POLITICAL PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEMS

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CHAPTER TWELVE
PARTIES IN GOVERNMENT

SECTION A

Entering government can provide a variety of opportunities for individual politicians to pursue their own goals—whether those goals be advancing their particular policy priorities, enjoying the rewards of office, or increasing their influence within the party. Obviously, government is also a resource for the party—controlling it provides the means of enacting public policy but also ways of strengthening the party itself. This is achieved, for example, by placing party supporters in administrative or quasi-administrative positions over which the governing party has influence. How important a resource government is varies. That a party has entered government does not necessarily mean that it, or indeed its coalition partners, moves public policies in the direction it wants. Nor is it the case that, for those in office, it is always 'to the victors, the spoils'; in some regimes being in government provides relatively few means of rewarding either the party's 'movers and shakers' or its faithful members.

Furthermore, the relative importance of public policy, on the one hand, and office and its rewards, on the other, varies enormously between regimes and also over time. A comparison will help to illustrate this point. During the Jacksonian era (1829–37) and for decades afterwards American parties used control of government to reward their supporters; at the city level, for example, employees served 'at the pleasure of the mayor', which meant that they could lose their jobs if they ceased to help their party or subsequently the other party won the mayoral election. It was a system driven primarily by office goals and not policy goals; there were policy differences between the parties, but party competition did not involve conflict over radically different political agendas. This use of government looks very different from that made by, say, the 1945–51 Labour government in

Britain. There were major differences between the Labour and Conservative legislative agendas at the 1945 general election, and Labour's years in office were notable for the vast amount of legislation (nationalization, the creation of the welfare state, and so on) it enacted. However, Labour maintained the British tradition of not using the state to reward its own supporters. The civil service and other public agencies did not have political litmus tests applied to them in the selection of personnel to occupy key administrative positions. The point of this British–American comparison is *not* to suggest that a party's pursuit of policy and of office goals vary inversely with each other: there is no evidence for the existence of such a relationship. It is a much more basic point that is being made: the 'rewards' of government vary considerably within liberal democratic systems.

To understand these differences it is useful to look at the two kinds of 'rewards' separately. We begin first with the policy-related dimension and then turn in Subsection 2 to the office-related dimension. But there is a third issue that is linked to both these aspects of party behaviour; this is how long parties stay in government once they have got into it. Whether they are wanting to use office to pursue policy ends or to acquire the resources that come with office, how much time do they have to do that? This issue forms the subject of Subsection 3.

1. The Policy-Related Dimension

At the beginning of Chapter 11 we identified a three-stage link between voters and public policy output that many writers have seen as crucial to the idea of representative democracy. In that chapter it was shown that the notion that voters' preferences should be treated as an exogenous variable was questionable. Spatial models of party competition which draw on this conception of the voter–public-policy relationship leave themselves open to criticism. Nevertheless, the research of those who have utilized this approach is of value in helping us to 'unpack' the third stage of the voter–policy output link—whether parties in government do enact the kinds of programme favoured by most voters.

Although there are limitations to this kind of data, party manifestos and other statements of party policy are an important source of information about the policy goals of parties. By comparing them with what *governments* say they will do and with the actual policy output of governments it is possible to gauge whether this third stage of the link is present in liberal democratic polities. One major research project has examined ten countries with multiparty systems and compared party manifestos with subsequently published government policy programmes (Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Luxemburg, Belgium,

the Netherlands, Italy, and Israel).[1] Of course, there might still be a gap between what governments claimed they were doing and what they did, but knowing the relation between what parties said they would do and what governments intend to enact is a very significant first step in evaluating the third stage of the voter–policy output link.

The research, co-ordinated by Laver and Budge, concluded that, in general, policy was an important factor in the formation of governments in these countries, but that there were variations between them.[2] While policy was a major factor in the Scandinavian countries, it was less significant in some other countries, including Israel and Italy. Moreover, while a single left–right dimension did not work as well as multi-dimensional spaces in some countries in explaining which policies came to be adopted, it did work in a number of cases. They argue that

> policy has a relatively simple impact on coalition bargaining. Perhaps the most striking consequence is that, if a single party regularly controls the median legislator in the left–right dimension, it can become an almost permanent fixture in office and receive consistently higher policy payoffs than other parties.[3]

This takes us back to the idea of the 'pivotal' party, which was introduced in the last chapter. When one party is consistently the 'pivot' (it controls the median legislator on the ideological spectrum) the actual composition of the government matters very little to the government's policy output; in the Netherlands and in Italy (before 1994) Christian Democratic parties were the major determinants of the policy agenda because of their 'pivotal' position. (The pivotal role of the Christian Democrats in the Netherlands is important in explaining why the omission of the Dutch Labour Party from government after the 1977 election, cited in Chapter 11, was not such an affront to the idea of democracy. Although the Labour Party was the largest party, the pivotal position of the Christian Democrats meant that it was the latter who would be the main determinant of policy whether Labour was in government or not.) However, when the 'pivotal' party varies over time, as it does in Scandinavia, then the precise composition of the government affects the policies pursued. In both sets of circumstances, though, what a government does is related to who is in it.

Yet generalizing from this sort of evidence to the conclusion that it matters which party or parties are in government is questionable. In particular, three objections may be made to such a move. First, there is the argument that, by focusing on the kinds of countries that were included in the Laver/Budge study, there is a tendency to forget that there have been liberal democratic regimes where the party composition of a government matters much less. Secondly, there is the claim that it is not the parties *per se* but other political institutions that shape the policy agenda of governments. Finally, there is the argument that it is not different political parties but different levels of socio-economic development

that best explain differences in policy output between political systems. We examine these three criticisms in turn.

Does party always make a difference?

This line of criticism is 'institutional' in character. The ability of a party or parties to implement policies they want depends on their control of government being more than nominal. Two examples can be introduced in support of this criticism. The first is the French Fourth Republic. The composition of governments changed, but the changes were so frequent that the impact of party on policy was slight. Instead, France was largely run by its administrators. As Mény notes, 'the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Education certainly wielded more influence than the numerous Education Ministers who succeeded one another in his time'.[4] To a large extent the successful policies associated with the Republic (economic modernization, planning, and so on) revealed the strengths of administrative dominance, while the major failures, and particularly the debilitating colonial wars, exposed the problems associated with a parliamentary élite that was too much preoccupied with infighting in the Assembly to develop medium- and long-term policies.

The second example is the United States where the separation of powers means that the party controlling the government may not have control of the legislature. Indeed, 'divided government', which has long been a feature of the state governments, became the most common pattern of power distribution at the federal level between 1952 and 1992. The consequences of this mutual blocking power have been disputed. There are those who see 'divided government' as producing 'gridlock'—a failure to develop and carry out major policy initiatives. But there are other observers, such as David Mayhew, who claim that Congress and presidency have been able to compromise effectively, on a proposal-by-proposal basis, during years of 'divided government' producing legislation that the public will find acceptable.[5] But the two interpretations share the assumption that under 'divided government' party agendas cannot be implemented.

Both the Fourth Republic and the US examples draw attention to the fact that the institutional context matters: occupancy of the main offices in the executive does not ensure that public policy will reflect party programmes. Now two kinds of response might be made to this. One would be to accept it, but to point out that there are far more liberal democracies like those in the Laver/Budge study than there are Fourth Republics or American models. The other response would be to deny that these two examples actually demonstrate what they are alleged to. In this regard the research of Budge and Hofferbert is worth noting because they attempt to prove that party is important in the United States.[6] They compare party programmes with patterns of federal government expenditures and show

that the power of the executive is such that whichever party controls the presidency will produce programmes of expenditure that more closely resemble their own party's programme than that of the opposing party. This is an interesting conclusion that meshes with the conventional wisdom that the power of the modern Congress is largely *reactive*. Yet it does not alter the principal conclusion drawn above that the institutional context in which a party is operating in government makes a difference. Furthermore, the fact that American party programmes are very general in character, and that individual politicians can ignore and repudiate their own party's programme, means that the significance of the Budge/Hofferbert results should not be overstated. Anyone looking at the programme of the party that won the last presidential election for a guide to public policy since that election would be disappointed. It provides a better guide than the other party's programme would, but nothing like the guide that, for example, the manifesto of the winning party in a British general election provides in the case of Britain.

Are parties the really significant political institutions in policy-making?

If the ways in which parties 'connect' with government make a difference, then might the links that parties have with other political institutions be key features of policy-making? Consider the following paraphrase of an argument that some authors have made about the development of welfare states in Northern European states, especially Scandinavia:

> It was the organization of the working class that produced the welfare state. Obviously, the social democratic parties were a vital element of that effort, but it was as much the trade unions and other organizations that contributed to the welfare state being put on the policy agenda in Scandinavia.[7] When parties are tied into social groups via other organizations they will be in a much better position to realize their policy goals than when such links are weak. The absence of such links with other organizations was one of the reasons parties in 3rd and 4th Republic France were highly ideological in their pronouncements but relatively ineffective as initiators of policy.

This type of argument, which has a broad institutional focus, counters the competition approach of researchers like Budge and Laver who see party policy as a response to the electoral market. The limitation of the competition approach is its failure to address two points. First, the imperative for a party to push through particular policies may be due as much to its links with other organizations as to its needs to appease voters. Secondly, these other organizations may actually provide a resource for a party in getting its programme accepted in the face of opposition from other parties or social organizations.

However, once the possibility that the organizational context might be a factor affecting their influence on public policy is accepted, a serious problem of explanation can be observed. If parties in government use their control of government to foster links with other groups, and these other groups have an incentive to seek influence within the governing parties, how do political scientists determine who is influencing whom? Take the case of post-war Japan. Here was a polity in which the ruling party (LDP) promoted the interests of major Japanese industrial concerns; government policy had great support among major economic organizations. But the question of the extent to which the policies were really *party* policies or the product of a party–industry partnership is a difficult one to answer. So too is the question of whether the LDP's long-term occupation of government allowed it to consolidate its position through co-operating with the industrialists or whether it permitted the latter to co-opt the party for its own benefit.

Similar problems could arise in understanding the connection between the Social Democratic Party, the trade unions, and business in Sweden during the decades of Social Democrat rule. As was outlined in Chapter 6, the corporatist approach to policy-making could be understood as a Social Democrat strategy to provide arenas of decision-making power for the trade unions and to weaken coalition building by opponents through drawing business into apolitical, corporatist negotiations. But corporatism might also be interpreted as a strategy that suited businesses in a relatively small economy, subject as they were to the impact of external economic forces, because it gave them some influence over policy and took much economic decision-making out of the political arena where the Social Democrats had a decisive advantage.

Distinguishing between the interests and policy positions of parties and those of other organizations is much easier in a polity where there is greater alternation of parties in government. But, as we have seen, the two-party model is so uncommon as to provide very few instances with which to test the argument that the institutional alliances a party has before it enters office are an important influence on the likelihood of its enacting fully its policy programme. The issue remains unresolved.

Does politics matter?

If the first two questions emanate from an institutional perspective, this third question pits the sociological approach against the competitive approach. From about the mid-1970s until the mid-1980s a major debate raged in political science as to whether 'politics mattered'. Like most such debates some of the research on which the argument was conducted had been undertaken much earlier. Moreover, like many other debates it petered out to be replaced by a new set

of research concerns. The protagonists on the one side were those who adopted a sociological perspective: public policy was the product of social forces. The main determinant of a state's policies was its level of economic development; wealthier states had extensive programmes of expenditure, including welfare provision for its citizens; poorer states did not. Using macro-level data these studies concluded that it mattered very little whether a country was governed by a left-leaning or a right-leaning government. Similar studies of individual countries, such as Richard Rose's analysis of British public policy, concluded that in major policy areas, most especially those concerning the economy, it did not really matter whether a Conservative or a Labour government was in office.[8]

Clearly, the 'sociologists' were utilizing quite different kinds of data from more recent researchers like Laver and Budge. The former were looking at policy output and relating it back to the kinds of parties that had been in power; the latter were looking at governments' statements about their policy programmes and relating them to those of individual parties. We might expect that the former strategy would be less likely to reveal differences between the parties, simply from what we know about the long-term working through of earlier policy decisions. For instance, Republican Richard Nixon, who was committed to reducing the role of the US federal government, presided over a huge increase in federal government expenditures during his five and a half years in office; this was because programmes initiated in the previous Democratic administrations were coming to fruition during his tenure and he lacked the congressional majorities to cancel them. But, if we correct for this sort of problem, is there a case for treating the evidence produced by the 'sociologists' as proof that parties do not make a difference?

One of the limitations of the 'sociologists'' case is that they do not always distinguish between those policy areas where parties might be expected to make a difference and those where they could not. Growing internationalization of the economy has made it far more difficult for individual countries to pursue distinctive economic policies. The incoming Socialist government in France attempted such a move in 1981 and it ended disastrously a few years later. Another policy area where international alliances constrained the opportunities for distinctive party policies was defence and foreign relations in the era of the cold war. Again, in the case of most European democracies today, membership of the European Community places some limits on the opportunities for parties to develop radically new foreign policies. Of course, any evaluation of the role of parties must take note of those policy areas in which they cannot be effective, and it might be that we should be forced to conclude that overall their areas of effectiveness in policy were very restricted. But it is important to separate those areas where parties might be expected to be influential and those where they would not, so that like is being compared with like.

The constraints facing governments are relevant in another way. Countries different stages of economic development face different limitations in terms the services they can provide. A wealthier society can afford to provide more s vices than a poorer one.[9] The important question is: what happens when we h the constraints constant? Do different countries in a broadly similar cont adopt similar policies even if they have very different kinds of government power? Several studies comparing American states with respect to welfare pro sion and other social programmes purported to show that party control was a significant variable. However, they could assert this only because they did control first for the level of economic development that the states had reach and then seek to discover whether, within given bands of development, the ado tion of social programmes came under Democratic rather than Republic administrations. Since the per capita income of the poorest states was only abo one-third the income of people living in the richest states, it was not surprisi that party control turned out to be insignificant by comparison with econon variables.[10]

Another limitation of the 'sociologists'' data was that often the cross-natio comparisons brought together under one heading programmes that had a v different basis and a very different impact on those they affected. For examp gross data on welfare provision can be constructed in such a way as to mak appear that the United States conforms to a general pattern of advanced ind trial countries in which the state increasingly provides benefits for its citize But, as Skocpol notes: 'Despite the desire of many scholars to view its social p icy history in universal evolutionary terms, the United States has never co close to having a "modern welfare state" in the British, the Swedish, or any ot positive western sense of the phrase.'[11]

Once account is taken for these biases in using aggregate data, the claim t parties do not matter appears much weaker. But this does not mean that part are completely free to develop proposals for public policy in whatever directi they think the voting public will let them go. Evidence that there are some g eral constraints operating on them is provided by a policy area that has b prominent in most liberal democracies since the end of the 'Does politics m ter?' debate in the mid-1980s—privatization. Privatization in some form become evident in nearly all liberal democracies during the 1990s, having start in Britain in the early 1980s. Among the reasons for these initiatives have b pressures to facilitate enterprises competing in foreign markets that might closed to directly state-owned (or controlled) firms. But the variations to found in the privatization process—ranging from the most radical forms of p vatization to merely switching to more indirect forms of state-owned business testify, at least in part, to the role that party can play.

In the end, many, though not all, of the claims made for the role of parties

policy-making, by researchers like Laver and Budge operating within the competition approach, seem to be broadly correct. Parties can make a difference. But there is an important caveat to be added to this conclusion—they are likely to make far more difference with respect to the general direction that public policy takes than in the development of distinct, detailed, policies. The reason for this is quite simple. Parties lack the resources—in terms of information, research staff, and so on—to develop detailed policies on their own. Of course, there are variations between countries and between types of party in this regard. For instance, the policy institutes attached to the German parties provide a far greater resource than is available to the British parties. But even the best-resourced parties cannot replicate in opposition the kind of policy development that governments can. In brief, being in government provides a party with the greatest opportunities for developing policy.

At its most extreme this is evident with American administrations. A presidential candidate's 'policy agenda' as revealed by statements in the campaign bears only partial resemblance to the policies that, in hindsight, are most identified with that President. With the exception of the Reagan administration, there is not a single President from 1945 to 1992 for whom the policies with which the administration was subsequently most associated had been evident at the end of the administration's first year in office.[12] Even in Britain parties largely make policy 'on the hoof' while in government. In 1981 the Conservative government's privatization programme was relatively modest and did not represent a significant departure from the pattern of policies pursued by other post-war Conservative governments. A few years later privatization was a far more radical programme, and it was the years in office that had made that possible. Nor should it be forgotten that the other great 'transforming' government of the post-1945 period, the Labour government of 1945–51, had been in government as a coalition partner from 1940 to 1945. Labour's experience of economic planning in wartime contributed to the direction that economic and industrial policy took after the war.

This suggests that the question of the connection between party and public policy has something of the character of the proverbial issue of whether the glass of water is half-full or half-empty. The 'half-full' school can point to the link that has been established between party manifestos and what governments subsequently do. Thus, for example, it could be argued that generally the British Conservative governments from 1979 onwards carried out their electoral 'promises'. They did what they said they would do and that was different from what Labour stated it would do and also from what we can infer Labour would have done in office. What more, it might be said, could be expected of parties in a democracy? The 'half-empty' school could respond by pointing to the 1979 manifesto, which is not that dissimilar to previous Conservative manifestos; it

then asks the question—how would the Conservative policy record between 1979 and 1983 have been judged in retrospect had military loss in the Falklands, the continuing rise of the SDP, and adverse economic conditions brought about a Conservative electoral defeat in 1983 or 1984? Its answer to that question would be that it would have seemed much like previously failed Conservative administrations (such as 1970–4) with respect to much of its policy agenda. It was being in office and continued electoral success that produced the distinctive, radical policy outcomes of the 1980s. At elections parties in government are judged on their record, and that demands that they use the resources of government to develop policies—possibly in directions that had never been thought of at the previous election, though within the broad confines of the commitments the party made then. And so the debate between the two schools would continue.

Finally, when considering policy we should return to the three-stage model of the voter–party linkage that was outlined at the beginning of Chapter 11. There is a sense in which voters (as a collectivity) can be said to have some control over government 'output' through the intermediation of parties. The model of representative democracy described there is not wholly at odds with the real world of liberal democracy. However, in all three stages, and especially with the first and the third ones, the links are far more complex than the model allows. To speak of voters having preferences, and of those preferences ultimately being translated into government policy, is misleading. It draws on an analogy with consumers' behaviour in the market that cannot be pushed very far before it constitutes a misrepresentation of the political process.

2. The Office-Related Dimension

Separating the policy-related dimension from the office-related dimension of a party in government is not easy. Office provides resources for parties, and, as we have just seen, some of these resources facilitate the development of a party's policy. The occupancy of government office also provides rewards for individual politicians: it may well be thought of by a politician as being close to the 'top of the greasy pole', to use Disraeli's description of the British prime ministership. But, while such offices may be valuable in themselves, the direct financial rewards of being even a senior government minister are usually not high—at least by comparison with the kind of salaries received by most senior managers in large commercial firms. Consequently, how tightly a politician will cling to government office will likely depend on the particular circumstances: the arduous nature of the job and modest salaries have to be set against future political career ambitions and the status of public office.

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United States

Anyone who is familiar with books on American political parties might be surprised that one topic which is often covered as an aspect of 'Parties in Government' is missing from the discussion in Section A: the role of parties in legislatures. The reason for its omission is quite simple. Except in the United States, party leaders in the liberal democracies exercise such control over individual legislators that the subject of the role of party in these chambers is one that is rather uninteresting in the comparative study of parties. To be sure, there are variations in the degree of freedom enjoyed by legislators. For example, back-bench revolts on particular bills or motions are less common in Canada than in Britain; the greater patronage powers of party leaders, on the one hand, and the shorter parliamentary careers, on the other, combine to produce a less truculent

set of followers in Canada. However, these differences are merely ones of degree: the rise of party in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been associated with the rapid growth of party discipline in most parliamentary regimes. (France was an important exception—until the mid-twentieth century the highly localized basis of party politics made for looser parliamentary parties.) And even in presidential systems high levels of party discipline are possible; in Venezuela party discipline 'is so tight that congressional votes are almost never counted or recorded'.[27]

The American experience has been wholly different. With the notable exception of the period between 1890 and 1910, when a high level of party discipline was achieved in the House of Representatives, neither the House nor the Senate has been a chamber in which parties have held the whip hand. A similar pattern, in which parties have influence but not control over individual legislators, has been evident in the state legislatures. This immediately prompts the question of why the United States should be so different in this regard. The obvious starting-point in providing an answer to this is to note that neither the party leaders in the legislatures nor the party organization leaders were ever able to centralize in their own hands sufficient power over the nomination of candidates. Even before the widespread adoption of primary elections in the years 1900–20, the power of nomination rested with local politicians whose policy agendas could be very different from those of the leaders. In part, of course, this failure to centralize stemmed from the particular form the separation of powers took in the United States; legislative leaders lacked the kind of patronage resources that could induce compliance by legislators and by local 'politicos'. The direct primary placed the nomination process in the hands of voters, so that thereafter the question of a leadership veto could never arise.

Nevertheless, it is misleading to attribute relative party weakness in the legislatures to the consequences of the separation of powers. There has also been a general unwillingness to use many of the powers that do exist to enforce party discipline. This is seen especially in the attitude of the parties to the occasional third-party or non-party candidates who win election. Instead of 'freezing' them out, one or other of the major parties allows these legislators to caucus with them so that they can acquire committee assignments and thereby congressional seniority. Moreover, even the most uncooperative or rebellious of legislators is allowed to remain within the party's caucus. The kind of behaviour that would lead to expulsion from the party in legislatures in other democracies is tolerated in the American legislatures.

The main attempt in the US Congress to centralize party power was started by House Speaker Reed in the early 1890s and persisted until the revolt against one of his successors, Joseph Cannon, in 1910. Reed consolidated powers, including those of appointment to committees, in the speakership, thereby creating a

legislative hierarchy that centred on the one office. Thus, it was not a version of 'team' leadership that developed in the United States in the 1890s. Subsequently, Democrats and dissident Republicans revolted against Cannon and stripped the speakership of many of the powers Reed had accumulated. After 1910 congressional committees, and especially the chairs of the committees, filled the power vacuum left by this dismantling of the Reed framework. From then until the early 1970s the power structure in the House could be characterized as a struggle between party leaders and various committee chairs, the power structure in the Senate being even more individualistic and decentralized.

Congressional reforms in the early 1970s changed the role of party once again. On the one hand, the task of party leaders was made still more difficult because all House members, even the most junior ones, now had the resources to arrange for their own election, and this weakened the need for them 'to go along to get along'. On the other hand, the reduced powers of the committee chairs helped the party leadership to construct legislative coalitions, as did the weakening of the minority ideological wings in the two parties (the liberal wing of the Republicans and the southern conservative wing of the Democrats). But Congress remained largely as it has nearly always been: an institution in which the claims of party often conflicted with the claims of local districts. This conflict produces votes in Congress in which, nearly always, quite a large minority of members vote against a majority of their fellow party adherents.

Describing congressional party politics in this way might make it appear as if the congressional leaders are deprived of resources in dealing with their fellow legislators. They are not. They control some sources of campaign funds, facilities such as offices which affect the ease with which a legislator can conduct business, and have considerable influence in initial committee assignments; this gives them some leverage over their congressional parties. Consequently, party is a major influence on how a member votes in the chamber; indeed, it has been, and remains, the best single predictor of congressional voting. Indeed, beginning in the early 1980s, when the Republicans practised much greater party discipline in support of President Reagan's policy agenda, Congress entered a rather more partisan period. By the early 1990s a bitterly partisan spirit pervaded the Congress and during his first year in office President Clinton sought to rely largely on his party's congressional majorities to enact his legislation. In 1993 party unity in voting in Congress was higher than at any time since at least the 1950s. One of the costs of this to the Democrats was that the unpopularity of the Clinton presidency led voters in the 1994 mid-term elections to vote against Democratic candidates, and the result was loss of control of both chambers. Nevertheless, even in this more partisan era in Congress, party competes against other factors, and often those factors are more compelling for any given member. The levels of party unity evident in parliamentary systems are still far greater than in the US Congress.

That party is only one influence on the voting decisions of individual members of Congress has important consequences for the direction of public policy in the United States. Even when there is 'undivided government', much of a President's policy agenda may be diluted in the process of legislation. For example, in theory, Jimmy Carter had large party majorities in both Houses throughout his four years in office (1977–81); in practice, several of the measures to which he attached the greatest importance, including Energy policy and social welfare reform, were transformed in Congress to the point at which any resulting legislation was unrecognizable from Carter's original proposals.

CONCLUSIONS

Although many of its practitioners refer to political science as a *discipline*, it may be questioned whether it really is that. Unlike economics, for example, there is no single set of assumptions about the behaviour of the actors in a system that is accepted by all analysts; the common frameworks utilized by the vast majority of economists have no counterparts in political science. On the contrary, the study of politics has been strongly influenced by many other 'disciplines'—economics, sociology, social psychology, philosophy, history, law, and, more recently, feminist studies. In some cases, as with the behavioural revolution in the 1950s and, more recently, with rational choice analysis, some of those advocating the adaptation of particular analytical frameworks from other fields have seen these frameworks as capable of transforming the whole basis of the study of politics. Utilizing them, their proponents argued, would make possible the creation of a genuine political *science*—a discipline that could hope to rival the physical sciences in the rigour of its causal explanations. Alas, such projects have come to nought! Political science remains a 'market-place' in which different analytic frameworks and different approaches compete with each other, without any of them ever becoming dominant.

That judgement is reinforced by the evidence from the examination of parties and party systems in this book. In the Introduction I said that a number of the topics to be considered in subsequent chapters had been studied from one or more alternative approaches—approaches which I called 'sociological', 'institutional', and 'competitive'. It should have become clear by now that no one of these approaches is demonstrably superior to the others. Rather what each has to offer varies with the subject under consideration. Moreover, as was seen when considering the question of 'why party systems differ' (in Chapter 6), it would seem that the utility of a particular approach may depend on the kinds of linkage evident between voters and parties in the particular countries under consideration. (In this case the institutional approach becomes more useful when social solidarity is no longer the main factor binding voters to parties.)

That there have been alternative approaches employed by different researchers has contributed enormously to our understanding of party systems. The early disputes between 'institutionalists' and 'sociologists' have now generated

agreement on a number of important issues about causal relationships in the formation and persistence of particular kinds of party systems. The disagreements between the two approaches have moved on to other areas, but much has been learned from those disagreements. This is why attempts to impose single approaches (or related types to approaches) on political science are misguided. The causal factors involved in producing outcomes in politics are so complex that the dominance of any single approach will surely lead to distortion and oversimplification in attempts to explain the political world. The need for a plurality of approaches to the study of parties and party systems should be as evident in the mid-1990s as it was, say, in the 1970s, and as it should be still in the mid-2010s. Were this book to be revised in that decade, I am confident that this is one point that would not have to be revised.

The question of what might have to be changed were the book to be rewritten in twenty or thirty years' time is worth asking because it helps us to place some of the arguments that were made, and conclusions that were drawn, in earlier chapters in historical context. And to answer it, it is useful to consider first what I have said already about change in parties and party systems during the approximately one hundred years of liberal democracy, a type of democracy in which parties have played a crucial role in channelling political conflict.

One of the main themes about parties is that many aspects of parties in liberal democracies remain much as they were decades ago. With the exception of the ecology movement, most of the major party families can be traced back to at least the 1920s, and in some cases to well before then. As organizations, parties today are remarkably similar in the ways they conduct their affairs to the parties of the 1920s; the same comment can also be made with respect to party activities such as the nomination of candidates and some aspects of the running of election campaigns. Of course, there has been change—parties have not been preserved intact in some kind of 'time warp'. In many countries, parties are now less able to attract members than they once were; the membership of a party today is likely to be more issue-oriented than it was; arguably rather more attention now has to be paid to the claims of members to be involved in activities such as candidate selection than in earlier years; the advent of electronic campaign technology has tended to centralize decision-making on campaign strategy; and leaders in legislatures have supplanted extra-parliamentary leaders in influence over decisions relating to matters such as joining coalition governments. However, these and other changes have not made parties so very different from the institutions that formed in the era just before and during the period of democratization.

Broadly speaking, the same conclusion holds in relation to party systems. The 'freezing' of voter alignments noted by Lipset and Rokkan in the years between the mid-1920s and the mid-1960s has not given way to a more unstable electoral universe. The traditional large parties continue to receive a large share of the vote.

Although voting may be less of an expression of class or group identity than it once was, and may be more linked to the 'performance' of a party in government, there have not been wild swings in electoral support from one side of the political spectrum to the other. From the 1960s until the 1990s there was a high degree of continuity and stability in party systems in liberal democracies. The emergence of medium-sized new parties, let alone large new parties, was rather unusual; the sudden growth of, for example, the Progress Party in Denmark in 1973 did not herald the beginning of a period of growth for new parties, either in Denmark or elsewhere.

However, at the end of the 1980s one of the main factors that had helped to shape public policy throughout the liberal democratic world disappeared: the cold war ended. It is pertinent to ask, therefore, whether the collapse of the Soviet Union also marks a watershed in the development of party politics in liberal democracies. The claim that it does rests on the assertion that the cold war helped to 'anchor' many liberal democratic systems—'fixing' many of the relationships between the parties (for example, on the left between Socialists and Communists). In the absence of this anchor the possibility arises that changed relationships between the parties will affect links between particular parties and their voters. Might this, in turn, affect the possibility of new parties developing—possibly parties with rather different kinds of ideology, membership, and organization?

What of the evidence to support such conjectures? Certainly, the first half of the 1990s brought upheavals in some party systems. First, there are a number of countries where the parties in government have experienced very large swings in voter support against them:

- in Sweden in 1991 the Social Democrats' share of the vote declined by 5.5 per cent, the largest shift in its support between successive elections since 1944;
- in the US presidential elections of 1992 the party holding the Presidency (the Republicans) lost a larger proportion of the vote, compared with four years earlier, than in any election since 1968, making the 1992 election the second worst result for the incumbent party since 1932; then in 1994 the mid-term congressional elections produced the greatest voter backlash against the party of the President experienced by any popularly elected President in his first term of office since at least the New Deal: arguably it was the worst result of this kind since the nineteenth century;
- in France the 1993 Assembly elections saw the governing Socialist Party's vote collapse on a scale that was unprecedented in the Fifth Republic;
- in Austria in 1994 the governing parties (the Social Democrats and the People's Party) lost between them 11 per cent of the total vote, making it the worst result for governing parties since the country regained independence after the war.

Secondly, there were also three countries where voter revolt against governing parties led not only to major defeat for them, but also to a significant change in voter support for parties, including the growth of new (or relatively new) parties. In 1993 the Japanese LDP lost control of parliament, for the first time, to a coalition of seven parties; that year also the Conservative government in Canada lost all but two of its parliamentary seats, with the Reform Party and the Bloc Quebecois taking over as the second and third largest parties in the federal parliament. In 1994 the Christian Democrats in Italy collapsed as an electoral force; the incoming right-of-centre coalition government consisted of the neo-Fascist MSI and the recently created Northern League and Forza Italia. Between them, these three upheavals represented the greatest transformation in party systems in the liberal democratic world since the collapse of democratic regimes in the inter-war period.

However, the evidence from the first half of the 1990s does not point entirely in the direction of an overturning of the old order. An obvious starting-point is to note that, in at least one instance cited above (Sweden), the old order seemed to have been restored at the very next election—in 1994. In addition, in many of the established liberal democracies the election results of the 1990s were not abnormal—the experiences of Britain (in 1992) and Germany (in 1990 and 1994) conformed to this pattern: it was 'political business as usual'. The most serious disruptions to established party politics might be confined to a limited number of countries: Canada, Italy, and Japan are all regimes in which patronage either played a crucial role in the setting up of the liberal democratic order (Canada) or continued to play a central role in political life (Italy and Japan). In these countries linkage of voters to parties was either mediated through networks of patronage, or had been so mediated earlier; in both circumstances it left a more fragile set of links in place than in other countries. From this evidence we might infer that in the 1990s the overturning of an older tradition of liberal democratic politics was completed, rather than a new revolution begun.

Finally, it can be noted that with the possible exception of Italy, it is far from clear that the newly formed parties have consolidated their position in the party system. Moreover, none of these new parties offer startlingly different ideologies or structures from parties that have already commanded electoral support in the liberal democratic world. They are not that new or different.

Nevertheless, despite these caveats, the evidence tends to suggest that the 1990s is rather different from the last era when political scientists thought that widespread change in party politics might be occurring—the early 1970s. There are more instances in this decade of major revolts against governing parties than there were then, and this lends some plausibility to the notion that the ending of the cold war may have contributed to the emergence of considerably more fluidity in the electoral arena. Establishing a direct connection between the events of

1989–90 in Eastern Europe and the pattern of election results is very difficult—not least because foreign policy has generally been of relatively low direct salience in most elections. But there can be little doubt that in many ways the international context constrained party competition, and also affected how parties co-operated with each other in respect of governing, before the late 1980s. For this reason it is possible to argue that party politics may have entered a new phase—though with the important proviso that that phase may well not be very different from the one that preceded it. It is one thing to say that major electoral revolts against governing parties may be more common now, it would be another to assert that this portends radical change in either parties or party systems. There is no evidence that the latter will occur.

There is another respect, though, in which a rewriting of this book in the year 2015 might require a rather different focus. As we have seen in earlier chapters, comparisons of parties and party systems in liberal democratic regimes make it possible to draw some general conclusions about party behaviour there; extending comparative analysis to include other types of regimes involves the introduction of so many different variables that there are likely to be few general conclusions to be drawn. However, until recently the liberal democratic world has been confined to the Western half of Europe, ex-British colonies, and one or two countries, such as Costa Rica. Before the 1980s attempts at democratization elsewhere had not usually been sustained—at least in the long term. From the mid-1980s many of the states in Latin America started to redemocratize, and, after the fall of the Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, they were joined by a number of other states that sought to model their governmental systems after the liberal democracies. It remains to be seen how many of these attempts will succeed; it is quite possible that at least some of the states will collapse into some form of authoritarian rule. Nevertheless, it is also possible that by 2015 there will be more parties and party systems that can be embraced within a comparative study of liberal democracies.

The significance of this is not simply that it will yield further cases with which to test existing hypotheses and arguments. Rather it is that it will shift the analyses away from the predominantly Western European experience which is central to political science today. In turn, this should make it easier for comparativists to bring the United States 'in from the cold'. Because of the unusual nature of its founding, the United States is often treated by political scientists as different from other liberal democracies—so different that it should not be subjected to comparative analysis in the way that the European democracies are treated. This view is found among students of its parties as well as of its other institutions. Broadly speaking, the same holds true of Japan which, for similar sorts of reasons, is often, though not always, ignored in comparative studies of parties. One of the purposes of this book has been to show how both the United States and Japan can

be embraced with a comparative analysis while at the same time recognizing that aspects of their political experience differ profoundly from that in Europe. Because of the demands of competing for the votes of mass electorates, parties have to adapt in rather similar ways, and for this reason American and Japanese parties are not so dissimilar from their European counterparts as those who emphasize the 'exceptional' character of these political societies sometimes suggest.

Of course, area-based comparative studies—including, for example, studies of West European parties—will continue, and surely they will go on playing a significant role in increasing our understanding of parties in that region. But the opportunity will arise to bring into broader comparative studies two groups of scholars whose work is either not well known or not understood in a comparative context by the dominant group in comparative politics today, namely the Europeanists. The first group consists of those who conduct comparative research in areas like Latin America; the second, of those whose field of research is 'special case' countries, such as the United States or Japan. This should make for a generally richer set of comparative studies of parties and party systems. Of course, it will also make the task of explaining parties and party systems to those first embarking on their study that much more difficult, but that is a problem to be left on one side for the moment.