasis on the privileging of the position of the party in public office with respect to the other faces of party organization is not in itself dependent on the validity or otherwise of a particular classification of party organizations. On the contrary, it is a development which can be seen more or less irrespective of whether modern party organizations might best be typified as cartel parties, as 'electoral-professional parties' (Panebianco 1988), or as 'modern cadre parties' (Koole 1994).

The first and most obvious symptom of this new pattern in the internal balance of power involves the distribution of financial resources within the party, and, in particular, the distribution of state subventions. Since the 1960s, when direct state subsidies to political parties were first introduced in a limited number of countries, the channelling of state aid to party organizations has become an almost universal practice in the contemporary European democracies. In most countries, these subventions were first allocated to the parliamentary fractions of the parties, and only later, if at all, was the practice extended to include direct subsidies to the central party organization itself. Even now, the lion's share of the available subsidy continues to go to the parliamentary party, and it is only in a minority of countries—examples include Austria, Finland, and Norway—that the greater proportion of the subvention has tended to be allocated to the central party organization 'outside' Parliament (see Katz and Mair 1992b). Precisely who within the party leadership decides how these sums are then allocated across items within the parties' budgets themselves is, of course, not easily known, and in this sense the existence of the subsidies as such may not seem a strong indication of the privileging of the party in public office. But the fact that the process of state subvention was often initially limited to the parliamentary fractions of the parties, that the fractions themselves often still continue to win the greater share of the total subsidy, and that it is in Parliament that the final decisions are taken as to the levels and types of subsidy to be made available, all suggest that the increasing availability of state aid is one of the key factors operating to the final advantage of those in control of public office.

The second symptom which follows immediately from this, being partly the consequences of the availability of state subsidies, is that by the end of the 1980s a clear shift had begun to take place within party organizations in terms of the allocation of party staffs. Such time-series data on party staffs as are available contain clear evidence of a common trend across countries and parties whereby the growth in the numbers of staff employed by the parliamentary parties, and hence by the party in public office, has significantly outstripped that in the numbers employed by the party headquarters.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, across all the countries for which comparable data are available over time, the average balance has shifted from somewhat more than 25 per cent of staff being employed within the parliamentary offices in earlier periods (usually in the 1960s or early 1970s) to slightly more than 50 per cent by the late 1980s. Although in some countries this shift is very substantial (from having no staff in the parliamentary offices to having more than two-thirds of all staff in the parliamentary offices in the cases of Denmark and Ireland), and in other countries almost negligible (from 62.7 per cent in the early 1980s in the Netherlands to just 66.6 per cent in the late 1980s), there is no single country which defies this general trend. Given that staff constitute a crucial organizational

resource, these data also therefore confirm an increasing bias in favour of the party in public office.

The third symptom which is relevant here is one which we have already often highlighted elsewhere (see for instance Katz and Mair 1995; Mair 1997: 137–9), and that is that most substantial and/or enduring West European parties have recently enjoyed a period of office in national governments, and that most now orient themselves as a matter of course to the occupation of public office. In other words, there now remain few, if any, significant parties of opposition in the West European democracies; at most, there remain simply parties which, now and then, spend more or less limited periods outside government. Those that remain excluded from government office are those that occupy what is more or less the political fringe, a host of small parties which most usually represent either the extremes of left or right, or minority regionalist or environmental demands. The mainstream parties, on the other hand, now including a substantial number of Green parties, as well as even some of the representatives of the far right, have developed to a stage where they are now, or recently have been, holders of public office. This is a dramatic shift in contemporary party systems.

There are also two important aspects of this latter development which need to be underlined. First, as was emphasized above, the acquisition of a governing status is something which is now common to most of the established parties in Western Europe, and, being also something which has emerged through time, it therefore reflects a picture which is markedly different from that which could have been drawn even twenty-five years ago. Second, it is a development which will almost necessarily have impacted upon the internal balance of organizational forces within the parties concerned, since Panebianco (1988: 69) is certainly not alone in reminding us that 'the organizational characteristics of parties which are in opposition for a good part of their existence are different from those which stay in power for a long time'. Power—office—is itself an agent of socialization (e.g., Mughan *et al.* 1997). And much as the organizational style of parties has been influenced by the degree of commitment to and involvement in the parliamentary process, so too can it be expected to have adapted to the increasingly widespread incorporation into government. With time, then, and as governing becomes a standard experience and expectation for most mainstream parties, we can also anticipate that this will have led to the party in public office acquiring enhanced status, prestige, and autonomy. There occurs, in short, a process of 'parliamentarization' of parties (Koole 1994: 291–2), or even, in a more extreme version, a process of 'governmentalization' (Müller 1994: 73), a trend which inevitably risks relegating the importance of both the party on the ground and the party in central office.

Indeed, whatever happens about the party on the ground (see below), such evidence as does exist suggests that there is in fact less and less scope now

available for any potential conflict of interests between the party in public office and the party in central office. In terms of the position of the parties' national executive committees, for example, as we have shown elsewhere (Katz and Mair 1993), the tendency has been to increase the degree of representation, and, presumably, the degree of influence, afforded to the party in public office. Parliamentarians and their leaders now tend to be accorded greater weight in these bodies than was the case in the 1960s and 1970s, and correspondingly less weight is now given to the otherwise non-office-holding representatives of the party on the ground. The trend, to be sure, is not universal, but it is nevertheless sufficiently common to imply that, more often than not, the party in public office now exerts greater control over the national executive than used to be the case.

In any case, and within the general scheme of things, the political position of the party in central office is now clearly less important than was the case during the primacy of the catch-all party and mass party. As noted above, the growth in organizational resources, as indicated by staff and money, has tended to be to the advantage of the parliamentary party. Moreover, the resources which remain within the central office appear to be increasingly devoted to the employment of contractual staff and consultants, and to the provision of outside expertise. In such a context, political accountability would appear to matter less than professional capacity, a development which might well imply the erosion of the independent political weight of the party central offices. It is interesting to note, for example, that while it often proves very difficult to identify the electoral impact, if any, of the development of new campaign techniques and technologies, what is clear is that they have helped to shift the weight of influence within party organizations from amateur democrats to the professional consultants who control these techniques (Bartels 1992: 261; see also Panebianco 1988: 231–2). More specifically, the gradual replacement of general party bureaucrats by professional specialists may act to 'depoliticize' the party organization and will almost certainly help to create the conditions within which the leadership, in public office, can win more autonomy, not least because the activities of these new professionals are almost always more directed (externally) at winning support within the electorate at large rather than (internally) at the organization and maintenance of the party on the ground.

This also underlines a further important shift in the general orientation of modern party organizations. As television and the mass media more generally have emerged as the key channel of communication between party leaders and voters, offering the benefits of a direct linkage in place of what previously had been mediated by organizational cadres and activists, party campaigning has become more centralized and 'nationalized', with the core of the parties' messages now emanating directly from a single national source. A specifically local input has therefore become less and less relevant

to the national campaign,<sup>5</sup> implying that the parties also need to devote less and less effort to the organization and mobilization of the party on the ground. Resources become devoted instead to selling the party message to the electorate at large, and this can result not only in a changed—and more professionalized—role for the party central office, but also in the eventual erosion of the division of responsibilities between the party apparatus in central office and that in public office. Indeed, as parties become more externally oriented, the roles of the professionals serving the party in central office and of those serving the party in public office become almost inseparable, with both responding in the main to the demands of the party leadership in Parliament and in government.

#### MARGINALIZING THE PARTY ON THE GROUND?

All of this might well lead to the hypothesis that, with few exceptions, the modern mainstream parties have now been transformed simply into parties in public office, and that the other faces of the party are withering away. Hence it is not simply the party in central office that may have been eclipsed, subordinated, or marginalized by these most recent developments, but also the party on the ground, with contemporary party organizations becoming effectively indistinguishable from their parliamentary and governmental leaderships. The leaders become the party; the party becomes the leaders. One obvious symptom of this change is, of course, the sheer physical withering of the party on the ground (for some recent evidence, see Mair and Biezen 2001). Among thirteen long-established democracies in Western Europe, for example, party membership as a percentage of the national electorate has fallen from an average of almost 10 per cent in 1980 to less than 6 per cent at the end of the 1990s, a decline which, to varying degrees, is characteristic of each of these thirteen long-established democracies. Nor is this physical withering of the party on the ground simply a function of the expansion of electorates, such that, as was the case in the 1970s and 1980s, falling membership ratios might be attributed to the failure of the party organizations to keep pace with the growing numbers of enfranchised voters. On the contrary: in each of the long-established democracies there has also been a fall in the absolute number of party members being recorded, a fall which is sometimes very substantial. Indeed, with the exception of Germany, where the parties now count a host of new members within the former East German *Länder*, each long-established democracy in Western Europe has seen raw membership levels decline by at least 25 per cent with respect to the levels claimed in 1980. The evidence of organizational decline in this respect is unequivocal.

At the same time, however, and seeming to defy the hypothesis, there is also widespread evidence to suggest that party memberships are, in fact, being

increasingly empowered. Thus different parties in an increasing number of polities have now begun to open up decision-making procedures, as well as candidate- and leadership-selection processes, to the 'ordinary' party member, often by means of postal ballots. Rather than witnessing the withering away of the *power* of the party on the ground, therefore, what we see is the apparent democratization of internal party life, with the ordinary members beginning to win access to rights which formerly were jealously preserved by the party elites and activists. b1

On the face of it, of course, and despite the potential privileging of the party in public office, there appear to be a number of reasons why modern party leaderships should be unwilling to allow the power and even the sheer size of the party on the ground to evaporate.<sup>6</sup> Despite the growth in state subventions, for example, members continue to offer a valuable resource to parties in terms of both money and (campaigning) time. Members also offer themselves, as it were, constituting a reservoir of 'warm bodies' which can be used by the party to maintain a presence in local councils, advisory boards, and elective agencies, and through which the party can both exert influence and avail itself of feedback (see Sundberg 1994). In this sense, members continue to provide an important linkage mechanism through which the party can remain in contact with the world outside Parliament. That said, however, it is important to recognize that even these imputed benefits are substitutable or even dispensable. Thus, the share of party income which is derived from the membership can eventually be replaced by increased public subsidies, provided that the other parties in the system are willing to cooperate in the necessary legislation and decision-making. Moreover, and as noted above, it is also evident that the contribution of the membership to election campaigning is proving less and less necessary, as the campaigns themselves become increasingly controlled by and executed from the centre. And while the provision of 'warm bodies' may well be non-substitutable, it is nevertheless eventually dispensable, and it is perfectly possible to conceive of what might be seen as 'first-order' parties, which develop in such a way that they pay little or no attention to building a penetrative strategy on the ground, preferring to focus instead on a primarily 'national' presence.<sup>7</sup>

If parties continue to feel the need to foster a presence on the ground, therefore, it is probably due largely to the legacy of the past and to the inheritance of earlier models. Party organizations do not begin *ex novo*, but are inherited by party leaders, and although these leaders can attempt to effect major reforms and innovations within the organizations they inherit, there are nevertheless clear limits to the capacity for change. In other words, if a party already enjoys a presence on the ground, then it is unlikely that this can be easily amputated. Membership may not be valued very highly, but a membership-oriented tradition cannot easily be dismissed. In addition, and as part of this legacy of the past, membership may also imbue the party

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leadership with a sense of legitimacy. In Sweden, for example, 'the parties seem to want to maintain the *image* of a mass party, with a positive membership development being taken as proof that the party is perceived as a viable channel for political representation' (Pierre and Widfeldt 1994: 342). And a similar imperative clearly underlined the major membership drive undertaken by the British Labour Party following the election of Tony Blair as the new party leader. Conversely, in the case of new parties, and most especially new parties in new democracies, it is unlikely that a party on the ground will be assiduously cultivated (Kopecký 1995; Mair 1997: ch. 8; Biezen 1998). Other things being equal, the emphasis on maintaining a party on the ground, and, indeed, the sheer existence of a substantial party membership, is therefore most likely to characterize parties which have progressed through a long history of organizational development, in which the legacy of the mass party model continues to weigh upon contemporary conceptions of organizational style and legitimacy. For most of the long established parties in Western Europe, then, it is simply the case that the party in public office cannot avoid the presence of a party on the ground: however troublesome to the leadership it might prove to be, a mass membership is part of the party tradition.

Given this legacy, how then can the primacy of the party in public office be successfully asserted? At one level, the answer is for the leadership to marginalize the party on the ground, and even to let it wither away; whether consciously planned or not, for example, this certainly appears to reflect the recent experiences of the mainstream parties in Denmark and the Netherlands. At the same time, however, and as noted above, any such strategy risks costing the party leadership more in terms of declining legitimacy than it might benefit them in terms of increasing their freedom of manoeuvre. The preferred strategy, therefore, might be one which ostensibly enhances the position of the party on the ground, thereby making membership seem all the more attractive to potential supporters, while at the same time limiting the potential for a real challenge from below.

There are two possible ways in which this preferred strategy might be developed, both of which are already evident in a number of contemporary party organizations (see also Mair 1994: 16–18). In the first place, the ostensible power of the party on the ground can be, and has been, enhanced through internal party democratization, in which, as noted above, the ordinary member acquires a formal voice in the selection of candidates and party leaders, as well as in the approval of policies and programmes, and in which the mass membership becomes, in effect, a mass (party) electorate. This certainly represents an empowerment of the membership. At the same time, however, it also serves to erode the position of the party activists and the *organized* party on the ground, in that voice now no longer depends on militancy or organization. This is a particularly significant development, since it

was precisely from within the more militant stratum of the party on the ground that the party in public office has always proved most vulnerable to criticism. By enfranchising the ordinary members, often by means of postal ballots, the party leadership therefore effectively undermines the position of its more militant critics, and does so in the name—and practice—of internal party democracy. Almost by definition, the often disorganized and atomized mass membership of the party, entry to which now demands fewer and fewer prerequisites,<sup>8</sup> is likely to prove more deferential to the party leadership, and more willing to endorse its proposals. It is in this sense that the empowerment of the party on the ground remains compatible with, and may actually serve as a strategy for, the privileging of the party in public office.

The second approach is perhaps less evidently manipulative, and simply involves promoting a more effective 'division of labour' between the party in public office, on the one hand, and the party on the ground, on the other, in which the linkage between the two levels is more or less restricted to the local selection of candidates for election to national offices. In other words, and reflecting the tendencies initially noted in the American case by Eldersveld (1964), party organizations may increasingly adopt a stratarthic form, in which different and mutually autonomous levels coexist with one another, and in which there is a minimum of authoritative control, whether from the bottom-up or from the top-down. 'Local parties', reflecting the party on the ground, then work primarily at the local level, enjoying almost exclusive control over the policies, programmes, and strategies to be pursued within their own territorial limits. The national party, on the other hand, which is dominated by the party in (national) public office, is also free to develop its own policies, programmes, and strategies, unhindered by the demands and preoccupations of the party on the ground. The party on the ground may of course flourish in this stratarthic setting, but, in the end, it remains on the ground, being linked to the party in public office only through its control of that party's composition.

#### PARTY ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: SOURCES AND IMPLICATIONS

There is, of course, no 'single' party organizational form; on the contrary, what we witness today, as in earlier generations, are variations on quite a wide variety of different themes (Koole 1996; Katz and Mair 1996). Nor is there an 'ideal' party organizational form; rather, organizations develop in an often idiosyncratic way, being influenced not only by the specific social and economic contexts in which they operate, but also by the prevailing institutional structures, as well as their own histories. Commonalities can nevertheless be established. Despite evident national peculiarities, for example, the fact that

participation in political decision-making was formerly restricted to a small class of privileged social actors has proved sufficiently determining to allow us to draw cross-national generalizations about the character of the once dominant elite party. In a similar vein, the impact of mass democratization has also proved sufficiently powerful as to facilitate generalizations about the emergence and character of the mass party. And while the spread and relevance of the catch-all party continues to be debated, it is none the less clear that many parties did begin to shift towards a new mode of operation in the 1960s, in which there emerged substantial sources of conflict between the party in public office and the party on the ground.

It has been our contention in this chapter that even this most recent stage of development has now been superseded through the emergence of yet a new *modus operandi* in which the primacy of the party in public office is increasingly being established. To be sure, as noted above, the patterns which we identify are not always necessarily true, or not always necessarily true to the same extent, in all parties. Indeed, none of the specific patterns which can be discerned in the variety of party organizational forms has ever been wholly realized. What is certainly true, however, is that as party organizations adapt to the demands of contemporary democracies, they tend increasingly to revolve around the needs and incentives of the party in public office. And while the reasons for this change are myriad, with the immediate source being usually found in the internal politics of the party, the ultimate source can often be traced back to the environment in which the party operates. Although, other things being equal, it is possible that an equilibrium might emerge over time among the various faces and actors making up a party, changes external to party inevitably will upset this steady-state balance. Sometimes these environmental changes bring new pressures and challenges; other times they represent new opportunities. In each case, however, they alter the distribution of resources or incentives within the party and therefore the pattern of interactions within it.

The environmental changes that have received the most scholarly attention undoubtedly have been those relating to the electoral system. Indeed, the very existence of modern political parties with both their bureaucratic and their mass membership organizations usually is attributed directly to expansion of the suffrage, with the pace and timing (particularly relative to industrialization) of enfranchisement taken to explain many of the differences among parties (Lipset and Rokkan 1967b). As noted above, the party bureaucracy was made necessary by the need to organize and communicate with electorates numbering in the hundreds of thousands rather than the hundreds and the mass organization furthered the encapsulation of the party's electorate as well as the pooling of financial and other resources. And, of course, to be 'necessary' is just another way of saying that one is in control of a 'zone of organizational uncertainty', and therefore powerful. Other changes in electoral

laws, such as modifications of the electoral formula (including changes in electoral thresholds or district magnitude) or (dis)allowing an intra-party preference vote may also lead to changes in the internal life of parties, as well as to changes in the balance among parties (Katz 1980: 31-2). Even more directly, parties may have some or all of their organizational structure 'imposed' by statute, a constraint which becomes increasingly relevant as the provision of public subsidies is accompanied by the introduction of laws on parties.

Parties must also adapt to changes in the availability of, and need for, various resources. The evolution of media of mass communication provides one prominent example. The development of a party press allowed party organizers to communicate with their followers and potential supporters regardless of the cultural or political biases of the publishers of 'independent' newspapers. The party press naturally enhanced the importance of its publishers, primarily party bureaucrats, at whatever level of centralization the press was organized. It also required a well-articulated organization in order to disseminate and subsidize publications. It thus strengthened the bureaucratic and mass membership faces of the party vis-à-vis the party as government. The rise to central importance of broadcasting, especially television, has had just the opposite result, however. As noted above, television allows central party leaders, particularly those in public office to whom broadcasting time generally is allocated and who are seen as being the most personally 'newsworthy', to communicate directly with the public, both within and without the party, without the intervention of, or need for, a party organization per se. On the other hand, these new possibilities for direct communication also create a need for new varieties and levels of professional expertise.

Provision of public subsidy to political parties represents another obvious example of how changes in the availability of resources can alter the balance of forces within a party. Before public subsidy, many parties were financially dependent almost exclusively on voluntary contributions, either from their members or from business or other organizations hoping to buy influence or access. Loss of such support could have a devastating effect both on the party in office and on the party bureaucracy, and this made them dependent on those contributing to their campaign expenses and salaries. State subsidy reduces party dependence not only on outside contributors (as it was overtly intended to do), but also on the party's own grass-roots members. And again, to the extent that the membership organization is less valuable to other aspects of the party, the status and influence of those who hold office in the membership organization declines.

A variety of secular changes in the political environment also have the potential to force, or have forced, party adaptation. The traditional mass party of integration was based on a highly structured social system in which the relevant cleavages, be they class, religion, ethnic grouping, or whatever,

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were sharply drawn and unlikely to be bridged. When a party built a network of ancillary organizations and attempted to encapsulate its supporters, it was basically reflecting a pre-existing social reality. The 'freezing of political cleavages' was based on a more general freezing of social cleavages. The 'thawing' of these cleavages, spurred by such trends as increased and more meritocratic higher education and the homogenization of culture through mass media and mass consumption, thus undermine the traditional bases of mass organization. For example, the relative decline of social solidarity as the glue of the membership organization may make ideological purity relatively more important, and thus lead to strengthened demands for such purity from its leaders. The resulting constraints may be interpreted as making the membership organization relatively more costly to the governing organization, and thus as leading to attempts to secure alternative access to the resources the members provide.

This general social change has been accompanied by two more directly political changes. On the one hand, increased levels of education have only been one contributing factor to generally higher levels of political competence in the mass public. Better informed, more articulate, with more leisure time, voters become less dependent on party organizations for their connection to the political world. They also become less willing to accept the relatively passive role that the traditional mass party has given to its rank-and-file supporters (e.g. Barnes, Kaase *et al.* 1979). As the troops refuse blindly to follow, the influence in the party of leaders whose position rests on their command of these troops naturally declines. On the other hand, increased civic competence coupled with weakening social ties and increased use of general rather than party channels of communication mean that many of the processes that previously would have instilled a strong sense of party (or more general sub-cultural) identification have weakened. But since party identification not only provides a cushion of support that allows a party to survive temporary setbacks, but also is the basis for solidaristic rewards of membership, this too may alter the balance of forces within parties.

Although this discussion suggests how party change may be driven by the need to adapt to the environment, at least three qualifications to the simple dichotomy of external stimulus and internal response are necessary. First, some of the stimuli to change are internally generated, and once a party begins to adapt, it sets in motion forces that can have a ripple effect throughout the organization. Second, and perhaps more importantly, many of the 'external' stimuli discussed above are the result of party actions. For example, it is the parties in government that have voted themselves public subsidies, access to mass media, or (less directly, through the welfare state) longer lived and better informed electorates. Finally, to complete the circle, the environment also responds to changes made by the parties, and thus one explanation for the decline in party identification, for example, is the decision of the parties to

reach out beyond their traditional social bases, and in other ways to distance themselves from both identifiers and members. In many cases then, rather than simple stimulus followed by single response, or cause followed by consequence, there develops instead a self-reinforcing process, which, we argue, is now leading parties throughout the contemporary democracies to a position in which the party in public office is now firmly in the ascendant.

Even though we have suggested that this shift in the internal balance of power can be identified almost regardless of how party organizations more generally may be typified, we would also contend that the drift towards the primacy of the party in public office is nevertheless facilitated by precisely the same factors which we associate with the emergence of the 'cartel party' and with the absorption of parties into the state (Katz and Mair 1995). More specifically, the increasing reliance of parties on state subsidies, a process which facilitates the growing primacy of the party in public office, clearly draws these parties into an ever closer involvement with the state. The increasingly widespread participation of parties in government, a development which has helped to privilege the party in public office, is also central to the cartelization process. Furthermore, the movement towards cartelization is also likely to be enhanced as parties in public office are encouraged to acquire substantially more autonomy than was available to them under the old mass party model, and even under the catch-all model. Finally, albeit more indirectly, as politics itself increasingly assumes the status of a career, and as the substantive and ideological differences between competing political leaderships wane away (through either a voluntary or an enforced consensus), the leaderships themselves appear to assume an increased commonality of purpose, with each leadership seeming to find it easier or more appropriate to come to terms with its direct counterpart than with its own following on the ground. To paraphrase Michels, it now appears that there is increasingly *less* in common between two party members, one of whom holds public office, than there is between two public office-holders, each of whom comes from a separate party. Thus, while the position of the party in public office might well be in the ascendant in any one of the varieties of contemporary party organizations which have been identified and theorized about in the modern literature on parties, nevertheless such privileges are clearly a *sine qua non* of the emergence and consolidation of the cartel party.

## CONCLUSION

While the scope of this present chapter is too limited to permit an exploration of the full implications of these changes, three brief points can be noted by way of a conclusion. In the first place, it seems to us appropriate to trace an association between the increased ascendancy of the party in public office,

and the hypothesized cartelization of parties, on the one hand, and the apparent growth in recent years in popular feelings of alienation from, or even mistrust in, mainstream politics and parties, on the other (see Poguntke and Scarrow 1996a; Daalder 1992 and Chapter 2 above; and Torcal, Gunther, and Montero, Chapter 10 below). As party leaderships become more autonomous from their own following, and as they become increasingly busy with themselves and their own world, it is almost inevitable that they will be seen as being more remote. This in itself is problematic enough. But when this remoteness is also accompanied by a perceived failure to perform (even though such failure may well derive from constraints, both national and international, that are beyond the specific control of party), it can then develop into a sense of alienation and mistrust, in which the political leaderships are not only seen to be distant from the voter, but also to be self-serving.

Second, and following from this, it is evident from recent experiences in both Europe and the United States that there now exists a potential catchment area that can be exploited by so-called 'anti-party parties', often of the extreme right, which seek to combine an appeal to those alienated by the established parties with an appeal to more xenophobic, racist, and essentially anti-democratic sentiments (e.g. Mudde 1996). In other words, by lumping together all of the established parties as a 'bloc' to be opposed by the neglected citizen, these new extremist parties often attempt to translate a particular opposition to what we see as the cartelization of parties into a more generalized assault on the party system as a whole, and possibly even into an assault on democratic values as such. And while, with few exceptions, the appeal of such parties remains relatively marginal, it is here that we can see a genuine problem of legitimacy in contemporary democracies beginning to emerge.

Third, as indicated above, and as we have argued at greater length elsewhere (Katz and Mair 1995; Mair 1997: ch. 6), it is important to recognize that much of what is problematic here has been the result of decisions and actions which have been carried out by the parties themselves. In other words, in privileging the party in public office, the parties have risked being seen as privileging themselves, and, whether directly or indirectly, to have been using state resources in order to strengthen their own position in terms of subsidies, staffing, patronage, and status. As their position on the ground has weakened, parties have helped to ensure their own survival as organizations by more or less invading the state, and, in so doing, they may well have sowed the seeds for their own crisis of popular legitimacy. With the ascendancy of the party in public office, in short, parties in contemporary democracies, which often appear to be less relevant, now lay themselves open to the charge of being also more privileged.